

News Reach

Thames Reach's newsletter for service users, staff and friends
August 2011

ThamesReach
DOWNS

No Second Night Out Helping London's rough sleepers

A new 'No Second Night Out' project has helped over 200 homeless people off the streets of the capital since being set up in April.

The scheme targets people who are new to the streets and aims to prevent them from becoming long-term rough sleepers.

Funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), 'No Second Night Out' is part of the Mayor of London's campaign to end rough sleeping in the capital by the end of 2012. The London Delivery Board, set up in early 2009 by the Mayor to achieve this task, and involving Thames Reach's Chief Executive, Jeremy Swain, has already had a great deal of success.

More than three quarters of the capital's most entrenched rough sleepers are no longer on the streets, including one man who had been homeless for more than 40 years.

However, the charities and

other organisations that are working together to eliminate rough sleeping in London face many challenges.

"Mayor of London Boris Johnson said: "Putting an end to rough sleeping in London is no easy task but it is one I'm determined to achieve."

Figures released by the charity Broadway and compiled from the information supplied by outreach workers across the capital show an eight per cent increase in rough sleeping in the capital compared with last year.

However, of the 3,975 people found sleeping rough in 2010/11, around 60 per cent were new to the streets. Almost half were only seen on the streets once however and almost three quarters were only seen for one third of the year – an indication that early intervention is working.

New projects, such as

Thames Reach's Bus Project, are also finding homeless men and women who weren't previously being picked up in street counts.

A new rough sleeping public awareness and poster campaign has been launched, calling on members of the public to contact a special 24-hour hotline – 0870 383 3333 – with information about anyone they suspect may be sleeping rough and in need of help.

Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, said: "Putting an end to rough sleeping in London is no easy task but it is one I'm determined to achieve. It is simply unimaginable that anyone should have to call the street their home in the 21st century, and helping people before they become entrenched on the streets is absolutely vital.

"The success of 'No Second Night Out' is really encouraging but we have more work to do and I urge people to call the project hotline and play

their part in helping people to come off the streets."

Tom Vincent, Thames Reach's Pan London Outreach Manager, said: "No Second Night Out is an exciting development in service delivery to rough sleepers and Thames Reach services are integral to its running and success.

"The London Street Rescue helpline is being shared with No Second Night Out and the London Street Rescue team have taken on the challenging task of dealing with all the new calls and service demands.

"Further to this, we are putting out an extra London Street Rescue shift every single night across the ten central London boroughs taking part in the pilot.

"Thames Reach's SORT teams in Lambeth, Hammersmith & Fulham and Tower Hamlets are also putting out more shifts and pulling out all the stops to support the initiative."



London Street Rescue are running extra shifts every night to help with the new No Second Night Out project.

Comment

Facing up to the challenges

Maintaining quality services



Audrey Mitchell, Thames Reach's Director of Street and Hostel Services.

It has been a rollercoaster of a year for Thames Reach. Like many agencies supporting vulnerable people in the community, we have had to respond to funders having less money to pay for services.

It has been difficult as all organisations are under pressure to submit lower and lower prices. Whilst we recognise the need for value for money and efficiency, we have

been true to our ethos and values and ensured that we continue to offer a quality service that remains innovative and responsive in addressing the needs of vulnerable people.

We have had to find savings throughout the organisation. Firstly we asked staff to increase their working hours so that our full-time weekly hours are 37.5 instead of 35. We have reduced the number of managers overall and looked at how we can restructure services to retain our quality for less money.

Throughout all the changes we have tried to maintain good services and we thank our staff who have shown great professionalism and passion even during this period of change and uncertainty.

Sadly, despite our efforts, we have lost some contracts but we have also had some contracts extended and won some new business. We are

delighted, for example, to have the contract to run four hostels in Lambeth, and to have new schemes in Lewisham and Greenwich which support homeless people to access accommodation in the private sector.

“The challenges are not over but we are working through them with great determination and we appreciate the dedication of our staff, volunteers, and supporters.”

We have been working hard to develop new approaches which will help us offer relevant and person-centred services. We have designed services where ‘core’ costs are covered but some costs are paid only if we achieve the agreed outcomes – payment by results – which we embrace because we are confident we can achieve the outcomes. We will be increasing

the number of volunteers in Thames Reach. They already add value to several services but will play a role in more teams, as will students and interns.

We are committed to offering personalised services and have been ensuring all our policies and procedures are adapted to this way of working.

Looking forward we will continue to talk to commissioners about how we can work together to keep service quality high during these tough times, and ensure there is an appropriate range of services to meet need. We are keen, for example, to maintain preventative services like tenancy support to ensure we continue to help those at risk of eviction or isolation.

The challenges are not over but we are working through them with great determination and we appreciate the dedication of our staff, volunteers, and supporters.



Staff and residents are enjoying the calmer environment created in the impressive new reception area at our Graham House hostel.

Steven McIntosh, Thames Reach's property development manager, said: “The £250k building work has opened up the ground floor reception area as well as creating a new first floor training kitchen. Funded through the Government's Places of Change programme via Lambeth Council, the work has made the hostel more homely and less institutional. Plans are now in place to develop and open up the ground and lower ground floors at our Stamford Street hostel.

The Department of Health is providing £600k funding along with £50k from Lambeth Council.

Employment Academy

Work begins on the building

Building work has begun on the flagship Thames Reach Employment Academy which will help Southwark and Lambeth residents, including formerly homeless people, find work.

The building under development at 29 Peckham Road was originally built in 1904 and used until recently as offices by Southwark Council. The Employment Academy will provide support and training for the long-term unemployed to help them develop the skills and confidence to find jobs. It aims to develop a reputation for being a rich source of competent, well trained employees and to have strong links with a range of key employers across the capital.

The contractor, Lakehouse, which is undertaking the refurbishment of the Grade 2 listed building, has allocated ten

work placements to local unemployed people. Other opportunities to work at the Employment Academy when it becomes operational will be publicised closer to the opening, due in summer 2012.

An open day took place on August 9th for local residents where they heard about the Employment Academy and the range of services proposed, and had the chance to have their own say on how this community facility can contribute to the local neighbourhood. Thames Reach is committed to working closely with local communities to ensure that it contributes to improving neighbourhoods and meeting local need.

The Employment Academy will provide a range of community facilities such as a café, an events room and meeting rooms for local people.

The project is funded by the Homes and Communities Agency and is a cross-borough initiative supported by Southwark and Lambeth councils as well as by the London Mayor's Office.

Jeremy Swain, Thames Reach's Chief Executive, said: "The Employment Academy will be a fantastic community resource and we intend that it becomes renowned as the place to go in order to develop the skills and confidence needed to find, and keep, a job.

"There are some wonderful spaces within the building which people living locally will be able to use for meetings and events.

"We believe that, over time, many thousands of people will find work through making use of the Employment Academy."

In brief

IT changes

IT support at Thames Reach is now being provided by appiChar, experts in helping charities improve their expertise through better use of technology.

All IT helpdesk queries should now go to 020 7033 7571 or support@appichar.co.uk

All IT support requests will be given a unique ticket reference number which will be sent to you by email after you have logged your query.

If you have any questions about the changes, you can contact Adam Monks who is the service desk manager at appiChar on a.monks@appichar.co.uk

Appichar is now focusing on the roll-out of thin clients which will replace the existing PCs with a faster system.

E-learning

Thames Reach staff, volunteers and service users can now access over 100 online training courses via a new Thames Reach e-learning portal. The new system has been set up in partnership with The Charity Learning Consortium and offers people the opportunity to develop their skills across subjects including IT, personal development and management.

One of the main benefits of the new e-learning system is that you will be able to start a particular course where and when it suits you. Using online training means you can stop and start the course at any time and manage how you learn, at your own pace. The new range of e-learning courses complement Thames Reach's existing training courses.

To find out more please contact the Learning and Development team on 020 7702 5664/5668.



The £6.5m Thames Reach Employment Academy will be housed in an Edwardian building which offers 20,000 square feet of space.

Westminster settlement

Soup runs step up to the plate



Jeremy Swain, Thames Reach's Chief Executive, on the soup run issue.

Earlier this year, Westminster City Council proposed a byelaw to prevent soup runs distributing free food on the street in an area of Victoria around the Westminster Cathedral piazza.

The threat of a byelaw created considerable debate and attracted much media attention. The council went through a formal consultation on the proposal. The consultation report indicated a clear split between the views of local residents and businesses who

supported the byelaw and soup runs and faith groups which opposed it.

Thames Reach along with a minority of homelessness charities supported a byelaw. We also offered to play a role in brokering discussion between the council and soup run operators. In response to this, Westminster City Council approached me and asked me to chair a meeting involving all sides in the debate to explore whether a voluntary, self-regulating solution could be found to address the problem of the over-provision of soup runs.

Following a promising roundtable discussion at Westminster City Hall, a smaller delivery group was formed, tasked with finding a voluntary solution. The group, which I chaired, has met on five occasions over the past two months and put in place a plan commencing with a Month of Action, which seeks to bring to an end the giving out of soup in the cathedral area. At the time of writing, the Month of Action is entering its

final week and has been fully supported by Housing Justice representing the faith groups and the Soup Run Forum which is attended by all the main soup run operators.

“There is now agreement that giving out soup on the street in the cathedral area is no longer the right thing to do.”

There is now agreement that giving out soup on the street in the cathedral area is no longer the right thing to do. At the same time, the role of soup runs in working with the homeless and actively seeking to reduce homelessness has been acknowledged and is supported.

Soup runs operating on, or near, the piazza have been asked to find alternative ways of providing a service. Some have taken up the option of moving indoors, making use of the nearby King George's hostel as a base at which they can distribute food and drink. One soup run, Streetlytes, has

become a regular fixture at King George's hostel and has extended their service impressively to include assistance in finding accommodation. One of the most influential soup run operators, the Simon Community, has decided to offer a women-only soup run service from a women's hostel in the vicinity. Some soup runs are currently not prepared to move inside and instead are moving to an outdoor location away from the cathedral area.

There is much more to do as large numbers of people continue to congregate near the piazza to receive handouts from soup runs, not all of which have yet stopped operating. However, the level of agreement reached is very encouraging and reflects the genuine concern felt regarding the long-term negative impact soup run activity has had on local residents living near to the cathedral. Thames Reach is pleased to be playing a crucial role in trying to achieve a voluntary solution that would avoid the introduction of a byelaw.

New schemes in Greenwich and Lewisham

Thames Reach has launched two new schemes that will help homeless people find suitable housing.

In Greenwich a £40,000 project will work closely with the local authority to broaden access to shared properties in the private rented sector for homeless people.

It will target 18-35 year olds who cannot afford self-contained flats as a result of new housing benefit restrictions and changes to the local housing allowance. From 2012 single people under 35 will only be paid the shared room rate rather than the rate for a self-contained flat: the

exception to this rule are hostel residents who are exempted after a three-month stay thanks to lobbying of the Government by Thames Reach.

The Lewisham project is a £40,000 initiative being undertaken with the local authority which will help people move on from hostels and supported housing schemes or divert them away from this type of accommodation into more appropriate private rented sector housing.

It is intended to help people move on with their lives by finding them private rented sector properties and support-

ing them in their new homes. This will free up spaces in hostels and supported housing for other vulnerable homeless people and make more effective use of available resources.

The project builds on an existing scheme, run by Lewisham Council and Thames Reach, working on the same principles.

The service will also have a focus on obtaining flat-share accommodation for 25-35 year olds who will no longer be able to access self-contained accommodation because of the housing benefit changes.

Both projects are funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government and are part of the Crisis Private Rented Sector Access Development Programme.

