

NEWS FOCUS

— but no windows

'Now the majority of people sleeping rough we have never dealt with before, and that is quite worrying. You can't deny that it probably has something to do with the recession'

'In the past we were dealing with entrenched rough sleepers who were known to us. Maybe six years ago there were ten to 15 people sleeping rough long-term but they have all been brought into the shelter, which is a massive improvement. Many of them now have their own flats.

'Now the majority of people sleeping rough, of which we are finding perhaps one or two a month, we have never dealt with before, and that is quite worrying.

'You can't deny that it probably has something to do with the recession.'

One of those new faces, Stuart explains as we check the public toilets in Parade Park, was found just before Christmas in this very spot.

'A young guy was about to spend his first night on the streets,' says Stuart.

'He had only been in the Island a few months – he had moved here for a girl – but the company he had been working for went bust and he then broke up with his girlfriend.

'He felt he had literally run out of options.'

The young man, Stuart adds, was all too keen to accept help from the team and within five weeks had a new job and was living in his own flat.

'It is things like that that make people like me come back,' says Stuart.



Lucy Mason in the bus shelter known to its homeless users as the 'Room with a View' Picture: DAVID FERGUSON (00893131)

I had met Stuart at 8 pm at the shelter at Kensington Place. He had brewed a fresh flask of sweet tea and packed a bag with some sandwiches that had just been donated by Marks and Spencer before we set off in the outreach team's car.

With temperatures struggling to get above freezing our first stop is a beach shelter overlooking Havre des Pas bathing pool. As we approach Stuart is pleased to see new lights have been installed. He explains that the shelter had been a common place for homeless people in the past because it is well sheltered from the elements. Tonight it is empty and there are no signs that anyone has used it to sleep rough.

Next we go to Pier Road car park. Stuart checks the public toilets before driving up to the higher levels. He is careful to check the stairwells and any sheltered cubby holes. Again there are no signs of rough sleepers.

Two beach-side shelters by West Park are our next stop. Stuart explains that the tell-tale signs of someone sleeping rough include rubbish and cardboard boxes stowed under benches. The fact that Jersey is so tidy makes spotting these signs so much easier, he adds. Again there is nothing to suggest anyone sleeping rough.

When we then drive round to the shelter opposite the new West Park apartments on Route de St Aubin. Despite its elevated position, Stuart shows me that it is actually quite sheltered in both corners, depending on which way the wind is blowing. Here we find a number of empty cans of extra-strength lager and Stuart says there is a strong smell of urine. He says he will come back later just in case anyone returns for the night.

Our next stop is the public toilets in Parade Park where Stuart had found the young man before Christmas. There are no signs of anyone sleeping rough but Stuart is pleased to see that new syringe bins have been installed. He explains that the toilets are actually a very clever place to sleep rough because you can lock yourself in and the light is on a sensor. 'If you don't move no one will know you are there,' he says.

'And anyone trying the door will just think the toilets are locked for the night.'

Next we check the public toilets at Sand Street car park. Again there are no signs of rough sleepers so we head off to Green Street Car Park. We drive all the way to the top level as Stuart explains that there is a well-sheltered cubby hole on the top floor. At the top we get out to inspect the small landing where the lift comes out. The landing has a door and is therefore very sheltered, and Stuart explains that the lift mech-



Chef Sean Culkin in the shelter's new kitchen (00892319)



Support worker Stuart Campbell (00892320)

anisms also bring a bit of heat into the area. The landing is clear.

Patriotic Street car park is our next stop, and Stuart explains that this is where ten to 15 entrenched rough sleepers would spend every night about six years ago. After checking the toilets and stairwells, which are clear, we drive up to 'Trap 10' on the tenth level. Stuart shows me the four parking spaces which became known as Trap 10 within the homeless community because of their sheltered nature. There are no signs of anyone sleeping rough.

After almost an hour and a half it is almost time to head back to base. But as we drive past the Hospital Stuart spots a man

sitting on a bench in Parade Gardens. We get out to investigate. Stuart approaches the man calmly, introducing himself clearly and asks if the man, who has a bottle of vodka beside him, is OK. He says he is and explains that he has had an argument with his girlfriend and will be heading home shortly. Stuart makes sure he leaves a card with his contact details on and explains what the shelter can offer – just in case.

Before returning to the shelter we make one last check of Room with A View in case anyone has returned for the night. On the way we pass a beach shelter at West Park we checked earlier and both notice that someone is there. Inside we find a young couple enjoying the romantic setting and with a quick apology we are soon on our way again for our final stop. No one has returned to Room with a View.

Back at the shelter the other staff members are pleased to hear that no one has been found sleeping rough and Stuart gives me a quick tour of the building. He explains the many improvements that have been made to the building over time, including a new state-of-the-art kitchen. As we walk through a courtyard there is a warmth about the place that goes far beyond the central heating system – which is apparently playing up anyway. People greet Stuart with a cheery smile and quick chat and he explains that a welcoming atmosphere is always important.

'When someone first comes into the shelter the first thing is to get them some hot food and make them feel welcome,' he says.

'Every person has their own needs and it is about letting them know that there is someone there to help.'

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