

Jon Miles, Director of Church Urban Fund's Together programme, writes about how the Advent Sleepout Challenge is providing crucial funding for the charity's work on homelessness.

This winter, our joint ventures with Church of England dioceses – known as the Together programme - will support night shelters in major cities such as Birmingham and Manchester as well as King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth. Nearly 4,300 bed spaces will be provided over the coldest months through dozens of churches and tens of thousands of volunteering hours. The Manchester night shelter alone will provide 2,160 bed spaces over six months, with support from nine churches across the city and nearly 19,000 volunteering hours. In King's Lynn, a new night shelter offering places for 15 homeless guests will be launched in response to a dramatic rise in the number of rough sleepers in the town.

The night shelters are more than just somewhere to sleep, they are about hospitality and service. Friendships are made and typically volunteers and guests will share a meal together in the evening, followed by activities ranging from table tennis to drama and creative writing workshops. Guests are valued and encouraged to use their skills, and where possible supported to get into permanent accommodation and employment.

Since 2015 we have seen 175 church groups sleep out through the Advent Sleepout Challenge to raise sponsorship money. This money has

g night shelters open and funding support for guests.



For the Living Room night shelter, in Great Yarmouth, the Advent Sleepout Challenge in Great Yarmouth Minster was crucial in helping fund a project coordinator to work with guests on applying for benefits and housing.

This year we are seeing more churches and cathedrals getting involved to take the challenge.

The Advent Sleepout Challenge has been an excellent way of bringing people on the fringes of church life into the church during the Christmas period, creating opportunities for people of different backgrounds to share an experience together.

So, please do host an Advent Sleepout Challenge at your church this year, it may be a cold night for you, but it will mean a warm welcome for someone who desperately needs one.

For more information, visit the [Advent Sleepout Challenge website](#).

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