

Rough sleeper charity hands over 300th coat

A West Lothian entrepreneur is planning to climb the highest mountain in Africa using a coat as a sleeping bag to help raise fund for a design that has helped hundreds of rough sleepers.

John Keogh's Ootsider firm was established to provide warm clothing to rough sleepers.

He created the all-weather Ootsider – an all-weather coat sold to wild swimmers and other outdoor sports enthusiasts which can convert into a warm sleeping bag – and has now reached the milestone of donating more than 300 to charities helping people sleeping on the streets.

And now he plans to use it to keep himself warm during an ascent of Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.



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John Keogh gives a talk on the work of The Ootsider and rough sleeping to a school. Copyright John Keogh.

John decided to set up the Ootsider after an encounter with a rough sleeper on the rain-soaked streets of Glasgow just days before Christmas three years ago.

Profits from the sale of the coats which sell for around £150 are ploughed into making coats to be handed over to charities.

John initially distributed coats he'd had made by himself. He raised money to make the initial coats through charity events like sponsored sleepouts before setting up the Oostider as a Community Interest Company.

Outlining plans for the Kilimanjaro trip which aims to raise funds for The Ootsider brand and awareness of the issues

around rough sleeping, John says the climb will be as much as about product development as fundraising.

“I’d like to design a Kilimanjaro coat,” he said. “I want to go to Kilimanjaro and not take a sleeping bag. How possible is that? I don’t know because it’s freezing, but if someone can sleep in it on Kilimanjaro, they can sleep out in a sleeping coat.”

The coat has been upgraded using newer, more insulating textiles since the first was made just over two years ago. The line has also expanded to include sweatshirts and Beanie hats.

The latest donations – to an Edinburgh convent which works with rough sleepers – included the 300th coat to be handed over.

But John is keen to develop the coat and other ideas as much as he can. He has also established links with local schools, speaking to primary and secondary pupils about rough sleeping and seeking ideas from pupils about ways which can help solve the issue.

“We are not going to solve things overnight,” he says. “It’s about raising awareness about rough sleeping and homelessness, I’ve developed these coats but are there there any great ideas that the kids can have.

“People rough sleeping are not bad people and it’s about raising awareness with the kids. If we can raise awareness with them, they might be the generation who can do something more positive. I want to do more about that.”

You can see the work of the charity at <https://theoutsider.co.uk/>

Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter