

Amber

# get set!

The twice yearly newsletter from **Amber** – Summer 2022





# A new Amber centre for Kent, Jubilee celebrations and much more...

We were delighted to open the doors to Downsview, the new centre in Kent, in late April. The purchase of the property was made possible with a hugely generous donation from the Henry Oldfield Trust, a grant giving charity, chaired by Richard Oldfield, Deputy Lieutenant of Kent, former High Sheriff, and a trustee of Amber.

The latest figures show that an estimated 2,500 young people were either homeless or at critical risk of homelessness over the last year in Kent. Amber's centre will work closely with partners in the area to help young people facing homelessness and long term unemployment find work, education and a safe and secure home.

As Richard says, *"Amber has a strong reputation for working in partnership and supporting the community. Its arrival in Kent will help get young people into training and the world of work."*

*"I've seen first-hand how Amber works and the Henry Oldfield Trust is delighted to be helping make its vision for a centre in Kent a reality."*

It is great to be able to share an interview between Sarah, our new Centre Manager and Mark, one of the first young people to use the centre on page 3.

We have also continued to provide support to young homeless people across our other 3 centres and it is fantastic to be able to share positive news from those centres too. It is particularly great to share the news that with thanks to the support of Barclays, we have been able to provide even more support to young people facing difficulties with their mental health (page 5).

As ever, the work that we do is only possible with thanks to all of our funders and supporters, many of whom go under the radar, so I would like to finish by saying a big thank you to you all.

Paul Rosam, *Chief Executive*



## Downsview, our new centre in Ashford, Kent opened in late April. We tasked Mark, one of the first people to stay at the centre, to interview Sarah, the Centre Manager.

This is what they had to say.

### Mark - what made you want to come and work for Amber?

*Sarah* - when I saw the job advertised, the first thing I did was look into what Amber's ethos is for young people. I thought it sounded like an excellent opportunity to put the skills and experience I had gained with another homelessness charity and working for Kent County Council to good use.

### What makes you different from other managers?

I have gained a wide range of experience and knowledge over my career working with charities, local authorities and business. I believe I possess a certain amount of individuality and uniqueness, which is the same as the young people that we support across all of our centres.

### What can you bring to the table for the residents?

Apart from food..... working across the county with local authorities and social services is a great starting point to be able to help the young people staying at Downsview. Having worked with young people, I understand

their needs and can listen and be empathetic to them, as well as giving them advice if needed. In my career, I have made some useful contacts around Kent that could be beneficial to the young people at Downsview.



### What do you like about working at Amber?

I really enjoy coming in and seeing the young people working together - whether it be cooking, cleaning or taking part in the programme (sometimes with the music it feels like a rave!!) The best thing is the laughter and the camaraderie between the young people at Downsview. The team and I work in a place which is a temporary home for young people, it is an amazing

feeling. The best thing is seeing the progression in all the young people and I am always amazed by how far they have come in a short space of time.

### What do you want to achieve at Amber?

I would simply like to help as many young people as possible to find work, apprenticeships or education and most importantly safe, secure accommodation. Ideally, and in the nicest possible way, I hope not to see them again as they move onto better things and succeed in life (except for a visit of course). Everyone who moves on from Downsview will make a handprint on our hallway wall to remind us who has moved on from the centre. We want to see as many of these prints as possible.

### What do you think of the team at Downsview?

When I think of the centre, I think of the staff and young people as one team. We all have similar mind-sets and are caring, helpful and most importantly all have a laugh and a joke but keep focussed on the programme and helping the young people achieve their goals.

### What was Downsview like when you arrived and before the residents arrived?

The centre was very dark and dingy and not very welcoming. The refurbishment has included a complete overhaul of the kitchen and redecorating the communal areas. There was also work to do in the bedrooms to ensure they were suitable. The whole centre is now very bright with yellow walls, chairs and pictures to give the place a vibrant youthful feel. The best feeling is hearing the young people talking and laughing and enjoying the centre. It has really brought Downsview to life.



