

A LIFE IN A DAY

"This book follows on from 'The Story of The Whitechapel Mission' and depicts the daily activities of the dedicated team who provide a much needed service to some of society's most vulnerable people."

GILL PARKER: CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

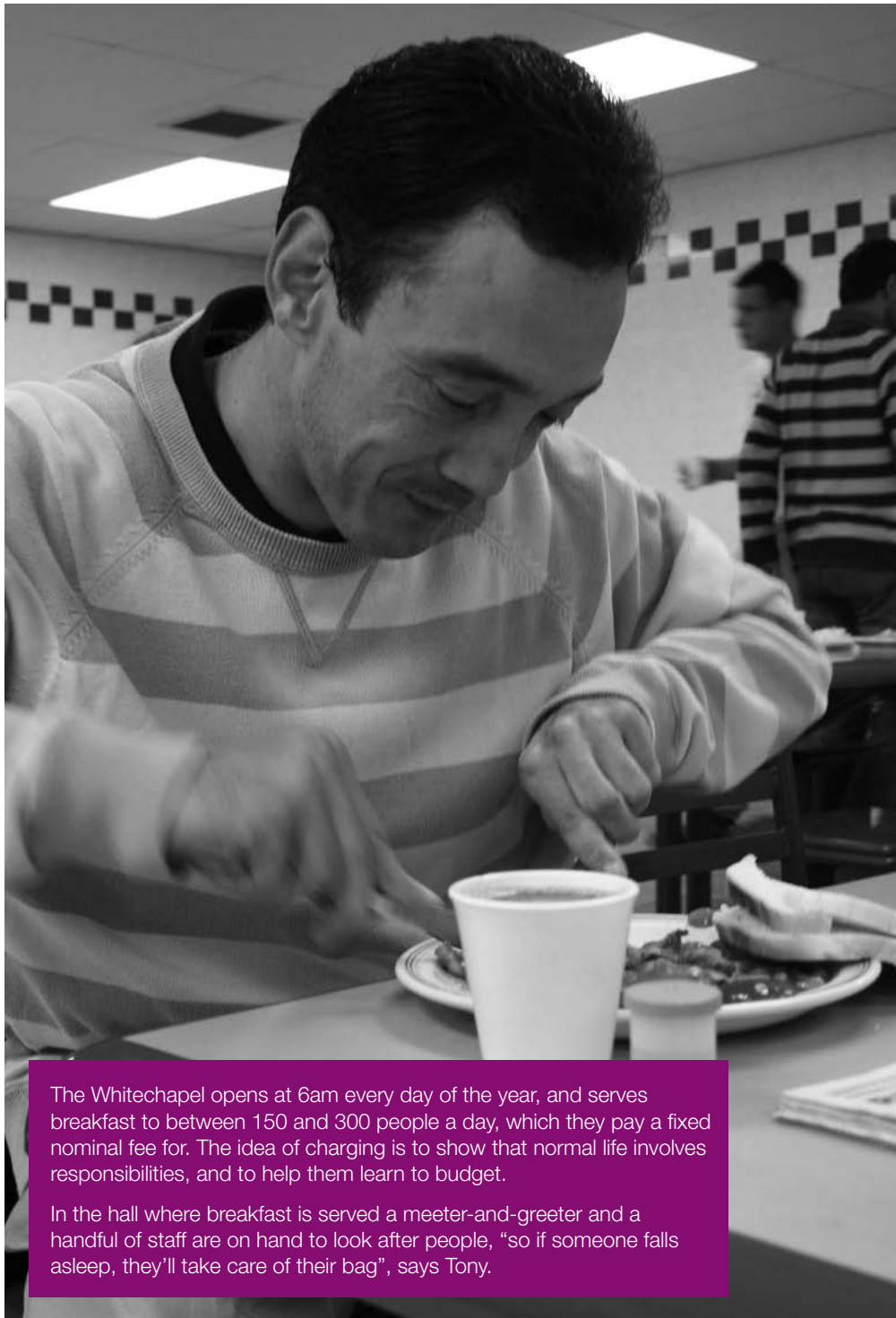


The Whitechapel Mission has been established since 1876 and has a reputation for dealing with desperate cases with warmth and dynamism, continuing to deal with the changing face of homelessness in London.

