

# BETWEEN THE LINES

PAUL'S OWN UNIQUE TAKE ON THE ISSUES OF THE DAY

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**CSAN charities call for action to address a welfare system that has pushed the poor and vulnerable to the edge**

A report from the Catholic charity Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) has found that both benefits claimants and those in charities trying to support them have been pushed to the edge by the welfare reforms of the past five years.

Launching the report in London, the Impact of Welfare Changes, several directors of CSAN charities suggested that some of the recent moves made in the budget will push more people over the edge.

Keith Fernett, the director of Caritas Anchor House, based in Newham, east London, outlined a process that has seen the state abrogating its responsibilities to the most vulnerable and dumping them on the charitable sector.

Fernett echoed the report when he told of how the removal of free phone lines for benefit claimants has made resolving matters so much more difficult.

The personal interface with the public has been removed leaving claimants to struggle with "decision makers" operating from call centres, using scripted procedures for response tools. Peter Boylan of Nugent Care's New Beginnings team in Liverpool, believes the move in the budget to remove support from those in the 18 to 25 age range – in the belief that this will make them stay with the family – will just exacerbate an already dire situation. He believes people will just move around more.

Teresa Clements, centre manager of the Brushstrokes Centre in Birmingham, pointed out that young people are often leaving home because of overcrowding. "There can be family breakdown, domestic abuse all contributing to forcing people out," said Clements.

Ms Clements call on faith leaders to speak out about what is happening across the country to the poor and vulnerable. "Human dignity is the key element here – the faith leaders should speak out," said Mr Fernett.

The report calls for an end to the use of financial sanctions for people with mental health problems and for the introduction whereby claimants are given a chance to provide an explanation, rather than be sanctioned for a first "offence."

It also calls for training for JobCentrePlus employees on how to help and assist vulnerable people with some joint working with charities at the rockface.

\* Charities "the only safety net left" after benefit cuts - Morning Star - 15/7/2015

POSTED BY PAUL DONOVAN AT 05:00