



UNION
CHAPEL

Margins



The Margins Project Annual Review 2019/2020



A Message from Michael, the CEO

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Writing this in the middle of the pandemic, it's a challenge to reflect back on 2019 and consider how much transformation was underway for The Margins Project. But the year 2019-20 was a substantial year of change and development – for The Margins Project, as well as the wider Union Chapel.

We welcomed a new Director, who created an ambitious strategy and business plan. Margins thanks David Morris, the preceding Director, and to the previous Margins trustees, for their dedication to developing strategies, steering the charity and approach of diligence and clear purpose.

The world has changed substantially since March 2020. But what has remained the same is the drive,

commitment and passion of The Margins Project team. They continue to support our visitors in their hour of need.

I recall one of the first things a visitor told me about The Margins Project. They said it felt like home, a community, a place they could trust – different from other services. This has also remained, and is increasingly important in these enormously challenging times.

What the future holds remains unclear. The next few years are likely to be challenging for all. But the service's role remains utterly vital, more so now than ever. We provide hope and support to people when they need it most, champion inclusion and solidarity, and drive inspiration, opportunity

and empowerment to our communities, alongside the wider Union Chapel.

I would like to thank our funders and our supporters, for their support in 2019-20, as well as their continued support into this year and beyond.

I wish to give the biggest thanks to The Margins Project staff and volunteers – including the frontline team Daniela, Nick, and Iraj. Also, to our visitors persevering through these tough times. Despite these challenges, they clearly and kindly show how important our work is to them. They are all an inspiration, and I look forward to navigating the world ahead together.

”

The Margins Project Annual Review

The Background

The Margins Project is a community charity – based at and a part of Union Chapel in Islington – offering a range of services to people who experience homelessness. Our services aim to support and empower people to move to more stable, fulfilled, and sustainable lives; addressing varying stages of recovery from crisis to employment. We are here for people facing homelessness and wider crisis. We recognise people for their potential, their hopes and aspirations. We believe everyone deserves an opportunity to flourish,

to realise their potential, and to find a place of dignity in society. The Margins Project offer an in-depth programme of personal development, tailored to the individual. This includes paid employment in our commercial kitchen, personalised housing and benefits advice, as well as food, shelter, and other essentials. Working together with The Margins Project, people facing homelessness see significant improvements in their employment prospects, wellbeing, and housing situation.

Our values:

- **Inclusion:** we strive to support people whom other agencies do not
- **Individual:** we tailor our work to the individuals we work with, providing in-depth support to make a meaningful impact
- **Empowerment:** we provide people with the time, tools and opportunities to realise their potential and succeed in their own right



In 2019/20, The Margins Project's operations and services continued whilst the new Director led a substantial review of the services, with the team, stakeholders and the trustees towards, to develop a new strategy and plan for The Margins Project. This involved internal review of current services and research of similar homelessness services. These were located locally in Islington, neighbouring boroughs, and across the London region. External research from organisations such as Crisis, Shelter and Homeless Link was also considered.

In April 2019, we spoke to 350 people who are directly or indirectly affected by homelessness. People felt that homelessness would continue to rise over the next 10 years.

Rough sleeping has risen 165% in the UK since 2010, and in London this increase has been over 200%.

We were involved in the October public presentation, where the Union Chapel unveiled ambitious plans. The team are working towards renovating the Sunday School Hall and increasing outreach to other community organisations, engaging them in activities that celebrate Heritage and Culture, and promote social inclusion. The Margins Project intends to be fully involved in these activities and direction.

However, none of us



could have predicted the forthcoming pandemic. In March 2020, Union Chapel had to close as a venue, as did the Margins Café. As well as serving audiences, our café offers training and supported employment for people who experience homelessness. Temporary closure caused significant loss of income to both organisations, and delayed our strategic plan.

We were able to run the night shelter until the end of March,

and worked intensively with Islington Council to place all remaining people at the shelter into hotels or other accommodation. The team also worked with the Union Chapel team, in partnership with Islington Council, Museum of Homelessness, Streets Kitchen and other agencies, to establish a Homeless COVID-19 Task Force and campaign. Union Chapel served as the host venue and donation drop-off point for the borough.

