

helping create healthier communities

Jon Brewer describes the health-related work of the Shaftesbury Society

As a privileged schoolboy at Harrow, Anthony Ashley Cooper (later the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury) came across a pauper's funeral. The scene changed his life. He not only became the leader of the evangelical movement of his day, supporting foreign missions, founding the Bible Society, the Church Pastoral Aid Society, and numerous local YMCAs but as a Member of Parliament from 1826 he became one of Britain's greatest industrial and social reformers. Shaftesbury steered through factory reform, limiting the shifts of textile workers to ten hours a day. He took a special interest in the care of the insane. His Mines Act (1842) banned women and children under 13 from working underground.

For 39 years he was president of the Ragged School Union, an enterprise now known as The Shaftesbury Society. This tackles issues of unemployment, homelessness and the problems of low income families. Many of the programmes run by Shaftesbury are directly health-related, including the care and education of people with physical or learning disabilities.

People with disability

Shaftesbury runs three schools and two colleges for young people with disabilities. In each case the staff work closely with visiting health professionals, as part of each pupil's individual curriculum. Health professionals play a key role in the Society's provision of residential, domiciliary and respite care.

In Harlow, for example, Donna Spooner is key worker to Valerie Hart at Shaftesbury's Keefield Close. Valerie, who contracted meningitis at age 11, has been a resident at Keefield since the beginning of 1997. She has both learning and physical disabilities. Before, she lived at home with her mother in Loughton. This could not be sustained when her mother became ill and had to go into hospital.

The aim is for Valerie to achieve as much independence as possible and this aim is being pursued according to a care plan. Donna oversees Valerie's personal care and arranges visits from her doctor, dentist, physio and speech therapist. Donna listens to their suggestions and shares the ideas with colleagues at Shaftesbury.

The care and education support Shaftesbury provides for each individual often includes ensuring healthcare support. However, the overall care provided by Shaftesbury in itself has immeasurable health benefits. The same can be said of the families Shaftesbury supports, many of whom have been through great stress.

Low income

Homelessness and unemployment have obvious health effects. Unemployment often leads to loss of confidence and isolation from others, and can result in depression. Low income and financial difficulties often lead to stress and dietary problems. Shaftesbury runs training courses for people who are long term unemployed. The aim is to help them gain the skills and confidence they need to re-enter the workplace.

Lena Fox House in south London offers direct-access accommodation for homeless young people, and also provides a resettlement service. Working with the nearby Shaftesbury Resources Centre it helps break the cycle of homelessness.

The Resources Centre helps with quality secondhand furniture for people who have been given unfurnished accommodation. It provides cots, toys, stair gates and clothes, helping make home life a safer and more stimulating environment for children. The project as a whole seeks to promote emotional and psychological stability among parents and children alike.

Church-linked community development

Shaftesbury works in partnership with a number of associate churches to provide day centres, community centres, and nurseries. In the process it enables the church concerned to respond effectively to community needs.



Chrissie Hayman

Photo: Shaftesbury

A key part of the work with local churches is Shaftesbury's Community Worker scheme. Chrissie Hayman is one of these workers, based in Crouch End, north London. She has worked at this church centre since it was opened ten years ago.

'I love working with people and getting around in the community' Chrissie explains. 'Working face to face with people is the most fulfilling part of the job and it is really rewarding to meet needs. It helps form a bridge between the

church and the community and helps local people to fulfil their dreams.'

Shaftesbury works with Chrissie and her development worker colleagues to ensure that high standards of practice are maintained through a professional development forum, regular supervision and annual performance reviews. This ensures that Chrissie is never completely isolated and alone in her work.

At Crouch End a wide variety of services is delivered. This is not due to Chrissie's efforts alone. Her presence plus support and training from Shaftesbury have helped unlock the skills of local people. Chrissie has helped develop a team of volunteers at the centre. Local Health Visitors are supportive and gladly refer people to the centre.

Among the programmes at the centre are parenting classes for pre-nursery children: birth to 16 months and toddler to two and a half years. Groups of 15-20 parents meet twice a week in the afternoon for two hours. They hear speakers and discuss health-related issues such as diet and health and safety in the home.

Topics include weaning, milk allergies, asthma and eczema. Reflecting the ethnic make-up of the community the centre has helped Asian children over difficulties with the acidic spicy diet served in their households. Dietary issues in the postnatal group include the need to avoid sweet drinks from bottles and for a better balanced diet with more fruit and vegetables.

'Health and safety' is another key topic covered at the family centre. They are discussed in group meetings and there is the offer of home visits as appropriate. Chrissie and the team ensure they have built a relationship with parents before commenting on things around the home: safety gates (or lack of them) and the unsafe positioning of furniture. They look out for other hazards, including the need to keep bleach and shampoo away from children.

Discretion is important. There are issues that Chrissie may not feel able to tackle during a visit. She may opt, instead, to raise



Photo: Shaftesbury

the issue as part of group discussion when that parent is present. It may open up an opportunity for the issue to be followed up gently with a 'what do you think about . . .' over coffee at the end of the session. Chrissie and the team also work directly with older children in an after-school club run at the centre.

Motivation

Across the spectrum of Shaftesbury's work, partnership with other agencies such as health professionals can make all the difference. This is especially the case when these health professionals share Shaftesbury's Christian motivation.

How can Shaftesbury help you?

- Get in touch to see if you might refer people to us. There are many programmes throughout the country that may be able to offer assistance.

How can you help Shaftesbury?

- With much needed finance.
- Bring Shaftesbury into your church. *Shaftesbury Sunday* falls every year at the end of April. Shaftesbury can provide information packs and speakers and can help your church consider Christian social action issues.
- If you live within the M25 the Resources Centre will collect donated furniture.
- Pray for Shaftesbury. Join the Prayer Partner Scheme. Use the prayer calendar.
- Become a governor. Our schools and colleges are always looking for committed Christians to get involved as local governors. Can you help?

Jon Brewer is on the staff of the Shaftesbury Society

For information on any of these issues please ring 0181-239 5555 or write to: The Shaftesbury Society, 16 Kingston Road, London SW19 1JZ.



Photo: Shaftesbury