

GTR pulls its socks up to support homeless over winter

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As COVID-19 deepens the poverty crisis, Govia Thameslink Railway partners with local charities across its network once again to support homeless people over the winter season and break stigma associated with homelessness.

Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), the UK's largest rail network, will join forces once again with a variety of its regional charity partners this Christmas, to provide support for the homeless as the winter frost takes hold and the COVID-19 pandemic continues to heighten the homelessness crisis in the UK.

The **Great Sock Appeal** has launched across the nation in a bid to support those that need it the most. Spearheaded by GTR, the collection is returning for a second year after the successful 2019 launch that saw 4,172 pairs of socks donated by customers and colleagues to seven different partnerships across the GTR network.

This year, the campaign is particularly poignant for GTR. One of the operator's colleagues is speaking out for the first time about his experience of being homeless, with the hope of breaking the stigma associated with homelessness and to encourage more people across the country to get behind the campaign, donate

and support their local community during this truly testing time.

Speaking publicly for the first time to tell his inspirational story, Allen Howe, who is now a Senior Contracts Manager at Govia Thameslink Railway, working across the Southern, Thameslink, Great Northern and Gatwick Express networks, says: "I know all too well the hardship and danger facing homeless people this winter, having spent many months on the streets myself after suffering abuse as a child and being forced out by my stepmother soon after my 16th birthday.

"Although I could've easily just given up, I knew I had to keep on pushing to try and get myself out of the situation. I went on to spend 14 and a half years working for the local council developing initiatives to support the homeless, as well as later working for the NHS before moving to GTR. I have turned my life around and now have two daughters that I absolutely adore. Don't be too proud to ask for help – there are ways to get you out of whatever situation you may be facing."

GTR is again rallying its customers and employees to join forces and support those most in need ahead of the dreaded winter frosts. In true 2020 fashion, this year's collection will move to a virtual format, in recognition of the reduced number of passengers currently travelling due to the pandemic. Instead of physical donations hubs, GTR is asking customers and staff to donate via its [fundraising page](#), and has set its sights on matching last year's donations to raise £8,344 which equates to **4,172 pairs of socks**, with any additional donations to be split equally between the participating partners. The appeal will launch on Tuesday 1st December and end on Friday 11th December.

Often overlooked as an unimportant item, for those sleeping rough a pair of socks is essential for keeping feet warm and dry. Without them there is great risk of blisters, fungal infections and even trench foot. This basic item of clothing helps to keep feet healthy, maintain good circulation and even manage diabetes.

Allen continues: "There's a huge stigma around being homeless. People often think it's related to drugs or alcohol – or that you've done something to get yourself there. The average person doesn't realise that if you miss just three mortgage payments, you too could find yourself on the streets. There were many times I felt like giving up, but if you do then you'll never experience the positive side of life."

Steve White, Chief Operating Officer at GTR said: "Through our work last year with our regional charity partners we've learnt just how much difference it makes to provide a new pair of socks and keep feet warm and dry. This year charitable donations are more important than ever before as we see our homelessness crisis worsen due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Christmas is a time for giving, and all it takes is one pair of socks, less than the price of a coffee, to improve the life of a homeless person this winter. We want to thank our customers, colleagues and local communities for their wonderful support for those in need."

Photo credit: Peter Alvey