Based in east London, the Mission offers a genuine welcome and practical support to the poor and homeless every day of the year. Tony Miller has been running the Whitechapel Mission since 1981.

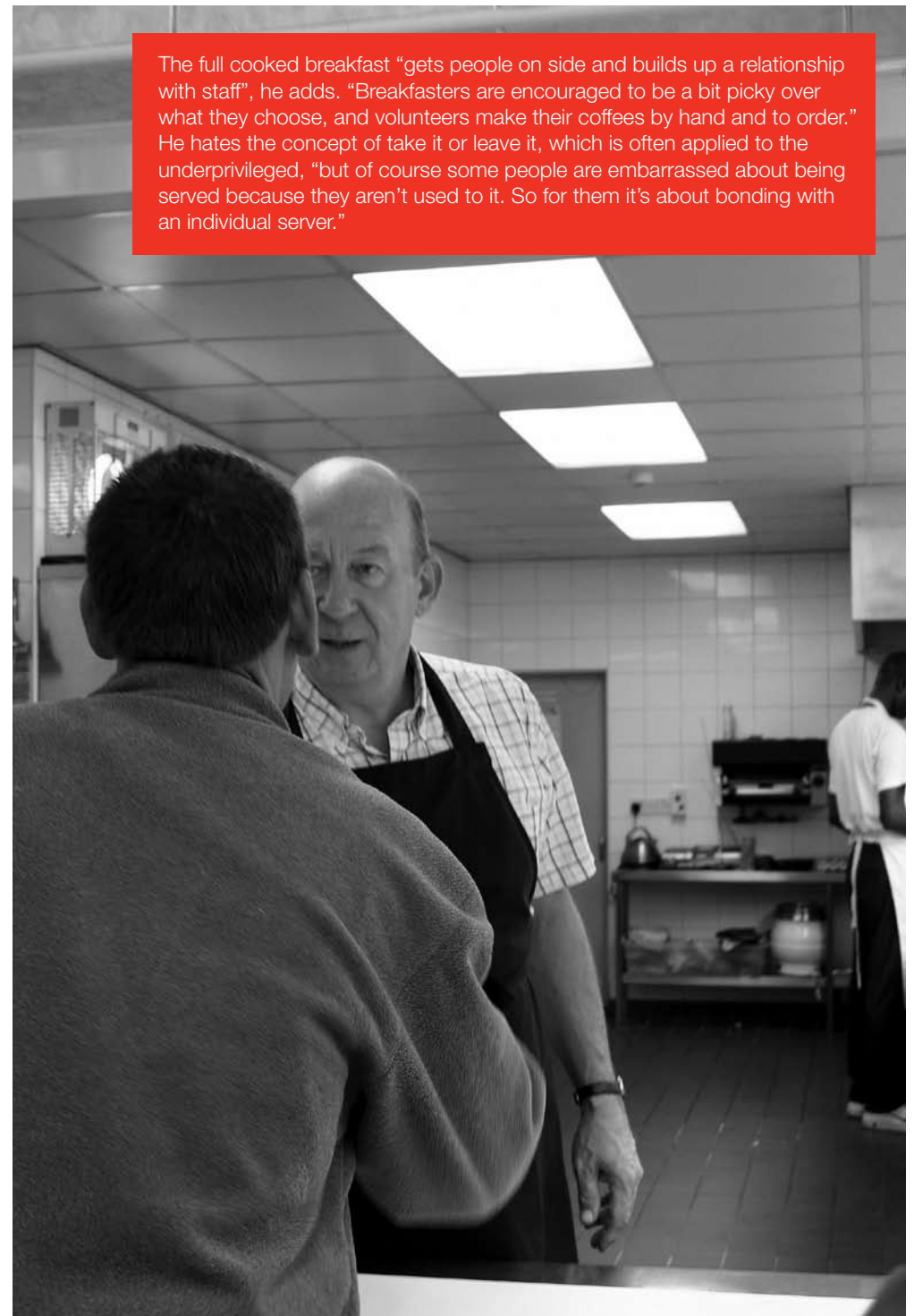
Tony's innovations have seen the operation go from strength to strength. Working closely with his dedicated team, he is at the sharp end of homelessness and poverty, where problems are extreme, occasionally horrific and untimely death is common.

