

# QUEUES, CLOGS & REDEMPTION



HELPING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SINCE 1869

**W**OOD  
STREET  
MISSION

MANCHESTER & SALFORD

STREET CHILDRENS MISSION



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Wood Street Mission has been helping children and families living in poverty since Victorian times.

*Queues, Clogs & Redemption* looks at our work down through the generations from the days of rescuing street children in the nineteenth century, sending tens of thousands to the seaside in the first half of the twentieth century, and running a city gym in the 1980s.



**WOOD  
STREET  
MISSION**  
SINCE 1869

The *Queues, Clogs & Redemption* exhibition and booklet is part of a series of heritage activities aimed at documenting our past and raising awareness about child poverty, in the run up to our 150th Anniversary in 2019.

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# EARLY DAYS

Wood Street Mission was established to help families living in dire poverty around Deansgate and quickly grew to attract the support of the great and good of Manchester.

“to seek and rescue the destitute and neglected children of our city from a life of poverty and vice . . . to preach and teach the truths of the Bible to both the old and young of the very poor, criminal and depraved classes of the city”



# Beginnings

Wood Street Mission was established in 1869. Called Manchester and Salford Street Children's Mission for many years, founder Alfred Alsop's aim was two-fold – to spread the Gospel through evangelical effort and provide practical help to families living in poverty in the catchment of Deansgate, Salford and Hulme.

Industrialisation had brought great wealth to Manchester but it also brought squalid, cramped living conditions, disease, and dire poverty. Alsop realised his evangelical message could not compete against a backdrop of hunger and human misery so along with a small band of philanthropists he embarked on a programme of religious activity and social works.

The setting up of the charity was also part of a wider nineteenth century movement to rescue children from neglect. Some well-known national children's charities were set up at the same time, including Barnardos (1866), Action for Children (1869) and the Children's Society (1881).

# Early Days

In the 1870s Deansgate was a very different place from today's affluent business centre. Then characterised by slum dwellings, prostitution and crime, the area was considered "a hotbed of social iniquity and vice" by the founding missionaries.

Consisting of a Mission Hall, Sunday school and temperance club, the Mission was initially situated further down Deansgate. It moved to the current site in 1872 when the building was demolished to make way for Central Station. The new purpose built premises housed a boy's home and an expanding range of activities, including giving out free dinners, clothes and clogs, and day trips to the seaside.

The building was extended onto Bridge Street between 1896 and 1907 to include accommodation for girls. The inscription 'Manchester & Salford Street Childrens Mission' is still visible on facades on both streets.



# Plain Speaking Messenger



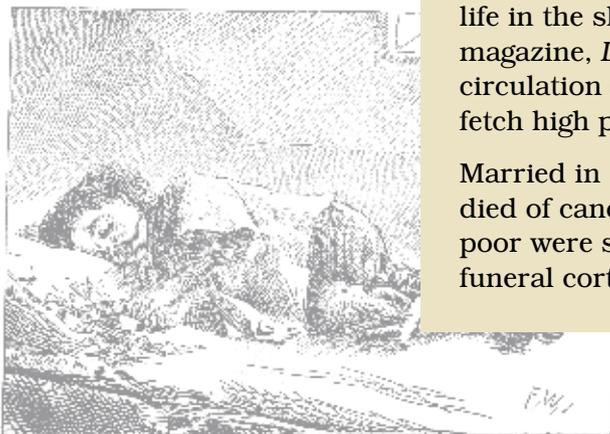
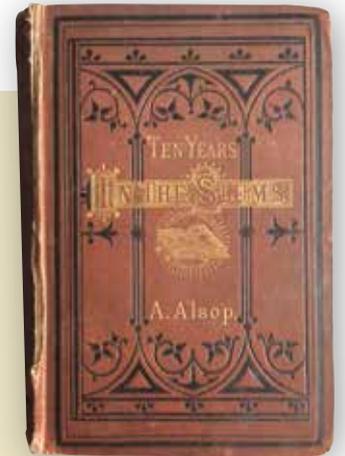
Bookseller Alfred Alsop founded Wood Street Mission at the age of 25. He was an evangelical Methodist who used a combination of religious zeal, plain speaking and good business connections to launch the charity.

Alsop showed up at music halls and drinking establishments at night to spread the word and invite 'sinners' to change their ways.

