

"LIVING"



Comic Strip Project on Homelessness at Hermitage Primary School, Wapping, London



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Interim Report

The aim of this project is to engage young people aged 9 - 11 with various issues surrounding the topic of 'Homelessness' – its many causes, its effects, and some of the steps taken by wider society to provide facilities for this vulnerable section of the population.

The vehicle for this engagement is the comic strip, utilising its inherent potential to educate and illustrate through the combination of word and image. One of many inspirations is the award-winning graphic novel *The Tale of One Bad Rat* by Bryan Talbot; which told the story of a homeless girl in London.

From the outset, we hoped to produce a piece of work that will have proven informative to the participants, and reflect their capacity to engage fully with a complex topic.

Simultaneously, a video/drama project was underway with another group of pupils exploring the same issues. When combined we see a multimedia presentation that examines the subject.

Dominic Preston of Rebellion, publishers of the long-running comic *2000 AD*, served as overall co-ordinator, liaising between the tutors, the school staff, and the Homelessness charity Crisis, which pledged support for this project.

He engaged the services of Steve Marchant and Kev Sutherland as specialist tutors; both are freelance cartoonists with considerable teaching experience. Steve is also a part-time youth worker for Lewisham Borough Council. They were assisted by Boo Cook, one of *2000 AD*'s top illustrators.

Initially, a 7-week programme was envisaged, with tutors visiting the classroom for one afternoon session per week; this was expanded slightly, owing to school holidays – and the enthusiasm of the pupils!

The programme was broadly based around 3 main areas: confidence-building drawing exercises, so that the pupils would not feel daunted by the task in hand; putting together a storyline that reflected many of the issues affecting homeless people; and adapting this script into comic-strip form.

The young people were clearly excited by the project, picking up the basic drawing skills quickly, even going so far as producing their own "How to Draw" leaflets in another lesson, reflecting what they'd learned.

Originating a script proved problematic at first. A planned visit to the school by selected homeless people from Crisis – who were to tell the pupils of their own experiences – failed to materialise. Instead, Crisis supplied a number of case histories (with the names, etc, changed). These were adapted by the tutors into 3 stories set within a framing narrative. The pupils then added their own ideas for situations and dialogue, and designed the general look of the characters.

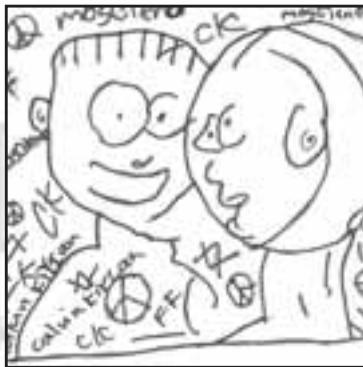
Each pupil then worked on a single panel of the storyline, drawing a picture to go with their part of the script, thinking carefully about how they might best illustrate that part of the story, and about how the characters might be feeling. This process was repeated until the whole story was done, so that the pupils each had several illustrations throughout the finished stories.

Special mention should be made here of the support and encouragement – to pupils and tutors alike! – given by the class tutor, Shireena.

At the time of writing (early April), the class contact element of the project is at an end, with the finished comic-strip story existing as 60 A4 illustrations, and cover design with the title – suggested by the pupils – of **LIVING**.

These illustrations will now have the dialogue added and be prepared for publication by the team at Rebellion, ready for inclusion as a comic book with the video project's finished work; it is also hoped that it will eventually be available to view on-line.

A full report and overview of the project will be made available after these final stages of production. For further information and to obtain copies of the video please send a mail to enquiries@mirandanet.ac.uk



Hermitage City Citizens Project 2003

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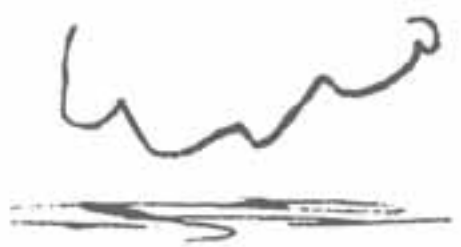
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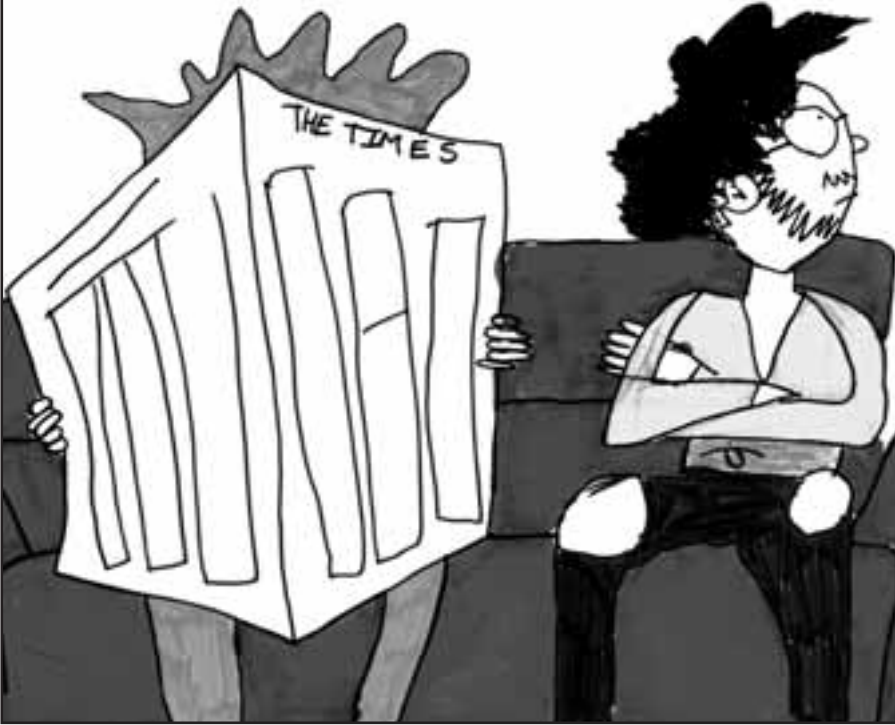
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It's a rainy Tuesday afternoon, and two young people are sitting in a drop-in centre for homeless people.



