

UK Stevenage Employees Take to the Street to Help Homeless

by Jude Lenderyou, contributing writer

Following a meal out with my colleagues where a lot of food was potentially going to waste, I decided to take it to North Herts Sanctuary, a local overnight homeless shelter in Hitchin. The Sanctuary is approximately six miles from the Stevenage office and has space for 17 people in shared rooms. The majority of clients are young males with issues such as drug and alcohol dependence, financial problems and/or mental health issues. Some are just victims of circumstance and are not able to secure permanent housing.

The leftover food was gratefully received and I noticed how little the people there actually had, so I decided to collect items needed such as toiletries, biscuits, sweets and other food on a monthly basis to supplement the basic provisions the Sanctuary provides as staples.

Stevenage employees have donated very generously and there are people who regularly throw in an extra couple of items on their shopping trips to help those less fortunate. The good thing about this charity is it directly helps people in our own area and by buying stuff they use rather than giving money, there is no danger of any funds not being used as they were intended.

In December Hely Salminen, Will Bloomfield and I took part in an overnight sleep out to raise money and awareness for homeless charities. Our nominated one was the Sanctuary. The sleep out was a well-organized event in the St. Albans Cathedral. There were facilities for hot drinks and biscuits and toilets but other than that it was truly sleeping rough.

Will pitched himself in some trees in the graveyard, while Hely and I laid our sleeping bags out up against a wall for some shelter from the cold wind. I awoke in the middle of the night to find two very drunk girls on their way home from a night out, laughing at us with our heads sticking out of our sleeping bags with Woolley hats pulled over our faces.

Just as I had fallen into a deep sleep I was woken up to move in the morning. I was cold and tired but felt I had done a worthwhile thing, so I was in a good mood. When I got home it made me really appreciate what I had and what some do not have. It is important to be reminded of that as it is too easy to forget. I would do it again, though I will encourage others to do it for the experience!

We raised almost £800 with Avnet contributing the same as we collected again. The funds went directly to the Sanctuary. Getting to experience firsthand what it is like to sleep outside made me resolve to keep our office collections going.

At Christmas we raised some money by not buying cards or presents for each other and instead put the money into a collection to purchase a card and present for every Sanctuary client to open on Christmas morning. It was important that each present was the same, so it was a mission to find 17 each of identical shower gels, deodorant, chocolates and other items. Rebecca Whitney and I put the bags together and when Hely and I delivered them, they were very gratefully received. We had a cup of tea with the staff and some of the clients. We later had a thank you letter signed by the clients, which was lovely.

Stevenage continues to support the Sanctuary every month. We now have item collection points around the building. Additionally, Sandra Scott, vice president of sales, has chickens and brings in free range eggs; money collected from the sale of these is used for Sanctuary. Chris Keohane, who works from home, contributes each month by post. I ask the Sanctuary what they require that month and use the money for to shop for those items.