

IMPROVING LIVES PLYMOUTH

OUR HISTORY



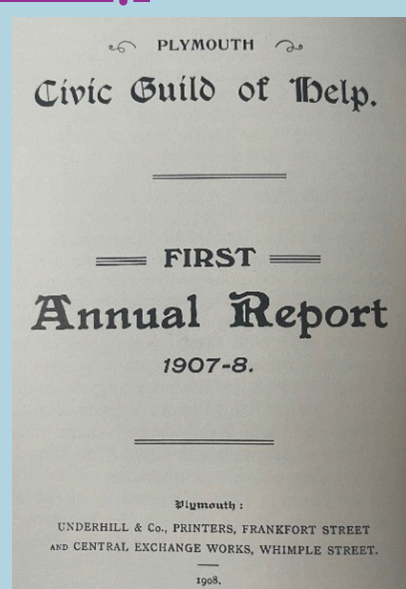
The following is the story of the work of Improving Lives Plymouth since 1907. Our charity has championed Plymouth's communities for over 115 years.

We have had several names over the years, as we have developed a wide range of activities and services to support and work alongside local people. Many organisations in the city started at Improving Lives Plymouth. Among them Age Concern, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Victim Support and Community Transport. Many societies also were set up, including the Multiple Sclerosis Society and Parkinson's Society.

The story of Improving Lives runs alongside the story of Plymouth itself. As we know, Plymouth is a city that has arisen from the ashes after the blitz and Improving Lives has itself changed, grown and developed as the city has.

1907 - 1921: Plymouth Civic Guild of Help

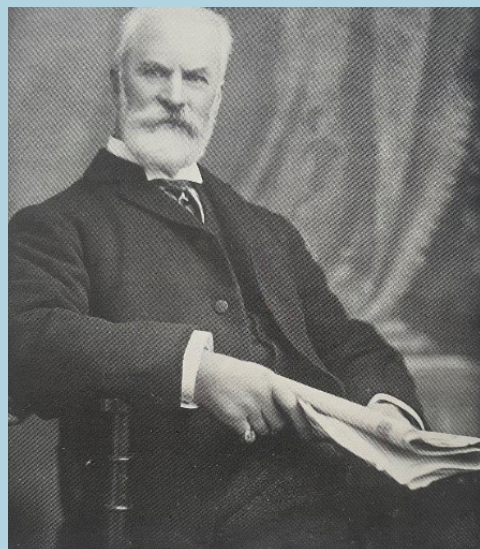
When Improving Lives Plymouth was formed in 1907, it was known as Plymouth Civic Guild of help. The organisation began after a public meeting held in the barrister's room of Plymouth Guildhall on Tuesday the 19th of March 1907. At this time, the social and economic conditions in Plymouth were challenging with many people unemployed, families struggling with the cost of living and/or having to reside in workhouses. In its early years, the Guild's volunteers found food, clothing, and shelter for unemployed families and enlisted the help of others in giving medical care (41 years before the start of the NHS) and legal advice.



The Guild helped families obtain work in other towns and sometimes provided people with funds to emigrate in search of work. The Guild looked after the children who had experienced trauma and adversity, individuals with disabilities, elderly people, families living in slum conditions and overcrowded housing and provided support to many women who lost their husbands as a result of war. This was the very beginning of what we would now recognise as the welfare state in Plymouth, the beginnings of a social service that could fill the gaps left by the state and provide flexible and responsive services, an approach that continues to this day.

In 1914 the Towns of Plymouth, Stonehouse and Devonport amalgamated, and the Guild extended its work across the city.

1921 - 1959 : Plymouth Council of Social Service



Mr. John Shelly,
First chairman of the Plymouth Guild of Civic Help,
1907-15.

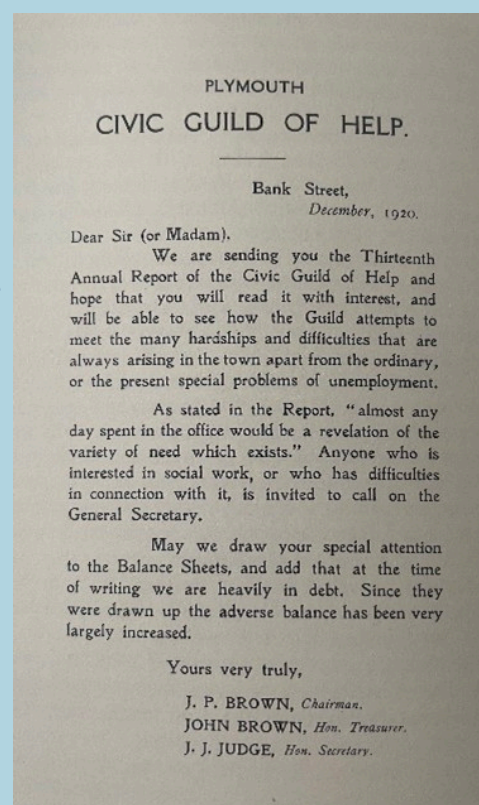
The council of social service was formed at a conference held in the council chamber on the 15th of September 1921 overseen by Mr Isaac Foot MP. Its objects were;

