

What's On In Edinburgh?

Forgotten Christmas needs your help

✖ Among the many great charities that try to make Christmas a little better for homeless people, there is one whose approach is a bit different.

Most of us remember the excitement of not knowing what might be in all those parcels under the tree, and many of us are still lucky enough to get mystery gifts from our nearest and dearest, even if they do turn out to be reindeer jumpers.

Forgotten Christmas not only raises funds for care packs for people living rough, it distributes them in a way that aims to recapture the surprise element of the festival – but **it needs your help, financial and practical, to reach as many people as it can.**



Stirling-based **Steven Tyrie**, who runs the charity along with **Andrew Moodie** and **Naomi Ross**, explains that, despite popular misconceptions, a **Salvation Army study** has shown that **the main reason for homelessness is relationship breakdowns** and that this accounts for a massive 43% of cases. Other major factors include physical or mental health issues (13%), job loss (10%) and debt (6%). Many people, says Steven, expect drugs and alcohol to account for most of the homeless people living on our streets, but while substance abuse is undoubtedly a problem for homeless people, it is often a result of being homeless rather than a cause of it. What's more, **armed service veterans** account for **one in ten** rough sleepers across the UK; their situation is often further complicated by mental and physical disabilities stemming from their experiences while

serving the nation.



Forgotten Christmas buys as many good quality care packs as its funds allow; Steve has negotiated a fantastic discount with **Mountain Warehouse and Go Outdoors**, who have both agreed to further reduce their prices after initial sale discounts have been applied, specifically to help the charity's money go further. This year the packs will consist of robust Mountain Warehouse **rucksacks containing a sleeping bag, travel pillow, Thermos flask, hat, scarf, gloves & socks, waterproofs, toiletries and a packed lunch**. To save money, Forgotten Christmas volunteers make all the packed lunches themselves, and even include a chocolate Santa if there's enough money left to buy some.



The packs are all distributed on two days – **12th December in Edinburgh and 19th December in Glasgow** – and the charity has a

very special way of handing them over. Steve, Andrew and Naomi place great emphasis on taking some time to talk to the homeless, listen to their stories and let them know that people are thinking of them and that they haven't been forgotten. As Steve says, 'if you sat on a street corner day after day with hundreds of people walking past without acknowledging you, I'm sure you'd end up feeling forgotten too'.

So, on 12th December, the group looks for suitable people; four people from a large group approach an individual with only the food package, introduce themselves and capture that person's name. One of the four people slips back to the rest of the group and writes the name on a pre-written card containing the names of everyone who has donated. While this is happening, the three other people who made the initial approach talk away to the homeless person while also giving them their food package. Then comes the big surprise; everyone else approaches and the card and full care package are presented.

'We need people who are prepared to help distribute the gifts on the day, but more importantly, take the time to **talk to these people, hear their stories, listen to their problems** and take a genuine interest. Everyone involved last year felt that this was the thing that had the biggest impact, not just on the people we met, but on us as well'.

Forgotten Christmas **needs your help NOW** to make all of this happen. To date it has raised **£900 of its £1,500 target**. The deadline for donations is **4th December – that's next Friday** – and it really shouldn't be beyond the people of Edinburgh to come up with another £600 between them. If you would like to donate, you can do so here www.gofundme.com/forgottenxmas. Please note that this is the *only* way that the charity can accept donations, as this enables it to leave an auditable financial trail.

Forgotten Christmas also needs **practical help**; in early December they'll need many hands to help **gift wrap the presents**, and on the day itself to help **distribute the packs and talk to the recipients**. If you would like to volunteer, whether beforehand or on 12th December in Edinburgh or 19th December in Glasgow (or all three!), please email **forgottenxmas@gmail.com** with your contact details and times you may be free; **everyone is very welcome** to come along. There's also lots of information on the charity's **Facebook** page [here](#) and **website** [here](#), and its **Twitter** account is [here](#). Steven asks that as many people as possible also share the message, 'An email round your office or talking to friends and family about it – any help will be greatly appreciated. Be creative!'



Last year many volunteers were moved by their conversations with the people they met. One, **Fiona** said this;

'Wow! A very emotional day with Steven and other volunteers with the homeless in Edinburgh. Every single one had a story to tell as to how they had ended up on the streets. I will NEVER EVER walk past a homeless person ever again without so much as a backward glance. To Daniel, the British soldier, to Tyler, a young 18 year old who had been sleeping rough for 9 months, to Sean, his wife died in July and he lost his home as it was a flat for a disabled person and they wouldn't let him take it over, to Paul and the many others we spoke to, not once did they ask for money, Tyler made me cry as he asked for food, Paul only wanted a wee hat and thermals. They were so grateful and I felt humbled by their sheer gratitude. A big THANK YOU to everyone who has donated and supported this, these stories will stay with me for a long time'.

So go on, dig deep for Edinburgh's homeless this year. Everyone needs help sometimes; everyone has their story.

