

# A Night Under the Stars celebrates a sparkling decade helping the Passage to help homeless people

IN OCTOBER 1980 Cardinal Basil Hume approached the Daughters of Charity to see if the basement area of St Vincent's Centre in Carlisle Place, close to Westminster Cathedral, could be used to provide shelter and comfort to the homeless. From these humble beginnings, the Passage was born.

Next month marks 30 years of the Passage, continuing to provide resources that encourage, inspire and challenge homeless people to transform their lives. Over the last 30 years the organisation has helped over 100,000 homeless people.

The Passage now, from that same original site, runs Britain's largest day centre for homeless people. In addition to providing services in our hostel and studio flats, over 200 people a day come to the day centre to receive immediate care (food, bathroom facilities, clothing,

laundry and a place off the street), housing advice, health services, and access to employment and training opportunities.

In addition to the 350 volunteers who support the work, there are also 100 staff. All of this costs money, and the Passage needs more than £4 million a year just to run these services, £2 million of which is sought from voluntary income.

A team of volunteers make up the fundraising team at the Passage, enabling 90p in every pound that someone donates to the Passage to go directly to frontline work by keeping overhead costs down. The Passage has a variety of initiatives to raise income and October 2010 also sees the 10th A Night Under the Stars fundraising concert in aid of the Passage, one of the most ambitious of these initiatives.

Again from humble beginnings, Night Under the Stars, an idea that came from Fr Michael Seed, has grown into one of the years' must-attend events.

The idea was to bring together stars of screen and stage who, by giving their time and talent freely, would enable the Passage to put on a show for the public while raising much-needed funds for their work. Now held at the Royal Festival Hall, the concert for 2010 has the theme "a night at the opera".

A committee of dedicated volunteers gives their time to organise the event, and for the whole 10 years Peter Sheppard has led the committee. When asked to sum up A Night Under the Stars, Mick Clarke, Passage Chief Executive, said: "Night Under the Stars is a unique event and I can't thank Peter and his committee enough for all they do. So many talented people come together

and give their time freely, in order to encourage others to support the work of the Passage. The Passage is about long-term solutions for homeless people, and works to help them break out of the cycle of homelessness for good. By purchasing a ticket for the concert, people help the Passage ensure that homeless people have the chance they deserve to further develop their own skills and talents and once again become a part of society."

Many artists have supported Night Under the Stars over the years, as can be seen from the images on this page, and in 2008 Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor himself performed a stirring piano recital. Commenting on the concert that year the Cardinal said: "We cannot all dedicate sufficient of our own time to empower homeless people to change their lives.

However, we can share in the work of the Passage as we support it through this evening's concert and into the future as volunteers, as donors and through our prayers."

In the very first annual report of the Passage, 30 years ago, Bishop O'Donoghue thanked donors in that first year for supporting the Passage and "keeping the wolf from the door". Thirty years on, and in the current precarious economic situation we all find ourselves in, the challenge for the Passage is perhaps even greater. But concerts like a Night under the Stars give everybody a chance to keep the wolf at bay and ensure that the Passage is always there to help those most in need.

Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster said this week: "As patron of the Passage, I am delighted to add my full support to this year's Night with the Stars.

Not only will this event be great entertainment, but it will help to raise funds for this worthy and important cause. The work of the Passage with the homeless in this part of London is deserving of widespread support. I hope you will give your support to this cause."

*A Night at the Opera*, the concert for this year, takes place on October 7 and celebrates 10 years of Night Under the Stars at the Royal Festival Hall, London. Griff Rhys Jones will host the evening with Joan Rodgers, much-loved soprano, leading a cast in operatic hits by Mozart, Bizet, Rossini, Puccini and many others. Victoria Simmonds, Jack Liebeck, Toby Purser and the Orion Symphony Orchestra and Chorus also feature. Tickets from £10 upwards. The Passage, SW1P 1NL, 020 7592 1856 or tickets@passage.org.uk.