

All the latest news from Wintercomfort, Cambridge's only day centre providing year-round support to homeless and vulnerably housed individuals.

How Wintercomfort helped Lee find work and stable accommodation after financial ruin left him on the streets.

Lee found himself homeless in Cambridge a year ago after the pressure from having to finance an expensive family court case caused his businesses to collapse. The resulting stress had pushed his mental health to breaking point. He speaks candidly about how quickly his situation deteriorated. "It was a massive domino effect really, I kept needing to pay the next round of court fees then I couldn't afford to keep the businesses running and it all just fell apart."

Despite suffering such an enormous setback and finding his livelihood in jeopardy, Lee was relieved to find much needed support from Wintercomfort and he was quick to tell me of the crucial role that the Wintercomfort community played in building up his self-esteem and stabilising his mental health through an extremely challenging time.

"I was able to come in every day and talk to the outreach team, and to know that that's there for you, that social interaction, then things don't seem so bad. Even what might seem like small things like having someone help me clean my clothes while I was homeless makes such a difference, it just takes some of the pressure away"

During his time at Wintercomfort, Lee was able to get connected with The Big Issue, which at the time operated out of Overstream House, and quickly made a name for himself as a successful salesman on the streets of Cambridge. "I've got three thousand people come and say hello to me every week!" he declares proudly.

Although his sales record is impressive, Lee is also keenly aware of the less tangible benefits that come with helping the homeless or vulnerably housed into employment. "There's so many people that I've seen just thriving once they're back in to work, it builds confidence, there's the social aspect of it and it really just helps you be able to come out of the circle of homelessness; if you've got a job, you've got some stability, not everyone's going to



be ready to work right away but to have that opportunity through Wintercomfort is really important"

From beginning as a street salesman Lee has been able to work his way up to main distributor for Cambridge after crowdsourcing two hundred references from his customers, and he can't wait to get started in his new role.

A year has passed since Lee was on the street in Cambridge, and with the help of Wintercomfort, his life has changed dramatically. Lee now has somewhere to live thanks to his taking part in a trial of the Housing First initiative, which aims to provide permanent housing for homeless people, as well as continuing his work for The Big Issue. He is now dedicating his time to championing the cause of the homeless and vulnerably housed in the local and wider community. He has a seat on the steering committee for the city summit on homelessness and was sent to The House of Lords to meet Lord John Bird, the founder of The Big Issue to discuss homelessness provision.

Despite these great achievements he remains humble. "It's all about people power" he tells me. His successes are "simply down to the support that people have shown him and given the same amount of help anyone would prosper, some people need a big kick and some need lots of gentle pushes but regardless, that support needs to be there and Wintercomfort are a big part of making sure that it is."

Words by Leon Blake Photo by Hazel Thompson



Sarah's welcome

Welcome to our latest Overstream News summer edition. The months pass so quickly

here at Wintercomfort and, while the summer season for many is a great time of year, homelessness continues. Last summer we saw our busiest ever day, so we are prepared for another busy summer season.

We were sad to see our Social Enterprise Manager, Rachel Newell, leave us in April as she moved to a new role at Kier Eastern as Corporate Social Responsibility Manager, no doubt a role she will excel in.

Rachel did an excellent job of managing Food4Food, our catering social enterprise and establishing Overstream Clean from scratch into a thriving enterprise getting our service users back into employment and training. I am pleased to report that Dominic Bowles has joined our team and intends to continue the growth and success of both our enterprises. A huge thank you to Rachel for all her hard work and success.

As I always mention, the quality of the services that we deliver is dependent on having high-quality staff and volunteer team members. We have appointed Gemma O'Shea to lead on supporting and training our volunteers – an absolutely vital part of our team here.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for supporting Wintercomfort, and I look forward to bringing you my next update in the autumn, which will be in a new format and with our new branding. We are preparing for challenging times ahead for our services and fundraising, as we continue to support our homeless community here in Cambridge.

Best wishes

Sarah Halls
Chief Executive

Wintercomfort and Homeless Stories project resounding success

H O M E L E S S
S T O R I E S

"Empathy not apathy" is the key message from the Homeless Stories project – a campaign that enables people who've become homeless to tell their own stories in their own words.

And the response was far from apathetic when Homeless Stories worked with Wintercomfort to produce three videos that hit social media with a bang gathering nearly 50,000 views in the last month and raising more than £1,000 for Wintercomfort.

I asked David Graham, one of the project's founders, what it was like working with Wintercomfort. He was quick to commend the bravery of the people he and his team interviewed, calling their stories "diverse, captivating, inspiring, heartwarming and heartbreaking all at the same time".

He also spoke highly of the Wintercomfort team, saying they were "a joy to work with" and that he hopes this is the start of an on-going partnership, which could mean more of the homeless community in Cambridge will have a chance to share their unique stories with the public.

