

Still there helping Friday revellers

Prepared for anything, a group of selfless volunteers give up their Friday nights to help vulnerable people on the streets of Windsor.

The Street Angels started out with 12 members five years ago and now the group boasts 26 members.

Dedicated volunteers are out in the town centre every Friday night but, with more volunteers, they are hoping to provide the service on Saturday nights each week too.

Group co-coordinator PCSO David Bullock has been with Thames Valley Police for nine years and set up the group after seeing a demand in Windsor.

On a 'bitterly cold' February night in 2012, the group took to the streets for the first time.

That night, they discovered a man sleeping in a phone box by Windsor and Eton Central Station; he had lost his wallet and jacket and was freezing cold.

"Obviously he could fall victim to the elements or if someone wanted to take advantage of his situation," said PCSO Bullock.

He was looked after by the Angels, who made sure he was able to get a train home.

This first night set the tone for the next five years and the Street Angels play an important part in Windsor's night-time scene.

Talking about why he set up the group, PCSO Bullock said: "Seeing that there was the need for something to be put in place to help vulnerable people and take pressure off the emergency services.

"It has been a success and that all comes back to the fact that we have such dedicated and committed volunteers that want to give back."

Best known for handing out flip flops and lollipops to worse-for-wear revellers, their work goes beyond this.

PCSO Bullock does not go out with the Street Angels himself but briefs the group at Windsor Baptist Church every night they go out.

Part of the briefing focuses on vulnerable people, including homeless people, who the group help on a weekly basis.

When I went out with the group on Friday, February 24, their fifth anniversary, they talked about a young homeless woman they had met the week before.

They had her name and were concerned about her safety so were looking out for her again.

There were enough volunteers to split into two groups on Friday and have patrols on Saturday as well. Within two



IN THEIR recognisable royal blue jackets the Windsor Street Angels have become an integral part of the town's night-time economy. Five years since starting out, the group is going strong, with a steady intake of volunteers ready to do their bit. **Tara O'Connor** reports



minutes of leaving the church in Victoria Street, the volunteers came across a homeless man in the doorway of a Peascod Street shop.

The volunteers knew him by name, as they had first met three months ago, and stopped and chatted for a while before giving him a cup of hot soup and bread roll.

In the first couple of hours of their work before the streets got livelier with clubbers, they took the time to speak to vulnerable people in the town centre.

"The volunteers can give that bit of meaningful compassion and light-hearted conversation," PCSO Bullock said. "What is lovely now, five years on, is the An-him by name, as they had gels are part of the fabric of the nighttime economy."

After spending a couple of hours with the Street Angels, recognisable in their distinctive royal blue jackets, it is clear how much people appreciate the work the group does every week.

Nothing is too much for the group, even bending down to sweep up broken glass from the street.

Outside the arches in Goswell Hill, the volunteers stopped to talk to a group of girls in the smoking area. They thanked the Angels for what they do, calling them 'amazing people'.

Another young woman who saw the group sweeping up broken glass insisted on donating money to the cause.

The charity relies on donations and is part of Windsor Christian Action, which includes the Windsor Homeless Project and FoodShare.

Training provided by the Street Angels includes first aid, autism awareness and conflict management.

People who are interested in joining can arrange to go along as an observer to see what a typical night entails.

PREPARED for any-

Street stalwarts

THE longest-serving Street Angel Martin Shea, 56, was there on the group's first night. He is a regular on the night-time patrols, even coming back to volunteering six months after he suffered from a stroke two years ago.

The group carries a portable defibrillator with them, a project Martin is passionate about. He said he has already used a defib to 'get four people back' in the Peascod Street area.

Another regular volunteer James Kipper, 25, from Maidenhead, has been with the group for more than a year and a team leader for six months.

As well as being a Street Angel, he is a community responder and a Thames Valley Police cadet leader.

"Every night is different," he said. "We have had a couple of times where we have called an ambulance for a serious head injuries and I dread to think what would have happened if we were not there."



HAPPY TO HELP: Volunteers at Royal Ascot in 2015.

Angels at the races

IN A typical year, the Windsor Street Angels help more than 4,000 people.

They would typically distribute 1,000 pairs of flip flops, 600 bottles of water, make 47 referrals to other agencies and calm down 73 situations.

As well as patrolling the streets on Friday nights, they can also be seen at Royal Ascot.

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DEDICATED: The volunteers ready to head out on their fifth anniversary on Friday, February 24.

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