Crisis and Support Services

Over the past year, The Margins Project has run a Crisis Drop-in Centre and Cold Weather Night Shelter. Visits have access to our In-House advice service and other support, such as 1-to-1 mentoring.

The Crisis Drop-in Centre ran every Monday and Wednesday from 11am–2pm. Along with immediate respite from the streets, it provided a dry safe space, shower and toilet facilities, food and refreshments, laundry, and fresh clothing.

“ Coming to Margins has been vital to me. The staff and the system set up are really good. The food is outstanding. Everyone has been so friendly and welcoming. The atmosphere is also very good ”

“ Everything is very good; you could not do anything better ”

“ I feel very relaxed and safe here ”



People found The Margins Project through word of mouth or referral from the numerous agencies that Margins work with in the London Borough of Islington and wider region. They need our services because they are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or in crisis. They are frequently experiencing additional, complex problems. The Margins Project work hard to get people off the streets and into more stable situations, working with each individual and representing them: on the phone and in person, including at the council, doctors and benefits tribunals. Within this, The Margins Project are very grateful for the dedicated team of experienced

and committed volunteers who support our staff to run the drop-in services.

Clients were offered an initial assessment and, where appropriate, referred. Depending on their case and needs, they would meet our in-house Housing and Benefits Advisor or other specialist agencies. This allowed them to access advice about a range of issues including housing, benefits, prevention of eviction and repossession, domestic violence, immigration, referrals to alcohol and substance misuse services, as well as other physical and mental health services.

Over the year, The Margins Project helped 149 people including 48 women.

Of these Clients, 38% were struggling with mental health challenges, 20% had poor physical health and 74% were of no fixed abode (this was not just people sleeping rough but included hidden homeless such as sofa surfers). A further 10% were in a temporary shelter. The remaining 16% were in social housing or privately rented accommodation, but vulnerable to becoming homeless.

Of the people The Margins Project supported:

11

were placed
into permanent
accommodation

13

into temporary
accommodation

21

into emergency
shelter

34

received
benefits

11

accessed our
hardship fund

5

were signposted to
debt management

19

accessed the food
bank, 15 received
food vouchers

6

joined The Margins
Project Supported
Employment
programme

2

were signposted
to employment
services

7

were linked to a GP
or medical services,
4 to drugs and
alcohol services

6

were helped with
landlord issues,
5 made housing
applications

32

people received
general advocacy

Our Cold Weather Night Shelter ran for a 13 week season (January to March). During this time The Margins Project welcomed up to 15 guests every Wednesday night, who would otherwise have been sleeping rough. The Margins Project were, again, supported by a great team of volunteers working alongside the overnight shift leader.

As one of the seven venues of the CARIS shelter, Margins collectively accommodated 58 individuals over the season.

Over the course of the shelter season, 9% of guests moved into positive and stable accommodation. The move-ons of 62% of other guests were also positive and, while not necessarily the most stable, reflect that the vast majority of guests moved on in a stronger position than when they arrived. This brought the total of positive move-ons to 71%.

A positive outcome is defined as the individual moving on from CARIS more empowered than when he or she was referred into the service. A guest moving to another shelter from CARIS may, at first, not signal a positive

outcome on the basis that he or she moved from one shelter to another. However, almost without exception, our guests left better equipped to enter sustainable accommodation than when they arrived. This includes applying and/or qualifying for Universal Credit, getting onto a housing list, replacing lost original essential documentation, gaining access legal and immigration advice, setting up a bank account, registering with a GP, gaining access to mental health services, and securing employment.

All guests exited the service free of Covid-19, a remarkable achievement in itself.

The following case illustrates the complex and ongoing support The Margins Project team often give:

A female in her 30s visited The Margins Project, looking for support in finding suitable accommodation. She had historical links to a North London borough outside Islington and a history of entrenched street homelessness. It took several sessions to more fully understand her circumstances. The situation was challenging because the Client found offers difficult to accept and rejected several housing options, due to undisclosed personal reasons.

