



# Guardian Angel at Streetwork



The Brixton riots set off a panic wave up and down the country about gang violence and young people. Edinburgh's response in 1988 was to form a new 'detached' youth project to work with young people. Having secured funding from the local authority and the Scottish Executive, Streetwork was formally launched in February 1992.

Tam Hendry, Managing Director and Founder of Streetwork, explains what they encountered, "When we got out there on the streets, we found large numbers of young people hanging around the city centre bored and wanting to meet their pals. We also quickly discovered others in severe crisis, involved in crime, sleeping outdoors, involved in prostitution, underage runaways and injecting drug users."

Before long, Streetwork were giving emergency assistance to all ages of homeless people. Among these were 69 individuals, described as the "hardest-to-reach" people, with mental health, drink or drug problems, often deeply ingrained.



"The Rough Sleepers Service has played a major role in reducing the number of hard-core longer-term rough sleepers in the city from 69 to 15," says Tam.

The work of both the Youth Workers and the Rough Sleepers teams can be extremely hazardous. In the past, team members worked in pairs, supported by comprehensive procedures to ensure that everyone could summon assistance if required. However, this came at a considerable cost, involving 3 senior staff for a minimum of 14 hours every week. In addition, unavailability of staff occasionally resulted in the services having to be cancelled. "The users soon lose faith in the service when it becomes sporadic," explains Tam

Following a successful trial, 12 months ago Streetwork subscribed to BTS' Guardian Angel lone worker safety surveillance service. This allows lone workers equipped with a mobile to register their activity details and an expected finish time. Guardian Angel escalates details of the visit to colleagues if the lone worker fails to check in before the finish time, and allows users in direct physical danger to call an emergency hotline.

"The Guardian Angel service has cost Streetwork considerably less than we were paying in staff costs, and since we adopted Guardian Angel we have never had to cancel a shift due to a lack of safety cover. This has freed up the staff to do what they are employed to do," says Tam.

The Streetwork teams, with their Guardian Angels, are out there on the Edinburgh streets every night of the year, in all weathers, looking for the most vulnerable people and giving them crisis support, making sure they are safe and helping them to access emergency accommodation.

"Guardian Angel gives us peace of mind and re-assurance that we are doing everything possible to ensure that the Youth Service and Rough Sleepers teams are as safe as possible," concludes the Streetwork Administrator, Josie Soutar.

