

## 2016 Sleep Out Press Release

AROUND 25 volunteers took part in a sponsored sleep out at Bromley Parish Church on Friday, November 11, raising substantial funds for The Bromley Homeless Shelter, which offers hope to the homeless throughout the winter.

Sponsored by Tamasha Restaurant on Widmore Road, which provided dinner for the volunteers, the sleep out is the charity's biggest fundraising event.

The homeless shelter runs from December 1 to mid-March. It can take in 12 at one time, but around 29 people in total made use of the service last year.

The shelter provides local homeless people with a hot meal, a safe place to sleep. Six churches across Bromley are involved in the programme.

"Last winter season, 19 of our guests found accommodation," said Ed Tree, chairman of the charity's trustees. "I've seen poverty throughout the world and been involved in various social causes, and I wanted to do something for the local community. You don't see homeless people in Bromley – they hide away, but they are there."

"When I went to give food to rough sleepers, I was shocked to find a couple in their 60s sleeping rough just yards off the High Street," said one of the volunteers, Jonathan Hutton.

Another of the volunteers that took part in the sleep out, recovered heroin addict Paul Osgood – who has experienced sleeping on the streets first hand – explained that the shelter is all about giving back: "I have been through the whole system so I know how it works. I know how important it is to have contact with others. Most homeless people would rather have a chat than be given a pound. The shelter is so important as it gives people hope and inspires them to improve their lives."

Serin Mehmet of Catford also took part in the sleep out. "I have always wanted to do it as it's a local cause for people in our community that can get overlooked," she said.

Tree added: "The sleep out gave us an insight into what it is like to sleep rough – of course, this was easy for us with the knowledge that we were safe and had a warm bed and food waiting for us the following night."

Over the past five years, the number of people registered as homeless in London has risen by 70%, with almost 7,600 people sleeping rough across the capital. The night shelter was created to provide a safe place for them during the winter.

Working in partnership with other organisations, including LATCH, the Bromley Housing Options team, Oxleas mental health services, and Food Bank, the shelter is entirely volunteer run, with no paid staff. There are typically around 150 volunteers that take part in the shelter over the winter season.