According to one account, in August 1884 he famously "invaded the drink-ridden area of Deansgate...when upwards of 150 men comprising some of the biggest ruffians and gail birds in the city" were invited along to services where many were "thoroughly reformed" before becoming "steady, sober, law abiding citizens".

Alsop wrote a number of books for fundraising purposes under a pseudonym, A. Delver, in which he colourfully portrayed life in the slums. A regular monthly magazine, *Delving and Diving*, enjoyed a circulation of 60,000 in 1883. The books still fetch high prices on the internet.

Married in 1872, he had seven children and died of cancer in 1892. At his funeral the poor were said to have lined the streets of the funeral cortege to pay their respects.



"Where that half-dead totter was lying"

# Lengthening Queues

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the scale of poverty relief projects grew against a backdrop of unemployment, low paid casual labour and the absence of a welfare state.

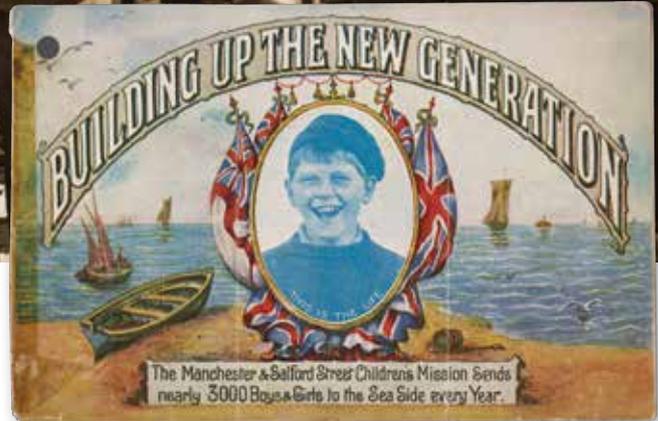
A *Manchester City News* article from 30 December 1905 explains how Superintendent John Richardson helped two labourers get work:

*"[They] had obtained work but were unable to start because they had no shovels. They explained their difficulty to him and after inquiry, he bought them shovels. They worked three days and then both returned voluntarily and paid him. Again, a week-ago, he gave a man one shilling to get a night's lodgings and some food. He got work next day and at the week end came to inquire what he owed. He was told "nothing" but nevertheless, he handed over 2s 6d for the mission and a "bob for the next poor chap who turned up"."*

The desperate situation must have stretched the charity beyond its limits at times. In the winter of 1907/08 the Mission provided shelter to 25,800 men and gave out 95,000 meals, 2,600 food parcels, 19,000 articles of clothing and 730 pairs of boots and clogs.

Two years later the Lord Mayor publicly thanked the Mission for supporting unemployed men the City Distress Fund could not help.





## Send Your Cheque!

The nineteenth century was a time of thriving philanthropy and the early missionaries were successful in securing the support of wealthy cotton merchants, retailers and philanthropists.

From the outset, business connections were important in generating income. Early benefactors took a keen interest in how donations were spent with Mrs Enriqueta Rylands – the widow of John Rylands – stipulating in 1896 that a £10 donation should “*be devoted to an old woman’s heat*”.

Wealthy donors were encouraged to visit St Annes holiday camp to see the charity’s work and attend the Sunday service. Held in the dining room, the service was open to the public and compulsory for all children at camp. Mayors and other senior dignitaries were invited to flagship events.

Apart from a short period in the 1980–90s when the charity received statutory funding, we have always been entirely dependent on voluntary subscriptions and donations and the generosity of the local community.

*Thank you!*

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# PRACTICAL NECESSITIES

Wood Street Mission is well-known for large scale poverty relief projects and has provided food, clothes, toys and holidays to tens of thousands of men, women and children.

“Please accept these words as a token of gratitude and heartfelt thanks, for the care and kindness that was shown to my daughter Kathleen during her stay at your camp last week... I am more than pleased to say she had gained 8lbs in the week...”



## Shelter

In the 1870s and 80s Alfred and his friends searched doorways and under market stalls at night for homeless boys. These boys were clothed and fed, and efforts were made to find them permanent homes. Some children were subsequently helped to emigrate to Canada.

During the severe winter of 1903/04 Wood Street Mission was a night shelter for over 35,000 unemployed men. About 500 men were packed onto hard benches in the basement and ground floor every night, with space so tight that anyone with two pence was asked to leave and find common lodgings.



Hundreds of men, women and children once again took shelter in the Mission during air raids in World War 2. There are poignant accounts of some of the families returning for help a few days later, homeless after discovering their houses had been bombed.