- "to promote, assist and coordinate social and charitable work in Plymouth and to provide a Bureau of information for such work"
- "to compile and maintain a common register of assistance and care"
- "to study the social conditions of the town in order to better them where necessary"
- "to increase the interest of citizens in service of the borough"

In May 1924 the Guild organised a conference on housing problems which was attended by the Lord Mayor and by representatives of the building industry. In a letter to the conference, Lord Astor said that in Plymouth "the housing question is not a problem - it is a tragedy". The Guilds office became a receiving and distributing centre for clothing for migrants in connection with the Devon and Cornwall group migration scheme.

1923 – The Guild cooperated closely with the dental department of the Plymouth Public Dispensary (In Catherine Street) to make it possible for people in need to have teeth extracted and dentures supplied. After treatment, many people were paying small weekly sums to the Guild towards the cost.

1934 – The Guild were providing meals to expectant mothers in partnership with Virginia House, to try and reduce maternal mortality. 90 expectant mothers were supported with 1898 dinners provided throughout the year.



1939 – A conference was organised to focus on the need for community centres in Plymouth. 5 years later, the Guild was able to report the existence of community centres at Tothill, North Prospect, Saint Johns (Devonport), Egguckland, Efford and Pennycross.

At the outbreak of war, The Guild was asked to recruit voluntary helpers to assist at refugee depots for people whose homes might be damaged in the air raids. The Guild also ran a Red Cross Message Bureau to help people in the city communicate with

civilian relatives and friends in enemy occupied countries. All messages were transmitted by airmail via Geneva and voluntary helpers dealt with around 500 messages a month, transcribing them, complying with censorship regulations and keeping records. Messages were limited to 25 words and practically every European language as well as Chinese was used. During the six years of war well over 15,000 messages were dealt with by volunteers.



The Guild also helped in the work of the Lord Mayor service welfare scheme and appointed a representative to the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA). The air raids began in July 1940 and were at their worst in 1941. During that time Guild helpers assisted at local food and shelter centres for people whose homes have been damaged or destroyed and also administered grants from the Lord mayor's air raid Relief Fund.

1943 – The Guild was asked by the Ministry of Labour to manage a reception hostel "Endsleigh", for men transferred to Plymouth on war work and later another was opened at Portland square. Altogether nearly 3000 men were given accommodation before the war ended.

1949 - the Lord Mayor asks The Guild to organise Christmas hospitality for servicemen and service women after the war. The Guild also brought together young pigeon fanciers and helped in the formation of a Plymouth Boys Racing Pigeon Club.

1949 – ILP reported that 200 representatives from churches, voluntary societies and business organisations were playing an active part in its work and it was involved in around 60 activities across the city.

1951 - The chairman's forward in the 1950/51 annual report referred to the pioneering work by the Guild in its early days and mentioned the following organisations as originating through Guild activities: the tuberculosis care committee, the crippled children's committee, the voluntary association for mental welfare, the special school's aftercare committee, the clinic for nervous complaints, baby week exhibitions and a convalescent children's home. He also reported that it was with the Guild's considerable help that the Citizens Advice Bureau was organised and, in the autumn of 1941, The Guild began their 'Old Peoples Welfare Work', much of it of a pioneering nature.

1953 - the coronation took place in June 1953 and a number of elderly people left Plymouth to see Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh drive through the flag decked streets of London to Buckingham Palace. The outstanding achievement in the coronation year for the Guild was the Plymouth Pageant. Mr Ernest English, General Secretary of the Guild at the time said "we had the privilege of recruiting a ground team of men and women who took part in what is probably one of the greatest community efforts ever organised in the city. Literally thousands of people were involved, either preparing for the pageant, rehearsing and taking part in the production, or being occupied with the detailed organisation on the business side. The production of the pageant was a striking example of all that the Plymouth Council of Social Service stands for, the bringing together of men and women voluntarily in order that they might work together for the good of this city and in doing so find happiness for themselves".

