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, engrossed 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 a couple of 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.