The Margins Project Housing and Benefits Advisor contacted several agencies, including StreetLink and local council, to understand her situation. Then, with her consent, the Advisor worked out a more realistic plan to move forwards with.

The Client attended an appointment with the council and the Housing Options team gathered suitable and affordable referrals. The Advisor confirmed this progress with the council and

liased with them to speed up the referral process. After some delays in contacting housing agencies directly, The Margins Project was eventually successful and arranged a fast track assessment for the Client.

The Housing and Benefits Advisor raised the individual as a Client of concern (as she was still street homeless and refusing shelters) with the council. In light of the vulnerable nature of the Client, a supportive agencies meeting was arranged. This resulted in the completion of a Clearing House application.

The Client was offered, and accepted, a temporary emergency bed space. This resulted in an offer of temporary accommodation through Islington Council, which she also accepted.

The Client is now in suitable temporary accommodation. She is linked in and engaging with services in finding suitable permanent accommodation.



Introducing our In-House Advisor

“



I'm Nick, The Margins Project Housing & Benefits Advisor.

I've been in post at The Margins Project for two years and I'm profoundly grateful for the opportunity to have a positive impact on individuals' lives.

My role includes supporting individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This can include offering general benefit advice, completing benefit calculations and applications, as well as attending appeals. I also liaise with several partner agencies to provide the best opportunity for rehousing those who have unfortunately

found themselves homeless.

In my previous life, I was lucky enough to earn a living travelling around the UK & Europe DJ'ing in many fascinating places. This period of life was fun, interesting, and extremely rewarding personally. I then attended Leeds University, where I studies Social Sciences. I have since worked in the charity sector for well over a decade and I am passionate about advocating for those whose voices sometimes go unheard.

My previous professional experiences include working for CNWL NHS Trust in Kensington, St Mungo's in Hammersmith, and with ex-

offenders in Leeds. I believe my previous roles have all culminated in a wealth of experience that feels hugely beneficial for my current post at The Margins Project.

Due to personal life experiences, I have a passion for social justice and supporting those finding themselves in difficult situations. So often, these can be brought on by circumstances beyond an individual's control. I understand first-hand how important it is to offer sustainable and practical support. For the best results, it's vitally important to build empathetic, trusting relationships while supporting individuals holistically through long-term, positive engagement.

Here at The Margins Project, I can apply my passions (both personally and professionally) and find nothing more rewarding than resolving issues that can have a hugely positive impact on individual's lives.

”



Case study

Client X was a 50-year-old male Polish national presented at our drop-in service as street homeless. He was a long-term Islington resident who, due to a relationship breakdown, had been rough sleeping and sofa-surfing for four months within the borough of Islington. His mental health was well, but he was suffering from severe back pain due to a previous industrial accident; for which he had been compensated. Due to his injury, he was not working, had zero income, and hadn't yet registered for benefits.

A Streetlink referral was made initially but – as a long-term Islington resident with local connections and health concerns – Client X was also referred to the council's homelessness triage team. The team then began the process of applying for benefits. With no access

to payslips or a previous bank account, providing previous proof of income was problematic. So, the team registered online with HMRC to request proof of his previous year's income.

Due to his back injury, the team also made an initial application for Personal Independence Payments (PIP).

Like many, Client X was unaware of the importance of applying for Settled Status. EU Nationals must apply before 30th June 2021. As a continuous UK resident for five years, the team supported Client X to make a settled status application.

Client X was assessed by the council's Rough Sleeping team and issued a housing worker. Once his Universal Credit claim was successful, he would be supported into

private accommodation by the Private Rental team. Universal Credit assessed his claim and he passed the habitual residency test. He was now eligible for private rental accommodation support through the council. At the time of writing, he is also pending a PIP assessment which would offer further support.

During this time, The Margins Project supported Client X with hot food, showers and food vouchers. The Margins Project was able to have a positive impact on an individual's circumstances. As well as helping with immediate, short-term concerns (such as food provisions), longer-term issues that can take time to resolve (such as housing eligibility and settled status) were progressed.