# Amber celebrates the Platinum Jubilee in style

Her Majesty The Queen became the first British Monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee after 70 years of service and the centres all got in the celebratory mood.



**Farm Place** in Surrey received a grant from **Arts Council England** Let's Create Jubilee Fund through **Community Foundation for Surrey**, established to ensure that creativity played an important role in local community celebrations. We partnered with two local artists - Lisa Pettibone who primarily works with glass and metals and Danyah Miller, who is a storyteller.

Lisa delivered a glass tile workshop at Farm Place, where young people

used glass and reflective materials to form a large glass wall tile, which is now housed in the dining room. Lisa also created a reflective glass sculpture, which will be permanently displayed in the garden. Very generously, Lisa has also donated a glass sculpture called Yellow Rhythm to Farm Place, which has been placed next to the house with plants kindly donated from Homebase. Danyah delivered a spontaneous storytelling workshop with young people, reflecting on the past and focussing on their hopes for the future. We celebrated with an open morning on Saturday 11th June, attended by James Friend, the Vice Chairman of Mole Valley council, as well as residents from the surrounding villages and towns.

At **Bythesea Lodge** in Wiltshire, young people enjoyed games on the lawn and an afternoon tea. It was all hands on deck with ex resident Pip, very kindly baking fairy cakes, staff making a number of delicious cakes and young people decorating the centre in Union Jack flags and bunting.



At **Downsview** in Kent we took part in Ashford Borough Council's Jubilee Tree Trail. Working with a local art company, young people designed and decorated a tree to show what the Queen meant to them and how she represents the country. Over the Bank Holiday Weekend they made cakes and other goodies and celebrated the weekend with a tea party for the whole house.



The young people at **Ashley Court** in Devon had a lovely Jubilee weekend, which included a trip to the beach, badminton matches at the centre and a special tea on the Sunday afternoon.

The celebrations won't stop there however as thanks to a grant from **National Lottery Awards for All**, we are able to run a series of creative workshops this summer to help the young people at the centre create their own artwork, music and photographs.



# Expanding Amber's support for good mental health

Last year, 79% of the young people that came to Amber had either been diagnosed as having a mental health condition or highlighted their mental health as a challenge for them. We have also listened closely to the needs of young people and have consistently heard that mental health is one of the big challenges facing young people as we emerge from the pandemic.

So we are thrilled to have secured funding from Barclays to expand mental health provision for the young people at Amber as they cope with the aftermath of COVID-19.

As a direct result of the funding we will be able to employ counsellors for a 12 month period to work directly with young people at Amber centres.

This work is urgently needed as Sarah Johnson, Operations Manager at Amber explains,

*"During the pandemic disadvantaged young people have been among the hardest hit. Nearly two years of successive lockdowns, uncertainty, job losses and isolation have played havoc with their mental health. New admissions to our centres are*

*displaying more complex emotional and mental wellbeing issues than ever before.*

*"We are delighted with the funding from Barclays as it will fund over 3,000 hours of focussed mental health intervention and counselling for young people along with extra training and support for our staff team. This project will improve the mental health and resilience of the young people living at our centres as they cope with the longer term impact of COVID-19 on society in addition to their existing challenges."*

Barclays launched its 100x100 Programme as part of their £100m COVID-19 Community Aid Package

to help its customers, clients, colleagues and the wider community deal with the unprecedented social and economic crisis caused by COVID-19. Through the programme, Barclays is supporting 250 UK grassroots charities with donations of £100,000 to deliver impactful on-the-ground support to local communities affected by the pandemic.