# Clogs



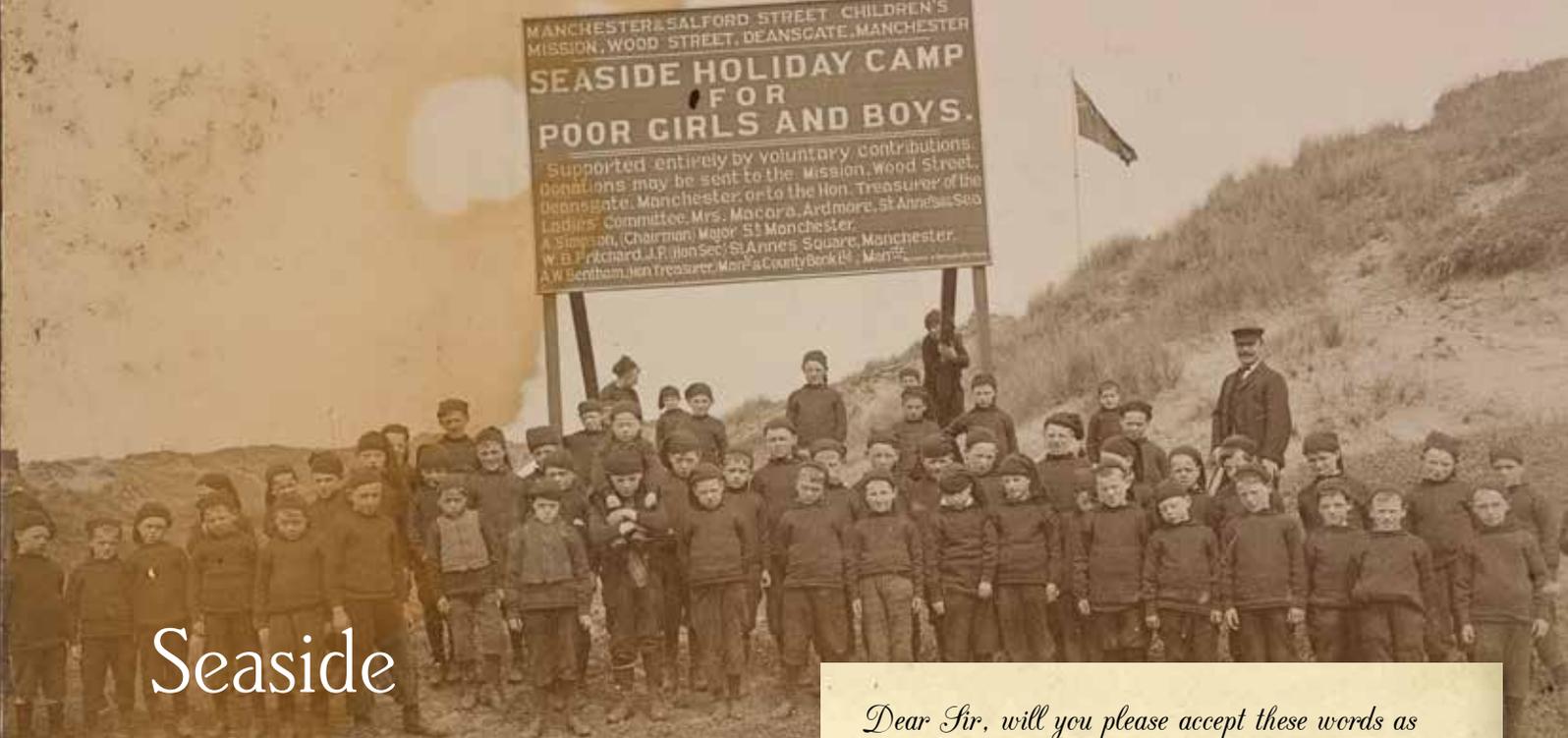
Gaunt, ragged street children who roamed the streets barefoot were given clogs in the early days and clogs continued to be given out until the 1940s. While the signs of poverty were not so visible by the second half of the twentieth century, clothes distribution has remained an important part of our work.

A fortnightly advertisement used to be taken out in the *Guardian* newspaper to encourage donations, which were received from all over the country and abroad. By the 1980s the increased cost of advertising and postage meant that the focus switched to Greater Manchester and a van was acquired to collect donations from homes and offices in the region. The secondhand

clothes market has since developed into a highly competitive, multi-billion pound global industry.

