

Homeless charity stays positive to promote change

Shelter offers start of a new life through volunteering

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Hundreds of homeless people from across Newham find themselves desperately seeking shelter every year.

Caritas Anchor House, Barking Road, Canning Town, provides a room to more than 200 homeless single adults annually.

The award-winning charity helps residents turn their life around through education, volunteering and development schemes.

However, the charity's most important tool for change is "happiness and creating a comfortable environment".

Director, Keith Fernett, took over the Caritas Anchor House 10 years ago. He said: "When I first came in, we were useless, and in the last

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Anchor House resident Shane

decade we've reinvented the whole charity. We've won numerous awards and the residents, and staff have become one big team.

"We want everyone to be happy."

According to the council there are currently 15,300 households on the waiting list for accommodation in the borough.

Statistics from charity Shelter show there were 1,090 households accepted as homeless in Newham

between 2013 and 2014.

Keith added: "The system here is under a lot of stress. Over the past few years, the borough has suffered many cuts and unfortunately homelessness will only increase.

"The area needs investment in people and the community need to pull together to support others in need."

In 2014, Caritas Anchor House provided a home and support to 231 homeless individuals.

It supported 63 into employment and helped 71 residents move out and into independent living through programmes focusing on employment, education and training.

The charity also receives more than 17,000 visits a year from people in the wider community who use the facilities and services.

Shane Carroll, 26, who is a resident, said: "Once you get here, you can start doing volunteering right away.

"It really helps people who are homeless - you make new friends, you work on projects, it's like a community and you have a chance to rebuild your life."

Keith added: "We are one of the national hotspots in homelessness and what we are trying to do is not only give shelter but change lives.

"We do everything with a positive outlook because that is the only way up.

"When people first come in, they've already been through enough, so we want them to see this as the start of a new life."



Anchor House helps more than 200 people each year





■ Caritas Anchor House plans to build 25 studio flats next door in Canning Town



■ Director Keith Fernett at the Caritas construction site



Help needed to complete expansion

The charity is appealing for donations to help complete a project which will see 25 studio flats built next to the current location in Barking Road.

The Home and Hope Appeal was launched in 2011 and the aim is to build a fit-for-purpose building, with a new block of 25 move-on studio flats.

The project will also include workshops, a new catering training facility, leisure and recreational areas.

The development will cost £15.3million and the charity needs to raise a further £2.8m to complete the project.

Director of Caritas Anchor House, Keith Fernet, said: "It's a great project and we really need the community on board to help

out.

"We're hoping to build more living space and training facilities for those who come through our door."

The project has been separated into three phases and includes the complete refurbishment of the current residential block.

Work on phases two and three, which includes the construction of new living space and training facilities, started in November and the entire project is set to be completed by 2016.

Keith added: "The training facilities will include a kitchen where residents will learn catering skills.

"This moves them closer to independence but also increases their confidence and that is one of our main aims at Caritas."

Keith added that the charity is appealing to residents and businesses across Newham for help.

He said: "We're appealing to the people of Newham to get involved in this worthwhile cause by donating to the project."

■ Visit caritasanchorhouse.org.uk for more information.

Operation to help rough sleepers

More than 100 rough sleepers have been helped into accommodation through Operation Alabama, a project led by Newham Council, Thames Reach and the police.

The borough has also seen an 80 per cent reduction in homelessness through the initiative.

A council spokeswoman said: "We work closely with our partners, including charity Thames Reach, and the police to ensure street homelessness in the borough is dealt with in an appropriate, humane and fair way. Through the Operation Alabama initiative, our officers alongside Thames Reach and the police assess what support rough sleepers need as well as providing emergency hostel accommodation if necessary."



Sharon's story



Sharon Gevaux, 60, became homeless in February 2014.

She said: "I grew up in Canning Town and I always used to walk past here thinking it was packed with drug addicts and alcoholics but that's not true. The truth is you don't know what is waiting for you round the corner.

"I came here last year after a relationship breakdown. It was hard but this was a new beginning. I started volunteering and now I am a staff member and I deal with the volunteering activities.

"Caritas has completely changed my life and it's the same for many other people.

"Caritas is a community, we are a team and we stick together. Not all homeless people are addicts, sometimes you just have a spiral of bad things happen to you and that is what I want people to know. If I can change my life at 60, anyone can."

Thomas' story



Thomas Thomas, 50, has been staying at Caritas Anchor House since September 2013.

He said: "I used to live on my own but it became difficult to keep up with the rent.

"I couldn't maintain the property, then all of a sudden I was homeless. I made several attempts to get temporary accommodation but I wasn't successful and that is when I ended up at Caritas.

"Since I have been here I have learnt so much and my life has changed. I didn't have a lot of confidence and there was a lack of support.

"But I was soon assigned to a support worker who helped me get started on my development programme.

"Caritas is a brilliant place, we start with volunteering, which helps us learn new skills.

"They also enrol us on to educational programmes at local colleges and this helps us when looking for jobs."





■ Director Keith Fernett with current and former residents