1958 - Mrs E. Sitters, organiser of the Home Help Scheme for Old People reported that 672 older people were being looked after in December 1958 by the Guild. A budgerigar scheme for older people living alone was started, and every older person applying was supplied with a cage, a bird and seed to last a week. Some pupils from

Devonport High School for Girls volunteered to visit the older people and help clean out the cages.

This will probably be the last report of our Council under its old name, and a recommendation of change of title is being submitted at the Annual Meeting. The term 'Council' has caused many people to think that we are part of the Plymouth City Council and, therefore, are a Local Authority Service. In order to remove this confusion, we hope to use the original word 'Guild', and shall become 'The Plymouth Guild of Social Service'.

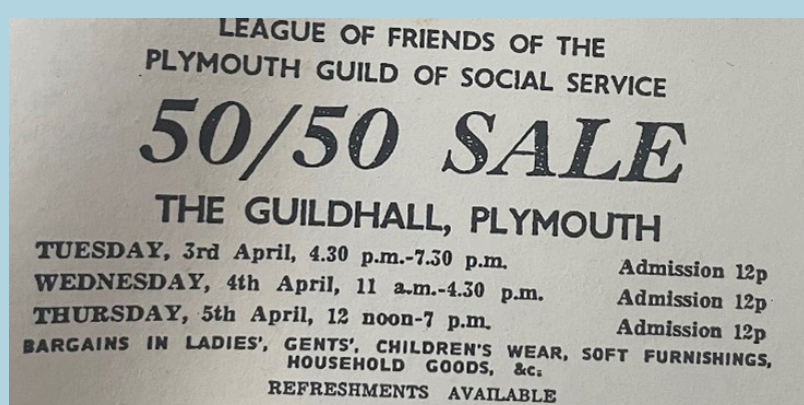
It may be, too, that the time is near when we must seek alternative accommodation, for Marlborough House is overcrowded, and the steps and stairs present great difficulty to the old and the disabled who come to us for advice. We would like to think it were possible to find a place which is not elaborate, but homely and accessible.

The illustration on the front cover is a sketch of the kind of building in which one day, and may it be soon, we shall be able to serve the family of Plymouth.

Annual Review 1958 – 1959

1959 - 1973 : Plymouth Guild of Social Service

1959 - Two important decisions were taken. One was to revert to the use of the world Guild, and we became Plymouth Guild of Social Service. The other decision was to find new headquarters, the Buckwell Street site was leased by the City Council and the foundation stone laid by the chairman in October 1959 in the presence of some 300 people. It rained, as it can only rain in Plymouth, but Mr Ernest English described the ceremony as "inspiring". Among the crowd were lady Astor and the Lord Mayor of Plymouth.

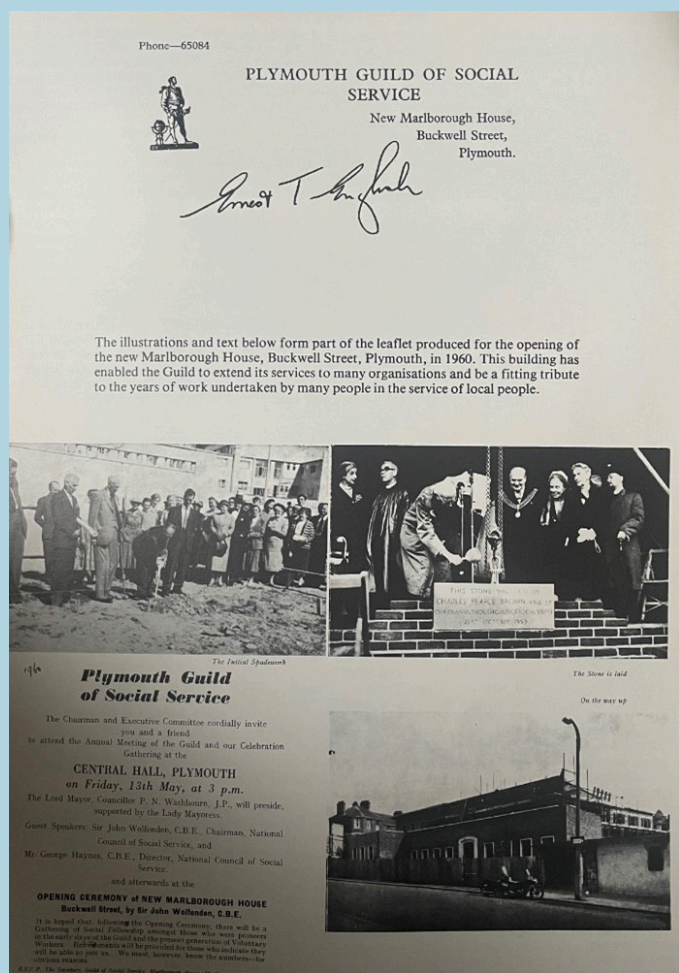
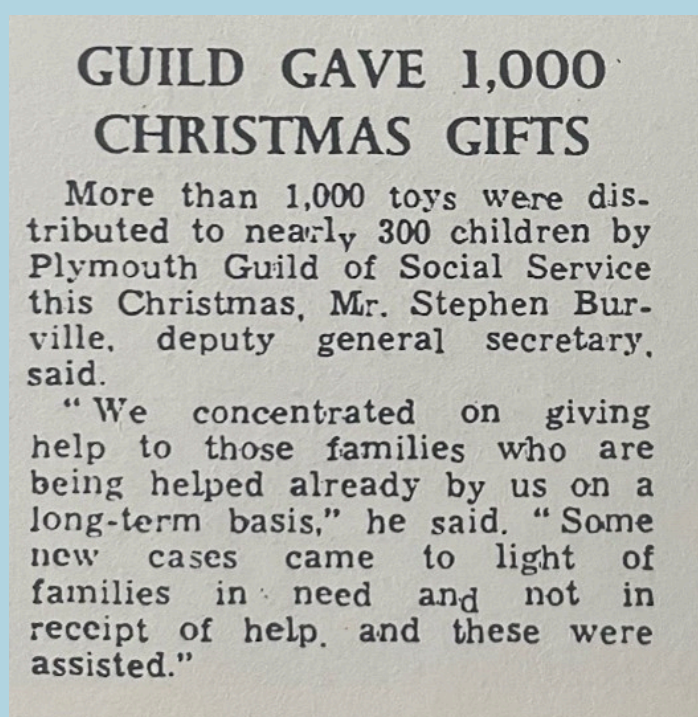


