



PRESS RELEASE

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**RUNCORN SHOPPING CITY'S NATIONAL
GROUND-BREAKING CHRISTMAS PROJECT
FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE**
Heart-warming, uplifting Xmas story

Hundreds of homeless people across the North West will be warmer this Christmas, thanks to a ground-breaking community project by a Runcorn shopping centre.



Shopping City converted an empty shop unit into a reception centre to take in donations of duvets, blankets, coats and other clothing, which will not be sold but distributed direct to the region's many homeless people.

Working closely with local radio station Wire Fm and homeless shelters, Halton Lodge (Runcorn), Room at the Inn (Warrington) and Brennan Lodge

(Widnes), Shopping City Runcorn ran its *#Warm the Streets* campaign for four weeks in the lead up to Christmas.

The big-hearted folk of Runcorn, Widnes and Warrington donated more than 60,000 items of bedding or clothing in a unique venture, which has been so successful other shopping centres around the country have pledged to copy next year.

Shopping City manager Karl Clawley said: “We have been blown away by the generosity of the local community. Halton is one of the most deprived boroughs in the country but that doesn’t stop local people having big hearts.

“The response has been amazing. Someone came in with 300 spare sleeping bags and local Tesco distribution centre community manager David Coleman happened to be walking past and offered us the services of his staff to pack and sort all the donations.

“The fact that homelessness is such a major issue is absolutely shocking in the 21st century. Many of the safety nets that used to be there have disappeared and people are losing their homes due to unemployment, relationship breakdowns and mental health issues. It’s a heart-breaking situation.

“We originally set out to help our own local community but the response has been so amazing that we will be working with homeless people and charities all over the North West, particularly in the bigger cities where the situation is more acute.”

The ‘#Warm the Streets’ shop opened on 19 November and received thousands of donations until Monday 17 December, when everything was packed ready for distribution.

Helping out from Tesco’s Widnes distribution centre were several young adults who have all been affected by the devastating impact of homelessness.

32-year-old Arron Jones was taken into care, aged only four, due to drug problems in the family and was without a stable home for most of her youth. She said: “I know what it’s like to experience that constant fear of losing your home and feel like you are beneath everybody.”

Her colleague Aaron Haydock, 27, also found himself on the streets for about six weeks due to a breakdown in family relationships when he was 19. “I was locked out of my house and given an hour to collect my belongings and go. As a young single man, you are bottom of the heap when it comes to getting help, so I was bed-hopping with friends and on the streets for a month and a half before I managed to get a part-time job and slowly pull myself up. Homelessness can happen to anyone.”

For more information about community projects at Shopping City Runcorn, check out the website: www.shopping-city.co.uk.

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