

CHRONICLE APPEAL: Donations will help give shelter and food

As winter bites, the city's homeless battle the cold in alleys and doorways

By Chronicle reporters
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SHELTERING in an alleyway off Chelmsford high street with just a thin blue sleeping bag to protect him from the icy temperatures, 57-year-old Sed is dreading winter.

"It's the cold that I worry about - I walk a lot, that's why I know all the people in Chelmsford, but illness is always a problem," he told the Chronicle.

"I have depression and I've suffered panic attacks but if you don't keep warm you get ill, a friend of mine got pneumonia."

Two years ago Sed lost his flat in South Woodham Ferrers after a spell in custody for what turned out to be a case of mistaken identity.

He has been sleeping rough ever since, often seeking brief respite from the cold in Chelmsford library or McDonald's, and sleeping in the doorway of high street department stores.

Struggle

He is one of 1,323 homeless people across Essex who will struggle through winter this year, and to whom the Essex Chronicle and Essex Community Foundation hope to lend support through our 2013 Surviving Winter appeal.

"In this day and age it's disgusting anyone should be homeless, it isn't the Victorian times anymore," said Caroline Prue, a volunteer at Sanctus café in Chelmsford which serves up hot meals and tea and coffee to the homeless for free from its base on Broomfield Road.

"Once you're unemployed you struggle to pay your rent, you become homeless. Finding a new



PUNISHING: A homeless man in the city centre earlier in the winter

home again requires a deposit, which benefits won't cover."

Sleeping under layers of scrap cardboard and wrapped in clothes often soaked through by rain, rough sleepers in Chelmsford can be spotted just metres from the sites set aside for multi-million pound commercial developments such as the planned John Lewis.

While analysts report signs our economy is recovering after five years of recession, national figures continue to show a year-on-year rise in those people left behind on our streets.

Statistics from the department of communities and local government show that 174 people were accepted as homeless and in priority need in Chelmsford between April 2012 and March 2013, a figure that has more than doubled since 2009/10.

This is also reflected in Braintree where, in the last financial year, there were 164 deemed homeless, compared with 103 just three years earlier.

"We are sending all this money to foreign countries, which I don't begrudge at all, but I think charity should begin at home," said one



TOUGH: A homeless man sheltering in a Chelmsford shop alcove earlier this winter

49-year-old taking shelter in Sanctus, who found himself without a home three weeks ago after losing his job in the construction industry and being unable to afford the rent for a flat.

In 2012 the Essex Chronicle and

Essex Community Foundation's campaign raised nearly £40,000 which enabled warmth and food packs to be distributed across the county, and support vital voluntary and community organisations, such as foodbanks, day

centres for the elderly and services for the homeless.

■ If your voluntary organisation supports elderly or vulnerable people and a grant would help call Essex Community Foundation's grants team on 01245 356018.

£1k help for fuel costs

OPENED 18 months ago to respond to a growing demand in the town, Braintree Emergency Night Shelter can provide accommodation for up to four people at its premises on High Street, and last year received a grant of £1,000 from the Surviving Winter appeal to meet fuel costs.

"Once we take someone in we look after them until they find somewhere more secure," said manager Rob Sefton.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- You can text COLD00£10 (or other amount) to 70070
- Give online at <http://www.justgiving.com/Winter-Appeal-2013>
- Or you can send a cheque to Essex



GIVES HELP: Rob Sefton gentleman in his sixties that we're helping out at the moment, he was evicted and has health problems.

"Over winter the demand for space will go up because people in their tents will begin to feel cold."

Community Foundation, 121 New London Road, Chelmsford, CM2 0QT - please complete and return the Surviving Winter form (right), and remember to tick the Gift Aid box

to the growing number living rough



DREADING WINTER: Sed, 57, who has been living rough for two years pictured in Chelmsford's 'Gap alley'.

NO MATTER HOW MUCH IT'S ALL FOR THE CAUSE

Surviving Winter

I/WE would like to support the Surviving Winter Appeal 2013.

Name

Address.....

Postcode E-mail.....

If you are a UK taxpayer, Essex Community Foundation can reclaim Gift Aid, ie 25p on every £1 that you give, at no extra cost to you. Please sign below if you want Essex Community Foundation to reclaim tax on this donation.

Signed Date

■ Please return this slip with your donation to: Essex Community Foundation, 121 New London Road, Chelmsford, CM2 0QT