



Homeless residents find breathing space in Brentwood

Homeless residents from East London charity Caritas Anchor House enjoyed a three-day break at the Abbotswick House of Prayer this month.

Joined by two Lifestyle Architects, seven residents took part in the *Breathing Space* programme at the retreat centre in Brentwood, Essex.

[Caritas Anchor House](#) is a residential and lifeskills centre, supporting people affected by homelessness, substance abuse, mental health, domestic violence and crime. The charity aims to help residents tackle and overcome life's barriers and obstacles, enabling them to see they have the skills and talents necessary to be happy and successful in life.



The aim of the annual retreat to Abbotswick is to provide the residents, many of whom have been marginalised by society, with a safe space to reflect away from busy inner city London, in an environment which is green, peaceful and quiet.

Through the group activities the residents were able to create a connection with each other which, at times, can be hard to establish in a busy environment like Caritas Anchor House. They also practised meditation and were shown the benefits of mindfulness – a technique which helps people to change the way they think and feel about their experiences.

"I had done some relaxation exercises before I went to [Abbotswick](#) which helped me when I was struggling," said one resident. "I thought attending the 'Breathing Space' programme would be helpful, and it didn't disappoint. Through the meditation and mindfulness sessions I learnt how to put things in perspective and set in coping techniques for when things get hard."

Keith Fernett, CEO of the charity, said of the retreat "The group had a really great time at Abbotswick this year. The calm environment gives our residents the opportunity to take stock of where they are in life, be proud of how far they've come and be hopeful they can continue to succeed.

"Though some of the sessions could have been quite challenging for the residents, each one of them adapted well and we're really impressed with the progress they have all made. Abbotswick helps our residents come together and find their inner strength so they can tackle any problems they may experience."

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