



West Sussex Charity Turning Tides Launches Emergency Appeal to Support Increasing Numbers of Homeless People through Covid-19 Crisis.

Embargoed until Thursday 16th April 00:01

On Thursday 16th April local charity Turning Tides is launching its first ever emergency appeal in response to the escalating Covid-19 crisis. The charity has supported homeless people across West Sussex for the last 28 years but Chief Executive John Holmstrom says: *'We have never seen anything like the situation we are facing now and urgently need to ask for help. The picture we are facing as an organisation is deeply troubling.'*

The public are being asked to join a 'campaign to keep homeless people in our community alive' and vital emergency donations are requested via the Turning Tides website www.turning-tides.org.uk. The charity has seen an unprecedented need for its services in the last few weeks and this rise is set to continue.

John Holmstrom continues;

'We have 21 properties across the county supporting some 200 homeless people. Additionally, we are providing vital practical and emotional support to growing numbers of rough sleepers being housed in temporary accommodation to limit the spread of the virus. There is an unprecedented demand on our services and this will only increase in the weeks and months to come. Many of our courageous frontline staff are designated keyworkers and, like our colleagues in the NHS, they are under huge pressure and putting their own health on the line as they support some of the most vulnerable people in our community.'

Homeless people are extremely vulnerable in the face of Covid-19 and have been named as high risk by the government. They include men and women whose health has already been damaged by trauma, rough sleeping and poverty. As many as 80% of the people supported by Turning Tides have mental health issues and about half of their service users are aged over 50. Even without the threat of a deadly virus, homeless people die on average 30 years sooner than the general population.

Three weeks ago the government set in motion an 'Everyone In' initiative to slow the spread of the virus through this particularly vulnerable group – it aims to offer every homeless person temporary accommodation during the crisis. Turning Tides have worked around the clock, with colleagues across sectors, scouring the streets and countryside, to find homeless people and bring them in to empty hotels and other temporary accommodation. This unprecedented development brings with it a need for increased support.

Ruth Poyner, Head of Fundraising and Communications, explains:

'On the streets, homeless men and women often survive on the generosity of the public who give to them directly. Now they are temporarily housed in local hotels and B&Bs and they are very much alone, frightened, in poor health and more unsure than ever as to what the future holds. They are often staying in one room with no support networks or family to lean on. These men and women are reliant on our frontline staff who are stretched to the limit providing emergency support, ranging from food and toiletries to mental health support and health education, including the basics of handwashing, social distancing and self-care.'

'Moreover, the number of homeless people is growing. For every rough sleeper approximately 20 others are sleeping on sofas, in vehicles, or insecurely housed. Now, as the virus spreads, these arrangements are breaking down. Covid-19 is accelerating financial hardship, relationship breakdown and mental health issues, all of which contribute to homelessness.'

Turning Tides is facing the dual challenge of significantly increased need for its services alongside the cancellation or postponement of all its community and fundraising events - a change that could result in as much as a 50% reduction in fundraising income.

The challenges faced by charities were acknowledged by the Government last week (08/04/2020) when the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a £750 million fund to support charities through the Covid-19 crisis.

Turning Tides CEO John Holmstrom comments:

'The fund is of course a welcome announcement but we also know it won't go far enough and won't reach everyone in need. As a whole, the charity sector is set to lose a staggering £4 billion in 12 weeks (National Council for Voluntary Organisations). More people than ever need our help and therefore we have to do everything we can to support them.'

The Turning Tides Emergency Covid-19 Appeal also asks for people to provide their email addresses via the website www.turning-tides.org.uk so the charity can keep the community informed during the weeks and months ahead.

Endnotes:

- Interviews with John Holmstrom and frontline Turning Tides key workers are available.
- Interviews with homeless men and women are also available.
- High resolution images can be provided.
- Please contact Communications Manager, Gemma Orpwood gemma.orpwood@turning-tides.org.uk or phone 01903 680740 Ext:232.

About Turning Tides:

Turning Tides is the largest provider of homeless services for single people in West Sussex. The charity runs 21 properties in various locations across the county and has over 300 volunteers and 140 paid staff supporting its mission to end local homelessness. For over 28 years, Turning Tides has supported thousands of rough sleepers and homeless men and women throughout most of West Sussex.

Turning Tides believe that everyone has the right to a home, regardless of the difficulties they may face in their lives. The work they undertake to empower homeless and insecurely housed individuals is vital. Through a variety of specialist support services, both residential and community based, the aim for each person is that they are empowered to fulfil their potential and secure a brighter future.

Head Office: Turning Tides, Town Hall, Chapel Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN11 1HA

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