First Response, funded by Chestertons, is an innovative volunteer programme that locates people who are sleeping rough in London, enabling StreetLink and outreach teams to find them faster and offer them practical support to leave the streets.

First Response has now been in operation for nine months. Working across five boroughs, our team of fantastic volunteers have been out on 263 shifts, contributing 1,565 hours to locating people sleeping rough who are in need of assistance.

Homelessness is an emergency whatever the weather, but in winter and freezing weather, people are in even greater danger. This winter is the first time that First Response has been active during the colder months. Our goal was to help our Outreach teams to keep operating at capacity during this crucial period.

To prepare for this, we inducted our first Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) volunteer leaders. With feedback from our Outreach teams, these leaders were trained to self-manage shifts during cold weather periods, allowing us to put all efforts into getting people sleeping rough in from the cold.

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is an emergency response to prevent deaths of people sleeping rough during winter and is activated by local authorities when temperatures are forecast to be lower than 0°C for three nights, or in London for one night. St Mungo’s operate ‘Pan London SWEP’, providing a safe and warm place to stay for those who may otherwise be sleeping out in freezing temperatures.
Feedback from the Frontline:

As our Outreach teams entered the busiest period of the year, this offered a chance to reflect on the impact of First Response. We caught up with Colin from the Westminster Street Outreach Service who shared his experience:

“First Response was a new model and idea for the Westminster Outreach team to learn how to integrate into our existing shift patterns.

It has had two main benefits; firstly, in allowing us to respond to the very high volume of referrals in Westminster in a timely way, with the confidence that these sites are being investigated thoroughly. Secondly, in freeing up the team to target specific locations or have set target shifts that they otherwise wouldn’t be able to do.

As First Response has been a pilot project, it has also had the effect of making the whole team think about what it means to respond to a referral and what the best use of our resources are. Over the last year there have been many robust debates which have challenged preconceptions and I think helped us all develop as a team.

There are specific examples of where the North team in particular had to travel to the far reaches of our borough - where it can take more than half an hour to get from one client to another - that it has been very useful to know that First Response were out dealing with other busy locations such as the Strand or Victoria.

Since its implementation in April 2018, it has now become an established part of how we conduct our regular shifts.”

For more information:

If you would like to learn more about volunteering for First Response contact us by email at volunteerservices@mungos.org or by phone on 0203 856 6160

For more information about how we work with our corporate partners, please contact corporate@mungos.org