Bill Tidnam, Thames Reach's Director of Housing and Community Support, said: “We're really happy to build on our partnership work with Lewisham and Greenwich by helping homeless people move quickly into accommodation where they can get on with their lives.

“These schemes will give real help to homeless people where and when they need it.”

Shaping policy

Former rough sleepers take the lead

Fourteen former rough sleepers who have spent much of the past year investigating the world of homelessness have come up with a series of recommendations for the improvement of policies and services for homeless men and women.

The Homeless People's Commission held regular meetings throughout 2010/11 and heard evidence from policy makers, service providers and researchers, and brought this knowledge together with their own lived experience – over 70 years of homelessness between them.

Their findings are contained within a report which was launched at the House of Lords earlier this summer and presented to the DCLG, the Government department with responsibility for homelessness. Grant Shapps, the Housing Minister, has now invited the Commission to present their findings to eight government ministers on a Ministerial Working Group that

crosses government departments and seeks to prevent and tackle homelessness.

The full report contains 93 recommendations proposing a comprehensive programme for government, local authorities, provider agencies and homeless people themselves.

The consistent themes of these recommendations are:

- devolving power to the local level, particularly through the development of self-help among homeless people
- more cost-effective services through the prevention of homelessness
- the need to help homeless people into stable accommodation and employment
- more personalised services
- increasing the contribution of homeless people to the development of future policy and services.

The Homeless People's Commission was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and organised by Groundswell with policy expert, Geoffrey Randall.

It consisted of nine regional groups based on a Citizens Jury model in which a small group of people set out to examine an issue of public significance in details and then deliver a 'verdict'.

Jimmy Carlson, a former rough sleeper and Homeless People's Commission member, said: "We found good practice in the area of homelessness up and down the country but this was not replicated everywhere. We need to tackle the fact that there are holes in service provision. We believe that if the Government listens to our findings, it will have a much greater chance of succeeding in its bid to end rough sleeping by the end of 2012."

Athol Halle, Chief Executive of Groundswell, said: "This is a great example of the Big Society in action. It's the first time people who have experienced homelessness themselves have had the opportunity to get so involved in shaping this major national policy issue."

In brief

Charity awards

Thames Reach has been grabbing the attention of judges connected to a number of high profile awards.

The most recent announcement saw London Street Rescue volunteers shortlisted in the prestigious Andy Ludlow Awards.

The London Reconnection Project, which has now helped over 1,000 Central and eastern Europeans living on London's streets to return home, has been shortlisted in the Big Impact Award category of the Third Sector Excellence Awards.

Thames Reach's super-strength campaign has been shortlisted in the same awards in the category of Best Communications Campaign. The campaign was influential in getting the Government to pledge to increase the price of super-strength lager in its forthcoming autumn budget.

Thames Reach's annual review, written by the communications team and designed by Imagination, has also received some plaudits. A finalist in the 2010 Design Week Awards, it went one better in the 2011 competition when it was highly commended. It also received a runners-up prize in the prestigious Customer Communications Category of the Marketing Magazine Design Awards.

The charity was also a finalist in the London Excellence awards 2011, in the category of 'Making Partnerships Work'. Debra Ives, Quality and Policy Manager at Thames Reach, said: "This recognised our work across the organisation to develop partnerships with others, including GP's, health teams, the UK Borders Agency and London Ambulance service, to meet the needs of service users."

Albert slept rough for many years.

Thames Reach helped him turn his life around.

You can help London's rough sleepers by texting 'home' to 70099.

Help a homeless person off the streets.

Each text costs £2

You will be charged £2 plus one message of your standard network rate. Thames Reach will receive a maximum of £100 for each message sent.

www.homelesstext.co.uk



Thames Reach ran a digital advertising campaign on billboard space generously donated by Clear Channel earlier this year. The campaign ran across London and encouraged the public to make a text donation helping homeless people off the streets. The campaign was the brainchild of creative team Oliver Tiersh and Mar Broseta who gave their time and expertise for free and had the backing of double Grammy Award winning recording artist Imogen Heap who donated a single to the campaign. The ads featured real homeless people rather than actors.

