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PRESS RELEASE

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Stories of homelessness capture the attention of Jeremy Paxman

Normally Jeremy Paxman is the one telling the compelling story. But yesterday the BBC journalist and now Patron of homeless charity, Anchor House, listened intently as some of East London's homeless residents recalled what it was like for them without the support of their family and friends.

Located in Canning Town in the London Borough of Newham, Mr Paxman visited the centre where he is helping to raise more than £9.3 million to help re-develop the award winning residential/life-skills centre.

"What struck me most was how these amazing people, who have obviously been through quite a lot in their lives, have not given up and now have huge ambitions for the future," Mr Paxman said.

"I think it's great. Inspiring actually. . . they are addressing the root causes of their problems and they now have plans for the future.

"For me the single most startling thing about homelessness is how incredibly thin the line is between a settled, ordered life and complete chaos. It can be losing your job, the break-up of a relationship, a problem with drink or drugs, or sometimes just a family row."

Anchor House director Keith Fernett says the Canning Town charity is very excited to have Paxman on-board.

"Jeremy is a strong advocate of finding long-term solutions to homelessness and we are very pleased to have his support," he said.

"He will be working with us to help raise £9.3 million through our appeal to ensure our much needed work in the Newham community continues."

"Our mission is to build a new 21st century building, with a purpose built block of 25 move-on studio flats, workshops, a new catering training facility, leisure and recreational areas," Mr Fernett said.

For more information or to donate online: www.anchorhouseuk.org.

PHOTOGRAPH:



Caption: Celebrity Patron Jeremy Paxman with staff and homeless residents at Anchor House

EDITORS NOTE:

Based in Canning Town, an area of high deprivation – the third most deprived borough in the country, Anchor House is a nationally acclaimed flagship project addressing the root causes of homelessness: deprivation; drug addiction; mental illness; unemployment; lack of skills/education and crime. It is a registered charity providing accommodation for up to 180 single homeless people each year. It also provides a wide range of accredited vocational training courses in construction, electrical, plumbing and distance learning for both residents and the local community.

Anchor House been so successful in helping homeless people back into work that in November 2010 it won four National Training Awards by the UK Skills Centre and Anchor House's Employment and Training Officer Aggie Chikiwa (former resident) was awarded UK National Trainer of the Year.

It was also awarded the Charity Times Award for Best Use of Technology and was a finalist in the Third Sector Excellence Awards for Financial Management. And in 2006 and 2008, it won the Michael Whippman Award for Innovation in Homelessness.

From data taken from the '2010 Trust for London' and 'New Policy Institute', the London Borough of Newham, is at the wrong end of every indicator including health, homelessness, unemployment and work opportunities. Canning Town specifically is the most deprived ward in the third most deprived borough in the country, and is ranked third in the country for income deprivation affecting children and second in the country for income deprivation affecting older people. On top of this Newham has one of the highest rates of child poverty in London.

During 2009-10, Newham had over 36,000 households on the Housing Register (applying for a place in social housing) and around 3,500 households in temporary accommodation. Newham has the highest single homelessness population in the UK. Skills shortages are a major problem and significantly higher than across London as a whole. In 2009, 19.1% of people in Newham aged 16-64 had no qualifications. Only 24.2% were qualified to NVQ level 4 or above. This compares to London averages of 11.8% with no qualification and 39.7% at NVQ level 4 and above.

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