Supported Employment Programme

The Supported Employment Programme lasts four months, employing and supporting up to 10 trainees who have been affected by homelessness. Many have experience with the criminal justice system, and the majority are experiencing long-term unemployment. Candidates have experienced some form of homelessness within the past three years, are seeking to improve their employment prospects, and are willing to learn and work as part of a diverse team.

The aim is for trainees to move into employment or further training at the end of the programme. The team work closely with trainees to ensure that these employment or training prospects reflect their interests and ambitions. In turn, this encourages a positive relationship with learning and professional development. The team monitor progress throughout the programme, both informally and formally. Trainees are encouraged to take up group and individual support; including ESOL, numeracy, job club, and therapy.

The programme employs people who may struggle to find work elsewhere. Its mixture of 'real world' work, training, and tailored support enables trainees to see possibilities and make progress they find hard to envision on arrival. Previous trainees have moved into roles including Warehouse Forklift Trainer and Restaurant Manager, across industries including the council and gardening.

Traditionally, The Margins Project has run the programme as two four-month tranches. However half-way through this year, the team trialled a new model where trainees could join on a rolling basis and progress through three stages:

- 1. Try It –** Trainees learn the basics of food preparation and working in a commercial kitchen. This stage is unpaid, however travel costs are reimbursed
- 2. Dive In –** Trainees serve food to the general public, and learn about the operations of a commercial kitchen. They

are paid and can work on a personal development plan if they wish

3. Get Ahead – Trainees are offered additional training opportunities, such as food hygiene levels 1-3, interview training, and other specialised topics according to their goals. Our specialist employability coach provides practical support around CVs, job searches, and career planning

Throughout the programme, participants have access to regular support and supervision from our Café Training Manager, as well as food and refreshments. A reference can then be provided upon the successful completion of each stage.

Unfortunately, with this year's closure of Union Chapel and Margins Café, the team could not fairly assess which model was more effective. There is no doubt, however, of the effectiveness of the supported employment programme in the long term, as this message from a former trainee illustrates:

“

I was referred to The Margins Project's Kitchen Training Programme by the Welfare Centre at the 999 Club in Deptford, September 2018. I came there because I had reached a very difficult time in my life and was in a situation I never expected to face, feeling I had no other work options. I was also being threatened with eviction from my flat whilst struggling with serious health problems as a result of Type 1 diabetes.

My health was deteriorating further because of the stress and worry my housing situation was bringing me. I found myself without any hope.

When I started the Kitchen Training Programme, I felt a serious change within the first 10 days I was there.

I found myself enjoying the work in the kitchen and, in particular, interacting with customers in the café.

I felt much calmer and happier every day when I came in for the programme, and felt more optimistic about my life.

I was touched by the feeling that people do care and it gave me the confidence that things could get better. Two months later, before I graduated from the programme, the Kitchen and Training Manager Iraj found me a job. It was as a waiter in a restaurant in Luton, called La Mezza, and came with accommodation. I worked there for four months, until I was approached by another restaurant owner who offered me the job of in-house manager at The Dog and Gun,

near Chelmsford. It was a much better paid role and another job which came with accommodation above the restaurant. I have been working and living there ever since and am proud to be part of a successful, high-end business. Iraj has visited me at the restaurant to see how I'm doing, it was very nice to see him and brought back nice memories.

I can't imagine my situation now being any better than it is. I've ended up in a restaurant in the middle of beautiful countryside, my ideal location to live.

When I wake up in the morning I just feel so happy. I owe it all to The Margins Project, and I hope one day I can repay you.

”





Meet a Volunteer

Back in 2017, Gulcan came to our project drop-in when she was experiencing homelessness and sofa-surfing when possible. The council had suggested she find The Margins Project for support. Gulcan was very proactive and worked with us from the beginning while we supported her through our winter shelter network (CARIS). The team also helped her apply for and access benefits. She was very curious about how she could move forward and wanted to explore her options to find work and training opportunities. She was a great candidate for the training programme. Therefore, she was offered the opportunity to try out at several sessions in the kitchen. She joined the training program in February 2017, and was finished by June.