The introduction of the welfare state after World War 2 saw a big reduction in the amount of clothes distributed. But de-industrialisation, unemployment and recession in the 1980s prompted a shift in focus back to clothes distribution once more and the scale of this work continued to grow into the twenty-first century.





## Seaside

Wood Street Mission was once one of the biggest providers of free holidays for children in Manchester.

Sending children from poor families to the seaside for fresh air and exercise was popular in Victorian times and we took children on day trips to Southport from the nineteenth century. Children used to meet at Victoria station at 5.30am to catch an early morning train with some spending the night on Albert Square to make sure they did not miss their day out. Week long holidays took the place of day trips in 1897 when a decision was taken to build a camp of wooden huts at St Annes.

Squires Gate, a purpose-built holiday complex complete with swimming pool, seven acres of playing fields and a playground, opened in

*Dear Sir, will you please accept these words as a token of gratitude and heartfelt thanks, for the care and kindness that was shown to my daughter Kathleen during her stay at your camp last week. As I am pleased to say that she came back feeling a world of good for the stay. I had her weighed the day she went and then again the day she returned on the same scale I am more than pleased to say she had gained 8lbs in the week...*

*Yours obediently, J Byrns*

1922. It was built following a public fundraising appeal to mark our 50th anniversary. In its heyday the complex gave 3,000 children a year a week-long seaside holiday where they enjoyed trips to the beach and the south pier, as well as resort facilities.



## Santa Claus



Crowds of children used to gather on Wood Street at Christmas time to receive a toy. The toy distribution was a flagship event for the charity, often attended by city dignitaries.

Festivities began with a breakfast on Christmas Day for hundreds of children. This was followed by the main event on Boxing Day when hundreds of children received a toy and an orange from a member of the management committee dressed up as Santa. Later, tins and packets of food replaced the breakfasts and in the 1960s we started giving out toys before Christmas, something we still do today.

In 2015 we gave toys and food to over 2000 families and 4,500 children – twice as many families as are helped at other times of year.

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# CHANGING LIVES

But the real purpose of the founding missionaries was to change lives. This has remained a central theme of our work into modern times, from innovative youth work in the 1960s to our current focus on improving life chances.

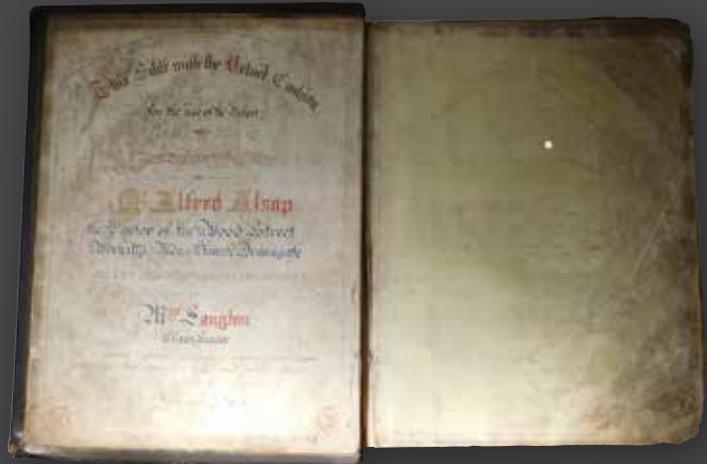
“He locked the door on us, but instead of preaching he gave us a meal – the first decent meal I had tasted for months – and he talked to us, a straight talk, man to man.”

# Redemption

Wood Street Mission remained an evangelical organisation up until the 1950s.

One of the first superintendents, John Richardson, had his own moment of redemption after meeting Alfred Alsop.

A 1911 obituary in a local newspaper entitled “Police baiter who became a great philanthropist” recounts how Richardson was in his lodging house when he heard Alsop and friends outside. Alsop’s wife, who was with them, was singing a hymn he knew from Strangeways prison.



