

**\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

**20<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

**Formerly homeless Caseworker from South London presented his MBE by Prince William, joined by the keyworker who inspired him to turn his life around after a decade of homelessness and alcoholism.**

Groundswell caseworker Dennis Rogers has been awarded an MBE in the Queen's 2019 New Year's Honours list. On Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> March the Duke of Cambridge presented the MBE medal to Dennis, who was accompanied by his brother, sister in law and Mary - who he credits for helping him turn his life around.

After a decade of rough sleeping, alcoholism and poor health Dennis is now a Caseworker for Groundswell. Joining the team in 2010, he was one of the first members of staff to trailblaze the peer advocacy approach to helping homeless people address their health problems. Dennis recently gave an interview describing how he fell between rough sleeping, varying forms of temporary accommodation and holding down a job whilst fighting his addiction. He talks about how his role at Groundswell enables him to be a role model for others because he 'speaks their language' – Dennis knows exactly what its like to experience homelessness.

*'My keyworker (Mary) and I were talking over lunch. I said I want to start work with the homeless and I wanna be as good as you. And she said no, 'I want you to be better than me'. I was quite shocked to be awarded the MBE, from being homeless and I've got dyslexia and things like that. I never dreamt ever that I'd get something like this. I was gobsmacked...even if it encourages one homeless person to see there is change, it can happen.'*

Dennis, who slept rough for over 10 years, was living in temporary accommodation in Lewisham when he met Mary who went 'above and beyond' to support Dennis in his battle with alcoholism. When Dennis was stabbed in the lung whilst drinking in a park and admitted to hospital, Mary stopped him being discharged back into his accommodation where they both knew Dennis he would go back to drinking. On finding out about his MBE Dennis was determined to locate Mary so she could attend the investiture with him. Through the power of social media and the help of homelessness charity Thames Reach (who Mary worked for when supporting Dennis) the #FindMary hashtag took off and a week later she had been tracked down. After coming out of Buckingham Palace today Mary said:

*"Dennis was always a gentle kind soul, thankfully I got to work with him. Today was a special day, to say I'm proud is an understatement!"*

Dennis, who has been working with Groundswell for 8 years has been awarded an MBE for using his experience to become a role model for homeless people. 'Dennis from Groundswell' is now a famous face amongst homelessness services and homeless people. He tirelessly uses his own experience to help

London's homeless men and women engage with health services and make that first step into a better life. Dennis' visit to Buckingham Palace for his work in helping homeless people access healthcare comes a week after the [Bureau of Investigative Journalism reported that nearly a third of homeless deaths were from treatable illnesses like tuberculosis, pneumonia or gastric ulcers](#). Just in the past year, through sheer determination and the ability to build a relationship with anyone, Dennis has helped over 90 homeless men and women across London start to address their health problems and engage with healthcare. Since the project began in 2010 Groundswell's Homeless Health Peer Advocacy (HHPA) team have together supported homeless people to attend over 16,000 health appointments.

Jeremy Swain, the Deputy Director, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Delivery at Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, who nominated Dennis for the award has said:

*"I'm delighted that the totally inspiring Dennis Rogers has received an MBE in the New Year's Honours List for services to homeless people. Dennis has used his own experience of homelessness in best possible way helping many others escape it."*

- The published interview with Dennis Rogers MBE can be found [on Groundswell's website](#).
- A selection of photographs of before the investiture are available, professional photographs will be soon.
- You can read the Bureau of Investigative Journalism study '[Homelessness kills](#)' [here](#).

**\*\*ENDS\*\***

#### **EDITOR'S NOTES:**

- Groundswell is a registered charity founded in 1996, supporting homeless people to be involved in delivering solutions to homelessness – including peer research, client involvement and health.
- Groundswell's pioneering research programme works with peer researchers – people who have experienced the issues they are studying. More information [here](#)
- Groundswell's Homeless Health Peer Advocacy (HHPA) programme focuses on peer volunteers – people with lived experience – enabling homeless people with complex health needs to access the healthcare they are re entitled to. More information [here](#)

<http://groundswell.org.uk/>

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