

JANUARY MEETING

First Speaker

The Work of Porchlight

A talk by Fiona Tapley – Services User Involvement Co-ordinator

Reported by Alan Lee

Porchlight works with homeless people and for 40 years has been Kent's premier homeless charity. It was set up in 1974 by Tom Giggord motivated by his own experience of being homeless.

At present they have 160 staff of which Porchlight try to ensure that at least 25% have themselves been homeless at one time. They support about 1200 homeless people on a daily basis. Fiona stated that statistically 1 in 11 people have been homeless sometime in their life. She then gave the meeting a number of examples, many concerning young people.

There are also what is known as the "Hidden Homeless". These include the "Sofa Surfers" - who rely on friends to put them up for a night or two. Others live in squats or are in temporary B & B accommodation. There are also a growing number living in caravans or cars.

Porchlight also run shared houses and hostels, a mixture of self-contained and shared accommodation. The charity has 115 beds in the Dover/Ashford/Canterbury and Ramsgate area. The Dover area accommodation includes a 9 bed adult hostel and a building in the Tower Hamlets area - which can house a maximum of 7 people for up to 2 years. A number of these people suffer with mental health



problems. Within Dover there are another 3 shared houses that accommodate a further 9 people.

The charity runs various initiatives which include: "Porchlight Adolescent Support Service" - Where 26 staff work in conjunction with K.C.C. Last year they helped 2,000 vulnerable young people.

"Porchlight Primary Care Link Service in Kent" - They have 25 staff who, along with G.P's, assist people with housing, money and life problems that can affect their health.

"Community, Inclusion and Befriending Service" - run throughout Kent. This supports people for 6 months to help them integrate back into the community and resume normal everyday living. This supports about 5,000 people annually.

In East Kent they work closely with the private rented sector arranging accommodation with landlords. Many homeless people find it difficult to get a tenancy agreement as they do not have a regular address or prior place of residence.

"Porchlight Helpline" - this is a 24 hour service, lottery funded, with about 150 staff and 50 volunteers. There are always vacancies if anyone is interested.

A dedicated person is employed to help the homeless to return or to start employment. They link with many businesses and education establishments to improve basic literacy, numeracy and life skills.

Jobs, education, training and events have been provided locally thanks to a grant from Dover Big Local. This encouraged youngsters to attend sports and music events in Pencester Gardens. Others have been on sailing ships and courses with West Ham Football Club. These also help to

teach community values and working together.

"My Streets" is an initiative started in Canterbury. It includes a tour of the city but also teaches people where they can obtain help, have a wash or a bath when needed.

During her talk it became obvious that Fiona had a great passion for helping the homeless through her work with Porchlight.

————— Second Speaker —————

Invicta Miners – Stories of the Kent Coalfields

A talk by **Jim Davis**

Reported by **Terry Sutton**

The era when there were 7,000 miners working in the Kent coalfield was recalled when Jim Davis, an expert on the industry, was the guest speaker at our meeting on January 18th.

A number of former Kent miners were among the appreciative audience at the public meeting at St Mary's parish centre.

Jim knows what he's talking about. He worked at Betteshanger colliery for 33 years starting as a haulage hand and finishing his mining career, as the last employee there,



Statue of Miner Now Moved From Dover

by filling in the pit shaft when Betteshanger closed. In retirement he went on to become a successful Dover businessman.

Using film and other screened images he told how work on an abandoned Channel Tunnel at Shakespeare Cliff confirmed the belief that there was coal to be found under Kent. Coal had been mined from the same seams under Belgium and France since the Middle Ages, he said.

In the quest for the hidden coal East Kent



Shakespeare Colliery 1905