Nigel Higgins, Barclays Chairman, said:

*"Our 100x100 charity partners have been working tirelessly to support vulnerable communities across the UK through what has been a difficult time. These charities have*

*championed a range of causes, including tackling homelessness, food poverty or loneliness, and we are immensely grateful for their work in the communities in which we live and work.*

*"It is evident that the effects of the pandemic will continue to be felt by many for some time to come. Our decision to extend our 100x100 Programme for a second time reflects this, allowing Barclays to support 250 UK grassroots charities in their crucial work in our local communities."*



# BARCLAYS



## Special visitors to Ashley Court in Devon



We always love hearing from young people who have left Amber and hearing about what they have achieved since moving on. What is lovely is that even those who moved on over a decade ago have great memories of their time at Amber and see their stay with us as hugely important in their lives.

We've had two such visitors to our centre in Devon this year.

The first, **Stewart**, stayed at Ashley Court in 2008 after realising his lifestyle had spiralled completely out of control. Since moving on he's

been on an incredible journey and has certainly had some ups and downs. He's worked in various sectors including financial services and is about to embark on a new career in mental health support.

Since moving on from Amber he has stayed clean and 9 years ago also stopped drinking.

During his visit Stewart gave a startlingly honest account of his life both before and after his stay at Amber, which left everyone in the room hanging on his every word.

Stewart wanted to come and talk to the young people currently at Amber

to show them what is possible if you commit to recovery. Afterwards he said, *'If my visit helps just one of them push through to a better life then it will be worth it.'*

We featured Stewart's visit on our social media pages, which prompted Jake to get in touch.

**Jake** came to Ashley Court in 2011 after a spiralling gambling addiction led to him facing homelessness. He describes his time with Amber as a *'shock to the system but really worth it'* adding that his stay *'has made a massive difference'* to his life.

A few years after leaving Amber Jake started a roofing and property maintenance business that now employs 6 people.

Jake wanted to visit the centre but wasn't sure about doing a talk to a big group so he visited for the day and got involved with different activities and went along to the 'opportunity football club' we attend in Exeter.

After his visit Jake said, *'It was great to see the place again and I had some great chats with the young people here now. It was lovely being able to muck in for the day.'*



# All the news from the centres

## Farm Place, Surrey



In April, we collaborated with **Volunteer It Yourself (VIY)** to redecorate the changing rooms at Stockwood Park Rugby Club in Luton. Steve Daly, Chairman at Stockwood Park RFC said, 'We cannot thank VIY and the team enough for the hard work that has been conducted to transform our changing rooms. The professional manner in which the management, supervisors, mentors and most importantly the volunteers conducted themselves, is truly wonderful.'

We welcomed volunteers from **Dorking Cycling Club** to help decorate the dining rooms at Farm Place, led by Jim Ford, who kindly dedicated

his decorating services and time in organising the volunteer group. We were generously donated paint from **The Little Green Paint Company** and, as well as paint, all the equipment needed was kindly donated by **Dulux Decorating Centre**. Tables and chairs were donated from the ethical clearance provider, **Waste to Wonder**, who have also provided furniture and PPE equipment to our other centres.

**The Education Development Trust (EDT)** have seconded George as a job coach to Farm Place as part of their 'Making a Difference' campaign funded by European Social Fund. The success rate has been so phenomenal EDT are showcasing our partnership



and applying for Frontline Advisor of the Year award with Employment Related Services Association!

We are lucky to be supported by various groups in our local village in Ockley, one of which is Kindred Spirits. As part of the local church's outreach programme, they usually run a community café open every Wednesday. They kindly allowed us to host one morning, where a team of young people had a great time chatting to people in the community, whilst being run off their feet with tea and coffee orders! A wonderful £110.85 was raised for Amber that morning, alongside a generous donation of £250 from Kindred Spirits. Here's what the Amber helpers had to say:

*'I loved it! It was great to meet people and get out into the community' Mike*

*'It was nice to do something different. I felt happy serving everyone' Ryan*

## Ashley Court, Devon

A number of young people have gained their CSCS cards with our long term partner **Train4All**. These cards are vital for anyone wanting to work on building sites so they will be hugely valuable for the young people when they move on.



