

Shelters In England Turn Young People Away As Number Of Rough Sleepers Rise

Holly Udobang is packing the last bag: a sleeping mat, gloves, woolly hat, waterproof poncho, hand warmers. It's the sort of kit that teenagers might need for a Duke of Edinburgh trip.

5 But this bag is for young homeless people, to give them a fighting chance of getting some sleep on the streets of London. Holly and her colleagues at the New Horizon Youth Centre are packing them to give to the young people they now have to turn away every day, as an increasing number of emergency shelters shut their doors.

"Things are going backwards," says Phil Kerry, New Horizon's chief executive. "People come to the centre and we're not able to help them that day and they're going out on to the streets. That's a daily reality. There are simply not enough places for people to go, even in the winter."

10 This is the last kit bag because the 199 others that New Horizon bought for the winter have already been handed out, six weeks earlier than expected.

The number of rough sleepers in London had risen from 3,107 in March 2023 to 4,612 by December last year, according to data from Chain, the homelessness information network. More than a third are under 35.

15 There are broadly four kinds of people needing help, staff say, although a common factor is family breakdown brought on by the cost of living crisis.

"Some of them have quite severe mental health needs," says Udobang, who is New Horizon's counsellor. "Some have been kicked out of their family home because of their sexuality. We get a lot of people escaping gangs too."

James Tapper, in *The Guardian*, Feb. 2025