BEGGING FOR CHANGE

YOUR KINDNESS COULD KEEP PEOPLE ON THE STREET

DEPAUL
Homelessness has no place

welome
ORGANISATION
The Begging for Change Campaign

The Begging for Change Campaign is a campaign run by 2 Belfast-based charities - Depaul and the Welcome Organisation - and is supported by Belfast Policing and Community Safety Partnership, Belfast City Centre Management, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Police Service Northern Ireland.

The Begging Campaign asks people to think before giving money to those who are begging and answers some of the common myths around begging. Depaul and the Welcome Organisation’s primary concern in undertaking this campaign is the health and wellbeing of those involved in street activity.

About Depaul

Depaul is a charity supporting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Established in Belfast in 2005, we support thousands of vulnerable men, women and families each year.

We believe that homelessness has no place and our mission is to end homelessness and change lives.

About The Welcome Organisation

The Welcome Organisation adopts a non-judgemental approach to addressing homelessness issues. All of our services are based on the principles of harm reduction delivered through low-threshold services. We are recognised for accepting people ‘where they are at’ as opposed to where others think they should be.
“It breaks my heart to see people out in the cold, sure it’s only a few pence to help them get something warm to eat and drink”

Unfortunately, those who are begging on the streets of Belfast, more often than not, have addiction issues. These addictions can lead to deterioration in their health. Our overall aim is to provide vulnerable people with support.

This evidence comes from The Welcome Organisation, who are out and about on the streets of Belfast every day from 8am until 1am the following morning. They estimate that almost all those they come across begging have some form of addiction.

Research from elsewhere in the UK shows a direct correlation between begging and addiction. Begging has increased significantly in Belfast over the last 18 months and there is a growing concern that more people are begging due to addiction. We want to ensure people are supported into services where they can access help.

We need to ensure people have access to treatment services and are supported away from begging.

“MYTH #1

“I was in town last Saturday night and a fella asked me for a few pounds to pay for a room in a hostel”

The emergency hostel accommodation set aside for Belfast men and women who are homeless does not require payment in order to ‘book in’. Hostel rent is covered through Housing Benefit, which hostel workers can help the new resident to claim once they have moved into the hostel.

There are over 2000 temporary bed spaces in Belfast each night, 319 of these are Direct Access hostels, and any vacancies in these can be accessed via The Welcome Organisation’s outreach team. Depaul also offers 23 beds in Stella Maris to support people with active alcohol addiction; it is not a prerequisite to stop drinking to access this service.

The Welcome Organisation, Depaul and other charities in the city will support people to access other services when they are accommodated. The Outreach Team is active from 8am – 1am the following morning and supports around 1300 people annually.

Between October and December 2015 only 4 of the 146 people arrested in Belfast for begging were without an address. Most people begging have accommodation of sorts, either a hostel place or a flat or bedsit.

Most people who beg have accommodation. Outreach workers can help those who don’t to access a hostel bed.

“MYTH #2

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“But there can’t be any harm in giving someone a few pence”

Giving to people who beg is not a benign act without consequences, and begging is actually an offence. Depaul and The Welcome Organisation have both worked for over a decade in Belfast and we have seen many lives damaged by drugs and alcohol misuse. We have lost people to addiction and these addictions have often been supported by loose change that comes from very well-meaning members of the public.

By all means engage with people on the street. A smile and a hello go can go a long way. You could buy them a cup of tea. Most importantly, if you are concerned that they are sleeping rough contact The Welcome Organisation’s outreach service on 07894931047.

Giving to people who beg is not a benign act. In some cases it may have serious consequences.
**MYTH #4**

“Come on, these are people who are just a bit down on their luck”

Most people begging are not individuals in temporary difficulties, but are people who are dependent on begging income.

There is no need to beg on the streets in 2016. It is an urban myth that if you have no address, you cannot claim benefits. This simply isn’t true. In addition, The Welcome Organisation has a day centre where people can access food, clothing and support. They can also use this as a postal address.

That is not to say that there are not many people on the streets needing help and support. The outreach team is out every night helping people who are homeless into accommodation.

Many people asking for your money are caught in a desperate cycle of begging from the public.

The Welcome Organisation runs an outreach team commissioned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to help people who are rough sleeping. Please work with them, not against them.

**MYTH #5**

“Isn’t this just about some people wanting cleaner city centres?”

Depaul and the Welcome Organisation’s primary concern is for those who are seriously damaging their health and putting themselves at risk by begging on the streets. All partners involved in this campaign want to see those who are vulnerable supported into services.

However, we are also aware that local communities are justifiably concerned at the impact of begging on their neighbourhoods. In a recent survey in Belfast 37% of people surveyed said that they felt intimidated by people begging on the streets. 53% said they would not use a cash point if they saw a person begging in front of it.

Working to address concerns about begging and its impact is a responsibility that both Depaul and The Welcome Organisation take seriously.
“I heard someone say in the pub the other night that they saw people being dropped off to go and sit on the street and beg, that can’t be true can it?”

There is anecdotal information suggesting that organised crime gangs could be linked to some cases of begging. These gangs see begging purely as a means of making money and your donation could, for example, be used to assist or fund criminal operations.

You can never be sure that the people who are begging are not in a situation where they are being exploited against their will.

Often people who beg are in need or may even be exploited by others. Any suspicions about criminal involvement should be reported to PSNI or Crimestoppers.

MYTH #7

“Are some of the people begging on the streets of Belfast doing it because they have no access to other support in this country?”

This could be true but in most cases people can be helped to access support. The Welcome Organisation will provide support to people to find out their rights and will make onward referrals to other agencies.

If a person has no entitlement in Northern Ireland they can be supported to return to their country of origin if they can access support there.

There are a range of agencies working to support people who are not originally from Northern Ireland, to find out more visit www.belfastcity.gov.uk/community/advice/migrants.aspx
MYTH #8

“Ok you have made some valid points but aren’t you just demonising all homeless people as feckless beggars and addicts?”

A key point here is that only a small percentage of people begging are homeless, significantly less than 20%. People who are homeless do not always beg, and people who are begging are not always homeless.

Our overriding concern is to save lives. Every year there are drug or drink related deaths of people who use homeless services. We have seen this in 2016 in our own city. We want to help people into decent accommodation or services where they can get the care and support they need. To do this we need the backing of the public.

Remember, only a small number of people who beg are homeless.

MYTH #9

“I really want to help and see that there are lots of groups out on the streets; is that the best way for me to get involved?”

It is really important that we have a co-ordinated response to supporting people involved in street activity. Our main goal has to be to help people into accommodation and get them the support they need. We should do all we can to NOT facilitate people staying on the streets.

If you want to support people who are actually homeless, Depaul and The Welcome Organisation, and other charities in the city have volunteer programmes in place. We would encourage concerned individuals to contact established charities who can provide support to you and to those who need access to services.

Volunteering is a great thing to do and contributes to a vibrant society. We must ensure that any action we are involved in does not cause any further harm.
BY GIVING MONEY TO PEOPLE WHO ARE BEGGING, YOU COULD BE PROLONGING ADDICTION & OTHER ISSUES.

Please give responsibly and support local charities instead.

Website: [bit.ly/begging4change](http://bit.ly/begging4change)
#begging4change