In May we were thrilled to be invited to meet Jo Richardson, Director of the **Chartered Institute for Housing**, in Fowey. Jo was completing an epic sponsored walk of the South West Coast Path for **End Youth Homelessness (EYH)** who fund our employment bursaries and the housing fund supporting young people into rental accommodation when they move on from Amber.

During her 46 day walk Jo had one afternoon off and she spent it doing some filming to promote her walk and the work of Amber and EYH.

Young people from Ashley Court were invited along to talk about their experiences of homelessness and how Amber and EYH are helping them work towards a better future.



A new project we have been working with at Ashley Court is the **Britannia Sailing Trust**. This project, located in nearby Winkleigh, is refurbishing the last remaining Class 1 East Coast Smack (a traditional fishing boat). Vicky and Abbey from the Trust came along to the centre and told the young people all about the opportunities available to volunteer and learn new skills.



We'd like to say a huge thank-you to the staff at **Willmott Dixon** who are building a SEMH (Social, Emotional and Mental Health) school in Okehampton. They invited a group from Ashley Court to the site for a talk about bricklaying and block work and the opportunities available in this field. They were also able to have a go at laying some bricks.



### Downsview, Kent

Since the opening in late April, we have been forming links with local business and the community.

We were delighted to have the opportunity to present to **McArthur Glen**, owners of a large retail park in Ashford, where Dan, one of the young people staying at Downsview told his story and about how Amber is helping him and giving him confidence to fulfil his potential.

All of the residents have taken part in a football programme to help with

their mental health and have had trips to local landmarks and enjoyed the beautiful Kentish countryside.

**Wilko's** in Ashford donated seeds, compost and trays so we have started our own vegetable garden and will hopefully have some results very soon.

Some of the staff team and young people attended Canterbury Pride in June and had a great time talking to a variety of people and organisations about the work that Amber does.





### Bythesea Lodge, Wiltshire

It has been a busy start to the year with young people taking part in a number of engaging activities across the centre. Sue, who has settled in to her new role as Team Leader, has brought an artistic flare to her workshops. We've seen sewing classes, salt dough making and much more.



Where possible, we like to get out and about to encourage young people to experience new things. Fun was had by all at the **Bovington Tank Museum** last month, where we witnessed a live tank display! Trips like these are hugely important for team dynamics and give young people an opportunity to experience different activities.



Wiltshire's new High Sheriff, The Marchioness of Lansdowne, was welcomed by young people to the centre. The theme for her shrieval year is 'Home' which looks at the many different aspects of what a secure home looks like to different people.

Young people at our Wiltshire centre decided to do a workshop on what 'Home' has looked like for them (past, present and future). It was a thought provoking and emotional subject that raised some important issues. We look forward to welcoming the High Sheriff again in the not too distant future.

And finally, we are extremely grateful to have been supported by **Rick Stein, Marlborough** with their charity lunches back in January. The money raised has gone directly to support homeless and unemployed young people at our centres.

## Fundraising events for your diary

### SLEEP OUT

We are holding our first Sleep Out event in Surrey on Saturday 1st October on Ockley Green. There will be a live five-piece band playing that evening, bring your sleeping bag and enjoy the music around the fire pit, whilst raising vital funds for Amber! To register for this event or find out more email [louise.cheung@amberweb.org](mailto:louise.cheung@amberweb.org) or call 07879415716.

We are also returning to the Eden Project in November on 10th November for their annual Sleep Out. This very special event features music, talks, workshops and more before everyone beds down for the night outside the link building right by the iconic Biomes. There is a cover but it is outside so it can get very cold – a warm sleeping bag is a must!

Entry is £25 and all participants are asked to aim to raise at least £200. Please contact Becky on [rebecca.fry@amberweb.org](mailto:rebecca.fry@amberweb.org) or 07808 531699 for more information.



### Lily's story

Lily, 21, moved on from Amber in Devon after a 6 month stay. She has started a job as a courier driver and has a room in a shared house with the help of the End Youth Homelessness Housing Fund.

Lily came to Amber because she was facing homelessness - her relationship with her family had broken down due to her escalating drug use. She nearly ended up living on the streets but the council referred her to Ashley Court, our centre in Devon.

Being at Amber has been hugely helpful to Lily

***"My time here has helped me realise that I don't need drugs to be happy with my life. I absolutely adore the staff here - they have just been so supportive. Before I was never one to trust professionals but I've really opened up here and find myself talking to staff about stuff I never thought I'd talk to anyone about."***

Getting into a routine was hard for Lily at first, ***"having to be up every morning was really hard at first but once I got used to it I found the routine of life at Amber really helpful."***

Reconciling with family and some of her friends was important to Lily, ***"my time here has helped me see who I wanted to stay in touch with and help me rebuild those bridges."***



Lily is really excited about moving on. ***"I am a little nervous but mostly really pleased, I want to save to get my own place and to go on a holiday as I've not been away on a proper holiday in years."***

Lily doesn't know what would have happened to her without Amber.

***"I quite literally lost everything, my car, my friends and my family. I dread to think what would have happened to me without Amber. The way my life was going was heading to a really bad place."***

### Tom's Story

Tom was first made homeless in his early 20s when he and his mum decided to move from Dundee to Surrey to be near his sister and her daughter, who were missing having family close.

They had secured a flat but things went badly wrong as their landlord pulled out just at the last minute leaving both him and his mum homeless. Tom sofa surfed for a while but also lived in a tent with his mum in a park for 6 months. During this period Tom was offered accommodation on a number of occasions but he refused to leave his mum who was finding it more difficult to access support. Eventually, a safe hostel was found for his mum and Tom was placed in a hostel for young people a short while later.

Sadly this hostel was not a good place for Tom. Since the age of 15, Tom had struggled with arthritis and had been prescribed opiates over the years to manage the pain. This led to an addiction to prescription drugs. There were lots of drugs available at the hostel and Tom's drug use spiralled out of control leading to him being evicted. After spending a few weeks sleeping rough, Tom moved in to Amber.

Tom found all the staff at Amber really helpful in ensuring that he stayed in a good place. He commented, ***"Amber stopped me from dying; I was on a dangerous path to non-existence and***

***self-destruction"***. Two of the support staff in particular were brilliant, always making themselves available to chat if it was needed and making sure that he was alright.

During his time at Amber Tom achieved a huge amount including taking his Maths and English GCSEs as well as updating all his qualifications in Health and Social Care. To help with the cost of this he was able to access support from the End Youth Homelessness Employability Fund.

Tom has now found a job as a carer at a care home in Dorking. He has also found a room in a shared house with people he met while at Amber so knows he will be in a supportive environment with people he knows and trusts.



***"I'm looking forward to living in my own place again, to have a job and to do a normal days work as it feels like a long time since life has been normal."***

## K's story

K has recently moved into his own sustainable and secure accommodation provided by Wiltshire Council. The future is now looking bright for K, a far cry from his turbulent childhood.

*"My childhood was pretty hard. I lived with my mum and twin sisters but my mum's partner was very abusive towards us. We experienced a lot of domestic violence, which wasn't helped by their drinking. I didn't really have a childhood, I had to make sure that my sisters were safe, I felt responsible for them. I finally moved to my gran's where things were better but then I was sent back to my mum's and the abuse continued.*

*"Once I was old enough, I decided to move to Cyprus. I was only 16. I trained as a lifeguard there and really enjoyed it, I didn't want to come back. After the season had ended I returned home but I had nowhere to live."*

K was able to access a place to stay via the YMCA's Crash Pad Project but it wasn't ideal as he couldn't stay there during the day.

