

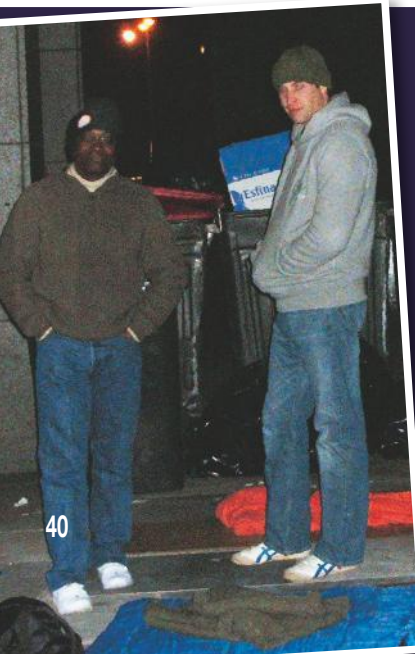
'You'll never get a better chance to crack homelessness'



Prince William listens to the experiences of those who use the drop-in services at Garden House in Peterborough



William spends a night sleeping rough on the London streets in December 2009 (left). The experience has given him some understanding of the problems that homeless people face, but it was his mother Diana who made him passionate about the cause, taking him and his brother Harry to shelters from a young age (above)



SUPPORTING A CAUSE CLOSE TO HIS HEART THE DUKE OF CAMBRIDGE HEADS TO A DROP-IN CENTRE AND TELLS WHY IT IS TIME FOR A SOLUTION

Prince William once slept rough near London's Blackfriars Bridge to raise awareness of homelessness, and has been a fierce supporter of charity Centrepoint since his mother the Princess of Wales took him there as a boy. Last week, during a visit to a Peterborough drop-in centre for rough sleepers, he told of his hopes that the Covid-19 pandemic would help end the problem of homelessness.

Speaking at Garden House, a support facility provided by Light Project Peterborough, the Duke of Cambridge said the UK should seize the opportunity to rehouse people permanently, with initiatives during the pandemic offering solutions to homelessness. "You'll never have a better chance nationally to crack homelessness and do something properly," he said.

SEIZE THE MOMENT

Thousands of rough sleepers across Britain, including 130 in Peterborough, were temporarily rehoused during lockdown through a Government campaign. The Duke said he believed that in New York officials were buying hotels to house homeless people because tourism levels had dipped. "So there's opportunities here, there really is, to do this and we've just got to be a bit brave and a bit bold to get it done," he said.

The 38-year-old chatted to recipients of the centre's support, sharing a laugh with Gary Griffiths, a rehoused 55-year-old roofer who was living in his truck for six weeks before lockdown. When asked by Gary if he had lost weight – much to the amusement of the group – William replied:

"Around the jowls maybe, have lost a bit of weight up here, around the chin? Maybe lockdown hasn't been quite so [bad]."

Gary said the Prince also shared with him his unusual choice of hangover food following a heavy night. "I said: 'You need a bit of pie and mash in you, fatten you up a bit,' and he said: 'Don't. I ate jellied eels on a hangover, after a bender,' which I thought was quite good – at least he's human," he said.

Tackling homelessness has been a lifelong project for Prince William, who as a child would join his brother Prince Harry and mother visiting services provided by Centrepoint. Following in Diana's footsteps, William was appointed the charity's patron in 2005. Four years later, in December 2009, he spent the night sleeping on the streets of London to understand the challenges faced by young homeless people better.

Last week the Duke also highlighted another issue close to his heart – to end the illegal wildlife trade, a commitment he made in 2014. In a webinar with the Unite for Wildlife Taskforces and leading wildlife experts, he cited public health risks and the threat of zoonotic diseases – illnesses transmitted from animals to humans – as reasons to act. "Right now, there is a real chance to ensure that the urgent steps that the world must take to prevent future zoonotic disease pandemics are designed in a way that also helps to eradicate the illegal wildlife trade," he said, adding that global organisations have "a crucial role to play".

REPORT: EMILY STEDMAN