But through their practical support and consistent care, they can turn desperate cases around, giving people without hope a second chance.



The Whitechapel opens at 6am every day of the year, and serves breakfast to between 150 and 300 people a day, which they pay a fixed nominal fee for. The idea of charging is to show that normal life involves responsibilities, and to help them learn to budget.

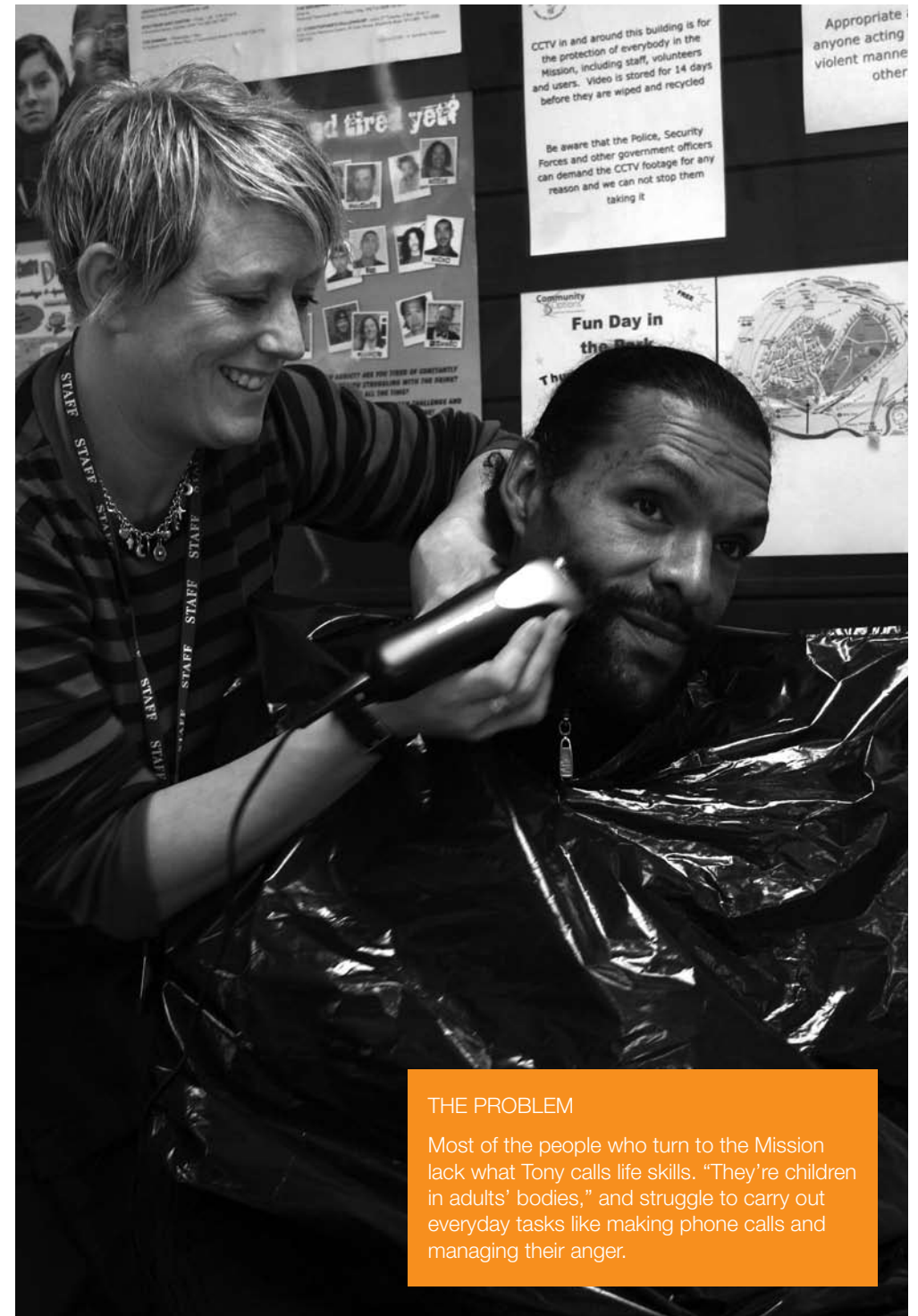
In the hall where breakfast is served a meeter-and-greeter and a handful of staff are on hand to look after people, "so if someone falls asleep, they'll take care of their bag", says Tony.