A middle-aged man wearing a guardsman's outfit with a big key in his back walks over, carrying mugs of tea.



I'm Eric by the way... so who are you two?

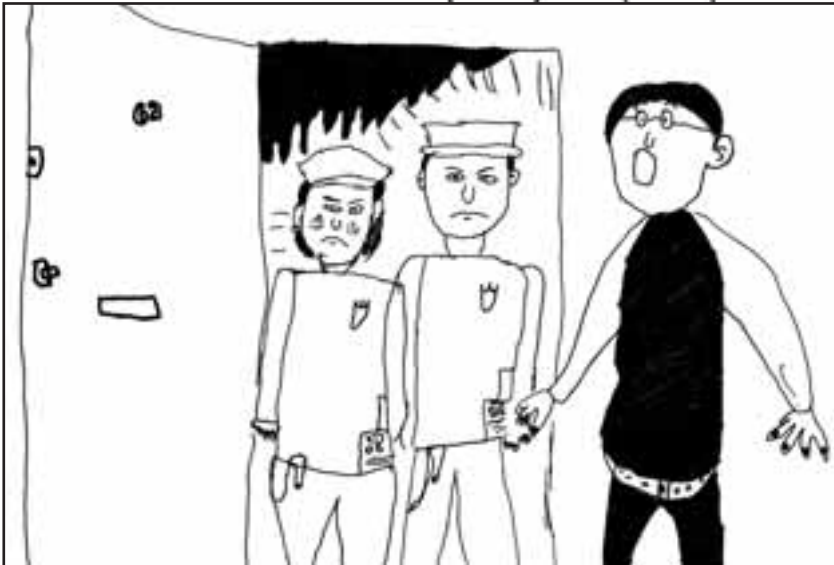
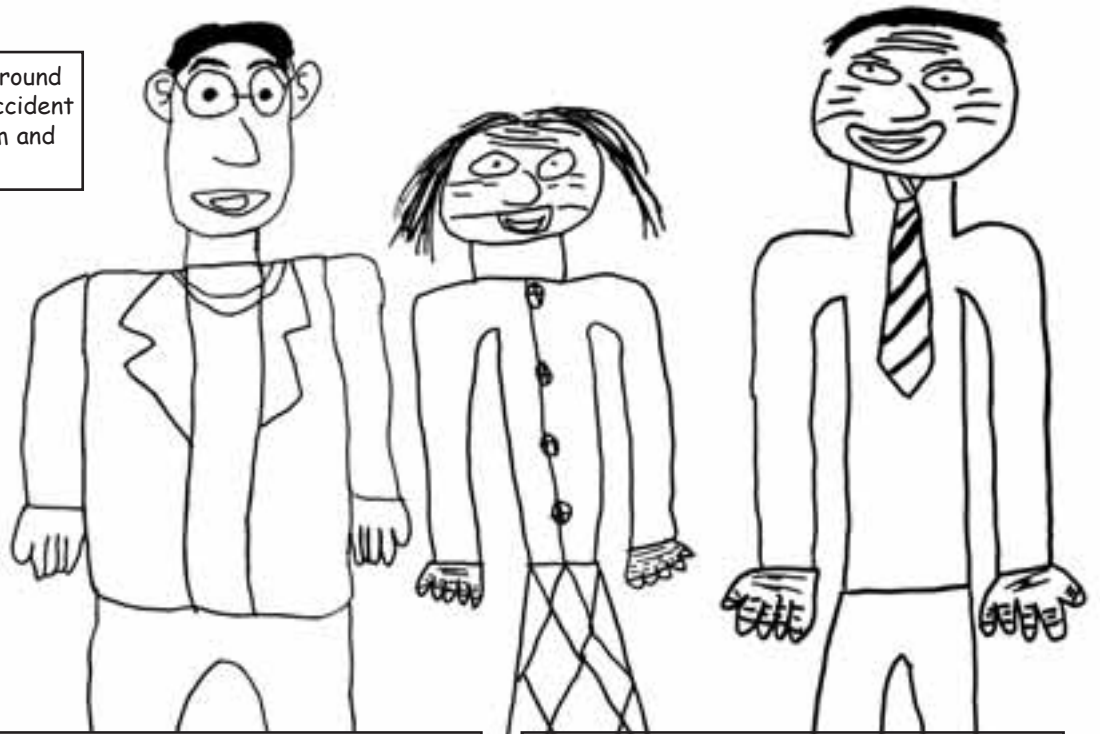
My name's Jane. What's your name?

Daljit, but my friends call me Dali.





One day, the police came round and said there'd been an accident on the motorway. My mum and dad had been killed!



After the funeral, I went to live with my uncle, but I was too upset to go to college or find a job. He's very strict, so he threw me out.

I stayed with a friend for a while, but we argued all the time and then he threw me out.

So, I ended up on the streets, and sometimes I slept in a train station.



