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Charity prepares for event

Children's charity SAFE@LAST is putting the final touches to preparations for its third annual BIG sleepout event due to take place this Friday 23rd October.

The charity is preparing for over 200 supporters that have agreed to sleep rough at Parkgate Shopping, Rotherham. The BIG Sleepout is an event that aims to raise funds and awareness to support the 4000 children and young people in South Yorkshire that run away from home each year.

SAFE@LAST is a registered charity that works in South Yorkshire with children and young people who are at risk through running away from home. The charity has been established for nine years and provides services including a 24 hour helpline, MISPER (Missing Persons) scheme run in partnership with South Yorkshire Police, preventative workshops and an emergency young person's refuge – the only one in England outside of London.

The charity receives very little statutory funding and is reliant on the generosity of the local community to continue its vital work.

Supporters taking part in the BIG Sleepout will be 'sleeping rough' on a car park with minimal comforts on what is forecast to be a cold October night. Supporters are aiming to have a taste of what sleeping rough is like for the ¼ of young runaways who feel that it is their only choice.

An example of a young person SAFE@LAST has helped 'Jenny* is 15 years old and has recently stayed in the SAFEPLACE refuge which is available for children and young people who are at risk from where they are running from or where they are running to. Jenny was introduced to our service through her 'drugs' worker. She had spent the previous months living with her girlfriend in a flat and they had survived by stealing, tattoo inking for money and occasional drug dealing. The relationship with her girlfriend failed and Jenny now did not have a roof over her head. The on-call Manager met with Jenny and after establishing that she fitted the criteria she was admitted to the refuge. The staff at the SAFEplace refuge worked closely with Jenny and her other workers and were able to make contact with her family. Jenny returned to her family by train a couple of days later. Without SAFE@LAST's involvement Jenny may have continued down the path of risky choices and may not have had anywhere safe to sleep. She also may not have been reunited with her family.' Jennys name has been changed to maintain confidentiality but the events are a true record.

SAFE@LAST patron, South Yorkshire Police Chief Constable Med Hughes is taking part in the BIG Sleepout for the second year and said "The BIG Sleepout is a great event, and I'm pleased to again spend the night out with friends and fellow supporters to raise important funds for SAFE@LAST. It's great fun for us for a night, but reminds us just how grim life can be for young runaways, for whom every night can be cold, dangerous, and frightening. Supporting the BIG Sleepout can make a big difference to the lives of young people"

Also taking part in this years event is Joyce Thacker Strategic Director, Rotherham Children and Young People's Services who said "The annual BIG Sleepout for SAFE@LAST is such an important date in our calendar. It highlights the plight of children and young people who are forced to runaway from difficult situations in their lives and it keeps the issue firmly on the agenda. Please do everything you can to support this very worthwhile cause."

SAFE@LAST Founder Trustee Hilary Massarella said "We are pleased that the people of South Yorkshire have again taken this event to heart and agreed to forgo all their home comforts for one night in the hope that it will prevent a young person from having to experience the cruel realities of sleeping rough. We don't have as many people signed up for this event as last year and so the pressure is on for us to raise as much funds as possible with the help of those taking part. Please support us and those taking part. You can sponsor one of our rough sleepers online by visiting our website www.safeatlast.org.uk. Young people really need your support"

Those present on the night will also be able to watch an emotive interplay of music and movement that conveys the desperation, isolation and vulnerability of teenage runaways - a feeling that SAFE@LAST works to dispel, presented by IPDancers with choreography by Igor Strukov.

Ends

PRESS CALL

- Photographers and journalists are welcome on the night of the BIG Sleepout at 9.30pm when photo and interview opportunities will be available.
- Supporters will be arriving between 8pm -9.30pm.
- Photos taken by the charity will be available after the event.
- Please confirm if you will be attending to clare@safeatlast.org.uk

EDITORS NOTES

- The BIG Sleepout was officially launched by the The Mayor of Rotherham, Councillor Shaukat Ali, accompanied by the Deputy Mayoress, Miss Wajida Naseem on July 4th 2009.
- The BIG Sleepout event will be taking place on October 23th 2009 at Parkgate Shopping Rotherham
- It is estimated that 78,000 children and young people run away from home each year with nearly 4000 of these incidences taking place in South Yorkshire. *Smeaton and Rees, Running away in South Yorkshire*
- Research has shown that 1 in 4 young people who runaway end up spending at least one night sleeping rough. *Smeaton and Rees, Running away in South Yorkshire*
- Young people who run away are often in danger from where they are running from or too and spending a night on the streets is never a safe option but for some young people it seems like the only choice.
- SAFE@LAST is a registered charity working with young people who have run away from, or have been thrown out of, the place where they usually live.
- Young People that need help can contact SAFE@LAST on their 24hour helpline by calling 0800 335 SAFE.
- People wishing to support SAFE@LAST can contact the charity on 01909 566977 or make a donation via the website www.safeatlast.org.uk

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