



## **Street Survey and Head Count of homeless people Friday 26 March**

On Friday 26 March volunteers from the Simon Community and Housing Justice carried out a street survey and head count of homeless people in Central London.

The aim of the survey was to talk to homeless people and find out what help or accommodation they were being offered, and whether this was what they needed to come off the street. Another aim was to find out the extent of heavy handed enforcement approaches to tackling homelessness, such as the so called "Operation Poncho" used in the City of London.

During the survey which took place between 7-10pm volunteers talked to homeless people in the Strand, Victoria, Lincolns Inn Fields, Oxford Street, Covent Garden, Temple, Embankment and Waterloo. More than 60 people responded positively to the request for information, and many had been on the streets for some months and even years.

Whilst this was only designed as a brief snap shot survey the most alarming conclusion is that many had not been offered *any* help or accommodation.

One interviewee had been sleeping rough for 10 months and had been in contact with outreach workers. However as he had no serious support needs under mental health or substance misuse he had not been offered any assistance.

Other issues which people talked about included: their reluctance to take up the offer of a hostel bed; the particular issues faced by people from the EU, including one interviewee who was about to be deported although he had joined the workers registration scheme and worked for 2 years in the UK; and that some people did not want to use the benefit system. Some of these are highlighted in the other case histories - see below

That same night 109 people were counted rough sleeping in the Borough of Westminster between midnight and 2.30 am. This is of particular concern as almost all volunteer run winter shelters and statutory funded services are reported to be running at full capacity.

### **Synopsis of survey:**

#### **Length of time homeless:**

Out of 69 people surveyed we talked to 8 people who had been on the streets for less than 1 month, 12 who had been street homeless for 1 to 6 months, 10 who had been homeless for 6 months to 1 year, 14 who had been homeless for 1 to 5 years, 5 who had been homeless for 6 to 10 years, 5 for 11 to 20 years, 6 for 20 to 30 years and 2 for over 30 years. Therefore 30 of the 69 surveyed had been homeless for a year or less. Some respondents did not answer and some had been housed.

#### **Offers of Accommodation:**

Of those that answered the question, 29 said they had not been offered any help to secure accommodation. Twenty people had been given a hostel but of those eighteen were back on the

street. For example one person who has been homeless for twenty years has stayed in many hostels, with his longest stay being two years in Look Ahead but has never been successfully helped to move on to other accommodation.

Five people reported receiving other kinds of help which had been offered by charities, including having received help to find sheltered housing, and the Two Step scheme run by the charity Hope Worldwide which uses volunteers and rent deposit schemes to help single people find housing.

### **Experiences of Enforcement:**

Around half of the respondents talked about enforcement methods being used against them and many noted that use of these methods had increased recently. The enforcement methods experienced by the respondents ranged from attempts to remove them from the UK (experienced by two respondents in the last month), to the use of anti social behaviour legislation to restrict rough sleepers from certain areas. The majority of experiences were about being woken up and asked to move on in the night.

One person was *“dragged by their sleeping bag by police officers from Charing Cross Homeless Unit”* in the middle of the night from their sleeping place by the Army and Navy shop in Howick Place, Victoria. Four respondents reported having had a good experience of police officers whether or not they had been woken up in the night. One said *“Some officers are kind and will give you some time, but still you have to get up and pick your stuff up with no offer of any place to go”*. Another had been held in police custody for 24 hours for urinating by a tree.

Others talked about 48 hour ASBOs and their repeated use when a magistrate had dismissed the case from court. One person said that *“There has been a bylaw controlling entry to the subway in Charing Cross for 12 years - the police only started to enforce it a year ago.”* These comments would seem to indicate a recent increase in enforcement.

### **What help is wanted:**

Opinions on what help would be useful ranged from needing to help people in their first six months on the streets, to more food available in the afternoon. The most common response was that help was needed to find jobs and permanent accommodation (11 people). Seven people said more hostels and day centres were needed while four mentioned they found outreach workers unhelpful – either because they were patronising, too young or didn't listen. Three people had had problems accessing medical services, for HIV, diabetes and epilepsy.

