

Cover Story

What can I do?

Mudchute Farm

Sponsor an animal and help generate vital funds for the 32 acre city farm. A great gift idea. mudchute.org

Community Christmas trees

Purchase your tree from this Newham-based charity and 100 per cent of the profit will be used to support their work in the community. communitychristmastrees.co.uk

Santa's Grotto Canary Wharf

Tickets to meet Father Christmas are free but visitors can choose to make a £2 donation to Variety, the Children's Charity. canarywharf.com

Riverside Children's Choir charity Christmas single

All proceeds from the Bermondsey Primary School's festive release will go to UK based charity Music As Therapy International. *Let The Light Shine Down* is out now and available from iTunes for 79p. riversidechristmassong.blogspot.co.uk

Crisis volunteering

Volunteers at Crisis at Christmas, which provides centres across London December 23-30 that offer vital contact, hot meals and warmth for the homeless crisis.org.uk

St Mungo's e-Christmas cards

Send an e-card this Christmas and support homeless service St Mungo's with a suggested donation of £5. Alternatively, £25 helps a homeless person off the streets for good. mungos.org

Our festivities reflect conflicting emotions

HOMELESS / 2

Louisa Emery
The Wharf

With the focus often falling on families at Christmas time, the staff at homeless charity Anchor House make sure its residents are able to take some pleasure from the festive period.

The situation may not be ideal but director of the Canning Town centre Keith Fennett explained that his team tried to get the balance right for the 120 residents.

He said: "We celebrate Christmas at Anchor House but we keep things relatively low key because this is the time of year when everyone wants to be with their families and loved ones and when you are homeless and you are on your own it can draw attention to it. It can be a stressful time so we don't try and ramp it up too much.

"We have a tree and Christmas lunch and a church in Epping provides presents for our residents and that helps enormously. We have volunteers helping out with the meal and people can support us throughout the year by donating."

The majority of those who use Anchor House come from east

CASE STUDY: Fatima

It's 12 months since Fatima set foot in Anchor House, but in that time she has begun a university degree and started up a translation service.

After separating from her husband following a spate of domestic violence, Fatima arrived at Anchor House feeling confused, scared and bewildered.

"Anchor House has helped to set me free," she said. "It has given me a safe environment and the support needed to pursue my dreams."

"After my husband was arrested, I just couldn't believe that after years of marriage and working hard that I would find myself homeless. At first I was just happy to just be away from my husband, but it was very hard."

"But then I discovered that Anchor House was a place full of

opportunity. I felt fortunate to be here."

Originally from Bosnia, Fatima said Anchor House had helped her to deal with her issues and improve herself.

She said she has found moving on from homelessness to be a daunting experience but one that the charity was helping residents to do more easily.

"Anchor House is building new transitional accommodation – flats on site but separate to the centre – which is brilliant," she said. "Going from all of this wonderful support to a completely independent lifestyle is a big step. If you want to make something of yourself and turn your life around then Anchor House is the best place to be."

* Not her real name. Picture posed by model



London and residents and the wider community will be working together to spread some seasonal good spirit.

Keith said: "We are doing a carol service with our local primary school

Star Lanes on December 20 and the Anchor House choir are performing on a number of dates in December at St Katharine Docks."

Anchor House is currently looking to raise almost £10million as it plans

to expand services for its residents who typically use the centre for between six and 12 months, to provide them with the necessary skills to move out of homelessness for good.

Keith said: "We launched a £9.36million campaign last October to raise money for 25 flats, training areas, kitchens, a multi-faith room and offices, so far we have raised £2million in cash and £1million in pledges. Most of our money comes through trust funds, philanthropists and companies. Waitrose in Canary Wharf has included us in their green token collections."

Go to anchorhouseuk.org.

We tackle a need for basic home essentials

FOOD

Rob Virtue
@wharf.co.uk

TOWER Hamlets Foodbank was started two years ago with the aim of providing food hampers to the thousands of people in need in the borough.

It runs collections such as that at Waitrose in Canary Wharf last weekend which saw the public donate goods which end up with people highlighted as in need by social workers or charities such as the Salvation Army.

Founder Denise Bentley said after a successful first year, the charity really took off this summer.

She said: "I don't know if it was the Olympics and watching the volunteers there but people seemed to want to help."

"So our warehouse which is 2,200 sq ft was full. However, demand has really gone up so it was much needed."

Problems receiving benefits are a constant issue for many.

Denise said: "Out of 2,900 people we've helped this year only five are working. Times are hard."

"There's increasing rates of domestic violence, mental illness and rising debts. We've helped people who haven't eaten for days. Kids going to school with no breakfast and for who free school meals are the only food they have all day."

Denise's focus is on making the charity work as a business. She also needs to find a new warehouse for early next year when the current lease runs out.

"We have been lucky with volunteers but we need staff to make us sustainable," she said.

The charity is appealing for firms and the public to donate toys and food for an event on December 20 which will see the hampers given out to some of the most in need in the borough.

Go to towerhamletsfoodbank.org.uk.



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Keith Fennett: We try to get the balance right between celebration and understanding

Facing the austerity challenge

IN an office in Canary Wharf's Clifford Chance last week, the heads of five London charities met. Their aim was clear – to make life better for children with incurable illnesses and their families

"It's been a challenge getting everyone together and has taken four years to get to this point," said Richard House chief executive Peter Ellis.

"Each charity is fiercely independent but we are all in the same boat and this is all about the families. We just want to reach out to more families and do it better."

The idea was to find out ways to improve care and keep costs low in the current



Peter Ellis: Working together financial climate.

With Richard House children's hospice in Beckton, 33 per cent of income needed of £2.77million is statutory and

the rest comes from shops and fundraising.

As well as using that money to care for those who are currently using services, Peter believes it should also be used to contact many more families in need of support.

"It's about working with the community about issues around death and dying," said Peter, who at 20 first came into contact with palliative care when, while working as a nurse, he looked after a 15-year-old in his final days.

"As a community we shy away from that, so we're working with faith groups to help them in their support."

Rob Virtue