It is this diversity of circumstances that is so striking, from Michael an ex-RAF serviceman of 12 years who, after being unable to get work, found himself sleeping on park benches and under bridges, to Lee, a business owner whose expensive court battle to see his son left him destitute. However, with Wintercomfort's help, he was able to become a regional distributor for The Big Issue. [Read his story in on the front cover]

It seems the truth these stories tell is that we are all only a few unfortunate circumstances away from great difficulty ourselves.

Homeless Stories and Wintercomfort are both funded by the Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales.

You can view all the videos on the Wintercomfort Facebook page or find them at <http://tinyurl.com/y23g5lrf>

Farewell to Rachel Newell

Rachel Newell our Social Enterprise Manager left Wintercomfort in April to take up a new role at Kier Eastern as Corporate Social Responsibility Manager.

She joined us in May 2012, originally managing Food4Food and our willow coffin-making business. Following the closure of the latter, Rachel rapidly established our award-winning social enterprise, Overstream Clean.

Overstream Clean, since it was set up in 2014, has thrived, with a large number of our service users regaining employment and access to training through the enterprise. In April 2019, the venture was listed in NatWest Bank's SE100 list, which details the top 100 Social Enterprises to watch in terms of social return and sustainability.

Rachel said: "I am sad to be moving on from Wintercomfort. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time working here. We have seen real growth and success in our social enterprises and I am very proud of all we have achieved as a team. It was time for me to take on a new challenge and I know that, with Dominic, both enterprises will continue to thrive."

Dominic Bowles has joined Wintercomfort as Business Manager. He brings a wealth of experience to the position and we'll be sharing more in the next edition of our newsletter.



Roll of thanks...

We welcomed the team from Nationwide in for a photo opportunity. The building society is funding our new Housing Adviser role for the next two years, so its £45,220 grant will be well spent. Thanks to all at Nationwide for their backing.

Well-supported coffee mornings at Smokeworks and Cambridge Chop House raised more than £500. We have another planned for 10th October 2019 at Smokeworks on Station Road – more on that in our next edition.

The team at Sepura in Cambridge raised a fantastic

£3,800 last year to support our work, a huge thank you to all the team there.

Our thanks also to Cambridge Concert Orchestra, which hosted a concert at Fitzwilliam College, raising more than £1,000 for our work. Thanks to everyone involved.

Fundraising coming up

Marking World Homelessness and World Mental Health Day on 10th October 2019.



Cup for Change



Once again, we will be calling on the Cambridge community to put the coffee on and support us by hosting a Cup for Change event. It could be coffee and bacon rolls with colleagues, elevenses with a friend, or you could even sacrifice your takeaway coffee one day a week and donate £2.50 a week to Wintercomfort work. We'll be sharing more on this on social media and our next newsletter.

wintercomfort.org.uk/donate

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Five minutes with Gemma O'Shea

Wintercomfort's new volunteer co-ordinator

Gemma O'Shea has joined Wintercomfort as volunteer co-ordinator; She is responsible for looking after our brilliant and vital team of volunteers who help keep our services running.

Tell us about your job. How long you have been with Wintercomfort and what you did before?
I've just started my new role. It's my job to support our volunteer team to help deliver Wintercomfort's welfare services and social, learning and work opportunities.

I've worked and volunteered in the charity sector for more than 10 years, previously working with volunteers at Hughenden Manor, a National Trust property in Buckinghamshire.

What is your proudest achievement in life so far?

Playing a part in setting up the Tithe Barn Trust from scratch. It's a small, local charity, entirely run and led by volunteers.

How do you spend your free time?

Trying to learn French on Duolingo, the free language app.

What is your favourite book/film/music?

Book – Chocolate Bible, Film – Amelie, Music – St Germain

Tell us something about you we don't know

I have a crazy, one-year-old working cocker spaniel called Flash.

What would you take with you on a desert island?

Dark chocolate and an acoustic guitar. I've never learnt to play, but I'd have time on a desert island.

What is your philosophy for life?

Do what brings out the best in you.

What is the best part of your job/role here at Wintercomfort?

The people. It is such a welcoming and positive environment. I believe that's one of the reasons why several of our volunteers have been helping here for many years.

What makes you want to work at Wintercomfort?

I want to contribute and make a difference to people's lives.



Cambridge Half Marathon 2020

We will be putting a team of 20 people together to run for Wintercomfort next year.

If you or any of your friends are interested to run for us the places are free and the minimum target to raise is £250. If you would like a place please email:

fundraising@wintercomfort.org.uk
Tel: 01223 518 140



Do you have a few hours to spare?

Volunteering at Wintercomfort is varied, rewarding and challenging. If you have a few hours to spare and you're interested to support our work, please get in touch with Gemma.

volunteers@wintercomfort.org.uk Tel: 01223 518 140 Email: Wintercomfort.org.uk/volunteering

Your donation really will change lives. wintercomfort.org.uk

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