

Here to offer a safe place to call 'home'

Amanda Dubarry

CHRISTMAS is a much-loved time for many, as they gather to celebrate with loved ones to share joy, gifts and food in the comfort of their warm homes. But for more than 320,000 homeless people in Britain it's like any other time of year – a battle to get by.

In the London Borough of Newham, where homeless charity Caritas Anchor House is based, at least one in every 24 people are homeless – the highest in the country. The borough also has the fastest rising level of rough sleeping, and the number of homeless people who approached the local authority for help increased by 50 per cent in the last year.

For those sleeping on the streets or in unstable accommodation, such as shelters or bed and breakfasts, it can be a difficult time where they are reminded of memories of a life once lived surrounded by loved ones.

Thankfully, Caritas Anchor House exists to offer a safe place to call home, this Christmas and beyond.

We operate a 24/7 support service, and at Christmas we go the extra mile to spread festivity and hope to each and every person. With the help of generous supporters, we provide a traditional meal and host several festive events during the period, which bring everyone together as a community.

We provide more than simply a roof over the heads of those we support. We are driven by our mission to ensure that each person who walks through our doors goes lead independent, fulfilling lives, full of confidence and aspirations. As such, we provide holistic support and encouragement, 365 days a year, including access to healthcare, education and employment opportunities, life skills including money management and building support networks.

We exist not just to give people experiencing homelessness a place to call home, but to offer life changing support, to address the root causes of homelessness, and to create sustainable solutions to ensure that our residents do not become homeless again.

We could tell you about all that we do and the difference that we make, but we think it's best told by someone who has experienced it personally. Meet Kevin, who is living at Caritas Anchor House:

"I had been sleeping on a piece of cardboard under the A13 before moving into Caritas Anchor House. But when I moved in, I got more than just a roof over my head. I got a place I could call home. In fact, I never even said 'Caritas Anchor House' – I always said 'home'.

"There, I got stability which meant I could start applying for jobs. I was able to get a great job as a

mechanic after getting support to update my CV, help with training and skills, and the funding for my driving licence which I needed. All the support I got from my keyworker, Rose, made a big difference – she really helped me!

"I've now moved on into a home of my own, and although it's small there is enough space to have my family to visit, and for my grandson to stay over. It's only my first step but it's a really great one and I am saving money to move on again when I'm ready."

Each year we help over 250 people like Kevin to move on from homelessness.

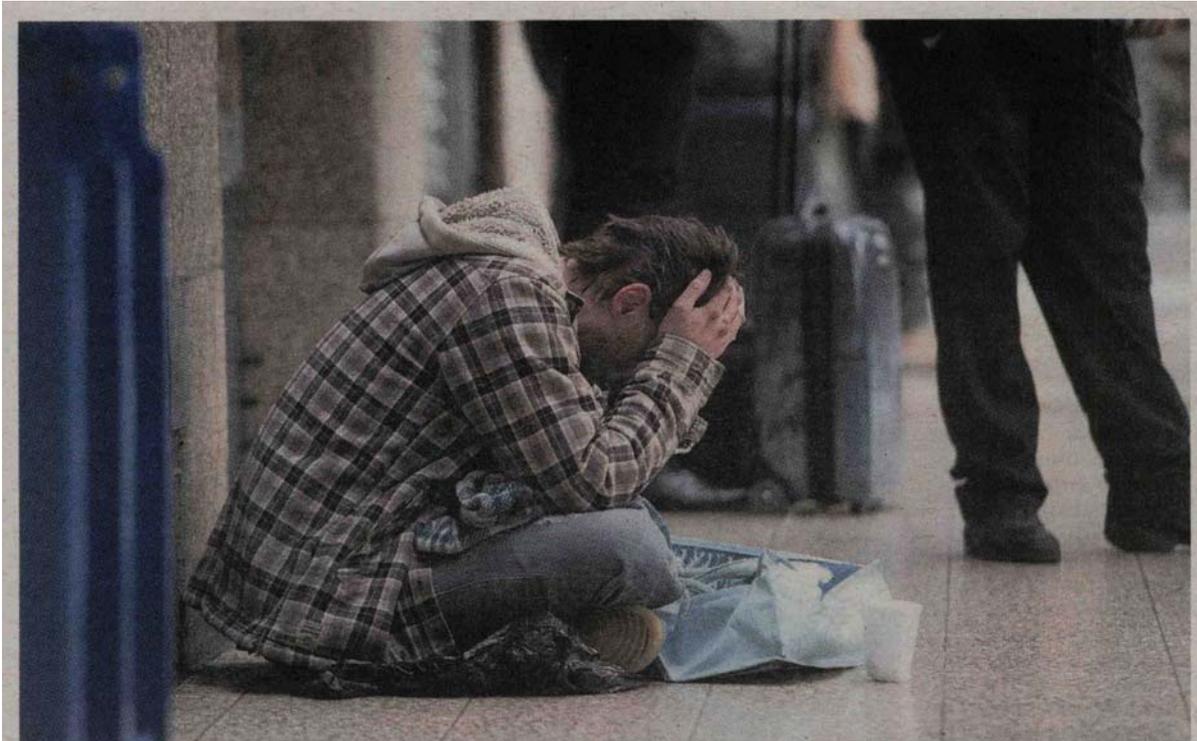
However, as homelessness rises in our borough and across the country, our charity is experiencing a higher demand on our services.

No-one should become homeless, and we're passionate that those who do receive the support and care they need to ensure they do not have to face it again.

If you'd like to hear more about Caritas Anchor House, please visit our website at: 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





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Picture: PRESS ASSOCIATION