David’s Story

My name is David Frost. In 2018 my house was in a very poor condition. I had no heating, running water, no bed and no working bathroom/toilet.

I had been living this way for a number of years and couldn’t see a way forward. After joining KeyRing I realised I could improve how I was living. My living situation had caused me to become very isolated and lonely. I had lost my confidence and when I did go out (which was rare) I avoided interaction and walked with my head down.

As I moved out of my house and into a local Travelodge KeyRing supported me to purchase toiletries, new clothing, a coat and footwear.

My confidence grew as I felt better about myself and I began to interact with the staff at the Travelodge. I was physically more comfortable after having a good night’s sleep as I had been suffering with aches and pains. KeyRing supported me to go out locally and choose all the items I needed to make my house a home.

I moved back into my house after five weeks. My house was now a home and I was very proud of all that had been achieved. Work then continued on my garden. During this time I found myself outside in my garden and as my neighbours passed I no longer avoided them. I began chatting with people passing and also built a friendship with the lads working in my garden.

Instead of being isolated and lonely I now spent my time chatting with people in my local community and looking forward to the lads arriving each day to continue the work on my garden. KeyRing would invite me to events and activities and instead of finding a reason not to join in as I had previously I would go along.

My quality of life has vastly improved as has my confidence. I am not lonely anymore.
Volunteering with FCHO

BY ASHLEY BONNEY

I have been a KeyRing Member for some time now. I started off in the Intensive Team but I am now in the Shaw network. KeyRing helped me to get a flat which I have made my home and I am very proud of it.

KeyRing have also helped me with voluntary work and at the minute I help out in the KeyRing Community Hub every Wednesday for 3 hours making brews, keeping the kitchen clean and tidy and keeping a beady eye on everyone.

KeyRing also helped me with a voluntary position at FCHO where I was meeting and greeting people 4 days a week. I had to wear a white shirt and a FCHO tie and I.D badge. This has been my favourite voluntary position so far because I got to meet new people every day and I was able to offer them help.

I enjoyed going to FCHO every day as it made me feel more confident, I was made to feel part of the staff family and I felt as though I fitted in well. At FCHO I bumped into a lot of people that I knew and it helped me to socialise. I am hoping to get a job there in the future.

KeyRing staff always encourage me to take part in things and are always there if I need some support or kind words.
Paula’s Story

I was referred to KeyRing in December 2017 after I was evicted from my home because of rent arrears. I was going through a difficult time with an aggressive and violent neighbour. My Housing Benefit and Income Support had been suspended and I found it very difficult to get it reinstated. I began to live off only the Carer’s Allowance that I received for caring for my eldest daughter.

I started to struggle with my mental health and I was sectioned. My house was in a state of disrepair and I was being threatened with eviction.

I spent 10 days in hospital and my youngest daughter went to stay with her father until I returned home. After being discharged from the hospital it was decided that my daughter would remain with her father for the time being.

Shortly after leaving hospital I was evicted. For the next few months I was sofa surfing.

This is when KeyRing started to support me on a weekly basis. At my first meeting with Suzy we discussed my debts, as well as setting up my Universal Credit account.

My ex-partner then decided that he was going to fight for full custody of our daughter. Dan supported me to look for support from a solicitor and to gather evidence of domestic violence in my relationship with my ex-partner.

One of my biggest hurdles was the fact that I was homeless and in over £4,000 of rent arrears. KeyRing helped me get a back payment from Housing Benefit and Dan supported me to set up a direct debit, a weekly payment of £5 and any extra money I received went towards my arrears.

Dan supported me to present at FCHO a few times and finally I was offered a 1-bed flat which I accepted straight away. I moved into the flat just before the final custody hearing.

At the hearing, it was decided that me and my daughter’s father should share custody and we are all happy with this. Me and my daughter’s father are now in a much better place and work as a team in the best interests of our daughter. I have a roof over my head and my daughter back where she belongs.

My debts are coming down and all of my current bills are set up to be paid by direct debit. My rent arrears are now down to less than £300. I am also bidding for a bigger property now as I need a 2-bed property for me and my daughter.

My time is coming to an end on the Intensive Service, but I am going to receive some ongoing support from the Network Service who will support me with my tenancy and everything that comes with it. If it wasn’t for KeyRing I’d have given up. I want people to know that whatever they are facing that they should always fight and never give up.
Jack’s Housing Journey

BY JACK LLOYD

In July 2018 I moved out of my family home because they were moving to Wales. I found a room to rent in the Oldham area for £380 a month which included bills. This was good for me because I had just started working.

