

Embargoed until 00:01hrs Monday 7 December

Local author's heart-warming story of Elvis the elephant - helping parents talk about homelessness with their children

St Mungo's homelessness worker Helen Brian's first published book 'Elvis' is proving a hit - and is already attracting attention from local celebrities with all profits going to local charities

After her young son started asking questions about people they saw sleeping rough, local charity worker Helen Brian was inspired to write a story to help explain homelessness to children. And so the character of Elvis the elephant was born.

This week Helen, who is a mental health and homelessness worker, publishes her book with Peahen Publishing.

Simply called *Elvis*, the book tells the story of the elephant who unexpectedly finds himself homeless and the support he receives to help him recover.

All profits from the book – which is the first Helen has had published - will go to homelessness charities Julian House and St Mungo's.

Whilst the official book launch will be taking place virtually on Friday 11 December, *Elvis* has already sold over 350 copies since it has been available to pre-order over the last two weeks.

Helen – who lives in Corsham and works for St Mungo's in Bath – wrote the book when her four year old son started asking her questions about people that he saw rough sleeping and she realised how difficult it can be to explain the concept of homelessness to children.

Helen was determined to combine her experience of working in the homelessness sector – as a Move-on Worker at Bath Hospital supporting people to ensure they have accommodation when they are discharged – and her passion for writing to create a children's book that would help teachers, parents and carers to talk to children about rough sleeping and the support that's available.

Helen Brian, author and move-on worker at St Mungo's, said, "I've worked in the homelessness sector for a good number of years now and I've often been hugely frustrated and saddened by the judgements and stereotypes that have been placed on the people that I've supported.

"It wasn't until my son became older that I began to try and think of ways to educate him around the subject to try and ensure he never made those assumptions.

"Last New Year's Eve, Elvis arrived in my head from absolutely nowhere and having previously abandoned my writing during a very difficult time in my life, I wrote my first book draft in 18 years.

"I am enormously proud of what I have achieved so far and I hope we can spread Elvis' story as far and wide as possible.

“Most of all, I hope I have shown children that compassion and kindness are important and that there is always hope, even in the toughest situations.”

Keen to use the story of Elvis to raise awareness around homelessness, Helen has inspired a number of local celebrities and influencers to support the project over social media, including actor, Kerry Howard and Olympian athlete, Amie Williams.

Actor and voice artist Steven Kynman - best known as Cbeebies Robert the Robot and the voice of Fireman Sam - was so touched by the book that he narrated the audio book, donating his time for free.

Stephen Kynman, actor and voice artist, said “What drew me to Elvis, was how clearly Helen had managed to tackle the extremely complicated issue of homelessness in such a gentle and touching story.

“I don't believe I've ever seen another Children's Book broach this and its central message of kindness and understanding pulled me in.

“After I read it, taking part wasn't a choice, I had to. I'm honoured to be part of such a beautiful book.”

The proceeds of the book will be split between homelessness charities Julian House and St Mungo's, who both provide a number of support services across the south, including Bath and Bristol.

Paul Hudson, Regional Head at St Mungo's, said “We are so proud of Helen for writing such a wonderful children's book that gently explores some of the complexities around homelessness. It really is beautifully written and illustrated, and a joy to read.

“Helen has been able to draw on her experience as a move on worker for St Mungo's in Bath - a role that is so vital in supporting people into accommodation when they are at a vulnerable point in their lives.

We are incredibly grateful that, after all of Helen's hard work in writing and promoting the book, some of the proceeds will be donated to St Mungo's.”

Cecil Weir, Fundraising and PR Director at Julian House, said "Helen's book is a fantastic initiative which will further help to raise awareness about a social issue, where there are still many misconceptions and a few persistent urban myths.

The root causes of homelessness are often linked to childhood trauma and mental health. Elvis' story is thought provoking, charming and amazingly insightful."

Follow Helen on Twitter @HelenMayBri and instagram @helenbrianauthor. The book is available to buy online at www.helenbrian.co.uk and in the following independent book shops:

- Oldfield Park Bookshop - Bath
- Julian House Book Shop - 86 Walcot St, Bath
- Corsham Bookshop - Corsham
- Devizes Books - Devizes

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Notes to editors

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About Elvis

By Helen Brian, Illustrated by Chantal Bourgonje / Peahen Publishing
<http://www.peahenpublishing.com/>

When Elvis suddenly loses his job and his home, he has nowhere to turn, until suddenly, a little stranger steps in to help. It doesn't matter how big and strong you are, we all need a little help sometimes.

- This story gently raises awareness around the subject of homelessness but also represents kindness and hope.
- Told in beautiful rhyming text.
- Proceeds of sales go to Julian House and St Mungo's.

About Helen Brian

Helen Brian works as a mental health specialist for a homelessness charity. Helen is passionate about raising awareness of issues that the more vulnerable members of society face. Helen's not afraid to tackle challenging sensitive issues in her books. She uses relatable and vibrant characters to help deliver gentle, yet important messages for her readers.

About St Mungo's

St Mungo's is one of the UK's leading homelessness charities and exists to end homelessness and rebuild lives. Each night the charity provides housing and support to 2,800 people across London and the South and helps thousands of others with advice, health, skills and work services.

About Julian House

Julian House provides a range of services to socially excluded people across the South West – particularly in the areas of homelessness, domestic abuse and prison resettlement. It also operates a number of social enterprise bike workshops which offer work experience and training opportunities not just for the men and women who are supported by the charity but other marginalised individuals.

About Chantal Bourgonje

Chantal Bourgonje is a Dutch illustrator and writer of children's books. Chantal has a lifetime passion for animals and the natural world.

About Steven Kynman

Steven is a British actor, voice artist and puppeteer who is probably best known as Cbeebies Robert the Robert and William Shakespeare for the Cbeebies Shakespeare productions.

Steve is also the voice of Fireman Sam and Naughty Norman as well as several other characters for Thomas the Tank Engine, Qpootle 5 and Best Bugs Forever for Disney.

He can also be heard on a number of Radio 4 comedies, such as Concrete Cow, Think The Unthinkable, Hut 33, Milton Jones, Giles Wemmbly Hogg but mostly as Henry, in The Castle.

Occasionally, he likes to hold his arm in the air for long periods of time, having trained with Jim Henson's as a muppet and animatronic puppeteer. He's worked on various projects from Muppet's Treasure Island to Construction Site, The Hoobs to The Dark Crystal, from Star Wars to Jurassic World. He was also lead puppeteer of Elf, Mojo, Demon Neil and others for Yonderland on Sky 1.

Theatre credits include Mr Perks in the Olivier Award winning production of The Railway Children, Vice Versa at the RSC, Death of a Salesman at York Theatre Royal, Prince Herbert in Spamalot at The Palace Theatre, London, Sunday In The Park With George and Forbidden Broadway both for the Menier Chocolate Factory.

Writing credits include The Hoobs, Justin's House and numerous comedy sketches and songs for Theatre and Radio.

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