1961 – The Guild started an Advice Anonymous service so that "shy and hesitant people can make personal contact with a friendly helper". 253 calls were received.

1964 - Guild general secretary Mr Ernest English retires, affectionately known through Plymouth as the "Prince of Beggars". He was given a memorable farewell in the presence of a large crowd.

1965 – Chairman, Mr Jim Woodrow, advocated training for the voluntary services and thought that "probation officers, childcare officers and social workers could get a good grounding in family casework techniques in the Guild". He wrote "in this way we can play our essential part in ensuring that social workers of the future realise that although professional competence is necessary, at the same time warm concern and compassion for the person is needed still, and must continue to be, the cornerstone of casework practice". He pointed out that there was no longer widespread poverty and hunger in Plymouth and the need for the Guild was changing more to a counselling and advisory role.

1960 - was a landmark in the Guild's history with the opening of the present premises in Buckwell St which were christened New Marlborough House but are now known as Ernest English House. The Lord Mayor attended a celebration gathering in Central Hall on Friday the 13th of May. Patients from Moorhaven Hospital began using the building as their city meeting place whilst shopping or waiting for the return bus, and the ex-patients and outpatients club, the retired dockyard employees and other organisations were also meeting at the new building.



1968 - the Guild distributed 2100 gifts to elderly and housebound members of the community. 175 bags of coal were also delivered to elderly people and shillings given to those who relied upon gas and electricity for heating. 400 older people were taken to the pantomime at the Hoe theatre and at the annual Old People's Rally at Central Hall. A chimney sweep service was started at a cheaper rate than the normal price, a 2 shilling luncheon club was proving successful and the Guild arranged for people with disabilities to access the swimming pool at the Royal Naval barracks every Friday evening.

1969 - a clothing service was started in Looe street with the aim of providing clothes for people in need. In this year there was a credit squeeze which had increased unemployment. The Guild expanded its debt adjustment service and became involved in making direct payments to families and financial difficulties. The new Rent Act resulted in many people coming into the office is to seek help filling in forms.

1959 - 1973 : Plymouth Guild of Social Service

1973 - at the annual meeting of the Guild in November 1973 it adopted a new constitution and changed his name to the Plymouth Guild of Community Service for Southwest Devon.

1974 - the Old People's Welfare Committee of the Guild adopted a new constitution during the year and changed his name to Plymouth Age Concern and became independent, although it was agreed that both organisations would work closely together.

