



The temperance movement may have suffered a fashion crisis in the last century, but its messages are more relevant than ever. DDN talks to George Ruston, chief executive of Hope UK, about modernising to reach young people both inside and outside the church.

Alcohol featured prominently in the nineteenth century. Those who didn't depend on drinking it were likely to be concerned with its effects on families and society, and the first part of the century saw the tremendous growth of the temperance movement.

The UK Band of Hope was part of this movement, educating children, and trying to get political change in Parliament. With Queen Victoria as patron, the group that began life as a children's club in Leeds in 1847, had 3.5 million people – more than 10 per cent of the population – connected with it 50 years later, with a network of thousands of children's clubs that met each week, up and down the country.

The Victorian vision of 'the demon drink' coincided with the growth of printing technology. Suddenly it was easy to spread ideas, and to give information and printed stories to people who ran the children's clubs.

The Band of Hope was as much a group for alcohol education as a Christian children's club, but it made the most of strong links with the church. Not only was this a period of growth for voluntary organisations; it was a time when churches were increasing their congregations quite significantly. The Protestant work ethic was spread by the new mill owners, the Rowntrees and the Cadburys, who promoted temperance. Other powerful influencers like Arthur Guinness set up a brewery to wean the Irish off the hard liquor onto something more 'healthy'; hence the 'Guinness is good for you' slogans.

The messages were not just about abstinence, but about the wider social context – and that was where the Band of Hope were coming from, according to George Ruston, chief executive of the organisation, which has now updated its name to Hope UK.

Bringing the story up to date, Ruston describes the decline suffered by the Band of Hope – alongside the affiliated temperance groups – from

around the First World War. The obvious need for temperance was not there, as there were other things going on in society, he explains. The nature of society changed, then after the war people began to have more disposable income. In the early 1930s changes in advertising policy and direction by manufacturers swung the full force of alcoholic temptation at younger people, including women, so drinking was not just the preserve of men on the way home from the factory. Accompanying society's change, the original membership was growing older, people were less able to do voluntary work, and the decline mirrored dwindling church attendance.

Ruston has a pragmatic view of the Band of Hope's decline, which fits neatly with the responsive outlook of its modern incarnation. He volunteers that the organisation was an architect in its own decline, in that it refused to adapt to change. 'We would set up divisions between people, we would make statements that were outrageous and couldn't be defended,' he says, taking responsibility for his predecessors. 'The temperance movement pulled up the drawbridge... it didn't notice the decline until it was too late and its sons and daughters had jumped into the moat and swum away.'

Change in the organisation eventually started to take place when a 30-year-old took over leadership in the late 1960s. Coming in fresh, he had the audacity to change the leadership committee meetings in London from Friday afternoons, 'when only retired people and people of private means could go', to Saturdays. The trustee body began to be populated by workers again, and the organisation began to breathe.

By the time George Ruston left his job as community and continuing care unit administrator for Islington Health Authority for the much snappier title of chief executive in 1985, the

Band of hope
finds thirst for

LIFE

organisation had discovered a generation too young to know what the original Band of Hope was. With an appetite for change, Ruston threw himself into repositioning on the front line of primary prevention. He saw the gaps in the voluntary sector for drug education and prevention, and saw historical links with the church as a way of reaching into their networks, to reach families and influence youth work. Fifty thousand local churches represent a significant target group when you're trying to prevent drug-related harm, he says.

Yet to be relevant, the organisation had to recognise its strengths and weaknesses. The Band of Hope was definitely 'something for its time' and 'an organisation of the churches', says Ruston. With this recognition came the decision to focus on children and young people – but through supporting those who work with them, rather than directly. They decided not to become a national pressure group, but to concentrate on training others to spread education and prevention messages.

Today the Christian foundation is still there, and the renamed Hope UK carries out around half of its work with church networks. So they are a 'Christian drug education – but not one that's exclusive to the church,' Ruston explains.

When he took the job of chief executive, he expected to be in it for five or ten years. Looking back over 21 years, he reflects on his own sense of purpose, in steering the modernising project. An energetic person himself – he recently cycled 800 miles from London to Edinburgh via Cardiff, Dublin and Belfast to raise £9,000 for Hope UK – he seeks like-minded partnerships to marry their expertise with new resources and outlets.

