

From the streets to a place to call 'home'

Amanda Dubarry

PEOPLE sleeping rough in the London Borough of Newham, where homelessness is the worst in the country, are now able to access the support they so desperately need.

Catholic homelessness charity Caritas Anchor House has launched a rough sleeper's assessment centre, as part of the Government's new Rough Sleeping Strategy, and the borough's commitment to tackling homelessness in the borough.

Figures show that at least one in 24 people in the borough are homeless – compared to one in 200 nationally. What's more, last year saw a 50 per cent increase in people approaching the local authority for housing help.

In response, the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) allocated £1.6 million to the London Borough of Newham to help tackle the homelessness crisis. The local authority received the largest share from the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) grant, also distributed to 82 other councils across the country.

Based in Canning Town, Caritas **Anchor House**'s Rough Sleepers Assessment Hub was launched last December and is being delivered in collaboration with the local authority. It's just finished a three month pilot, which has seen great success, and so the ten bed spaces initially available will now increase to 20.

This new service is providing a lifeline to vulnerable and 'hard-to-house' people who are sleeping on the streets, by offering a short-term tenancy and support to access appropriate accommodation.

Nikhil was living on the streets

for eight months. After six weeks staying at the assessment hub, he is now moving into his own home.

"I was working full-time and had been renting a room for over a year," he said. "One day my landlord said I was no longer able to stay, but that he had sorted out a room that I could rent locally. I packed up my belongings and got in the taxi he'd booked.

"The taxi dropped me off outside a house, but there was no answer. I waited for hours, and when the home-owners arrived, they didn't know who I was or anything about me renting a room.

"It had all been a lie. I didn't know at the time, but he was unlawfully sub-letting his council property. I was attacked four times while I was living on the streets. I was beaten, and all my belongings were stolen. I was too scared to sleep and lost my job.

"I've been living at Caritas **Anchor House** for six weeks, and my life couldn't be more different. They've made it possible for me to get my life back. I am moving out tomorrow! They've helped me get a room in a shared house. I'm so relieved that I will have a permanent address again, and my next goal is to get a job and back to normal life."

We're proud that already many lives have been changed. The hub is reaching, housing and supporting some of the most vulnerable people with the most challenging and complex needs in our community.

By working with the local authority and projects, such as NEWway and the Single Homelessness Project, we are creating a network of support that has the greatest chance of helping those risking their lives on the streets.

The Mayor of Newham, Rokhsana

Fiaz OBE, has committed to tackle homelessness as one of her highest priorities for the borough. Councillor Susan Masters, cabinet member for adult social services at Newham Council said: "By forging a partnership with Caritas **Anchor House**, who have an exceptional track record in helping homeless people, we will be able to deliver the treatment, care and compassion that this council has identified as a priority."

Our team's breadth of knowledge and experience enables us to offer the best support possible to all of our residents, of which 79 per cent have multiple support needs in addition to homelessness – including mental health, alcohol or drug abuse, domestic abuse and offending.

The hub runs alongside our core service, which provides longer-term accommodation and personalised support to improve wellbeing, and overcome barriers to employment and independent living. We provide support and encouragement, 365 days a year, to help people get back on their feet. Last year our 140 bed-spaces enabled us to provide a home and hope to 262 people.

We continue to adapt to meet the changing needs of our community, and hope to always provide a lifeline to those experiencing homelessness when they need it most.

■ Visit: www.caritasanchorhouse.org.uk

■ Amanda Dubarry is 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



