

» News focus on a remarkable organisation's work

Charity's £9m appeal to help the homeless turn their lives around

by Kay Atwal

kay.atwal@newhamrecorder.co.uk

Anchor House launches an appeal this week to raise £9.3 million to help pay for the next phase of its refurbishment project.

The former seaman's mission in Barking Road in Canning Town was established in 1962 by the Catholic London Inter-Diocesan Council of the Apostleship of the Sea.

Its original purpose was to provide temporary accommodation for out-of-work seafarers coming into and out of the nearby ports.

As the volume of trade going through the docks declined, so did Canning Town – and Anchor House with it.

The building became dilapidated and ended up as a hostel for the homeless rather than as a seaman's mission.

Six years ago the Trustees realised that Anchor House was no longer in a fit state to fulfil its duty to the dispossessed and brought in new leadership.

Under the leadership of Keith Fernett Anchor House has changed out of all recognition. From a hostel for the homeless, it has become a life skills centre where the ultimate goal for its residents is independent living.

Today it has room for 118 residents and employs 39 staff (five of whom are former residents) and many volunteers.

It is raising funds for

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Cameron Inniss

its refurbishment and the total cost of plans is £15.3 million – with £6 million already raised. Phases 1 and 2 of the plans have already been completed and now the charity is aiming to raise the £9.3 million for phase 3 and phase 4 through the Home and Hope Appeal.

Recovery

Phase 3 involves the building of 25 new “move-on” flats at £176,000 per apartment.

Last year it was recognised as a centre of National Excellence and was awarded five National Training Awards by the UK Skills Council.

Keith Fernett, director of Anchor House, said: “There is an unprecedented opportunity for regeneration and job opportunities in the London

Borough of Newham.

“It is essential that we support our residents and local community to take advantage of these opportunities but this cannot be achieved without sufficient training support and facilities. At 50 years of age Anchor House is now urgently in need of re-development.”

Among the residents who have benefited from such training and support is Cameron Inniss, who is now working at his ideal job.

He said: “I was working 24-7 in my own painting and decorating business, working to pay the bills, working to survive but then one day I fell 25ft off a ladder. I snapped ligaments in my leg and I couldn't walk and couldn't work.”

After losing his rental place he became homeless, staying with friends for a while until finding refuge at Anchor House.

“I arrived at Anchor House disabled. I not only had to contend with being homeless but I also faced a long road to recovery.”

He said: “The staff and residents made me feel at ease and I pulled myself together and made a conscious choice to turn my life around by undertaking courses and training.”

It took him two years to walk steadily again. Since being at Anchor House Cameron has done courses in IT, manual handling, fork-lift operations, small business and NVQs in English and maths. He said: “I feel great, I don't feel angry any more and I am working at Anchor House helping to give back to the community.”

His next challenge is starting up his own small business in painting and decorating within Anchor House and mentoring other residents.

“Anchor House has helped me to set up my own website and business cards.

“I actually had a call the other day for a job and it was quite exciting when they told me they had found me on Google. I've never been Googled before.”



■ An artist's impression of a communal area



■ An artist's impression of a self-contained flat



■ Cameron Inniss

Anchor House is saving taxpayers £5 million every year, reveals economic report

Anchor House, in helping the homeless to turn their lives around, saves taxpayers £5 million a year through its work, according to a report.

The study, carried out by experts at Oxford Economics, found that the residential and life-skills centre in Canning Town provides

£3.98 in benefits to society for every £1 invested in its operations.

Anchor House director, Keith Fernett, says the charity decided to put itself under the microscope in the lead up to its October 17 £9.3 million appeal launch to prove to its supporters how much of a difference they are

indeed making. He said: “We are in the business of turning lives around and as a result of our work there are huge cost savings to society.”

“Because of our grassroots support we saved society up to £3.2 million from lower crime, £388,000 through increased employ-

ment and £225,000 by hosting Alcoholics Anonymous.”

The report also found that Anchor House saved the NHS £22,000 in hospital admissions, £14,000 in hospital outpatient treatments, £10,000 in acute mental health services and £5,000 in A&E treatment.

The charity accommo-

dates up to 180 single homeless people each year, and addresses the root causes of homelessness through training, education, volunteering and personal rehabilitation.

Monsignor John Armitage, the charity's chairman and Vicar General of Brentwood Diocese, says despite Anchor House being a small

charity with limited resources and operating in one of England's most deprived boroughs, the results achieved are astounding.

He said: “Last year 58 of our residents moved on to independent living, 32 were in employment and we trained more than 1,249 locals within the community.”