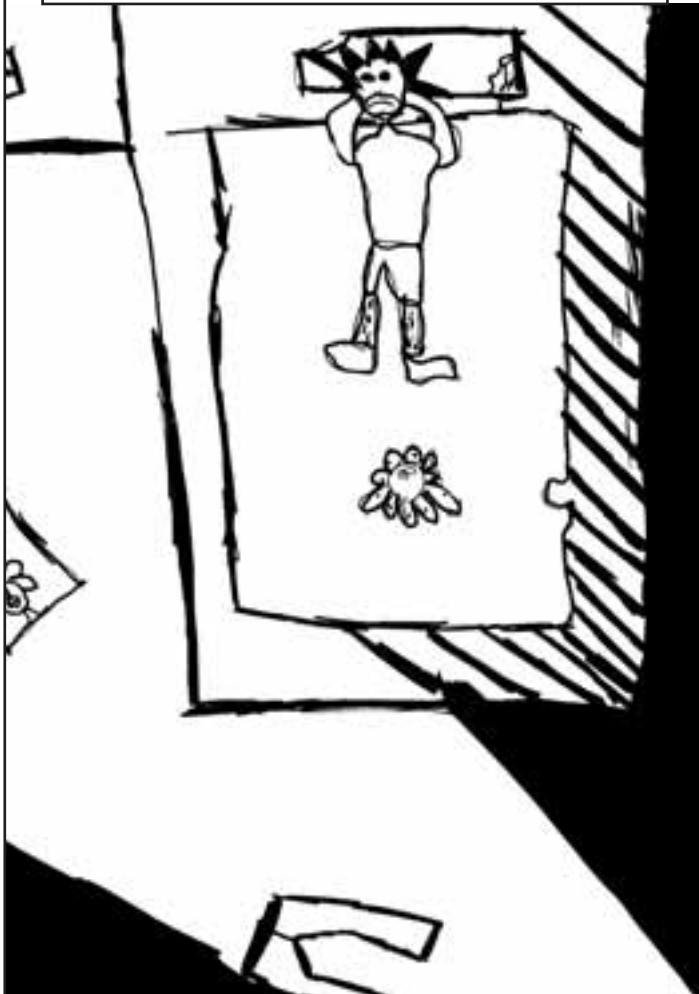
Eventually, my doctor helped me get into a hostel... she was really nice.

The people at the hostel got me a bed and breakfast hotel, but it wasn't as nice as the one next door.





I was stuck in a small room all day with nothing to do. It was damp, there were cockroaches, there was no TV... Every night, I couldn't sleep because people were always shouting and arguing... it was awful.



I used to go out for a walk if I couldn't sleep, and one night I came back and I'd been burgled. Someone had nicked my spare trainers, my jacket, and all my medicine.



I was afraid to stay there, so I put the rest of my stuff into a bag, and went back on the streets...

I come here nearly every day to get some soup and sandwiches, but they want to get me back into a hostel, or another B&B, and what's the point in that?

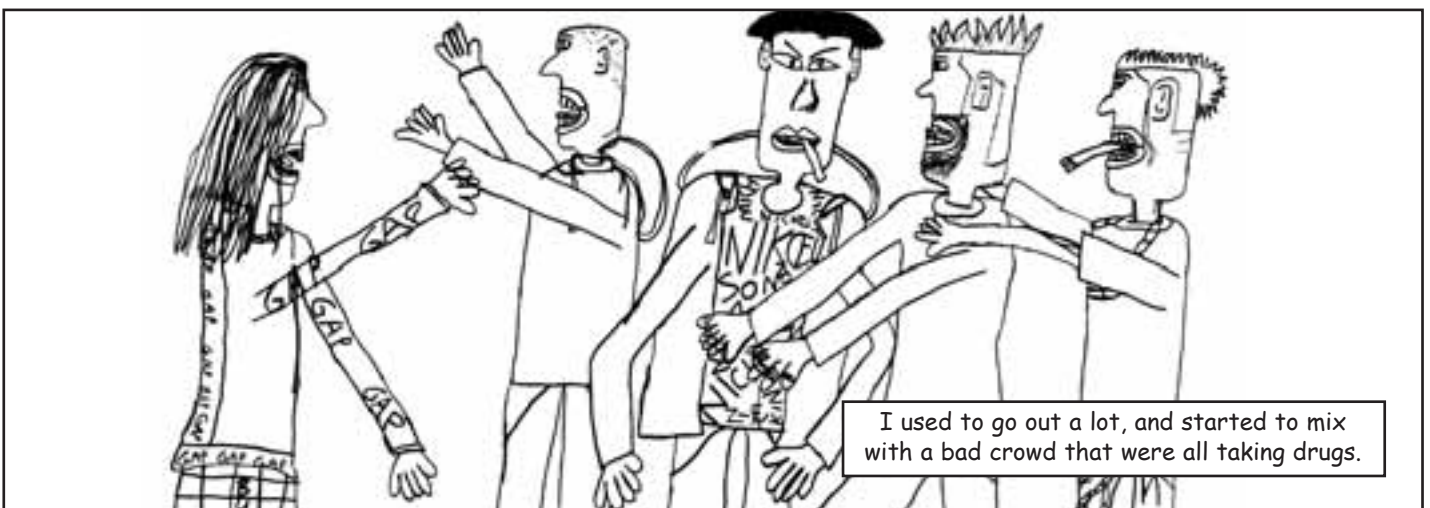
I know what you mean.



I was taken into care when I was 11, but it was a horrible place. I was bullied, and I always felt frightened...



When I was 16, they moved me into a hostel, but I didn't know anyone there and felt very lonely. Eventually, I got my own flat, but no-one came to see me or take care of me.



I used to go out a lot, and started to mix with a bad crowd that were all taking drugs.



One of them was called Nick and he became my boyfriend.



Nick moved in with me, but we spent all our benefit money on drugs, and when we ran out of money, he forced me to go out shoplifting.



I got caught a few times, and there was other stuff, and we eventually got evicted.

So, we were living on the streets. I'd beg for money for food, but then Nick would take it off me and buy drugs.



One day, I just got on a train without a ticket, to get away from Nick. When the inspector found me, he threw me off in London, and I've been here ever since.

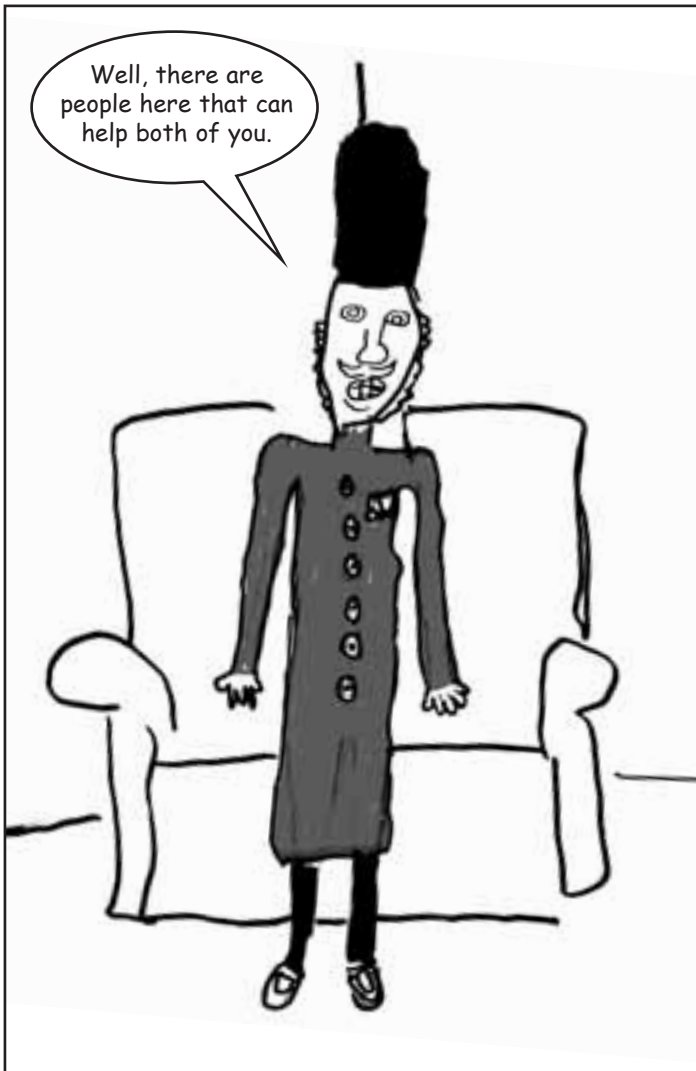
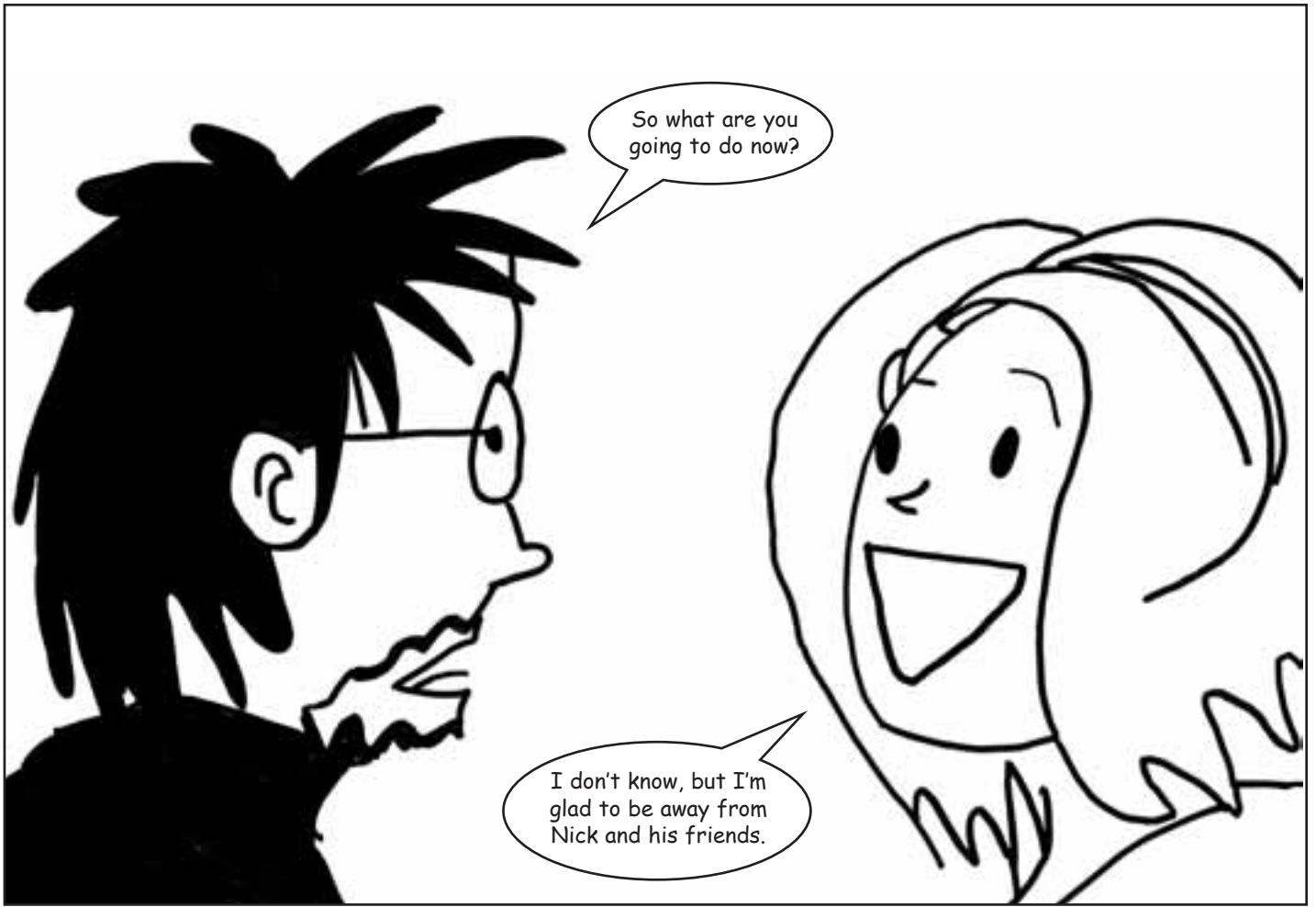


Right now, I'm sleeping in a car park at night...



And during the day, I sit begging on the street...





Let me tell you my story. Ten years ago, I was running my own business. I has a beautiful wife and a lovely home.



But then, in the same year, both my parents died. They were quite old, but it was still a shock.



The business wasn't doing well, so I had to work late at the office, and I worked most weekends...



I started to drink heavily to help me get to sleep...but eventually I was drinking all the time...



I began to sleep at my desk, and the business was doing very badly...



Then one weekend, my wife told me that she was leaving me.



So I started drinking even more.
I didn't bother to go to work.



I'd spend all day drinking, and most of the
night begging for money at bus stops.



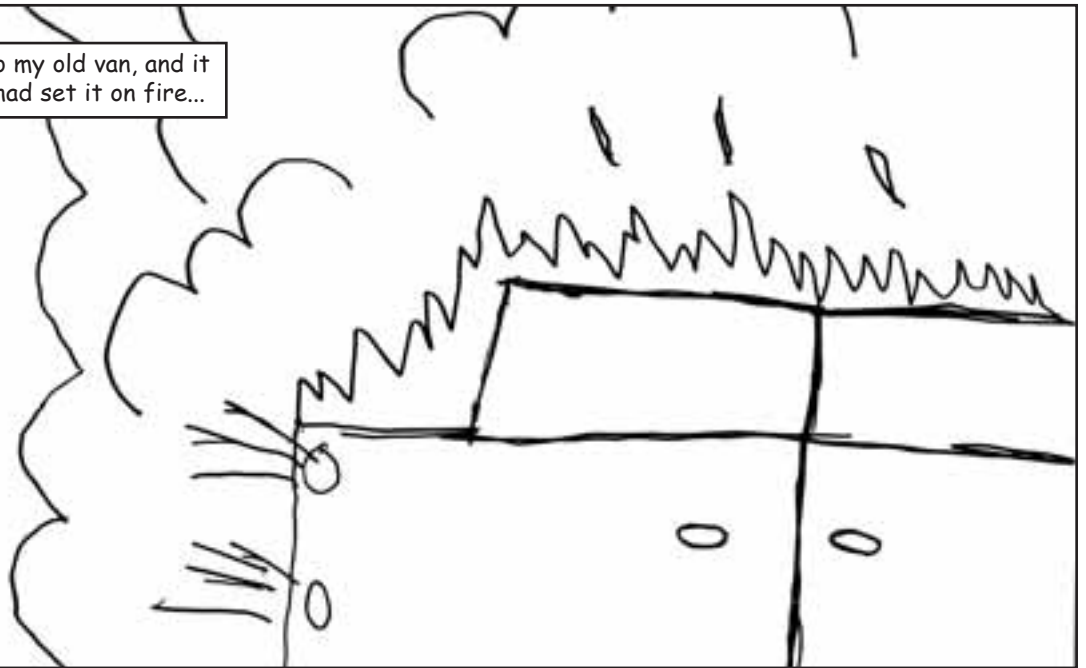
After 6 months, I went broke. The home
was sold to pay my debts, and I ended up
sleeping in the back of an old van.



I'd rummage through
litter bins for food...



One night, I came back to my old van, and it was burnt out...someone had set it on fire...



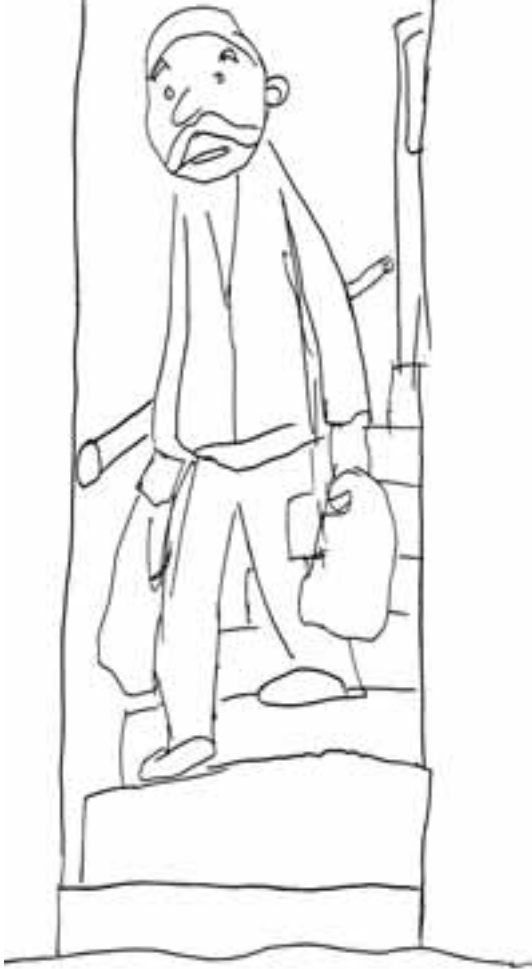
I lost all my spare clothes, my family photographs, and everything else.



So I ended up sleeping in a cardboard box in a shop doorway.



I tried to find a hostel, but they were all for young people or ex-servicemen, and I was always turned away.



I still had to beg for money, but without clean clothes, or a toothbrush, no one came near me.