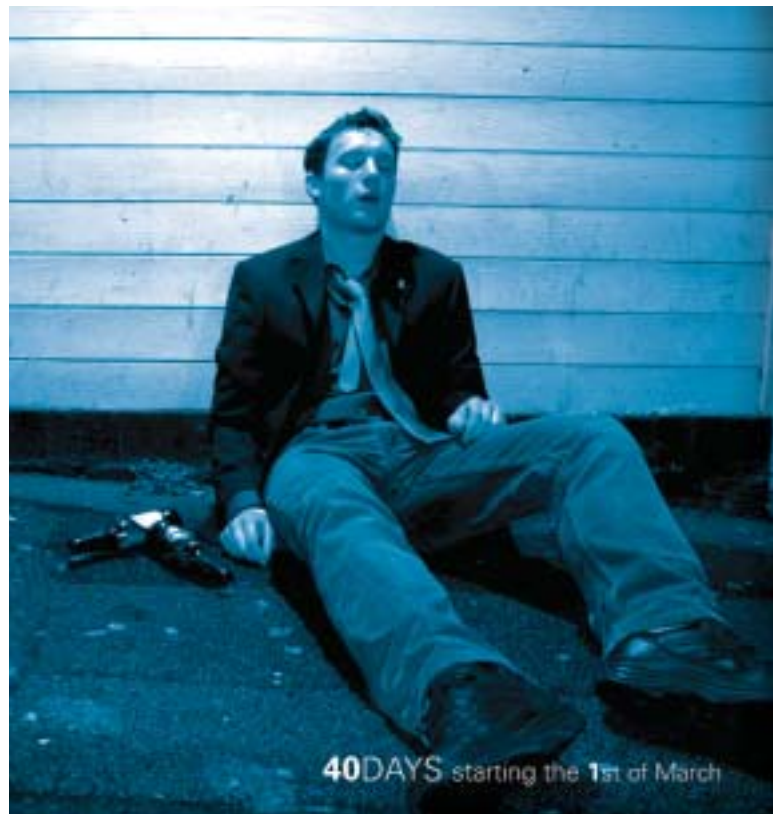
Seeing hard-won funds depleted by the cost of project work in the 1980s led him to a more efficient route to disseminating information. With a Department of Education grant, the voluntary drug educator scheme was created, now the 'heart of the organisation', which sends trained volunteers out to groups all over the UK to give basic drugs education.

With a voluntary organisations master's degree, Ruston is a keen observer of what drives organisations. He believes that it is the individuals who shape an organisation – which is

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why he takes his own responsibilities so seriously in taking Hope UK to the next level. His other motivator is that the task could be perceived as uphill – and therefore a challenge. He describes Hope UK as a 'tier zero' organisation, 'because it's actually working with people where there isn't a problem'. Their work 'does not hit the government's priority button particularly', he says – but it does often connect with youth services' priorities, and they respond willingly to all kinds of youth groups to train leaders at the basic level they need. The challenge is often in making people realise how much this work is needed, because it is proactive and not responding to existing situations where things have gone wrong. To make it easier to take on board, they offer flexible training options through their government-supported programme called Drugnet (which is short for Drug Network for Education and Training).

Catchy sounding campaigns, such as 'Drug proof your kids' – an Australian collaboration with, as Ruston says, an 'awful title but a useful purpose', bring Hope UK in contact with their target groups. Fully aware that the organisation cannot



wait for applicants to come to them, he takes on board the need for bright designs and go-getting initiatives.

The latest campaign, 'Thirst for life', challenges people to give up alcohol for 40 days and is accompanied by badges, ribbons and postcards. But despite the shiny new packaging, the organisation is staying true to its roots. The campaign starts on 1 March and runs through the period of Lent, using enough Christian reference to attract the enthusiasm of church groups – but appealing equally to those who just associate Lent with the game of depriving themselves of something for a while.

The partnership on Thirst for Life, this time with Share Jesus International, allows Hope UK to team its drug and alcohol knowledge with the evangelical energy of SJI's youth director, to engage with as many young people as possible. The £50,000 raised to run the campaign – 'a drop in the ocean by government standards' – has afforded a full-time worker on the project; then there's the usual resourceful 'all hands on deck' approach to channelling the messages through other people's networks and

contacts.

Postcards inviting you to sign up are finding their way into cinemas, universities, health clubs and pubs. A campaigner pack helps you to recruit your mates to the challenge. And while the health messages are tried and tested, much of the campaign work on Thirst for Life is innovative and 'being made up on the hoof as we go on'.

'It's an interesting update on what happened 150 years ago,' reflects Ruston. He is pleased that a report by the historian Professor Virginia Berridge, published last November, highlights the validity of the modernised temperance movement in modifying drinking behaviour. He seems comfortable that Hope UK is now in its stride, engaging in much needed health promotion at a modern pace. These days, through campaigns such as Thirst for Life, Hope UK is 'very much putting a human dimension onto education', he says. **DDN**

Visit www.thirstforlife.org for more on the campaign, or email info@thirstforlife.org. Hope UK are at www.hopeuk.org