


Out Under the Stars for Bethany



The Big Sleepout means exactly that, sleeping out under the stars for a night, It is organised by Bethany Christian Trust, a homelessness charity. It aims to raise the profile of homelessness, as well as raise funds, through the sponsorship of participants' friends and family.

The event will be taking place on The Royal Mile, inside the walls of Edinburgh City Chambers. Hannah Biddulph, organiser at the trust explained that around 175 participants are expected in Edinburgh. The event has been running in Edinburgh for the past 12 years, beginning at a small churchyard, and has since increased in size many times. In addition to the Edinburgh venue, 50 participants are expected at the other venues in Aberdeen, Dundee, Fife, which have been added this year.

 Biddulph said:- “The Sleepout is an important event because having a real experience of sleeping outside is an eye-opener.” She added “We do have a great night, but there is a serious element in that the fundraiser can go home, but the homeless person would be having a hard day trying to keep warm and find shelter from the elements. For that person there is no such thing as sleep...you're too cold and vulnerable.” This event, then, aims to show people how it can be the most horrendous of experiences.

Jenni Willis, a surveyor who has taken part four times, explained what it felt like:-“You knew you were going to get home, and were with friends. There are stewards and security

and we were sheltered from the real world of homelessness, but it does give an indication of what it must be like. There was a sense of vulnerability, and one side of me was numb when I woke up. This makes you think about how it is for them.”

People from all sections of society have taken part on previous occasions. Biddulph said:-“We have had people in their 70s, youth groups, Scouts, and everyone in between.” She added that 20 staff and volunteers will be participating to ensure everything goes smoothly. The event complies with health and safety, with security, and is supported by the council and by Lothian and Borders Police.

The issue of homelessness is very relevant to today’s society as Biddulph explained that over 45,000 people in Scotland alone registered as homeless last year. She expects this situation to worsen, due to the new bedroom tax legislation, “Bethany helps all sorts of people who find themselves in that situation, such as young people, men and women, families with young children and the elderly. Lots of our service users suffer from problems in their lives.”

Jenni also spoke of how the issue is relevant today:-“It could happen to anyone, but some people think it couldn’t happen to them.” She cited family breakdowns, the economy and the loss of jobs as the reasons. Jenni herself has known friends who have experienced homelessness and she takes part for them.

Bethany makes an immense contribution to the lives of the homeless, each year giving aid to a staggering around 4000 homeless and vulnerable people, according to Biddulph. She estimates they have 3000 volunteers, and 200 members of staff.

To those taking part, Jenni’s advice is to wrap up warm, and make sure you’ve got food and something comfortable to lie on. She is full of praise for Bethany, ‘I think the support that they give is unique’.

To register and download a sponsorship form, [go to the](#)

[webpage here.](#)

This will also give you some information in case you are thinking about joining in:-



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