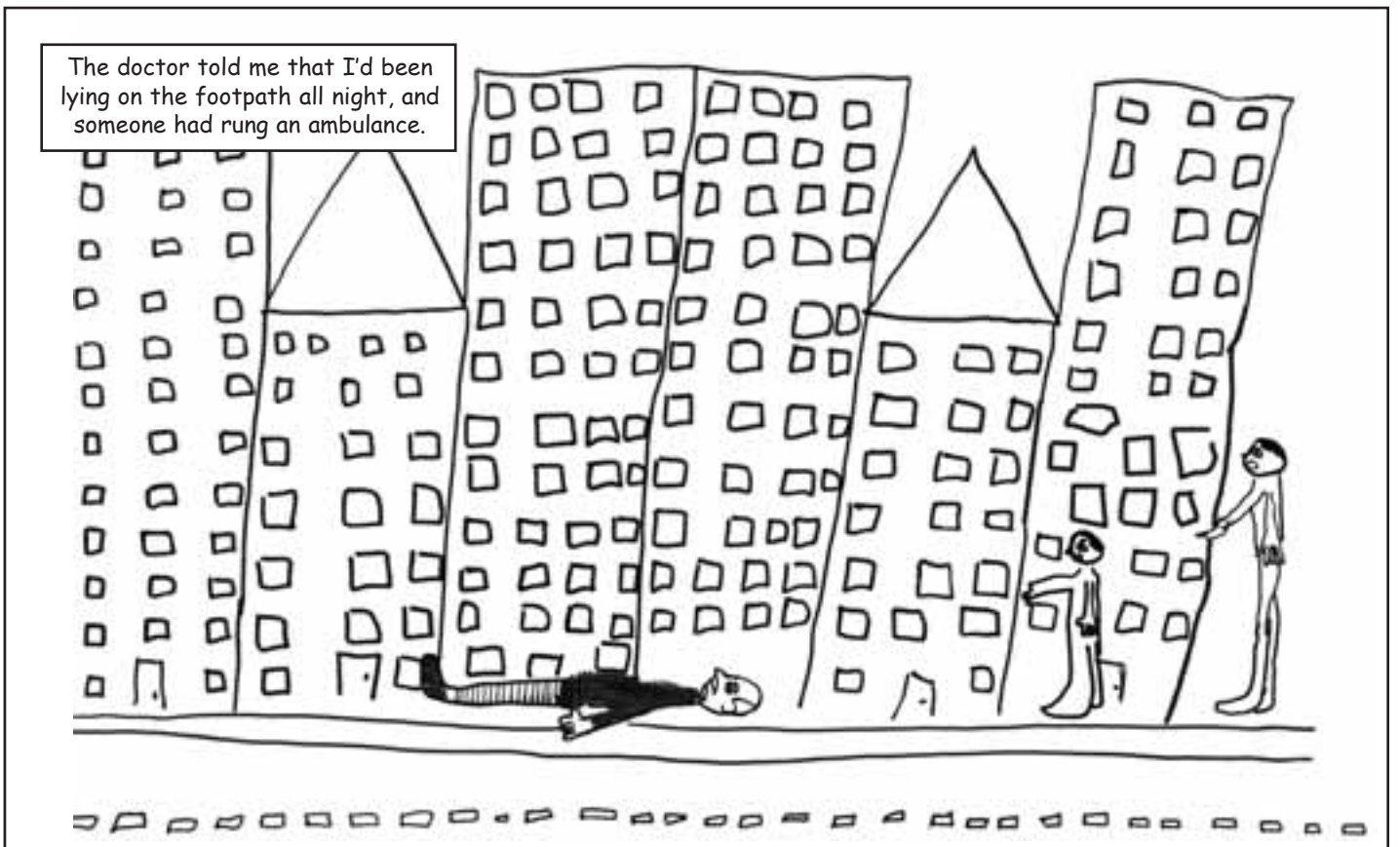
That winter was really cold, and I got very ill. I got so ill that I thought I would die!



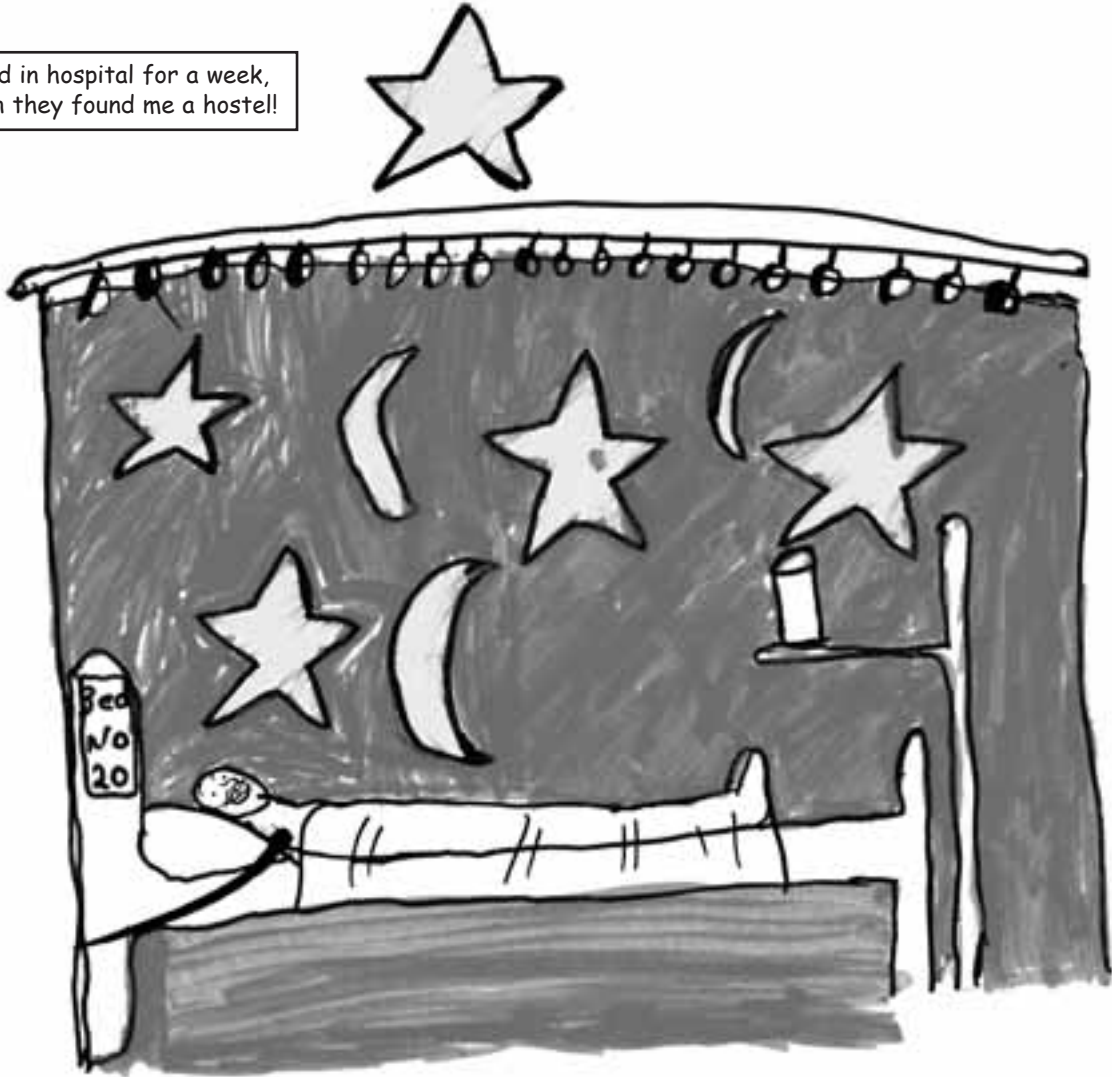
Then one day, I woke up in hospital!