*"It was good to have somewhere to stay but I had to be out of the accommodation from 9am-5pm every day. I didn't have any job to go to and my mental health started to suffer. I really wanted to get away, start afresh somewhere new."*

Finally, K was referred by the council to Amber's centre in Trowbridge. *"When*

*I first arrived at Amber I found it really hard. I didn't like it but after a while I started to get to know people and quickly settled in to a routine.*

*My mental health had got really bad and I needed more support. My Team Leader made referrals to Gamblers Anonymous to help with my addiction and I started to get counselling. My Team Leader also attended meetings with me, it gave me confidence to know that things were getting sorted. I have worked hard on processing all that has happened to me and the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy has really benefited me. The hard work is down to you though. Amber can only help you so much until you need to take responsibility."*

K is now looking forward to the future in his new home. *"My aim is to continue getting support for my mental health and get back into work as soon as possible. All of the hard work was worth it, it was worth the wait!"*

## Dan's story

Dan arrived at Amber in Surrey during the first Covid-19 lockdown after becoming homeless following a break up.

*"It was the pandemic which broke the camel's back. I couldn't live with my parents because my mum had to isolate – every day was a struggle and I started to drink during the day."*

While the break up and the pandemic was the immediate cause of his homelessness, Dan now recognises

that he started to struggle with his mental health at a very young age.

*"I never really dealt with it. When I was younger I played a lot of football and I got pretty good. But it became more other people's dreams than my own for me to make it as a professional footballer. The novelty basically wore off as it became exhausting."*

Dan gave up football and got into the wrong crowd at school. *"I drank too much, got into lots of stuff that was really bad for me. I didn't feel very happy at home so started staying out a lot. I didn't feel like I could connect with my parents – I just felt pressure whenever I was around them."*

Just before Dan arrived at Amber his best friend died from suicide. *"It felt like the carpet was pulled from under my feet. The pain of losing her was unbelievable but it did make me see that I needed to go to Amber and to take all the opportunities I was offered. I realised then I could go down a path with no return. It woke me up to how bad things had got."*

Because of the pandemic Dan's stay at Amber started in isolation. *"It was a bit weird but the staff were just so helpful – they really helped me settle in. At first I didn't open up about what had happened to me but as time went on I started to and the staff arranged specialist bereavement support and were just so reassuring."*



Dan speaking at Eddie's Jordan's fundraiser 'Amber Rocks' last year.

*I was at Amber for just over a year and during that time the staff were just so understanding and supportive. I feel like it helped me have an emotional breakthrough. Up until then I just felt like I had to man up all the time."*

While at Amber Dan took part in a project with 'Volunteer it Yourself' helping to convert some disused garages into workshops. He also attended in-house Amber workshops and training units including a session on 'Dreams and Desires' which helped him start to really assess what he wanted to do for work.

Before Dan moved on, he got a job in a care home working with people with dementia and Alzheimer's. He was then able to access the End Youth Homelessness Housing Fund to move to a shared house near work. *"I don't know where I'd be without Amber. Things had got really bad before I arrived. I was really at a crossroads but I feel I chose the right path when I made the decision to come to Amber."*



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Registered Charity Number 1051388

**A gift for the future** Helping young people into sustainable employment is key to their continued success when they leave Amber. One of the ways you can help us continue to provide this support for the years to come is to leave us a gift in your Will. We are so grateful to everyone who gives in this way.

Amber supports homeless unemployed young people in crisis **24 hours a day 365 days a year.**

We need your support to help us continue our work with young people. So we are asking that once you have taken care of your loved ones, please consider leaving a gift in your Will to Amber. With your generous support we will be able to continue reaching out to young people who feel they have no future, no hope and no chance to succeed.

For more information on leaving a gift in your Will, please contact Stephen Ballantyne on [stephen.ballantyne@amberweb.org](mailto:stephen.ballantyne@amberweb.org).


# With your help many more young people like Lily, Tom, K and Dan could have a future to look forward to. Please help us by sending a donation today.



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