1975 - Two new projects started this year a day centre for adults with disabilities (now known as Better Futures) and a refuge for women survivors of domestic abuse. Steve Day, General Secretary of the Guild at the time commented how a centre for women experiencing domestic abuse had been talked about since 1973, but "nothing was done until the Guild took the initiative and set up the home in 1975". He commented "from our short experiences, it has become clear that violence in marriage is by no means a new phenomenon, nor is it confined to any particular social class." The home was managed by the Women's Aid committee and run by volunteers on a daily basis. Apart from offering women shelter, legal advice was also available if they wished to start proceedings against their partners. During the year 1976 to 1977, a total of 72 women and 130 children used the refuge. More sought accommodation but had to be referred to other refuges in other parts of the country.

1977 - During this year, the Guild played a vital part in launching the Victim Support scheme in cooperation with the police, probation services, churches and social services. It also provided the secretariat for the scheme, who helped victims of crime and helped recruit and train the high calibre of volunteers needed.

1978 – The Volunteer Bureau was set up and 300 new recruits visited the centre thanks largely to publicity given in programmes by Plymouth Sound Radio and the BBC.

1979 - Plymouth Community Transport was launched to undertake journeys mainly at the request of social workers and hospitals. It also responded to calls from voluntary organisations to take people with disabilities to meetings.

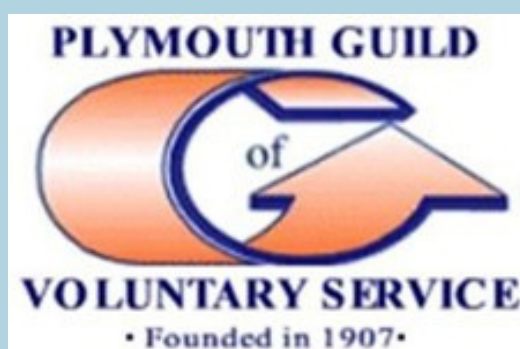
1982 – General Secretary Steve Day organises a Plymouth Guild of community service fun day on Plymouth Hoe to celebrate

volunteering in the city. Participants attending the event spell out the word 'people' and Devon and Cornwall police take an aerial photo from Smeaton's tower.



1997 - 2005 : Plymouth Guild of Voluntary Service

1997 – "Volunteers take a shot at the title" was how the Evening Herald reported our new name in January. The reason for the change from 'Plymouth Guild of Community Service' to Plymouth Guild of Voluntary Service was three-fold. First, to acknowledge the key part volunteers play in the Guild. Secondly, to underline the role we played in supporting voluntary organisations in the city. Thirdly, to help clarify how we serve the local community. The public launch of the new name and logo took place at the Guild's Buckwell Street centre at the end of January. We were delighted to welcome Rachael Campey, editor of the Evening Herald, who performed the official unveiling ceremony. The Evening Herald was instrumental in setting up the Guild 90 years ago and is still playing a big part in its development.



1999 - The Guild have long been Public Health champions in the city and played a vital role in helping to secure Health Action Zone status for Plymouth in 1999 with its resultant improvement in health, that has lifted Plymouth well out of the worst 100 areas in the country for health inequalities.

2005 - 2017 : Plymouth Guild



2006 - In its 99th year the Guild is as busy as ever, helping to make improvements in the life of so many citizens. It is no longer just a case of providing volunteers to help others, but the provision of support and advice in all sorts of areas. We have recognised the way in which the Guild has changed by renaming ourselves 'Plymouth Guild' with a strapline of 'Providing Support, Advice and Volunteers'. The new name reflected the way in which the Guild continued to give help in so many ways to so many people.

2007 - The Guild celebrated its 100th birthday. The Guild has always managed to change and grow in a way that is right for the Guild and more importantly right for the people of Plymouth. The core of the Guild's business is still its volunteers and the Volunteer Centre.

2014 – Thanks to legacies left by a Mr Cole and Mr Mercer – Plymouth Guild are able to purchase a second building, formally known as Ginko House, now known as the Mannamead Wellbeing Hub.

2017 : Improving Lives Plymouth



2017 – On our 110th year we changed our name to Improving lives Plymouth, to better communicate our main aim as an organisation, to support people to improve their quality of life. The new name modernised the charity (there was a lot of confusion over what a 'Guild' is!). We hoped the new name for the organisation would ensure those that would benefit from our projects would more readily identify what we do.

2020 – During the Covid Pandemic – staff at ILP became part of the Local Authorities community response. Staff undertook food shopping for vulnerable people, collected prescriptions, made welfare calls and checks and moved a whole host of activities and services online.

2021 – George Plenderleith, CEO for 24 years, retires. Rob Smith starts as ILP's new CEO.

2022- 40 years after the original 'people' photo was taken, organisation Low Profile recreates it on Plymouth Hoe. Staff and Volunteers attend from ILP to be part of the photograph and the event.



A charity at the heart of our community, supporting and inspiring people to improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing.