

The people seeing us through winter

CHRISTMAS IS PORTRAYED AS A TIME OF PLENTY BUT THE COLDER MONTHS CAN BE DIFFICULT. MEET THOSE WORKING TO KEEP OUR COMMUNITIES PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY WARM

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Staying warm James Anderson, founder of Depher

If anyone is dedicated to keeping the country warm this winter, it's James Anderson, founder of Depher. The Liverpoolian launched the charity in 2017 after meeting an older man who had been taken advantage of by a fellow plumber, "He made the gentleman believe he needed a boiler by sticking a magazine in the tank." James challenged the company's £5,500 quotation for a

job he did himself for just £170. That was the catalyst for launching Depher, which aims to protect older, vulnerable and disabled people in the community.

First building on James' background in plumbing, Depher has since evolved into a bigger operation that covers many needs, from help with paying bills to food delivery. And its aim remains the same: to give faith, hope and understanding to every member of the community. "We want people to know there are companies to help them when they think they're alone or nobody cares", he says.

The cost-of-living crisis means the charity's support has never felt more necessary. James tells the story of one woman with two young children who had only "half a tin of beans, half a tin of tomatoes, five or six slices of bread and a bag of pasta" to eke out over five days.

Depher provided them with two months' food, new carpets, a cooker, a boiler, radiators, electricity and gas. "If I had one Christmas wish," says James, "it would be for no child to go hungry, ever again." This winter, Depher will stay open seven days a week while bringing free plumbing and heating to those who can't afford it, as well as free gifts for children from their shop.

James believes Depher can act as a beacon of hope and set an example for other companies and individuals. To make a difference, "one thing we can all do is to come together triumphant as communities who look after each other," he says. "We don't need the establishment. We don't need the government. We just need each other."

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Keeping in good spirits

*Rosemarie Mallett,
Bishop of Croydon*

Rosemarie Mallett, Bishop of Croydon, puts into practice what she preaches: love in action. “I hope that, as I go about meeting people in churches and the community, they will get to see how that works,” she says. “Whether that’s speaking to a bereaved family member in a church or working with others to bring changes in the way those on the margins are treated in our society.”

After years spent working in academia – as a sociologist specialising in ethno-cultural mental health – while spending her non-working hours trying to work for God and for good in the church and her community, Rosemarie felt called to switch paths and was ordained as a deacon in 2004. In 2022, she became

Bishop of Croydon, the first Black woman in this role. She says her academic background still informs her work – not least the challenge of leading a large, diverse congregation within the wider community.

“We know that at least one in four people in the community at large face some sort of mental health challenge,” she explains. Her “core knowledge” around mental health helps her “understand the variety of challenges people may be facing, and their ability to make or not make choices in life.”

Bishop Rosemarie’s work remains rooted in her core principles: love your neighbour as yourself; do to others as you would have done unto you; show respect to gain respect. She says this is key to connecting with others and that the heart of any community is recognising “the impact that we can

have on others by our actions and, consequentially, trying not to aggravate tensions – especially with people we don’t know very well or at all.”

It’s not only awareness that can help us make an impact as individuals this winter. For Rosemarie, it comes back to that idea of “love in action.” If you’re feeling like you want to contribute but are unsure of how to help your community, a little goes a long way.

“Offer a little of what you have to those who do not have,” she advises. “That might be time, it might be money, it might be something in your house or home that you no longer use or need. Keep your eyes and ears open, look around you and see the need.”

But, Rosemarie believes, we are all stronger when we come together. “There are so many groups out there trying to help,” she urges. “Join in.” »



Getting dressed up

Sol Escobar,
founder of Give Your Best

If we felt like treating ourselves to a blue jumper, chances are we'd buy that blue jumper. We'd find one in our size, in a shade that suited us, taking that choice for granted. But what if war or a natural disaster upended our life so those options were taken away? And clothes went from being a pleasure to an essential that didn't fit or suit us?

Sol Escobar's charity Give Your Best was founded to give some normality back to female refugees and those seeking asylum. She says refugees often

have to accept whatever clothes they're given, however unsuitable, but her platform offers women choice. "We want to take away any sort of shame that might be attached to using a clothing bank or asking for help from a charity," she says. Once clothes are picked out, they're sent to the new owner with a note and extra items like chocolate and sanitary products.

Give Your Best launched during lockdown when Sol realised that getting clothes had become a big problem for the refugees in her community – "they didn't have bank accounts, so they couldn't shop online, and charity shops were closed." After rallying her friends and family, she was inundated with potential donations.

To avoid being left with things that weren't suitable, Sol asked everyone who wanted to donate to take a photo of the item and upload it to her Instagram page.

"This way, people could choose what they actually liked, in their size," Sol says. A simple step to restore dignity. Plus, as the donors enjoyed the experience, too, Sol "realised there was an appetite for people to donate in a way that was really meaningful." That idea grew into its own shiny shopping platform and, over the last two years, 15,000 clothes have been shopped from about 1,700 donors.

And Sol says there are other ways to help minority groups feel welcome. "If you're supportive of a community, do so



Putting food on the table

Robbie Davison,
founder of *Can Cook*

“We started Can Cook for a really simple reason,” says Robbie Davison, who founded the social enterprise in 2017. “I met a lot of local Liverpool residents and realised most weren’t cooking at all at home and had really poor eating habits.”

By joining forces with a chef, Robbie created cookery lessons showing how to make simple yet tasty dishes and, within two years, he and his team had a commercial cookery school, which funds lessons for people in deprived areas.

Robbie spends a large part of his time campaigning about the importance of food quality and nutrition. He believes that tackling food poverty starts with education about cooking with fresh ingredients at home, rather than with food banks, which he doesn’t see as a long-term solution. “You get random food at food banks, and that random food hardly ever makes meals,” he says. “So, it means eight out of 10 people never use a food bank when they’re hungry.”

“Food banks train people to eat products instead of meals. Imagine the indignity of that,” he continues. “What we’re saying at Can Cook is that, first and foremost, we’ll see you with dignity.”

We’ll deliver meals to your door and we’ll quickly get you cooking again.”

Robbie focuses on helping people feel in control of what they eat. Take for example Charlene, now employed by Can Cook, a mother of three in her 30s. “She came to us because she’d been eating processed food all her life and didn’t want her children to have the same relationship with food,” says Robbie. “She was terrified of veg. Within two weeks of working with us, she was eating veg and within four weeks, she was cooking all the food. Now she home-cooks for herself all the time.”

The Can Cook model works on a sliding scale. For the first month, the food is given for free and after that, households can buy £40 worth of food for just £10. Then after eight weeks, they pay £15 for the same amount, and so on. Currently, around six in 10 of the people using the free meals move on to paying a donation, and Robbie believes passionately that this not only helps families start eating good food again, but it’s also the key to something bigger.

“I’m a socialist and, for me, that means everybody gets treated the same regardless of their circumstances,” he says. “Every single thing we put on their plates is something we will eat ourselves. That’s a really big deal. Unless we can do that, social crisis never ends.” **S**

loudly,” she says, “because the women we help know what the news headlines say and they feel very unwelcome.

“Just having a chat to someone can make such a big difference. For me, it all started because I talked to someone in Calais affected by displacement. If we talk to people with lived experience, our views can be changed.”

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