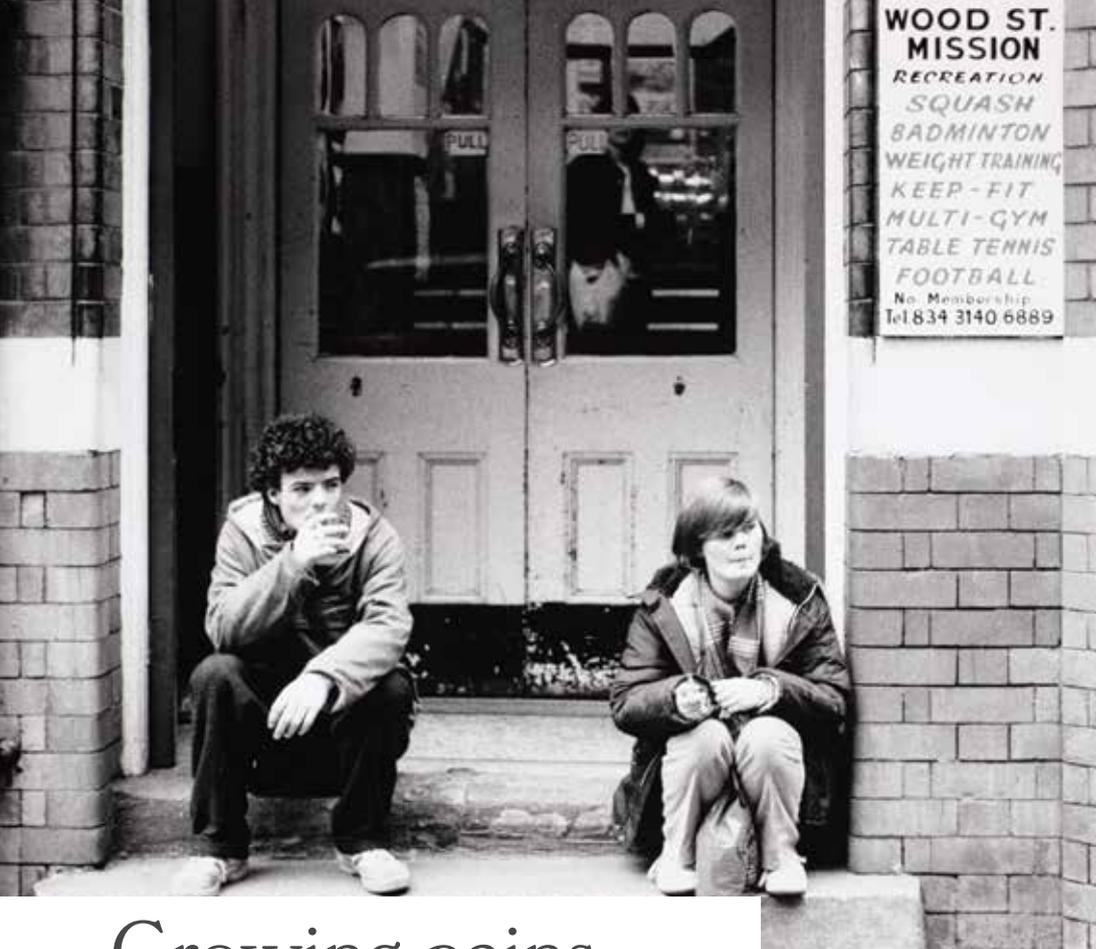
*“That hymn sung on that Sunday morning in God’s sunshine somehow affected me, but it did not prevent me following and jeering after the missionaries as they marched down the street. Mr Alsop led the way, and we followed with cat-calls and cheers. He answered us and goaded us on, leading us down one street and then another, and on into the Mission Hall. When we were in he locked the door on us, but instead of preaching, as we expected, he gave us a meal –the first decent meal I had tasted for months – and after we had done full justice to it he talked to us. It was not preaching but a straight talk man to man. When we left the building I felt thoroughly ashamed of myself. Arriving at the lodging-house one of the chaps offered me a glass of beer to “buck-me-up” I couldn’t drink it, and from that day I never tasted beer.”*



Religious activity continued into the twentieth century. Up to 500 children a week attended Sunday school in the opening decades and the number of Gospel services held doubled before expanding again during a religious revival in the 1940s and 50s. Senior religious leaders were invited to annual meetings and bibles were distributed to children to mark the coronation

of Queen Elizabeth II. The Chapel was also often used by other religious and temperance groups.

The 1960s saw a shift to secularisation. The numbers attending Sunday service, already under pressure because of the commercialisation of the area, dwindled, and the last service was held in the Chapel in the 1970s.



“No group in society faces greater challenges and opportunities than youth and it is fitting that the Mission with its tradition of work with street children should now extend its work to the new type of older street child, the teenager, whose presence in the city streets is so obvious today.”

## Growing pains

The 1960s saw a dramatic break with the past following the publication of a landmark government report on youth services which prompted the expansion and professionalization of youth work.

