

New beginnings at Caritas Anchor House

CARITAS IN ACTION

Amanda Dubarry

HOMELESSNESS is a huge problem in our communities and continues to rise at an alarming rate. In the last year alone, the number of homeless people has increased by 13,000, reaching over 300,000 by the end of 2017.

Meanwhile, the number of rough sleepers on our streets has doubled since 2010.

Last month I became chief executive of Caritas Anchor House, a vital homelessness charity in East London offering a lifeline to those without one.

The London Borough of Newham, where we are based, has the highest levels of homelessness in the country, with one in every 25 people without a home.

Putting a roof over someone's head is just the first step to tackling homelessness.

That's why Caritas Anchor House exists – to provide holistic support and enable residents to create new beginnings and lead independent, self-fulfilling lives.

We are the main provider of homelessness services in our borough, and provide a home and support to 140 people each day.

The landscape for homelessness services is changing – not always for the better.

However, a welcome relief comes with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act on 3rd April – the result of the successful campaigning of charities, organisations and individuals – including Caritas Anchor House and our residents.

Some of the most vital measures of the act include an extension of the period 'threatened with homelessness' from 28 to 56 days; and a duty to prevent and relieve homelessness regardless of 'priority need'.

This means that many more people will receive support and sooner, and so are less likely to become homeless in the first place.

This new legalisation is certainly a step in the right direction, and we anticipate a surge in demand for our services as local authorities work with and refer an increased number of people in need.

At Caritas Anchor House, we are constantly adapting to the changing context and causes of homelessness, and take innovative steps to maximise our impact.

We are delighted to have opened 25 move-on studio flats



Lifeline – Amanda Dubarry

on our site just over a year ago, providing a crucial stepping stone between supported and independent living – and increasing our capacity from 115 to 140.



We're now looking to complete the final stages of our development, expand our service offering and open our doors to more community members than ever before.

Recent figures have shown that almost half of single homeless people are aged between 16 and 25, and we have seen an increase in referral from this age group so are appointing a dedicated Young Person's Keyworker.

Newham is a highly diverse area, and one of our aims always is to promote social cohesion and inclusion.

Our Your Space project facilitates sessions where isolated individuals or struggling families and are able to participate in their community and foster positive connections.

We hope that in becoming a central hub in Newham by pro-

viding safe spaces, we can achieve lasting reform and a real sense of community.

An example of one of residents is Adrian*, who moved into Caritas Anchor House aged 23, having spent five years in and out of homelessness.

Adrian thought he could never get a full-time job, but with support in building his CV, training placements and learning interview techniques, his confidence in himself and his abilities grew.

"Caritas Anchor House is a place full of great opportunities, a place where you can make something of yourself," he said.

"I've just been for an interview and got a job in hospitality, it's amazing!"

Since starting here I have been truly inspired by the lives and achievements of our current and

past residents, like Adrian, and have been welcomed into a wonderful community of amazing residents, dedicated staff, and truly generous supporters.

If you are able to support us to create new beginnings for those who come to us for help, we would be truly grateful.

If you'd like to donate, attend an event or fundraise on our behalf, visit: www.caritasanchorhouse.org.uk or e-mail: appeal@caritasanchorhouse.org.uk

** At their request, our resident's name has been changed*

■ Amanda Dubarry is chief executive of Caritas Anchor House, which is a member of CSAN (Caritas Social Action Network), the Church's social action agency in England and Wales