



St. Nicholas House,
Cove Street, Cork.
T 021 432 1166



Mr. John Sample,
1 Sample Street,
Sample Town,
Co. Sample.

“I’ll never forget the cold. The unbelievable cold. The worst thing is when it rains, because you have no way of drying yourself or warming up.” Joe, 55

November 2011

<Salutation>, please will you help someone like Joe through the cold winter ahead with a generous Christmas gift of €<Ask1>?

Dear <Salutation>,

Have you ever walked through Cork City on a cold winter’s day?

If you have – you’ve felt the chill bite of the wind blowing in off the harbour, up the Lee and over Patrick’s Bridge.

Some mornings, it’s enough to sting your face raw.

Like myself, you would probably have thoughts of a warm room and a hot cup of tea or coffee to keep you going. But not people like Joe. Can you imagine what it must have been like for him, living homeless on the streets of Cork City at Christmas time?

<Salutation>, you’ve given so generously to support our work before — so I’m sure you’ll understand why I’m writing to you today. It’s because people who are homeless this Christmas desperately need our life-line services like the Soup Run and our Emergency Shelter . . .

Please will you send a gift of €<Ask1> today to help us give someone like Joe a hot meal on a cold day, shelter from the harsh elements, and the promise of better times to come?

Better times . . .

Please continue...

If you could have seen Joe when he first came to our shelter last Christmas —you'd have been looking at a man who believed better times were a thing of the past.

When asked how he felt when he first realised he had no money and nowhere to go, he simply said . . .

“I couldn’t understand it. I’d been in a relationship for fourteen and a half years. And I’d always had work. I just couldn’t understand how this had happened to me.”

Of course, there are reasons. There are always reasons.

For Joe, the biggest factor was that he was an alcoholic. But at the time he became homeless — he was still in denial. He worked hard. And he drank hard. But Joe didn’t believe he had an alcohol problem.

“Drinking was just a part of life. I was a builder. It was the done thing to go for a few pints after work. Bed to work . . . work to pub . . . pub to bed. That was my life.”

While the money was good, Joe was just about able to hold things together. But his long-standing relationship with his partner, Ann was beginning to suffer. She knew Joe had a problem. . . but he wouldn’t listen.

And then when the recession bit — everything fell apart . . .

“When the building work dried up I lost the plot. I went drinking all day. Even though I wasn’t earning, what I had went over the bar. I didn’t know how to go about claiming benefits — I’d never signed on in my life. All I’d ever done was work.”

<Salutation>, you can probably imagine what happened next.

With no source of income, and his alcoholism taking all the money he had left for drink — it was only a matter of time before Joe’s already strained relationship deteriorated beyond repair.

Things came to a head about eight weeks before Christmas last year, when Ann finally asked him to leave. Joe doesn’t blame anyone but himself. But at the time, it was a huge shock to suddenly find himself with no job . . . no money . . . and no home.

What happened next is a source of great shame to Joe. It’s a period of his life that he would much rather forget, but he kindly agreed to let me share it with you.

This is some of what he said . . .

“I was sleeping under bushes and inside old cars, any place where you could throw the head down for the night.

I’ll never forget the cold. The unbelievable cold. I went to sleep in a churchyard one night and when I woke up I couldn’t move, I was so cold.”

The worst thing is when it rains, because you’ve no way of drying yourself or warming up. You go walking round town all day, purely and utterly freezing.

Please continue...

“You’re wrecked tired, maggoty dirty. You’re avoiding people that you know because you don’t want to be seen in the condition you’re in. You live in the shadows, hiding in corners like some kind of criminal. You get so that you don’t think there’s much lower you can go. But unfortunately . . . you reach a new low.

There was a laneway ran alongside an old building in town and I used to sleep under a bush down there. One night some fellas found me while I was sleeping. I woke up with them peeing on me.

There’s no way of getting rid of that. You’re stuck with it. There are thoughts that will always stay with me.”

Joe lived like this on the streets of Cork City for six weeks last winter in the run up to Christmas. You’ll probably remember how bitterly cold it was, with thick snow covering the ground for weeks on end.

During conditions like these health problems are a huge worry for anyone who’s homeless. Influenza and pneumonia are much greater threats to people who are homeless than to other people. Those who are already ill frequently become much worse.

Tragically, people sometimes die on the streets too. As you may well know, the average age of death for a man living rough on the streets is just 42 years.

And because of this added risk we always redouble our efforts to help everyone who needs Cork Simon at Christmas.

Last year you helped us do exactly that. Thanks to you and other Cork Simon supporters who donated so generously last Christmas — we were able to provide people like Joe with the things they needed most . . .

. . . a roof over their heads and a bed for the night
. . . a place to shower, clean up and wash clothes
. . . hot drinks and food three times a day
. . . speedy access to the health services they need urgently

And of course . . . the warmth of human kindness.

You helped us to achieve this <Salutation>. But we urgently need your support to succeed again this Christmas. Please will you help someone like Joe by sending us another generous gift of €<Ask1> in time for Christmas?

<Salutation>, you may be wondering why we didn’t come across Joe sooner. We asked him the same thing and he said simply: *“I was too proud to go.”*

“Eventually, I was marched down by a friend, because I was losing a lot of weight and looking pretty ragged. I was welcomed in by someone called Catriona. It was a great boost even just talking to her. All the insecurities I felt about myself and my situation went within the first hour of me being there.

The thing I most remember is the first hot meal. I got this big plate of spaghetti

Please continue...

bolognaise. Well, they must have been expecting me, because that's my favourite dish. It was a wonderful welcome."

That welcome changed Joe's life. Maybe it even saved it. He's had his ups and downs over the last year — but things are really looking up for him now.

The important thing is that all of this was only possible because kind-hearted Cork Simon supporters like you gave so generously last winter.

But what about all the other people who may find themselves homeless this Christmas, just as Joe did last year? Even as I write this letter to you there will be others – men and women, younger and older – going through the same kind of thing.

With unemployment running so high — it's happening more and more frequently.

That's why our Outreach Team go out regularly – doing all they can to link up with people who need our Emergency Shelter. And why our Soup Run goes out every night — in every kind of weather — providing hot food and tea, warm clothing, access to our services and a kind word.

But to make sure we're there for everyone who needs us this Christmas – we urgently need your support.

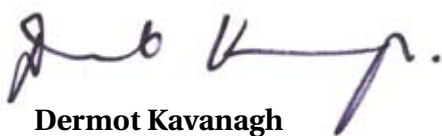
Please <Salutation> ... will you send a generous gift of €<Ask1> to help us provide life's essentials to people who have no one else to turn to this Christmas?

I really hope you can.

Thank you so much for reading my letter to you today. And, thank you for extending your kindness and generosity once again to someone who is homeless in Cork.

With my great appreciation and best wishes to you and your family this Christmas.

Yours sincerely,



Dermot Kavanagh

Chief Executive Officer, Cork Simon Community

P.S. Christmas is supposed to be a joyous occasion. But for people who are homeless, it's a terribly lonely and upsetting time. Please will you give €<Ask1> to help us provide shelter, sustenance and kindness to everyone who needs Cork Simon this Christmas? Thank you so much!