



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 27.10.08**

## 261 Sleep rough in Rotherham so children don't have to

Children's charity SAFE@LAST is celebrating after the third BIG Sleepout event was a huge success.

The event took place on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> October when 261 people braved the cold and wet to sleep rough at Parkgate Shopping, Rotherham 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 'slept rough' on the car park with minimal comforts through typical October temperatures and rain in the early hours to get just a taste of what the experience might be for a young runaway who has no choice but to sleep rough.

SAFE@LAST patron, South Yorkshire Police Chief Constable Med Hughes took part in the event and said of the experience "I was lucky. I had warm clothes, and family with me. A runaway child may have neither. They have constant fear, loneliness and boredom instead. And it's easy to stay out for a night when the morning brings a warm house, dry clothes, and a meal. It's harder when daybreak brings more rain and nothing else"

Also braving the cold and wet was Joyce Thacker Strategic Director, Rotherham Children and Young People's Services who said "I arrived late to the BIG sleep out as I had been to a dinner beforehand so actually felt quite alone as all the others sleeping out had settled down for the night into groups. I had to think where best to sleep as I was on my own, where best to keep myself safe - to be near others but not intrude. I thought this was how a young person might have felt, scared, vulnerable and very lonely. I had no hesitation in sleeping out for one night to raise awareness of runaways – I had somewhere warm to go back to, with family, and people who care about me. If I was twelve years old – sleeping rough must be one of the scariest things ever."

SAFE@LAST Head of Operations Mark Smith said "We had a fantastic turnout at this years BIG Sleepout and exceeded the number of people that took part last year. Our thanks goes to all those that have supported the event including all the brave people that slept rough and the organisations involved in making this event such a huge success like Parkgate Shopping, Rotherham. The challenge now is for all those who took part to collect their sponsorship money so that we can continue to provide essential services for vulnerable

children for whom sleeping rough isn't a choice but a necessity. I also want to urge the public that it's not too late to sponsor those involved and anyone wishing to do so can find more details on our website [www.safeatlast.org.uk](http://www.safeatlast.org.uk)."

## Ends

### EDITORS NOTES

- Photos are available to accompany this release. Please contact [clare@safeatlast.org.uk](mailto:clare@safeatlast.org.uk) for copies.
- 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.
- 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](http://www.safeatlast.org.uk)

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