Voluntary work

A new Thames Reach service called Volunteering into Employment offers a specialist work training course followed by a six month volunteer placement.

The scheme is for service users who are work ready which means they have an up-to-date CV, email account and ID as well as the motivation to get back into work. Individuals will be supported throughout their placement by a worker from the Employment and Resettlement team. Volunteer placements are available either within Thames Reach or with external organisations. If you are interested in using the service, please call the team on 020 7062 0500.

Peering into the job market

Shared housing and peer support to get back into work

Thames Reach has launched a project providing shared housing and peer support to formerly homeless people who are working or close to returning to employment.

Up to seven Peer Landlord London schemes will be established in a variety of London boroughs over the next 18 months and Thames Reach took handover of the first property in Peckham in August 2011. Peer Landlord London is a distinctive new form of housing which is employment-focused and aims to make sharing a property with others a positive experience. The properties are being provided on ten-year leases by Commonweal Housing, a charity that seeks to tackle social injustice through the development of innovative housing projects. Peer Landlord London accommodation creates an incentive for people to find and sustain work as the rent levels are subsidised and appropriate for people in entry-level jobs at

Minimum or Living Wage levels. Uniquely, one of the tenants, the peer landlord, is given special responsibility to provide informal support to other tenants, giving guidance on housing and employment-related issues for which they receive training.

“70 per cent of service users wanting to work either now or in the future.”

Shared housing was the orthodox housing model for homeless and vulnerable people in the 1980s but has largely been superseded by self-contained housing as the first choice for most people. However, for people at a particular stage in their life, shared housing can be an effective and beneficial housing solution, particularly when there is a deliberate investment in making the support that people in a shared situation can give to one another, a positive aspect of the housing.

With the Coalition Government's move to extend the shared room rate benefit restrictions for those in the private rented sector from 25-year olds up to those aged 34, the time has come for a new effective shared housing model.

The importance of peer support as a factor in helping homeless and vulnerable people make progress in their lives was emphasised in research called the Escape Plan that was undertaken and published by Thames Reach's partner organisation, Groundswell. They found that one of the main factors in escaping homelessness identified by former homeless people was having someone who had experiences to share that they could relate to. The peer landlord in each Peer Landlord London property will be selected on this basis: that is, someone who has a life history that other tenants can identify with and who has been successful in making progress with their life, notably

in finding and sustaining work.

Thames Reach's Chief Executive, Jeremy Swain, said: “Many former homeless people find themselves among the ranks of the unskilled and long-term unemployed.

“Though much has changed in terms of attitudes and priorities in the homelessness sector, it remains the case that the number of former homeless people in work remains depressingly low.”

At Thames Reach a survey of over 800 service users undertaken in 2010 found that fewer than ten per cent were in full or part-time work and yet 70 per cent of service users wanted to work.

According to Jeremy, “Employment brings confidence, better relationships and empowerment through increased income.

“Settled accommodation with peer support from those who can share their experience and inspire, can transform lives: this is the essence of Peer Landlord London.”



Earlier this year, Thames Reach service user, Gennoria Miles, (left) had tea at Clarence House with HRH the Prince of Wales. Gennoria, who lives at a Southwark Projects property, was taking part in the 10th Anniversary of the Ready for Work Programme run by Business Action on Homelessness (BAOH). Gennoria began the programme in 2003 and then, with the help of her Job Coach, secured a job at the Electoral Commission where she has now been employed for seven years.

“I was asked to share my homeless back-to-work experience and I enjoyed taking part in the discussions about how business would face and tackle encouraging homeless people back into employment. In the afternoon I was invited for tea at Clarence House with HRH the Prince of Wales – the President of BAOH. It was wonderful to be part of this occasion; I was amongst 60 guests attending from 23 cities in England. It was nice to personally meet and share my homeless back-to-work experience with HRH Prince of Wales. He is a very good listener and shows a genuine interest in your personal story. He also has a great sense of humour. At the end of the evening we all watched as HRH cut the 10th anniversary birthday cake and we all took a piece home to enjoy.