In 1962 Wood Street Mission appointed Arnold Yates, a retired police officer, as superintendent. Yates' appointment came against a backdrop of concern and moral panic about 'subversive'

youth cultures and a rise in juvenile crime. Under his leadership the focus of the charity shifted towards engaging older children in order to bring purpose to their lives and divert them from crime.

A youth club opened in Wood Street to cater for young people in the city. It soon had over 600 members drawn from as far away as Bolton and Macclesfield, with several hundred attending the club on Friday nights. A disco, coffee bar and counselling service – one of the first of its kind in the north of England – followed, and a Duke



of Edinburgh citizenship awards scheme was begun, offering a range of activities.

In the 1980s a squash court, keep-fit centre and gym was built, funded by the Sports Council, to allow young people from deprived backgrounds take part in sport. Income for the charity was generated by charging city workers for use of the facilities, which are fondly remembered by some prominent professionals now working in Spinningfields.

The sports centre was closed in the 1990s.





## Great Outdoors

Birchfield Lodge, a large country house in nine acres of land in the Peak District, opened in 1963 to allow young people to experience outdoor activities and communal living.

Bought following the sale of Squires Gate, the lodge was used to provide holidays for young people. It could accommodate groups of up to 50 and was also hired out to schools and youth groups to generate an income.

Letters from groups who stayed at the lodge were very positive, praising the facilities, surrounding attractions and relaxed atmosphere.

*"It made quite a change from Manchester. We all enjoyed walking around the countryside, playing in the fields and visiting the Blue John mines,"* wrote one child.



A teacher from a Newton Heath school wrote: *"We hope to make another visit next year... Now with the experience of a week we will know how better to use our time. The art man wants to take some kids sketching while I do some geology."*

Too expensive to maintain, it was eventually sold to the Greater Manchester Youth Association in the 1980s.

# Today

Today, almost 150 years on, the need for our work is greater than ever.

There are 55,000 children living in poverty in Manchester and Salford. Despite the affluence of neighbouring Spinningfields and nearby MediaCity, our cities have some of the highest rates of child poverty in the country, with one in three local children living in poverty.

In 2015 Wood Street Mission adopted a new 5 year strategy which highlights the importance of breaking the cycle of poverty. The strategy sets out how we will prioritise our work in the run up to our 150th anniversary to improve children's life chances by promoting engagement in education.

**Books are GRRREAT!** **WOOD STREET MISSION**  
Promoting Reading and Improving life chances

**WOOD STREET MISSION**

Wood Street Mission, 36 Wood Street, Manchester M2 2DQ  
Tel: 0161 234 3740 Email: info@woodstreetmission.org.uk  
Registered Charity number: 1032027

Call 0161 234 3740 to book a collection

#WoodStMission  
@WoodStMission

## Start Smart Smart Start

Donate uniform, sports kit and stationary and help a local child fit in and achieve at school

**SmartStart**  
MANCHESTER & SALFORD

See [www.woodstreetmission.org.uk](http://www.woodstreetmission.org.uk) for more details

**WOOD STREET MISSION** **Post**  
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ISSUE 2 | FEBRUARY 2015

## Books are GRRREAT!

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We have launched an appeal for children's books spearheaded by our new mascot. Children in low income households often have few books at home and are less likely to be good readers than their peers. Donate new and good quality second-hand books to our book clubs and help build a brighter future for children in Manchester and Salford. Or text **BOOK to 75000** to donate £5 to the Appeal. See page 4 for more details.

[www.woodstreetmission.org.uk](http://www.woodstreetmission.org.uk)



# Leave a gift in your will



Poverty blights children's lives and futures. We are committed to improving the lives and life chances of the 1 in 3 children in Manchester and Salford living in poverty. Help us make a difference to the lives of future generations of children by leaving a gift in your will.

**£500** could cover the cost of providing a nutritious meal for 100 children attending one of our holiday book clubs, which promote reading and literacy.

**£1000** could enable us give cots to 10 struggling families so their baby can have somewhere safe and dry to sleep.

**£50000** could allow us to kit out 1000 children starting school for the first time with a smart uniform and sports gear, so they fit in and want to achieve.

Our work has a big impact on the lives of local children. A gift in your will can make us stronger in the years ahead.

**For more information about how you can leave us a legacy go to [www.woodstreetmission.org.uk](http://www.woodstreetmission.org.uk) or call 0161 834 3140**



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STREET  
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