“When I came to Margins I felt so low and did not know where to turn. Going through the training program and receiving support from the team helped me to feel stronger and I got a sense of being able to do things again

After Gulcan completed the programme with us, she tried out a Pret-a-Manger work programme. Ultimately, Gulcan found a job at a supermarket and was able to find financial stability and longer-term accommodation. She was able to take on a tenancy and was on a good path into further independence.

Gulcan eventually contacted us and offered to volunteer. She wished to support us and others who find themselves in a similar situation to the one she went through not long ago.

“Volunteering at the drop-in, I feel that I can talk to people and may be able to help others to change their life the way I changed mine. I went through a lot and I can help people keep positive when they are feeling negative and are at a low in their lives

” Gulcan had plans to train in social care in 2020 but, like many others, COVID-19 put a pause on her plans. The team remain very grateful to Gulcan. We will continue to support her with any training to help her head in the direction that she sees as her future.

The Future



We predict a greater need for advice and wellbeing support in the imminent future.

Rough sleeping appeared to decrease for a period during the first lockdown, but we continued to see many people in need of support in various ways, including homelessness. The Margins Project was able to play a major role in supporting Islington Council to move people sleeping rough into temporary hotel accommodation. However, there remains a severe shortage of social and affordable housing in London. Unemployment is likely to continue to increase substantially and, when landlords can evict tenants again, there is concern of a wave of homelessness expected among people struggling with their rent. The post-COVID-19 world will see many others suffering trauma. There will be even more need for our support and services.

In the long run, we will work closely with our colleagues across the wider Union Chapel team as it develops as a community hub and ethical arts venue. The Margins Project encourage our visitors to contribute to civic life and engage in their activities, while also supporting the individuals and communities that have been hardest hit.

In light of COVID-19 and social distancing, the shape of The Margins Project's services (short- to medium-term) is far from certain. The Supported Employment Programme in the Margins Café is unlikely to resume until Union Chapel can once again operate as a venue. However, The Margins Project has evolved into a hot food takeaway for our would-be visitors. We are also exploring pop-up restaurant fundraising events and offering catering to film crews who hire parts of the building. In the long-term, when the venue can re-open, The Margins Project will explore widening training

opportunities as technicians and stewards.

The Crisis Drop-in had to wind down very temporarily but has now re-opened in an alternate state. Due to the physical constraints, it will not be fully operating until social distancing rules are substantially lifted. Our Housing and Benefits Advice service operated remotely using mobile phones and the caseload increased dramatically. Alongside our advisor, volunteers offered wellbeing support to rising numbers of people developing poor mental health due to isolation.