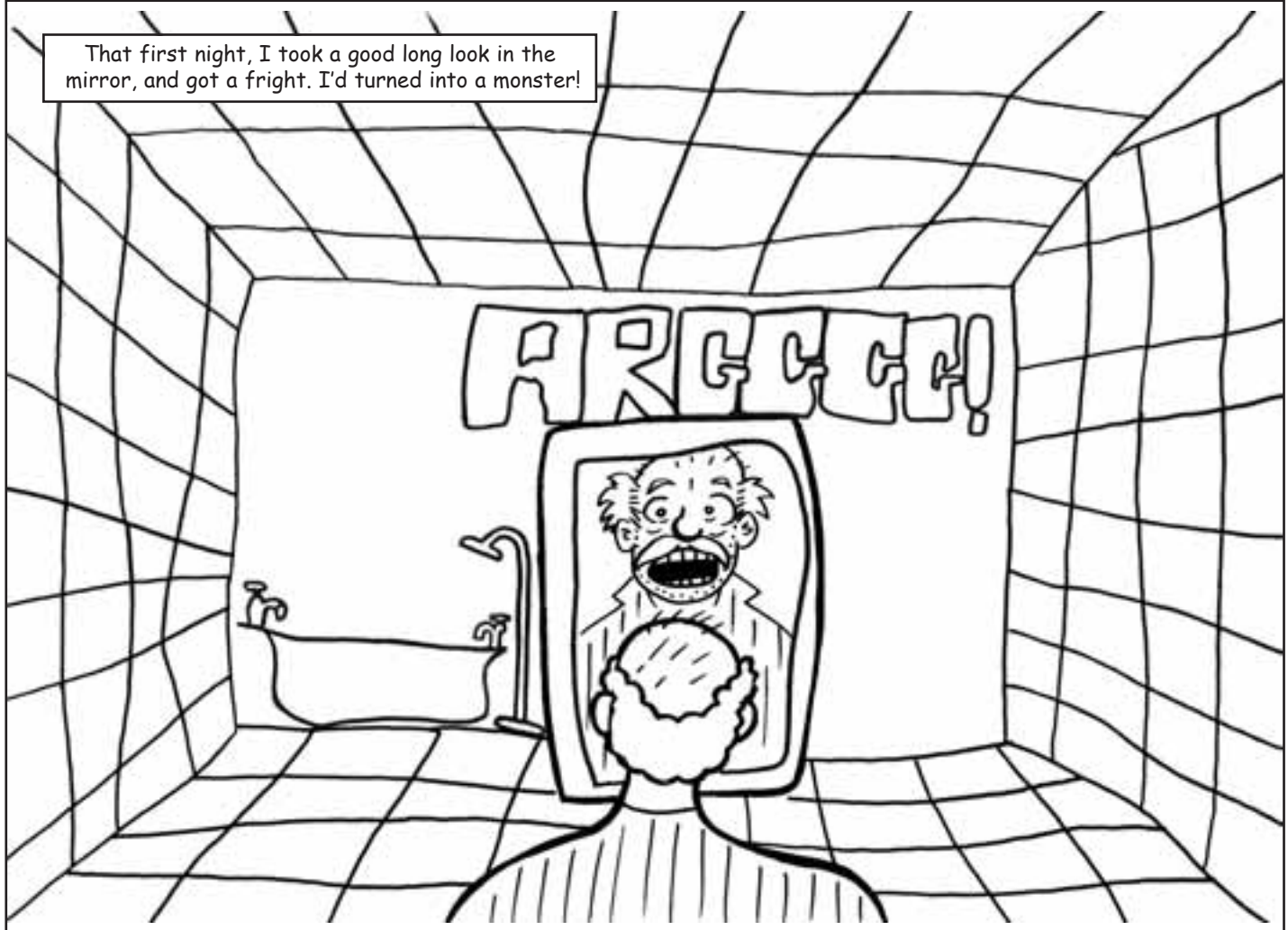
The doctor told me that I'd been lying on the footpath all night, and someone had rung an ambulance.



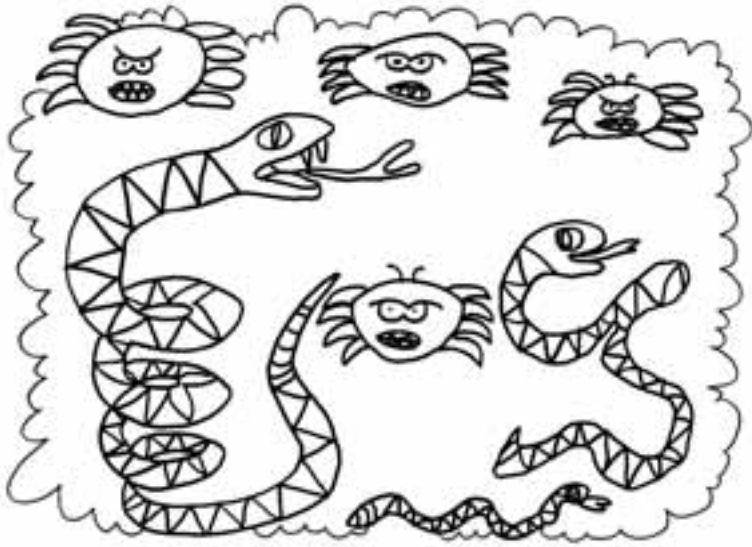
I stayed in hospital for a week,
and then they found me a hostel!



