

Pioneering station pilot helps Manchester street homeless into housing

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ROUTES OUT OF HOMELESSNESS



Manchester Piccadilly and Birmingham New Street station staff have joined forces with the housing charity Shelter to help people sleeping rough around the major transport hub.

The pioneering partnership has seen members of the station team specially trained by Shelter Engagement workers as part of a new outreach scheme which began in October 2020.

Network Rail staff work with Shelter's own engagement workers to connect and refer the people they encounter sleeping rough with Shelter's expert services in order to provide them with tailored help and support.

Since the pilot started, 100 people who were sleeping rough in or around Manchester Piccadilly have been helped by the partnership.

The help includes support to access to different services, such as registering with a GP, mental health services and setting up a bank account.

Crucially, 32 people were helped into emergency or temporary accommodation, and a further five have been helped into permanent accommodation so far.

Birmingham New Street station has also been involved in the joint initiative, with a total of 168 people helped across both cities.

Many of the people helped have been living on the streets for a long time, and the interventions by the outreach staff in the stations are a first step in the process to securing permanent accommodation and life-changing support.

One of the people helped was *Jack, 44, who was referred by Network Rail staff in December when the temperature was 0°.

He'd lost his tenancy after being furloughed at the start of the pandemic and had been sleeping rough for 9 months.

Mimi, a Shelter engagement worker, met Jack and together they secured a bed for him in emergency accommodation.

During that time Shelter worked with its partners to find Jack somewhere to stay longer term and he is now settled in supported temporary accommodation, which has meant he is able to return to work.

Jack said: "I had no idea what my rights or options were, but Network Rail and Mimi from Shelter have been amazing in helping me to get to this turning point in my life. Without this pilot I would still be on the streets, and because of their help I'm now back at work again. For the first time in months I feel safe and positive about my future."

The training given to Manchester Piccadilly workers by Shelter has given them confidence in how to sensitively approach people sleeping rough and share the options available to them for help and support.

This includes staff learning about the complex and traumatising factors which can lead to someone losing their home.

Non-uniformed staff work on the outreach shifts – as there can be a level of mistrust from being approached by somebody in uniform.

This has helped teams better connect and get to know people around the station, helping to build confidence and trust with one another.

Kyla Thomas, Manchester Piccadilly station manager, said: "Day to day our focus is of course to run a safe and reliable railway for passengers, but we must recognise stations like Piccadilly are also a place of refuge for people with nowhere else to turn.

"Before this partnership with Shelter we often felt powerless when we didn't know how best to help those without a safe and secure place to sleep for the night. Equipping staff with the knowledge and skills to help

people find a route out of homelessness has been a huge success – as proven by the positive outcomes and success stories since the pilot started.”

Liz Norris, Services Manager at Shelter, said: “This pilot has meant that we can reach out to people outside of our usual environment and be there when people might need someone the most. If you’re used to being ignored on the street, or worse, you can start to lose hope and we’ve been able to help restore that.

“We’ve been able to offer advice and support, helping people who had been sleeping rough to find safe accommodation. We know that home is everything, and together with our partners we’re able to help people find and keep theirs.”

Rail Minister, Chris Heaton-Harris MP, said: “These pilot schemes demonstrate how much the rail industry is committed to taking meaningful action and helping everyone who uses the rail network.

“We are all committed to ending homelessness and I know these wonderful pilot schemes will make a real difference and change lives.”

The Shelter Outreach project forms part of Network Rail’s five year ‘Routes out of Homelessness’ campaign.

For more information visit: www.networkrail.co.uk/rooh

- *Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality
- About Shelter: We exist to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society. We believe that home is everything.