OUR STORY

Under One Sky (UOS) is a volunteer-led initiative that has supported more than 4,000 people living on the streets of London since 2012. Founded by Mikkel Juel Iversen, we’re active in Cambridge and Madrid, with plans to expand to Manchester, Brighton, Bristol, Paris, and Berlin.

As a not-for-profit organisation, our work relies exclusively on private funds, and we spend those donations on supporting homeless people directly.

UOS volunteers distribute support packages with food, clothes, toiletries, sleeping bags, gift cards, books, and messages of hope & light, to people living through very dark times. The gift cards are used to buy tents, winter clothes and other necessities.

Our mission is to meet homeless people with a spirit of compassion, and a genuine desire to connect and create a feeling of belonging in our world today.

UOS was founded on the principle that humanity is one large family. We are all connected, regardless of our nationality, race, religion, or any other label.
A CITY PREPARING FOR LOCKDOWN

On Sunday 22nd of March, the day before the UK was officially put under lockdown, a group of our volunteers walked from Waterloo to Charing Cross with food and other essentials. We wanted to hear directly from the people sleeping rough on our streets, the friends we have got to know since we founded UOS eight years ago.

We saw an acute deterioration in their wellbeing, their basic needs for food and water were no longer being met. Workers and tourists were already staying away. The atmosphere in Central London had markedly changed, to one of fear, aggression, and desperation.

Within 200 meters of our starting point, we met more than a dozen men and women who were visibly frightened and starving and afraid. They told us different versions of the same story. They were hungry, because of Covid-19 the few passers-by were reluctant to approach them with donations. Emergency soup kitchens and food banks were reducing services, or closing all together. With most businesses shut, they did not even have cardboard to sleep on.

This was before the Government’s ‘Stay at Home’ campaign had been launched. After lockdown was announced the situation could only get worse. Which it did.
COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Despite the Government’s pledge on the 26th of March 2020 to house all rough sleepers, our outreach in London suggests that the numbers of newly homeless people in the capital has risen, as their living conditions deteriorate.

In response, Under One Sky has partnered with several other organisations, including Stories for Change and Action4London, to support people on the streets.

On the 2nd of April 2020, we launched a nightly food ‘outreach service’ providing hot food and drink to rough sleepers around Victoria, Kings Cross, London Bridge, Soho and the Embankment. In almost all the cases, this was the only meal the homeless people receive in the day.

To date (15th June) we have served over 20,000 evening meals. With new funds coming in, we have launched a new breakfast service, and are also providing clothing, toiletries, sleeping bags and mobile phones.

Amrit Maan, UOS Partner
Owner, Punjab Restaurant, Covent Garden
During April our teams felt deeply frustrated because the general public seemed unaware of the realities for people still living on the streets. The media was widely reporting the Government’s line, that most homeless people were now housed in hotels and hostels, and that homelessness was now ‘fixed’.

We knew this simply was not true, and that some of our friends were in real peril. We were acutely aware that the number of ‘the newly homeless’ people was rising.

Every day, we found more people in this position. There seemed to be a direct correlation between this new influx of people, and the fact that so many in the hospitality industry had lost their jobs, plus their income overnight. These individuals were simply in no way prepared or equipped for life on the streets.

It became Under One Sky’s mission, to ensure that this chronic situation was properly reported by the media. A breakthrough came when Amelia Gentleman, the award-winning journalist for The Guardian came out on the streets to report on our progress. Her subsequent article completely changed the game, and the narrative, bringing not only the attention of the media, but also financial support for our homeless family.

48 hours after publication, we had received donations of over £70k, and over 500 requests from new volunteers, meaning we can now achieve so much more to help our friends.
'London is so strange and sad': the sacked hospitality workers sleeping rough

Homelessness charity says it has 'never witnessed a more distressing situation' than during coronavirus crisis

- Coronavirus - latest updates
- See all our coronavirus coverage

Homelessness

More than 90 percent of rough sleepers have been offered safe accommodation within the last month, the Local Government Secretary said today - describing them as particularly vulnerable to Covid 19.

But Channel 4 News and the Bureau of

Many hospitality workers in London have been forced to live on the streets as the closure of businesses due to coronavirus has left them unemployed and unable to pay rent.
Coronavirus: Meet the EU nationals left homeless and hungry by London's lockdown

By Luke Hanrahan & Mary Colombel • 06/05/2020 • 19:40

"I worked in a restaurant, I lost my job and I couldn’t afford my rent."
GETTING INVOLVED

In one month from early April to early May 2020, UOS served more meals than we had done, in total during the previous eight years.

The huge logistical effort of cooking and distributing food to 300 plus homeless people every night, is made possible purely by private donations and an army of volunteers. Our work on the streets has been a lifeline for hundreds of men and women who live alone and abandoned on London streets.

As restrictions ease, and regular homelessness services reopen, we are looking at more ways we can continue to support our friends with empathy and compassion.

We’d love to hear from you if:

• You would like to donate funds or essential items for distribution
• You would like to donate a high-value item, experience or gift to be included in our online charity auction, launching July 3rd 2020
• You have skills which you would like to offer to support our efforts
• You are a business and would like to discuss corporate partnerships and activities

We want to live in a country where people have enough to eat and a safe place to call home.

Brian Whiting & Team
May 2020
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JULY 3rd CHARITY AUCTION

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UOS Volunteers, Embankment  
May 2020
THANK YOU