“I would like to thank Thames Reach who referred me to the programme back in 2003 when I was looking for work.”

Super-strength report

Devastating impact on England's homeless

A recent report on super-strength white ciders reveals the devastating impact these cheap and very strong alcoholic drinks are having on the health of homeless people across England.

It reveals how the drinks industry is using cheap culinary apple concentrate, often imported from abroad, to make white ciders, whilst benefiting from the tax breaks and low duty intended to boost the development of traditional cider apple orchards. This allows the drinks industry to produce a potent 7.5% drink which is cheaper than bottled water or lemonade yet still extremely profitable.

The report, commissioned by Alcohol Concern, and written by researcher Tony Goodall, was backed by both Thames Reach and St Mungo's.

'White Ciders and Street Drinkers' urges the drinks industry to recognise the damage caused by super-strength white ciders and to act responsibly and stop manufacturing it, alongside a series of recommendations for the Government:

- To considerably increase tax on ciders above 5% in a bid to get manufacturers to

decrease the alcohol levels in white ciders.

- To link cider duty rates to beer duty rates, especially super-strength lagers, and to look at minimum pricing.

- For the Licensing Act 2003 to be amended to allow local authorities to ban the sale of super-strength drinks across their locality.

- An end to the practice of selling cider above 5% in two and three-litre bottles and a one-litre cap to be introduced.

It also contains a series of interviews with street drinkers to establish the health problems homeless white cider drinkers are struggling with.

These include damage to liver, heart and stomach, double incontinence, fits, mental health problems, depression, blackouts and memory loss. In their own words the white cider drinkers reported: *"Throwing up blood; stomach ulcers; seizures; weight loss; poor coordination, heart failure; liver shot to bits; yellow vomit every morning; not remembering what I did last week let alone last month, diabetes, ongoing problems with my feet including toe amputation."*

Jeremy Swain, Chief Executive of Thames Reach,



Wholesalers have flooded London with White Ace cider.

said: "Super-strength drinks are a breed apart. The cheap and strong white ciders are a problem drink which have devastated and cut short the lives of tens of thousands of people since they emerged onto the marketplace. Astonishingly, they are killing more homeless people than heroin or crack cocaine. It's time for the Government and drinks industry to act so that they disappear from the country's super-market and off-licence shelves."

Thames Reach is now highlighting the disturbing trend in which wholesale companies, which show little in the way of corporate social responsibility, are aggressively marketing very cheap super-strength white ciders to off licences and local corner shops.

In London, this phenomenon has seen the wholesaler, Bestway, flood the market with White Ace, the drink of choice of many street drinkers and homeless men and women.

Former rough sleeper scoops award

A former rough sleeper has won the Bank of America Merrill Lynch Local Hero award for his work in helping other homeless people get their lives back on track.

Dennis Rogers was rewarded with £3,000 to spend on the self-help group he organises called the Saturday Club. This provides a drink and drug-free sanctuary at weekends for formerly homeless people struggling with sub-

stance misuse problems.

Prior to his voluntary work, Dennis spent nearly five years sleeping rough in shop doorways across London in areas such as the Strand. After moving into his own flat, Dennis has dedicated his life to helping other homeless people.

The Saturday Club get together every week to undertake a range of social and educational activities such as cooking meals, visiting the

theatre and photography lessons. All the members are former homeless people who have lived chaotic and frequently troubled lives and who are now seeking stability and friendship.

Dennis is the central person at the Saturday Club. He encourages people to attend, chairs group meetings and liaises with external organisations. He also regularly visits members of the group to

ensure everything is OK, linking them up with support workers from Thames Reach and, in emergencies, taking them to A&E.

