Helping at Crisis Christmas

Bianca is a senior dental nurse who volunteered in the Dental Service at Crisis Christmas for the first time in 2008.

When I first heard about the Dental Service at Crisis Christmas I wanted to give it a go, as it sounded so rewarding. I signed up in 2008 and was thrilled to be given three days of volunteer work!

I went to the induction meeting where a Crisis team explained how the week is run, what to expect and they also went into what it means to be homeless and the reasons why people are homeless.

I had never worked with or been in contact with homeless people before. I was one of the many people who offers a pound here and there and the most I'd ever done for a rough sleeper was give them a cup of hot chocolate on a freezing night.

Admittedly, I was a little daunted by the idea of coming face to face with these unfortunate people whom we see every day across London, and who seem ignored by our society.

When I turned up on that first chilly morning, I was immediately affected by the warmth of the place. It was buzzing! There were people everywhere – holding steaming cups of tea and coffee, engaged in wholesome conversations and having a good laugh. I couldn’t tell the difference between the guests and the volunteers. Although the building had been set up only a couple of days before, it seemed that this was an old meeting place for good friends.

Our first patient was a young man from Lithuania who was extremely polite and grateful. I wished all my patients to be like him! Another patient was a young professional man who had come to London on a working holiday and lost his job and couldn’t find another. He soon became homeless. Another still, was a gipsy who had great travel stories to tell and made everybody laugh.

The dentistry was carried out in fully equipped vans which weren’t much smaller than some of the surgeries I’ve worked in. We also had heating and a steady supply of chocolate to keep up our energy levels! We were parked next to the makeshift kennels, where guests’ dogs were having a Crisis Christmas of their own. They were bathed, fed and given a thorough workout and barked their appreciation regularly. I went in to visit the dogs several times – they were so cute!

We all worked hard but had plenty of time to sit down and have a chat with the guests and other volunteers and share stories. It was a great opportunity to meet new people. At the end of the three days I wished that my day to day work was as much fun as this.

If you’re interested, don’t hesitate to give it a go! Go to www.crisis.org.uk/volunteering. We love meeting new volunteers.

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