

A Glimpse From the Past – Respect

On the required reading for social work programs around the world is William Booth's *In Darkest England and the Way Out*. Published in 1890, it flew off the bookstands and is still influential today in Britain's approach to social welfare. At the root of Booth's proposition is the premise of respect – affording dignity to all people, no matter what their situation. This article from the [2015 Spring/Summer issue of Develop](#), the UK Salvation Army's International Development newsletter, is a great primer on this significant time in our history.

TACKLING POVERTY AND INJUSTICE SINCE 1865

Many things have changed in the 150 years since The Salvation Army began its work, as General John Gowans put it, to 'save souls, grow saints and serve suffering humanity'. Here Carl Jobson looks back at the legacy and how it continues to shape our work today.

The Salvation Army's early mission and ministry was characterised by a truth that is rooted in the Bible: that God is for the poor. William Booth, who with his wife Catherine founded the organisation that became The Salvation Army, started their ministry by preaching the gospel to those that were not being reached by the conventional churches. However, over time it became apparent that words were not enough. Booth realised that social reform was also needed in order to see the transformation that God had called him to bring about.

The early Salvation Army was characterised not just by ministering to the poor, giving hand-outs at arm's length, but also by building relationships. In that way, *'desperate, unemployed prostituted persons, criminals and alcoholics morphed into foot soldiers in God's revolutionary response to the problems of Victorian England'*.¹ In the areas of the East End of London where The Salvation Army began, nearly 40 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line². However, they weren't just suffering from a material poverty, but a poverty of being (or a lack of self-worth) as a result of being looked down upon by the rest of society. They were feared, abandoned and judged by most, but not by The Salvation Army. The Army sought not only to help, but also to welcome them into their community. This meant The Salvation Army was best placed to reach out to communities, because so many early-day Salvationists were from these places in the first place. This is echoed in most of our community development work around the world today. Our projects are either run out of a local Salvation Army corps (church), or are an extension of the relationships already built by them in the community. It is a natural overflow of our ministry in these places, and the projects are stronger for it. This is because these relationships can continue even when the specific intervention of the project has ended and its objectives are achieved.

¹ *REVOLUTION*, by Aaron White and Stephen Court p71

² *REVOLUTION*, by Aaron White and Stephen Court p72



In 1890 Booth published his social manifesto for the world, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*. Booth was writing about a completely different context (19th-century Victorian life in the UK) from the backdrop of our community development work in this globalised 21st-century world. Booth, after all, was a General who communicated by telegram, not tweets. Much has changed since then. Some of the ideas he put forward are now outdated, yet our work remains true to many of the principles that he outlined. The overwhelming thing that shines through the text is that it is people-focused. There is a recognition that transformation cannot be applied to people, but needs to involve and affect them. In all of our development projects we seek to do this – to come alongside people and support them to realise the change that they want to see achieved. Booth also recognised the effect that environment has on a person's situation, and how this can restrict their opportunity to bring about change. This is true around the world. After all, very few people are living in extreme poverty because of their own actions. Rather it is a result of where they happen to be born, and the environmental, political, social and economic factors that exist. Some of these are natural, but most are manmade. It's easy sometimes to blame the poor for being poor, but more often than not it is not of their doing. Rather it is due to how they and their ancestors have been exploited or subjugated by others in pursuit of their own wealth.

This belief in the intrinsic worth of a person, regardless of the position they find themselves in (whether they are at fault or not), is something further reinforced by Booth's thoughts of responding with dignity:

*'The indirect features of the Scheme must not be such as to produce injury to the persons whom we seek to benefit. Mere charity, for instance, while relieving the pinch of hunger, demoralises the recipient; and whatever the remedy is that we employ, it must be of such a nature as to do good without doing evil at the same time. It is no use conferring sixpennyworth of benefit on a man if, at the same time, we do him a shilling'sworth of harm.'*³

I've written previously within these pages of the importance of ensuring that any assistance we provide is done in a way that helps without hurting⁴. Here Booth recognises this need to respond in a careful and considered way. We recognise this too. Through our work we need to ensure dignity is maintained and address the real problem, not just the symptoms. 150 years later, dignity is central to the vision of our team, and all the change that we seek to help bring about.

There's much more that could be said about the legacy of Booth and his early Army of transformers, but the important thing is that this legacy lives on. This broad and diverse movement called The Salvation Army continues to respond to injustice and build relationships with what the world would still view as *'the last, the lost and the least'* across

³ *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, by General William Booth

⁴ See *DEVELOP* Autumn/Winter 2013 - http://issuu.com/saiduk/docs/develop_aw2013_web

126 countries. In Booth's words, may each of us continue to '*go and do something*' about the injustices that exist in this world – with our money, our time and our voice.

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