### **Case Studies (Names have been changed to protect identities)**

#### **Jan – Threatened with removal from the UK**

Jan is a Polish man who sleeps in a door way in Victoria area. He has been told that he is to be removed from the UK on Tuesday the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2010. He says he has never been offered any help to voluntarily return to Poland. He has worked for two years in the UK and was registered under the Worker Registration program, which could mean he is eligible for benefits and not liable for removal. He paid £130 for his registration. For the last six months he has been unemployed and he would like to find another job, or go to live with his family in France, but he does not have the means to get there.

Over a month ago he was given a letter which told him he was liable to be removed from the UK as he was unemployed, and gave him an appointment at the police station. When he went to the police station to be interviewed by the Borders Agency the police took all of his documents, including his registration and the letter he was served and did not give them back again.

*As part of a new effort by the government to remove rough sleepers from London's streets the UK Border Agency is attempting to remove destitute European rough sleepers. Seven notices of*

*liability to administrative removal were served on rough sleepers in the Victoria area in early 2010, and rough sleepers in other areas are likely to receive such notices in the coming months.*

### **Mike - New on the streets**

Mike has been sleeping in a door way for a week, after coming back to London from Ireland. He was homeless for two months from November to December 2009 in the same place in Victoria, London.

He has not been offered any help to find accommodation while on the streets, although he has met outreach workers from a local day centre. The day centre helped him claim benefits, which meant he had enough money to return to Ireland. He says he would like help to get a hostel room but so far has not had any.

The first night he was on the street he was woken up by police by two female police officers who said they were from Charing Cross Homeless Unit. They promised him they would buy him a ticket to Ireland and arranged to come to his doorway the next night. The next night two police men from Charing Cross Homeless Unit came and told him he had to get up and leave the area, even though he had permission to sleep in the doorway and he says this really upset him.

### **Peter – long term homeless person**

Peter has been homeless ‘a very long time’. He has been offered ‘rubbish accommodation I wouldn’t live in.’

Peter has two large suitcases with wheels, with all of his belongings in. He says that in the past some Police Officers have deliberately broken his suitcases – this has happened more than once. The last time was six months ago. He says *“I didn’t create homelessness. All my stuff is just the evidence I have been here a long time.”*

He said policemen come and wake him and others, in neighbouring doorways, up. The guys in the doorway next to him can’t speak English but the police carried on anyway. They said *“You’ve got to go, in ten minutes I’ll be back. I’ve been told to clear this area”*.

Peter says *“Apparently Westminster City Council pay over 1,000,000 a year to get us off the street. I’m sorry, but what are they doing apart from talking about nothing?”*

Area	Description	Count
1	Aldwych	8
2	Covent Garden	24
3	Whitehall/Piccadilly	
4	Victoria 1	25
5	Mayfair	5
6	Soho	9
7	Oxford Street/Marble Arch	3
8	Marylebone	4
9	Edgware Road	
10	Victoria 2	31
11	Hyde Park Corner/Belgravia	
12	Paddington etc.	

**TOTAL 109**

## Street survey and head count - Friday 26th March 2010

### Introduction

Hi, we're X and Y from *Simon Community/Housing Justice*. We're out tonight seeing how outreach teams are working with rough sleepers. Can we ask 5 quick questions? It should take 5 minutes. They're anonymous and will help get a good picture of what's really going on.

1. Are you or have you been homeless - if so how long?

2. Have you been offered accommodation by outreach workers or other services? If so what?

3. If this help has not been what you wanted, what help would you like to be offered?

4. Have you experienced heavy enforcement e.g. Operation Poncho - type "disruption"?

Details –      What happened?  
                  What time did it happen?  
                  Who talked to you?  
                  Where did it happen? (Mark on a map?)  
                  What was its impact on you?

5. Anything else you'd like to add?

**Thanks very much**

The information we get from this will be used to write a short report and you'll be able to see it at [www.simoncommunity.org.uk](http://www.simoncommunity.org.uk) and we'll also take copies on the soup run and tea runs to give out. We'll keep monitoring the situation on a regular basis so if there's anything you'd like to let us know please email [info@simoncommunity.org.uk](mailto:info@simoncommunity.org.uk), call **0207 4856639** or talk to somebody on one of our services.