

StMungo's

Frontline

Winter edition 2026



“There’s countless places to look for people sleeping rough. We never give up on finding them.”

Page 4



“Being on the wet, cold streets for 16 years took its toll. Now, I’m finally settled.”

Page 6



A night on the frontline

Page 3



A new year can come with goals and ambitions. For St Mungo's, our mission remains: to bring people off the streets and give them the chance to rebuild their lives. Thanks to your support, we can help more people begin their new chapter, with a place to call home.

For people experiencing homelessness, this time of year can be especially tough, spending their days in cold, wet weather. Many wonder how they will get through the week, never mind the next 12 months.

But that's where our teams come in, to offer hope and an opportunity to live a happier life – away from the streets and bitterly cold temperatures.

In the first issue of *Frontline* for 2026, we look at the difference St Mungo's teams are making to people's lives this winter and all year round.

Step into a frontline worker's shoes on page 3, by getting a glimpse of what their cold nighttime shift can look like.

On page 4, our Reading frontline team share what it's like looking for people sleeping rough, and how persistence and tailored support can change a person's life for good.

There's also John, a St Mungo's client, on page 6. After 16 years sleeping rough, he explains how we've helped him escape the cold, damp streets and rebuild his life away from homelessness.

I hope you enjoy reading these stories and take away the message that, with your help, we can turn lives around. Thank you so much for your continued support.

Emma Haddad, Chief Executive, St Mungo's

Contents:

- P3 A night on the frontline
- P4 Meet our Reading team
- P6 John's story

A night on the frontline

St Mungo's frontline workers often take to the cold streets on night shifts, when they are more likely to find people sleeping rough. Step into their world, seeing the reality of homelessness and bringing people into safety.

10pm

We collect a list of people bedded down who had StreetLink alerts made for them, noting their description and location.



11:20pm

We've alerted a local St Mungo's emergency accommodation. We give Joe directions – he knows the area well and is ok to travel there alone.



11pm



He's called Joe and has been rough sleeping for a month. We tell him about St Mungo's and he accepts our help.

Joe shares how long he's been homeless and personal details, like his physical and mental health needs, so we can provide the right support.

10:45pm

There's a person sleeping in a shop doorway. We gently introduce ourselves and ask if he is ok, so as not to frighten him.

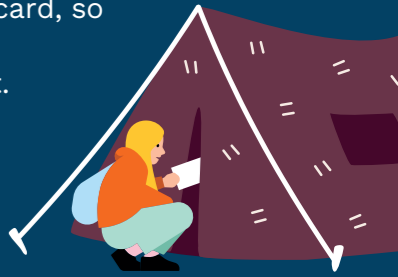


10:20pm

Time to leave, equipped with gloves, foil blankets, a first aid kit, assessment forms and other important items.

11:30pm

There's a tent pitched up – empty, except from a few belongings. We leave a calling card, so they know help is near if they want it.



11:45pm

We see people sleeping rough who are on our list and look out for others in more hidden spots. Not everyone wants to speak, and building their trust can take time.

3:30am

We're on 12,000 steps.

We've seen wildlife, street cleaners, dog walkers and milk deliveries beginning!



4am

Back in the office we write a handover to staff, updating them on who we've spoken to and helped.



5:30am

Time to go home and grab a bite to eat before bed, feeling grateful I'm able to warm up after a night on the streets.



“Life can take unexpected turns, leading to people sleeping on the cold streets. But we’re here to help.”

Before the sun comes up, our Reading frontline team are out in the freezing cold, searching for people sleeping rough. They share the process behind finding people, and how and they never give up on bringing them into safety.

Zoe

“I’m mainly office-based, processing alerts about people sleeping rough. They come in from StreetLink, local authorities and other agencies. Sometimes our clients will give a description of their friends on the streets.

There’s no barrier to telling us – we’re here to help anyone sleeping rough.

Part of my job is to work out where a person is bedded down. It can involve searching the area online, before giving the team directions on where to head to.

“Once a person comes in, it’s time to plan their onward journey – always with their best interests at heart and involving them in every decision.”

For some people, they have a lot of pride and don’t easily accept help. We gently work to break down that barrier. Life can take unexpected turns which send people into a spiral, and we want to make sure their future doesn’t involve a return to the streets.”



Phoenix

“When temperatures reach freezing, Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is activated. It’s all systems go to get more beds set up for people coming in.

We plan who’s going to visit each area and make sure we have enough cold weather SWEP packs. They include toiletries, foil blankets and some food. We also carry money to buy people hot drinks.

“The cold can kill people, so our priority is to bring them inside. The reality of what they go through is scary to think about.”

Doing this job means we’re always on high alert outside of working hours. I’ll be walking my dog and scanning for a tent in the distance.

There’s a lot of people I’ve helped who I’ll never forget. One was a lady, who was so young and had been sleeping rough for years. We got her into safety and after a lot of support, secured her a room in a shared house.

We went shopping for new bedsheets, which St Mungo’s got for her. She was so nervous about choosing the right thing – it was surreal to her. It reminded me why we do this: so she can experience the things many of us see as ‘simple,’ and finally have a place to call home.”

Louise

“We look for people on the streets, in tents, cars, bin stores and countless other places. I’ve mistaken a pile of rubbish bags for a person before. It was upsetting, that the two could even look alike.