The full cooked breakfast "gets people on side and builds up a relationship with staff", he adds. "Breakfasters are encouraged to be a bit picky over what they choose, and volunteers make their coffees by hand and to order." He hates the concept of take it or leave it, which is often applied to the underprivileged, "but of course some people are embarrassed about being served because they aren't used to it. So for them it's about bonding with an individual server."



Clients also have access to showers, clean razors and new toothbrushes – a return to normality for those who have had to sleep in their clothes.



THE PROBLEM

Most of the people who turn to the Mission lack what Tony calls life skills. “They’re children in adults’ bodies,” and struggle to carry out everyday tasks like making phone calls and managing their anger.



THE MISSION'S APPROACH

The Mission offers long-term support that equips its clients for the world. The team give the sort of stability that would be the norm in a strong family unit – that means rules and boundaries. “We set boundaries in the same way that a parent would,” says Tony, “and like parents, we show love and respect, and punish in a constructive way.” Many of these people live in a society where the bully wins, “so the more they bully, the more we’ll stand up to them.” Violent and anti-social behaviour will result in them being asked to leave, but they’re always welcome back the next day.



At 8.30, the Life Skills Centre opens, set up in 2004, now sees 20-50 people every weekday. Routine administrative tasks can be overwhelming and apparently insurmountable, and the Mission's staff help clients deal with the bureaucracy of life - from claiming benefit or rent issues, to getting hold of their birth certificates and setting up email accounts.

There are also regular visits from outsiders like drug dependency workers, councillors, nurses and educationalists.



While the professionals sort problems out, their clients are not passive spectators but are encouraged to be involved in the process. “We have to be careful that we don’t breed dependency,” says Tony.

Tony devotes the afternoons to visiting corporate sponsors, explaining how supporting the Mission has tangible benefits for them. Employees get a lot out volunteering there, which builds morale and in turn contributes to their employers’ Corporate Social Responsibility policies.

Tony also visits church groups. “60% of our income comes through churches and private individuals linked to churches. So I explain the Christian aspect of our work to them. These donors need to hear what’s being done in their name.”

The afternoons are also given over to dealing with organisations like the probation services and community services.



Friday lunchtimes are reserved for women. Ladies’ Day was set up to give deprived women their own time and space, away from the dominating and intimidating influence of some of the men they meet on the street.



Three years on, a core community of 30 regulars meet up for lunch and an activity, organised by Tony's wife, Sue. This is a democratic set-up, where staff, volunteers and the ladies sit at a long table and together plan Fridays' menus and how they're going to spend their time, and chat. "It's such a success because they all feel it's theirs," says Sue, "they're in their comfort zone."



The ladies choose activities such as finger painting, decorating T-shirts and making a cookery book of the Ladies' Day meals. "These are pass-times they missed out on as children," says Sue, "Now, they want the sort of escapism that would appeal to a young girl."



And it doesn't end there. On most nights, the doorbell rings, and Sue or Tony goes down to find someone hoping for a cup of tea or a chat. Even out of hours, they're never turned away.

There are many ways to help the Whitechapel Mission; donating money, clothing and everyday provisions; and through volunteering and fund raising. If you are interested in helping further please go to the website for more information. www.whitechapel.org.uk

The Whitechapel Mission would like to thank everyone who has contributed to and supported this project.

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