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Challenging perceptions on World Homeless Day

Bishop Alan attended a World Homeless Day event organised by Caritas Anchor House recently - and offered the charity the unconditional support of the diocese when he visited shortly afterwards.

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Bishop Alan attended a reception at the House of Lords recently to mark World Homeless Day. Newham-based homeless charity Caritas Anchor House organised the reception, which was sponsored by Foehn. The assembled guests heard from a number of speakers, including Jeremy Paxman, a patron of Caritas Anchor House, Rick Henderson, CEO of Homeless Link, and Monsignor John Armitage, Chair of Trustees at the charity. For his part, Bishop Alan spoke to endorse the work of Caritas Anchor House and warmly anticipated his first visit there within the month.

In his address, ex-BBC broadcaster and journalist Paxman praised the East London charity's work to provide a sustainable path out of homelessness as "the only answer to a worldwide problem". He urged guests to consider how incredibly narrow the line is between a settled, ordered life and one of utter chaos, whether the tipping point is losing your job, a family breakdown or simply struggling to pay the bills.



"Caritas Anchor House does exactly what is needed. Any person who is reconstructing their life, after a period of homelessness, is doing something that is much bigger than anything I've ever had to do. It's a major challenge for them and Caritas Anchor House helps them to do it through a tailored programme of activities." He praised the commitment of "people of faith" and their ability to "get their act together and get things done".

Every year, Caritas Anchor House provides support and accommodation to single homeless people, giving them so much more than just a roof over their heads. Last year alone, they provided a home for 232 people, helping 64 into independent living and supporting 86 into employment.

The charity is based in the London Borough of Newham, the third most deprived borough in the country, and was commended by event host Field Marshal Lord Guthrie on its ability to adapt to a challenging environment.

Speaker Rick Henderson, CEO of Homeless Link, expressed concern about the impact of budget cuts and how homelessness is on the rise throughout the UK.

"An end to homelessness is still possible and we have it within our means - Caritas Anchor House being a prime example. It's a fantastic organisation and last year, 37% of their residents were supported into paid employment – that's a lot higher than the industry average of 10% and an excellent achievement."

Monsignor John Armitage recalled his childhood in the area when he collected money for bricks to build the seafarers' refuge that subsequently became Caritas Anchor House. He said that the charity now needs help to ensure that every person who walks through their doors has access to the best care and support possible, making the hope of independent life a reality. Adding that 'caritas' means love or heart, he said: "Ordinary people with a great heart recognise that all of us have to work together, and that in that greatness of heart, we can make a difference to people's lives."

Bishop Alan subsequently visited Caritas Anchor House and was thoroughly impressed by what he saw. He heard from both the leadership team and the residents and commented: "It is remarkably different from other homeless charities and achieves wonderful results. The residents themselves are the best advert for it: as I said to director Keith (Fernet), of the two presentations, the residents' was by far the best!" He continued: "I am delighted to be president of Caritas Anchor House and to offer the charity the unconditional support of the diocese. I am really happy to get personally involved and spend some more time there."

For more information or to make a contribution to turn a life around please visit www.caritasanchorhouse.org.uk or call 0207 476 6062.

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