

Why TV's Paxman decided to fight for the homeless

SOCIETY A life in chaos is closer than people think, he tells **Rob Virtue**

Many a politician or university student has felt the force of Jeremy Paxman's ire. But there's one group of people who bring out the former *Newsnight* presenter's compassionate side. A patron of homeless charity Caritas Anchor House, he revealed it was the "contempt" shown to those who have ended up on the streets that persuaded him to fight their corner.

"When people ask you to think about charities you've got a serious decision to make," said the 64-year-old. "I decided homelessness was for me. Most people are scared of homeless people because they think they're off their heads. There's contempt aimed at them from people who say 'I've got a roof over my head why haven't you?' But there's a very narrow distinction between the life most of us lead and one of complete and utter

chaos and it doesn't take much for it to change. It can be something like losing your job or falling out with your parents." Mr Paxman was speaking on World Homeless Day last Thursday at a House of Commons event organised by Anchor House, the charity based at Canning Town. The journalist and TV presenter has supported the charity since visiting in 2011. He said he was impressed by the support they offered those on the street.

"It all comes back to individual issues and the only way you can solve them is through individual decisions," he said.

"It's a sensible support system it offers and not namby pamby. It gives people the chance to get their lives back. Anybody on this journey is doing something much bigger than anything I've had to do."

The broadcaster is a regular visitor to the east London charity. And he is moved every time he visits the residents.

"I last went there a month ago and what most struck me was something very simple," he said. "I asked what they liked about the place and someone said 'it's great because they say good morning to you'."

"Imagine living in a world where people don't say 'good morning' just because you're homeless."

So does he make sure he says hello to homeless people in the street? "I try to," said Paxman. "But I'm sure I sometimes fail. We've just got to remember that we're all human beings."

"When I was growing up you didn't see homeless people or beggars but you occasionally saw tramps and if you were compassionate then you'd give them something to eat."

"The growth of homelessness is a distressing thing. Something is not working in the way we look after each other."



MATT BADEVOCH

Jeremy Paxman, above right, and Julie Etchingham, left, join VIPs and guests at the Houses of Parliament for a discussion about homelessness



Tell us about life in Anchor House
"I asked what they liked about the place and someone said 'it's great because they say good morning to you'."
Jeremy Paxman

Fellow broadcast journalist Julie Etchingham is also a patron of Anchor House, having first got involved with the charity around four years ago. She said it was a visit to east London and conversations with the residents

she found living there that cemented her support.

The charity has so far raised almost £10million towards a £15million extension to its east London facility - a complex of 25 studio apartments designed to help people in the transition back to independent living.

Ms Etchingham said it would be a fantastic addition.

"The charity helps homeless people receive the correct treatment and then puts them through a training process for job and life skills," she said.

"It holds their hand in the most supportive way."
Go to anchor.org.uk

Help us win votes for meadow plan

ENVIRONMENT

Rob Virtue
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A LARGE piece of urban riverside land in the heart of east London could be transformed into an area of woodland and a wild flower meadow under an ambitious scheme.

Mayor of London Boris Johnson and photographer David Bailey have backed the Cody Wilds campaign. And public support in a national competition could help it win £120,000 to move the plans forward.



Newham-based charity Gasworks Dock Partnership is behind the proposal for the 1,800sq m of land close to Canning Town and Bow.

Chief executive Simon Myers said: "We've got to get at least 60,000 Londoners to vote and beat the likes of Manchester and Liverpool. "We've just got support confirmed in the last 24 hours from Boris Johnson, who said he will tweet about it, and photographer David Bailey, which is fantastic news." The Cody Wilds site was built in the 1870s to hold gas and for chemical works. The competition runs until November 4. Vote at vote.growwilduk.com **Greening east London / Page 16**

Rich and poor must meet in the middle

INEQUALITY

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EAST London is financially strong but remains vastly unequal, according to a report released today.

Financial and business services are booming thanks to the success of Canary Wharf, according to the study commissioned by the East End Community Foundation. The area is also strong in education, arts, culture and heritage.

However, in equality, jobs, housing and the environment, the area is among the worst in the country. And perhaps most worryingly, child poverty is seen as "extremely high" in the East End affecting 42% of young people.

EECF's chief executive Tracey Walsh said more should be done to make sure residents received a dividend for living in a prosperous area.

"Lots of businesses on Canary Wharf have worked with us for many years to improve opportunities for local people. We just need to see more of them come on board so that we have a truly joined-up approach to tackling deprivation," she said.

"Coming together to tackle the

widening gap between the rich and poor really is the most effective way for businesses to support the community."

The research for the report, called *Vital Signs*, was carried out in connection with Queen Mary, University of London.

In conclusion the report said: "The picture of the East End is mixed with some indicators identifying urgent issues to be addressed but with others showing that the area is leading the way nationally."

"Perhaps of greatest importance to highlight are the inequalities in relation to outcomes for all of the themes."

"It is to be hoped that the next few years will see a focus of attention and resources on these inequalities so that they can be overcome, making the East End a fairer place to live."

The EECF was formed in 2012 following a merger between the Isle of Dogs Community Foundation and St Katharine & Shadwell Trust. It covers the City, Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham.

The charity has recently launched its 100 Club, which aims to get 100 people to donate £1,000 each. Half the money will be used immediately and half will be held back in a future fund. Go to eastendcf.org for details.



Tracey Walsh: More to do



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South Quay DLR (3 minutes walk)
Cross the foot, walk straight ahead past the car barrier towards offices and then up a narrow set of stairs in the corner to Astons Terrace.

Happy Christmas!

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