When I first see a person, I’m not interested in their tenancy history, finances or any of that. I care about who they are – their needs and how we can get them out of rough sleeping.

We ask some questions like what brought them into homelessness, where they usually bed down, if they’re from the local area or have any health or substance use issues.

“If they accept our help, we can offer camp bed spaces at our Reading hub. It’s warm and there’s breakfast every morning.”



While they’re staying with us, we introduce them to a St Mungo’s support worker and link up with other local services: GP’s, accommodation providers and more. It’s like putting a puzzle together, so

we can find a solution to end a person’s homelessness.

Some people’s stories really stick with you. I once met a man who wouldn’t accept our help for several months. We’ll never say, ‘Ok we tried, that’s the end of that.’

I kept returning, and eventually he said, ‘I think I owe a large tax bill.’ He thought something terrible was going to happen, and his worrying escalated to the point he found himself on the streets.

After helping him inside and looking into the tax, he didn’t owe anything at all. It was bittersweet – it put an end to his homelessness, but he’d been suffering for nothing. It was a reminder that sometimes, homelessness isn’t the biggest problem a person has.”

“The wet weather was the worst – I'd be cold for days and couldn't warm up.”



Before John turned his life around with the help of St Mungo's, he slept on the streets, on and off for nearly 16 years. He shares his story of finding safety away from the cold and finally settling in a home that has no end date.

“My first experience of sleeping rough was back in 1979. I was living with my father in Scotland, and he passed away from a heart attack. He was a big drinker and in debt. One day, the people he owed money to came knocking.

I explained my father had died, but they wanted me to pay them. At that point I knew I needed to get out of the house.

“There were also a lot of gangs around, and I didn't want to be associated with them. So, I decided to pack my things and leave the area.”



I began drinking heavily around this time and found myself sleeping rough in London. But I'd travel to different cities too. It was me and my sleeping bag, going wherever I decided.

Extreme weather

Some nights, it would be freezing and chucking it down with rain. I'd be soaking wet and visit charity shops for replacement clothes. When you're cold, at least you can eventually warm up.

“But when it's raining heavily, it goes right through you. I would be damp and cold for days and get pains in my chest.”

Even spending one awful winter outside does your body no good – I've been out there, so cold and shivering for a long time.

Dangers of the streets

I'd keep myself to myself and not bother anyone, but even still, the streets were dangerous and there were times I felt unsure what to do.

A few times people kicked me, or came out of pubs drunk, acting unpredictable and calling me a 'tramp.' Some were nice though, buying me a hot drink, food and leaving me to sleep where I was.

Over time, you learn how to handle the streets a bit more. I found the best places to sleep, 24 hour cafés and where to get my hair cut!

Finding St Mungo's

I was on the streets in London 12 years ago when someone from a local charity told me about St Mungo's and said, 'I think they have somewhere for you to stay.'

“I visited the service, and it was an immediate 'yes' from me. It was time to settle down. I was shattered and all the years of being out there had taken its toll.”

St Mungo's has done a lot for me. Aside from having my own room and a warm bed, I get along with everyone here. The team have supported me with detoxing from alcohol and I'm happy drinking one or two beers now – I've cut down a lot.

They are here to help with anything we're going through, but don't tell us what to do either. I can still live independently, following my own routine. Things like doing my shopping and going for a coffee with my friend.



“Of course, things aren't rosy all the time and bad days happen. But when they do, I can go for a walk to think things through and know I have a home to come back to.”

I'm happy knowing that I could stay with St Mungo's for the rest of my life if I wanted, and that I'm no longer homeless.

On the streets time was ticking for me to move on, but not here. I really do enjoy my life now.”

John lives in a St Mungo's accommodation for people who have spent extended periods sleeping rough.

There is no fixed end date, and clients can stay for as long as it suits them. Our team provide ongoing support, while encouraging each person to maintain their independence.



Gifts in wills can help rebuild lives.

We know that becoming homeless doesn't happen overnight – it's bit by bit, as life unravels.

But leaving a gift in your will to St Mungo's can help provide the safety net someone is missing.

For every £10 St Mungo's receives in donations, £1 is from gifts left in wills. This generosity has a huge impact on how we help people and the range of services we offer.

Your gift can mean we provide more than a roof over someone's head: it's a support worker, mental health care, skills and job training. It can help us continue supporting people in need today and for generations to come. Because no one should face life's hardest moments alone.

After taking care of those closest to you, will you leave a gift in your will to St Mungo's? Your legacy can provide life changing help for someone when they need it most.

For more information, contact our Gifts in Wills team on legacies@mungos.org or 020 8600 3000. If you've already remembered St Mungo's in your will, please accept our heartfelt appreciation.

St Mungo's helped bring Lawretta into safety. You could help even more people start again.

Thank you for reading this edition of *Frontline*. We hope you enjoyed it. If you have any questions or feedback, feel free to contact us using the details provided.



StMungo's

Supporter Care team

Email: supportercare@mungos.org

St Mungo's, 3 Thomas More Square,
London, E1W 1YW

Registered Charity No. 1149085. Company No. 8225808
(England and Wales) Housing Association No. LH0279

Follow us on social media:

  @StMungos  @StMungosUK

If you would like to change your contact preferences or sign up to receive *Frontline*, please contact our Supporter Care team. Our privacy policy explains how we use personal information, for more details please visit: mungos.org/privacy-policy