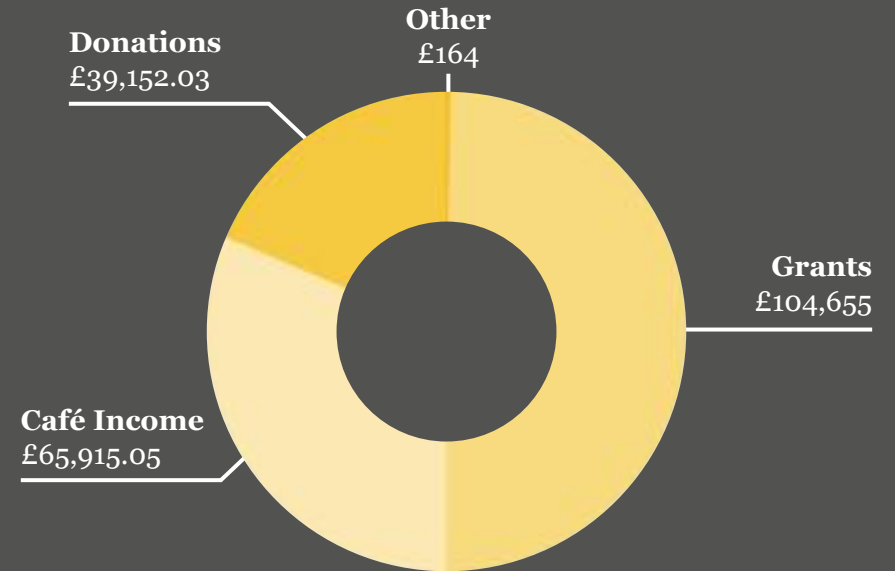


The Financials

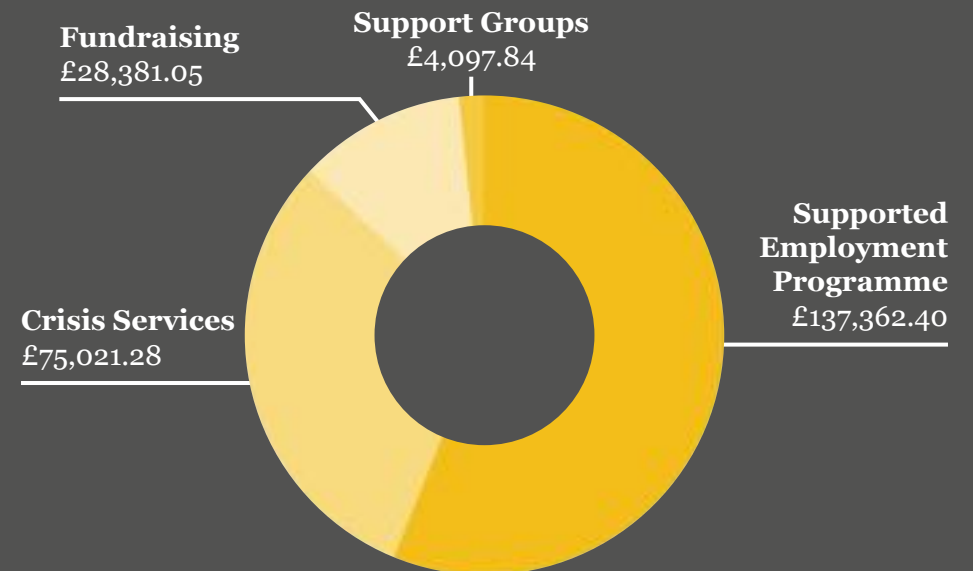
Statement of Financial Activity	2019/20 Unrestricted	2019/20 Restricted	2018/19 Unrestricted	2018/19 Restricted
Total income resources	£142,111.08	£67,775.25	£133,428	£76,784
Total resources expended	£144,725	£100,138	£195,249	£59,147
Net incoming resources	£2,614	£32,363	£61,821	£17,637
Total funds brought forward	£52,722	£66,363	£114,543	£48,725
Total funds carried forward	£50,107.80	£34,000	£52,722	£66,363

Please note free reserves of £30,000 are held to equivalent to 12 week's general fund expenditure

2019/20 Total Income £209,886



2019/20 Total Expenditure £244,863



Thank You

Allan Charitable Trust
Autotrader
Belle Epoque
Budgens
Canonbury Primary School
CARIS
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Susan Ferry
Andrew Gardner
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Karen Stallard
Streets of London
StreetSmart
Tesco
Trussell Trust
Liz Walker
Union Chapel Choir
Union Chapel Project
Waitrose Community Matters
Wrap up London

Our sincere thanks to all the individuals and organisations (some preferring to remain anonymous) who have given so generously through donations. To all our amazing volunteers who give their time. To all our partners in the Supported Employment Programme. To Union Chapel Events for all their support. Last but not least, many thanks to Not Actual Size for their pro-bono support.

Design by Not Actual Size www.notactualsize.co.uk

All photography by Daniela Sbrisny

The people photographed are not necessarily those that appear in our case studies.



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How You Can Support Us

Make a Donation

£20 pays for an emergency pack of food and essential goods

£50 pays for a person in difficulty to be given an advice session

£100 supports a trainee on the Supported Employment Programme

<https://www.unionchapel.org.uk/donate>



Volunteer

Give your time and skills to The Margins Project.

For further information contact:
marginsdropin@unionchapel.org.uk

Sign Up to Our Newsletter

Let us keep you up to date with our latest news and campaigns.

<https://www.unionchapel.org.uk/projects/margins>

Become an Ambassador

Spread the word about The Margins Project within your own networks and community. Encourage others to donate or fundraise to support The Margins Project's work.

Contact: andrew@unionchapel.org.uk



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