Dennis Rogers said: "Before I got help from Thames Reach, I had never won anything, and my life was spiralling out of control.

"This award from the Bank of America Merrill Lynch will be used to help keep the Saturday Club going."

News

Fundraising

Raising money for frontline services

Many of Thames Reach's projects are dependent on the support of individuals and corporate supporters.

In a climate of spending cuts, raising money for projects helping homeless men and women is more important than ever.

Ibbie Omideyi, Thames Reach's fundraiser, is coordinating a new open evening every month for potential donors and long-term supporters.

She is also promoting a new mentoring scheme which will see corporate supporters use their experience and expertise to help employment and learning trainees, service users eager to return to work.

One of her main goals for the year is to promote World Homeless Day which is on Monday, 10 October. She said "The purpose of World Homeless Day is to draw attention to homeless people's needs locally and provide opportunities for the community to get involved in responding to homelessness by supporting the work of local homelessness agencies.

"Lots of people are already raising money for Thames Reach to mark the day this year. The Days Inn Hotel in Waterloo is holding a raffle where the winner will be given a weekend break for two, with all proceeds from the competition going to Thames Reach.

The historical St Alfege church in Greenwich will be holding a special collection on Sunday 9, October. Elsewhere, trendy Shoreditch bar, Beach Blanket Babylon, will be collecting warm coats and jackets in aid of London's homeless, while long-time supporter KPMG will be holding a staff activity day."

Ibbie is keen to bring staff and service users on board with the fundraising day too.

If your local pub, church, café or community centre would take a collection pot for World Homeless Day, or if you would like to hold an activity, please contact Ibbie for a resource pack at whd@thamesreach.org.uk or call 020 7702 5626.



The MEC tennis tournament raised £5,500 for Thames Reach. Tricia Noel and Ross Macbean wore fancy dress.

On the streets with London Street Rescue

News Reach reporter, Ben Hennessy, meets Thames Reach volunteer, Andreas.

The grand foyer of petroleum giant Shell's UK headquarters, located just off London's South Bank, provides a stark contrast to the secluded side streets of north London that Shell employee, Andreas Koutsoulides, visited during a volunteer shift with Thames Reach's London Street Rescue team earlier this summer.

A Cypriot national, Andreas has always had an interest in volunteering and charitable work. While at university he set up his own fundraising project geared towards raising money for ill children in his home country.

Not long after moving to London to start work for Shell, Andreas felt he wanted to move back into volunteering. He decided to research some of the issues facing London's rough sleepers and spent some time learning about

organisations that help homeless people in the capital. Yet it was a chance encounter with two friendly security staff who spoke enthusiastically about the work Thames Reach does that led to him volunteer with the Street Rescue team.

"I was having a short break one evening, just outside the offices where I work, when I got talking to two security guards. I asked them if they knew about the charities that work with rough sleepers in London and they recommended Thames Reach immediately.

"I read more about Thames Reach online and was impressed by the range of services they provide for homeless and vulnerable people in London. After contacting Thames Reach, Ibbie Omideyi from the fundraising team came to our offices and gave an inspiring talk about the organisation. She explained how Thames Reach works across the whole spectrum of homelessness, from

helping rough sleepers off the streets and supporting those at risk of becoming homeless in their own homes to running employment schemes helping people get back into work.

"As soon as I heard that there were opportunities to volunteer with London Street Rescue I was really keen to be involved. I was impressed by how organised everything was. I was offered different dates, well in advance, when I could go out with the team which meant I could organise my work time accordingly. I also received a call the day before the shift, outlining what to expect.

"The shift was led by London Street Rescue relief worker, Catherine Whittaker, who planned the evening meticulously.

She identified who we needed to help, where they were and when we needed to be there.

"We helped four people off the streets and into safe,

secure accommodation that night.

"It was an amazing feeling to know that I'd been a part of the process that helped these individuals living in such extreme circumstances off the streets."



London Street Rescue volunteer, Andreas Koutsoulides.