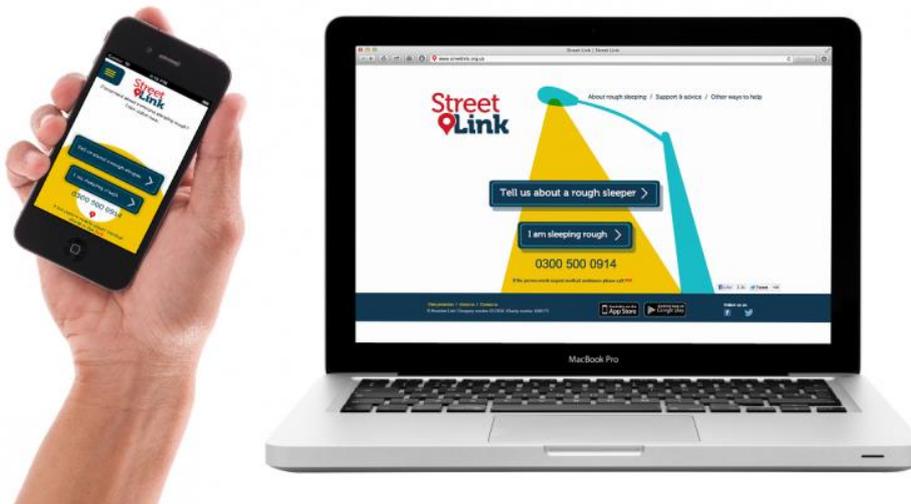


How you help people sleeping rough off the streets: how StreetLink works

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When you see someone sleeping rough in the street, what do you want to do? Fortunately, many people have an immediate urge to help – to support the person inside, out of the cold and into services.



That's why StreetLink was set up. It's a [national website referral service](#) that enables the public to alert local authorities in England and Wales about people sleeping rough in their area.

StreetLink is funded by grants from the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Greater London Authority and the Welsh Government and is run in partnership between Homeless Link and St Mungo's.

StreetLink acts as the link between members of the public or rough sleepers - who may not know where to turn for help - and local services. It is not an emergency service, but aims to connect those who do find themselves sleeping on the streets to services, accommodation and support.

Here's how it works in more detail – and also what it is not able to do.

Making a referral

Each day and night, a central team of around eight people, including four volunteers, answer calls and follow up website referrals from the public. In peak times, we can receive as many as 300 alerts per day.

When we receive a referral, the information is sent by email to either the appropriate local authority or the outreach team in that area to action.

Many local authorities have outreach teams, which are not managed by StreetLink, but by separate organisations. The outreach workers action these referrals by going out to look for people in the locations given at night, to hopefully assess and connect them into local support services where possible.

They report back to us with an 'outcome' within 10 working days, and, if requested, we send an update to the person who made the original referral. We do not go into personal detail, but will let you know whether the rough sleeper was either: found and supported, not found, or already known to services. This last case often means that outreach team are already working to support the individuals, but their needs might be more complex. If so, it may take longer to see a change in their circumstances.

Our volunteers

Our volunteers come from all kinds of backgrounds, and some have experienced homelessness themselves. [We're also looking for more!](#) We ask them to commit to four hours a fortnight - although many give more - and to take part in our training before they start. What do they get out of it? In the words of a current volunteer: "It's great to be part of a service that you know works, and which for many is the first step in helping people off the streets".

What we cannot do

As previously mentioned, StreetLink is not an emergency service, although local authorities and outreach teams aim to act on referrals as soon as they can. Response times vary from area to area, depending upon the resources available, but 2-3 nights is probably average.

Several areas do not have dedicated independent outreach teams. Where this is the case, we send the referral to the council's Housing Options team and ask them to let us know what they will be doing to follow up.

Sometimes we receive alerts expressing that someone appears to be physically or mentally unwell. In these cases, we may still make a referral but also advise the referrer to contact the emergency or non-emergency ambulance service, as they are in a better position to do so.

If the referrer does not leave contact details and we know the location of the person in need, our team would not hesitate to call for an ambulance or police. This also relates to cases where there are children involved and the referrer cannot be contacted.

Challenges

Sometimes, due to the high levels of calls, we don't have the capacity to answer immediately. That's why we ask you to use our website and app for referrals whenever possible.

To make sure rough sleepers can be found by the outreach teams, the StreetLink team need to know the exact location that people have been seen sleeping. For example, “I saw someone sleeping in XX Park. Enter the park via XX Road. Ten yards in is a toilet block. They are in a bush directly behind that block”.

In addition, we will always take the following into consideration:

Time: What time did you see them?

Outreach teams go out at night or in the early hours of the morning. If the rough sleeper is not seen by the referrer during these times it is unlikely that the team will be able to locate them.

Site activity: What was going on at the site?

Unfortunately, outreach teams cannot verify someone as rough sleeping if they are begging, and not actually bedded down. It is also often the case that if individuals are begging and sleeping rough, they will have a different sleep site to the one they are begging at.

The location: Where exactly are they?

From experience, exposed locations such as famous landmarks, ATM machines and busy pedestrian streets are not typically people’s sleep sites. It can be more dangerous than normal to sleep there and it is common for people to be moved on. Outreach are generally aware of these ‘hot spots’ and conduct regular welfare checks.

This said, if you do see someone asleep at night - regardless of location - please do not hesitate to inform us, so that we can contact the outreach team.

The end result

StreetLink works. Since December 2012, around 25,000 people have been connected to local services and over 4,000 have been found accommodation as a direct result of their referral to StreetLink.

Thank you to all who have used StreetLink or downloaded the app. Spread the word, and if you’re in London, please do consider [becoming a volunteer](#) for us.