

The big sleepout

Bethany Big Sleepout at City Chambers

People of all ages turned up to spend the night sleeping outside at Edinburgh City Chambers on Friday night, despite the temperature falling close to zero. The 120 participants enjoyed live music, the onesie competition as well as the shelter building competition.

£20,000 was raised for the Bethany Homeless Shelter.

There was a great atmosphere of camaraderie as groups worked together to build their shelters of cardboard and sticky tape. Cups of tea, soup and snacks were provided free and everyone was dressed warmly in woolly hats, layers and thermals. The event was labelled the Big Sleepout rather than just sleepout, due to its expansion to other Scottish cities, said Edinburgh Care Shelter Manager Norrie Webb.

Organiser Claire Poad said of the evening:- "So far everything is going really well, and everyone seems really positive. The weather hasn't dampened any spirits. The shelter-building competition was a little bit of fun."

One boy who was enjoying the fun was Alistair Baines, aged 12, from the 12th Midlothian Scouts. Building a cardboard shelter with his group, Alistair explained:- "I am working towards my Scout badges, and also want to raise awareness about homelessness in the community."

His father Rob, who was providing a watchful eye, explained that for the children it was educational:- "It's for him to play a part and understand how important everybody is who we live with, teach them how the world works and also some practicality."

Despite the fun of the night, Norrie Webb explained the

reality behind the lives of his clients, which he wanted people to understand. He said:-"The aim is to raise awareness because the reality is it's cold, wet and windy.



The shelters are only open during the winter until the 1st of April, that there is nothing more we can do due to financing, which makes me feel helpless. Without the shelter, people would die from hypothermia. Two people who used the shelter this year have passed away. A 27-year old client died from cardiac arrest last year, so the realities of homelessness can have an adverse affect."

The Bethany care shelter is the only one running in Edinburgh. It is church- funded and run by volunteers, along with the

care van which distributes hot drinks in the evening which Webb also manages. According to Webb, there are nearly 800 volunteers helping to run all of these facilities, through the generosity of time and funds. These funds are provided through events such as coffee mornings, and donations. Norrie continued:-"Homelessness can be caused by all sorts of issues including relationship breakdown, or drug and alcohol issues. The care shelter helps those who cannot get placed in hostels.

The aim is to give people dignity and respect. I'm very lucky to be invited into these people's lives."