That first night, I took a good long look in the
mirror, and got a fright. I'd turned into a monster!



It wasn't easy. Giving up alcohol after so long made me see things. I thought I could see snakes and spiders crawling up the wall...

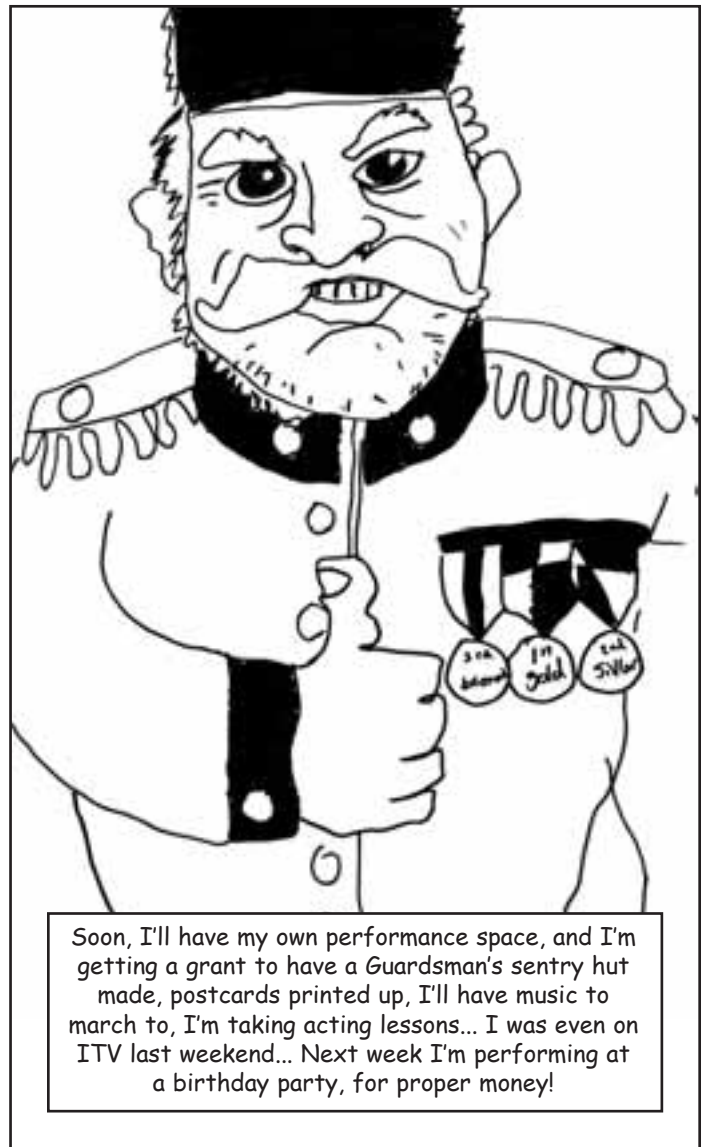


But the doctor gave me some medication, and the workers at the hostel helped by giving me little jobs to do, to keep my mind focused on getting well.



After a couple of months, I was in better shape...









T H E E N D

Over to you...

Our story ends with Daljit and his new friend, Jane, heading off to get some food; Eric, the 'Clockwork Guardsman', is left to meet his friend and make further plans for his new career... but what might happen next?

Dali had problems at the hostel he lived in - do you think he should try again? Perhaps there are different kinds of hostels - how could Dali find out? Or would Dali be better off living on the streets? If he does get a new home, what should he do then?

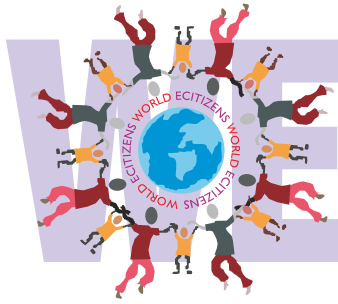
Jane ran away to London to escape the bad crowd she'd been mixing with. But are all homeless people criminals - or are most of them ordinary people, like Jane? Do you think Jane should try to go back to her old home town, or should she stay in London?

Eric has begun a new career as a street entertainer. Do you think he'll be successful? What problems might he face? Could his drinking problem return - and what might he do to prevent it? Are there more, or less, problems for people that become homeless in middle-age?

These are just a few points to think about. You could even invent your own stories about these characters, or make up new characters of your own!







Putting homelessness in the picture

Bringing important issues to the attention of children is always a difficult task - and the aim of the project at Hermitage School is to engage young people aged 9-11 with the topic of citizenship and homelessness. The media used to instruct the pupils about the various aspects of living rough were comic strip and video. This is the compilation of the childrens' efforts, combining word and image to illustrate and educate in equal measure.

The children were charged with producing their own comic strip about homelessness. This meant putting together a script and adapting it into comic strip form, each pupil working on a single panel of the storyline. They were tutored in comic-book storytelling by a number of experienced professionals from Britain's long-running weekly science-fiction comic 2000 AD. The homelessness charity Crisis, Mirandanet, Creative Partnerships and Domex, supported the whole project. The finished comic - entitled Living - was put together by 2000 AD's in-house design department.

As well as the educational process, Living works as a starting point too - enabling the pupils to learn more about the issues raised by the project and perhaps take their foray into the world of comics even further...

