

Keith Fennett, director of Caritas Anchor House, on the year ahead



PHOTO: Garry Knight

# Homelessness on the rise

At this time of year, it seems a good time to think about those less fortunate than ourselves.

This year, almost 500,000 people will face homelessness, with recent statistics showing that more than 100,000 people approached their council as homeless in 2013 - a 26 per cent rise over four years.

In reality, the actual figure is much higher as an estimated 380,000 people are part of the 'hidden homeless' - those staying in temporary accommodation such as hostels, bed and breakfasts, or on the sofas of friends or family.

However, in the face of this wide-

spread and growing problem, things are becoming increasingly difficult for the homeless charities who can help. Our Government funding is being cut, we have to overcome a number of hurdles to performance put in our way by the statutory sector and in the current climate of low wages, zero-hours contracts, pay day loans, benefits cuts and sanctions, things are set to get worse. The poorest in society are being increasingly excluded and more people than ever are just a few pay packets away from homelessness.

Caritas Anchor House, where I am director, is one of the main providers

of services to disadvantaged adults in Newham, east London.

We offer practical support, education and accommodation to hundreds of people affected by homelessness, substance misuse, mental health, domestic violence and crime each year.

Our aim is to provide more than just a warm place to sleep - we want to help people improve their skills and address their underlying needs. Our approach is highly effective and our record for getting our residents into work is four times the average for homeless organisations in the UK. We have also been shortlisted for

multiple national awards and were praised by Lord Touhig in the House of Lords last year as a charity that has “diversified and begun operating in new and creative ways”.

One of those that has benefited from our holistic approach is Tony. After splitting from his partner, Tony was unable to pay his rent single handed and he and his teenage son found themselves homeless and on the streets. They spent the next three months sleeping rough, with only old curtains and hats to keep them warm during the day and cardboard boxes to sleep on at night.

On a particularly rainy evening, Tony approached Caritas Anchor House, not knowing it was a service for homeless people, and was invited in for some shelter, warmth and a cup of tea. Shortly afterwards, he and his son were referred to us and moved in, and Tony took up as many courses and volunteering opportunities as he could.

Certificates now cover his bedroom wall and, following a volunteering assignment, he secured a job as a delivery van driver. He is currently saving hard and his next goals are to find his own home and get back into a settled life.

Looking back, Tony says: “I lacked motivation. If it wasn’t for Caritas Anchor House, I’d be back on the streets, sleeping on an old curtain. Now I’m on a good road and finally know it will only get better.”

This is just one story of many, and we want to do our best to help as many people like Tony as possible. For this reason, we are currently in the middle of our Home and Hope Appeal aimed at refurbishing Caritas Anchor House to transform our

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Keith Fennett, right, of Anchor House

building into a fit-for-purpose complex to meet the increasing demand on our services.

The first stage of this was focused on refurbishing all residential rooms and providing our residents with access to individual learning facilities, so that they have the best chance to improve their employability.

We now have builders on site again for the next phase of the appeal, which involves building 25 studio flats and first class training facilities.

Leaving the supportive environment here can be difficult for some residents, so the flats will act as transitional accommodation for those who need further support when making the move into independent living. They’ll be self-sufficient but our staff will be here for them if they need us and will still be able to access our services.

The training facilities are also a vital part of our plan to help our

homeless residents and community members back into work. Included in the plans are spaces for workshops, e-learning facilities, a kitchen for catering courses and a Community Resilience Centre to improve the health and wellbeing of our local community.

We put our residents and service users at the heart of everything we do, and this development is a huge milestone for us all.

The new facility will both extend our ability to offer services to meet the growing demand, and improve the quality of our education and training - key factors in enabling our three aims: For residents to gain employment, live independently and become an active citizen.

To find out more, visit [www.carita-anchorhouse.org.uk](http://www.carita-anchorhouse.org.uk) or to donate, please send a cheque made out to Caritas Anchor House, to 81 Barking Road, London E16 4HB.