

Aiming to transform lives and give hope for future

CARITAS IN ACTION

WINTER'S arrival marks a much-loved time of year for many, when families gather to take part in festivities and celebrate Christmas. But for more than 300,000 homeless people in Britain, it's like any other time of the year – a battle to survive.

While you read your newspaper, imagine for a moment not having a home of your own. At best, having no choice but to stay in unstable, temporary accommodation – if not on the cold, wet streets. For a growing number of people, this is not just a figment of their imagination, but a reality of everyday life.

Shelter has recently mapped the top 50 'hotspots' with the highest level of homelessness in the country, and the London Borough of Newham topped the list, where one in every 25 people are homeless. That's almost 14,000 people, with many more expected to be unrecorded.

These figures have been released at a time, as we approach the season of goodwill, when we become more aware of those sleeping on the streets in freezing conditions, and who have to spend Christmas time alone rather than surrounded by loved ones.

Though visible, rough sleeping is far from the full picture of homelessness.

The vast majority of homeless people are 'hidden' in hostels, B&Bs or sofa-surfing.

Homeless people are also increasingly in employment, but low wages and rising rents are a major obstacle to securing a home of their own.

That's why, homelessness should not be an issue considered only in the cold months, or when headline figures hit the press.

This is a crisis that needs to be tackled all year round.

Newham, the homelessness hotspot, is also the home of Caritas **Anchor House**, a Catholic charity for which I have recently become interim chief executive.

Caritas **Anchor House** exists to transform the lives of those without a home, and give them hope for the future.

We support over 250 homeless people each year, and no two stories are the same. As such, our model is holistic and tailored to support the needs of each individual that comes to call Caritas **Anchor House** home.

The support available focuses on emphasising each of our resident's inherent strengths and interests, and deploying these to aid progress and empowerment. Working together, we tackle the root causes of each individual's homelessness and identify the development they need to make to overcome their barriers.

Residents are offered help in all areas of their lives, including physical and mental health; education and training; work-readiness; financial management; establishing social networks; and, attaining skills to sustain independent living.



Our mission is to ensure that those who walk through our doors grow in confidence and move towards leading independent, fulfilling lives.

Our work has proven success in helping people to break the cycle of homelessness, by securing paid employment and building the skills to live independently.

We are proud that in 2016/17, a home and support was provided to 254 people. This included 83 residents who held a job in the year, with 38 securing new, paid employment – double the average for homeless sector organisations. We supported 89 residents to move-on from Caritas **Anchor house** and into their own accommodation.

One of those we helped was June, who left her home to escape her abusive partner. She spent ten summers and winters sleeping on buses, in public toilets and on the streets. She found special occasions the most difficult, as she missed her loved ones greatly.

Last year, June moved into Caritas **Anchor House** and received support to rebuild her confidence and her life.

She said: “The support I received at Caritas **Anchor House** has kept me focused and given me my life back. Now, I believe I have a future again, and am looking forward to what lies ahead for me.”

We hope for a day where homelessness is a thing of the past – where housing is genuinely affordable, where the safety net provided by the state functions effectively, and where support is available so no one has to become homeless.

However, until that becomes a reality, we will work passionately to ensure everyone who comes through our doors receives the support they need to get back on their feet.

By supporting Caritas **Anchor House**, your help this Christmas will go where it can make the most difference, and have a lasting impact on the lives of homeless people – this winter and beyond.

ANDY HAINES

■ To give a gift of hope this Christmas, and support Caritas **Anchor House** to transform the lives of those that call it home, visit www.caritasananchorhouse.org.uk to make a donation

■ Andy Haines is interim chief executive at Caritas **Anchor House** which is a member of CSAN (Caritas Social Action Network), the Church’s social action agency in England and Wales