In September I was evicted in the early hours of the morning by Police and Immigration. They said that the property was unsafe to live in. It turned out that the property was being illegally sub-let. I had paid £380 in rent 3 days earlier. Everyone who lived there had to leave within 24 hours.

I contacted Caroline (CLV) on the Saturday morning and she arranged to meet me to try to get my personal belongings. I don’t have access to a vehicle so Caroline offered to take my things home with me so they weren’t lost. It took us a few trips back and forth.

On the Monday I presented for a Homeless Assessment and was given a one night stay in a local Premier Inn and an appointment was made for the following morning. This appointment was very difficult for me as I have autism and I felt misunderstood. Caroline agreed to increase the number of times that we would meet up and she supported me when I was waiting for phone calls from the housing provider to advise on my temporary accommodation, usually whilst sat in the car in car parks of the various Travelodges or Premier Inns all over the borough and also out of borough. This included Hyde, Birch Services and Bury.

I have a job with the Co-op and it was important to me to keep this during this upheaval.

Caroline helped me with travel planning; e.g. planning routes, finding bus and train times so I could get to work on time. She also helped me with all the moves around different hotels. I moved more than 10 times.

I am now in a private rented flat that meets my needs and where I am very happy.

I moved into a flat in November. The flat was offered to me the first week I was homeless but I couldn’t move in for 7 weeks. They said this was because it was being cleaned and repaired but when I moved in it hadn’t been cleaned and there were lots of problems with it. I had to move out again after two nights. Caroline helped me get the rent money back and look for a new place.

I am now in a private rented flat that meets my needs and where I am very happy. I succeeded in maintaining my employment throughout the changes. It has been really difficult to cope with everything that has happened and I wouldn’t have coped nearly as well without the support of KeyRing.

Jack carried on with his job at the Co-op despite all the changes.
My Support

Jamie

Over time I’ve built up my confidence in going to public areas. I could never go to Manchester but after working with Jake I can go as far as the Trafford Centre. He’s also helped me with things like dental appointments and things I’m worried about. They also help me with my post – I had a benefit medical that I could have missed if I didn’t have that support. Thanks to Jake and Leonie I’ve really built up my confidence. I was very proud to become an uncle and I recently travelled to the Wirral to visit my seven month old nephew.

Thanks to Jake and Leonie I’ve really built up my confidence

Mark

After my mum had to go into care my KeyRing support helped me to get my own place in Oldham. I had been living with my sister. She helped me get on the housing list in 2017 but they said I had to wait until I was 55, which was in August. My social worker put me in touch with KeyRing. I met with Jake and Donna who looked at a few houses and flats. Me and Jake visited about 3.

We looked at two in the same place. The smaller one was actually better than the larger one. Jake and Donna spoke to the warden there and my sister Rhonda came to see it. She preferred the smaller flat too. It was smaller to clean and maintain. Rhonda helped me to furnish it. The colour scheme came from the curtains and then the rest of the furniture.

Sam

My workers have supported me through difficult times, as have my best friend and my family. They give me emotional support. When I first joined KeyRing I was in debt and not going out and now I’m not. Clare has also helped me to buy things for my house and Jakira helps me with my shopping and cooking at home.

When I first joined KeyRing I was in debt and not going out and now I’m not

Jamie G

KeyRing’s support has been massively helpful. They help me with bills and reading and writing – Caroline is brilliant. She always asks how I’m getting on with my kids who I see every 2 weeks. There should be more people like her helping people like me.
Member Involvement Day

BY THE OLDHAM EDITING GROUP

On the 5th December Oldham held a Member Involvement day. It was open to everyone in KeyRing.

When people arrived they were given a coloured sticker to put them into a group.

There was a focus on wellbeing activities. Each group did a different activity and then everyone moved around.

The activities included:

- Christmas cake decorating
- Cooking skills
- Meditation/relaxation techniques
- Armchair cheerleading
- Dance

After lunch everyone got together to do a Circus Skills workshop and the KeyRing choir performed.

Diane said “I enjoyed singing with the choir in public.”

Sam said “I enjoyed the choir and plate spinning in the circus skills workshop. I also liked learning about relaxation techniques”.

Diane said “I enjoyed singing with the choir in public.”

Sam said “I enjoyed the choir and plate spinning in the circus skills workshop. I also liked learning about relaxation techniques.”
The KeyRing Choir

The KeyRing Choir was started in October 2016 by Glenn Cosgrove, a support worker in Oldham who had a musical background.

Sam’s mum went to the choir at the Barker Street hub and Sam would go with her to support her. People kept trying to get her to sing but she didn’t want to. This Christmas she decided she wanted to join in with the Christmas songs.

They sang Mary’s Boy Child, Let it Snow and Winter Wonderland. They also sang The Carpenters’ Top of the World and dedicated it to the memory of Julie Jobey who was a big part of the choir and who sadly passed away last year.

Sam says: “I enjoy being with everyone, KeyRing Members, volunteers and staff.”
Hubs in Oldham

Chadderton Hub

The Chadderton Hub has been running successfully for over 6 months, with great attendance each week. KeyRing Members from all over Oldham attend and have enjoyed a huge range of activities provided by volunteers, staff and other agencies.

Lifelong Learning have provided craft classes, offering Members the opportunity to learn transferable skills such as sewing.

Our hub volunteer (Jess), who was previously a KeyRing Member, ran a gardening workshop, Members were able to sow seeds and repot plants to take home. She is also working alongside other local charities to set up a scheme where our hub can collect and donate clothing for the homeless in return for items we can use at the hub.

Jess has been working with the Flux Club social outreach programme, to collect items for the homeless and will be continuing to work with the charity into the new year, and encouraging Members to do more for those in need.

Members have worked together to put on seasonal parties where the wider community have been invited and joined in to celebrate various occasions. Our Halloween party was particularly popular, with Members enjoying spooky bingo, cake decorating and eyeball pong!

We have made valuable connections with the local PCSOs who are looking to provide safety awareness sessions, and with Mind who will be visiting in the new year to provide mental health awareness sessions.

The hub continues to grow, with Members now actively helping each other and suggesting activities they wish to organise.

Confidence has grown within the group, with many Members supporting and helping each other to do activities and to get to and from the hub.

On the 19th of December Members had a bring and share Christmas party. Everyone brought a Christmas treat we played games and the choir performed again! FCHO came along, and were very impressed by how many people attended.

FCHO are hoping to secure some funding for the hub so that we can work alongside local residents to put on a community Spring fair.
Fitton Hill Hub

The Fitton Hill Hub is steadily growing, with Members attending from across Oldham. Members have enjoyed tea and toast mornings, make your own healthy lunch sessions and a variety of craft activities.

The group are looking to work with Villages Housing in the new year to expand their existing breakfast club, to make it more regular and inclusive for all.

Both the Fitton Hill and Chadderton hubs have connected, with Members from each group regularly visiting both hubs.

Barker Street Hub

Barker Street Hub is based at Oldham Residents’ Community Centre and is every Wednesday afternoon from 3-5pm. It is open to KeyRing Members and the local community.

Activities at the hub include:

- ‘Check-In’ – this gives each Member the chance to talk about what they have been doing over the previous week.
- Head to toe/Toe to head – Philly (the Barker Street Community Living Volunteer) explains how to check your body while you are in the shower or bath for anything unusual.
- Using computers – Members can access computers for personal use, or for completing benefit forms or any other tasks they need to do.
- Arts and crafts – Members are currently making Joseph’s multi-coloured coat for the choirmaster to wear when the choir sings Any Dream Will Do!
- Board games.

The Bread and Butter Thing

Many of the Members use this scheme. It is a food scheme sponsored by local supermarkets who provide food. The OL1 Committee bags and provides three bags of groceries for £7, with the first delivery free. Based on the information provided by Philly they deliver to KeyRing Members in the OL1 and OL8 postcodes.

KeyRing Community Choir

The KeyRing Community Choir follows the hub at 5.30pm. They now have matching jumpers! They have performed at the Member Involvement Day and the Chadderton Christmas Party.

Philly has made connections with the OL1 Partnership Committee which is also based at the community centre. They offer weekly activities for the residents and KeyRing Members have been invited to attend.

They offer:

- Bingo
- Knit & natter
- Breakfast Tea & Toast
- Hikes and walks around Oldham
- The Bread & Butter thing.
Hubs and Circles

Hubs are a great way of connecting people and KeyRing want to do some more work with Members and others in their local community, looking at ways in which people can develop their skills and confidence, support one another more and build stronger communities.

To do this, KeyRing and FCHO are arranging a ‘Community Circle’ session at the Chadderton Hub.

What is a Community Circle?

A community circle is a way of bringing people together from a local community to share their skills, talents, gifts and resources and enabling conversations that lead to actions that make a positive difference.

We will advertise the date that we will meet once it has been agreed. If you would like to be involved, please let your Community Living Volunteer know.

The Life Skills Course

BY LISA WOOLFENDEN

I work for the Ancora Project, which is a partnership between KeyRing, Oldham foodbank and Christians Against Poverty. We work with people in crisis through the foodbank but also through hubs throughout Oldham, mainly at churches and community centres. Part of my role is to run the CAP Life Skills Course.

The next Life Skills course is starting on the 31st Jan. It’s an 8 week course. It covers practical money saving techniques, things like cooking on a budget, living healthily for less and making your money go further. It looks at pressures on people from life and how to take control of those things. It’s run as a relaxed group that people can be part of.

The next course will be running at the Salvation Army. Previously the course has been at the Salt Cellar but this time we are taking it to different churches around the borough. This will be the first time that I’ve run the course. I will have volunteers to help me – one of them has been through the course herself and now volunteers with Ancora.

People might think they’re the only ones with budgeting problems so I am looking forward to giving people the chance to meet other people in the same situation as them.

People who have been through the course previously have been able to make changes to help them get out of debt. They will be able to learn simple things that can make a big impact on their life.

If you would like to register for the course or know someone who is interested, please ring me on 0161 628 4133 or email me at lisa.woolfenden@keyring.org.
The Ancora Project: Susan’s Story
Ancora is a joint project with Oldham foodbank and Christians Against Poverty, funded by the Big Lottery.

Susan was referred to Ancora by the Children’s Centre. She was about to be evicted from her property along with her 7 year old son.

Susan had also lost her ESA due to missing an appointment and had been told to claim Jobseekers Allowance. Then she was told by Jobseekers that she could not sign on because she was not fit for work. Susan was also suffering from severe depression.

Ancora helped Susan to reinstate her Housing Benefit on the grounds of nil income. We then asked that they investigate why Susan had so many gaps in her Housing Benefit as she was over two thousand pounds in rent arrears. Susan’s case had gone beyond the point where we could offer support to prevent it from going to court.

We also tried to reinstate Susan’s ESA and were successful.

We worked on why Susan’s entitlement to Housing Benefit stopped in the first place and it was reinstated but was not paid yet. The day before the court date, we rang Housing Benefit. Susan intended to explain to the judge that the arrears were due to a mistake on behalf of Housing Benefit and we had the evidence to prove it.

When we arrived at court the next morning, a representative from Susan’s housing provider informed us that Housing Benefit had been in touch and had realised that they owed Susan £2,700 in Housing Benefit which would leave Susan’s rent account in credit.

Susan was told that she would still have to pay court costs but we are confident that this will be paid by Housing Benefit when they are contacted by a solicitor we spoke to.

Susan was ecstatic that she was able to remain in her home and has been really thankful that she has received the support to enable her to do this.

Thank you St Margaret’s!
A big thank you from the Ancora Project to St Margaret’s School in Oldham!
Children at the school pick a charity every term – alternating between a local and global charity. This term they chose Ancora as their local charity. They have been collecting personal care items that they have given to Ancora to give out to people who need them.

Suzy Pabla, who manages the project, went to the school to collect the items and meet the students. She said:

“A huge thank you to the fabulous children, parents and teachers of St Margaret’s for their very kind donations to the Ancora Project and for choosing our project as their local charity for the Autumn term. Your kindness is overwhelming and our beneficiaries will very much appreciate your donations.”
Kerry’s Christmas Meal

I went to the Rose of Lancaster pub for our Christmas meal with the KeyRing Members.

We bought our drinks and went and found where we were going to with our friends.

We had soup for starters and then we had our turkey dinner. I was sat with my loving fiancée John and we took pictures of our meal.

We had profiteroles for pudding. We all chatted with friends and then we got the bus back to Oldham. KeyRing has helped us both with our self-esteem and meeting new friends. We both never had that before.

Bernie raises money for charity

Bernie Smith has been enjoying card making classes with support for over a year.

In September she decided to use her new crafty skills to make cards for others. People commented on how beautiful and thoughtful her creations were, and said they would pay her. Bernie decided to make lots of cards to sell, and donate the profits to charity.

Bernie’s cards sold out, and she has raised vital funds for 2 cancer charities; Cancer Research and Maggie’s Oldham. Bernie says it makes her happy to do things for others, she loves that her cards make people smile. She is very proud of herself.

A weight loss journey

Susan Ball from the Greenacres network has been supported by Debbie Vickers for over 2 years.

Just over a year ago, Susan decided she wanted to get healthier, and joined Debbie at a local Slimming World group. They spent time each week researching and preparing fresh cooked meals, and bit by bit, their weight dropped and health improved! Susan enjoys walking everywhere, and has been cooking meals for her family and friends and encouraging them to be healthy too.

To date Susan and Debbie have lost over 7 stone between them, and are still going!