

PRESS RELEASE  
Recycle Week  
24 – 30 September

## Formerly homeless Herts man asks for used furniture to help charity that saved his life

Robert's life spiralled into depression and self-harm following the loss of his son, before Emmaus Hertfordshire gave him a place to live and the support he needed to overcome his grief. During national Recycle Week (24 – 30 September 2018), Robert is calling on local people to donate their unwanted items of furniture in order to help more vulnerable people change their lives for the better.

In the past 12 months, the St Albans-based homelessness charity saved over 300 tonnes of unwanted furniture, including wardrobes, beds and three-piece suites, from going to landfill. Instead, the charity offers a free collection service for items in good condition, with five van crews out each day visiting homes from all corners of Hertfordshire. The collected goods are then sold in their six charity shops in St Albans, Tring, Hemel Hempstead, Harpenden, Hertford and Barnet.

Emmaus Hertfordshire offers an alternative route out of homelessness for 39 people within a supportive environment by providing a home for as long as needed and work experience in its social enterprise. Many of the people seen in the charity's vans or shops are formerly homeless individuals, known as companions, who are working hard to rebuild their lives following the stress of homelessness and social exclusion.

October will mark four years since Robert moved to Emmaus Hertfordshire: "Prior to me moving in, life was a struggle. Following the loss of my son, I spiralled into a state of depression that lasted 11 years – I felt angry at the world and began arguing with the people closest to me. I began to self-harm and found the cycle difficult to get out of. In an attempt to numb the pain of my loss, I began smoking cannabis and I lost control of my life. I ended up having nowhere to live, and slept on the streets in London, and in hostels when there was space.

"When I arrived at Emmaus Hertfordshire, the staff encouraged me to see counsellors, and I really needed that. I am doing much better now and the charity's support has given me a way to deal with my demons head on. My daily life in Emmaus revolves around driving the vans to collect generous donations from the public, working in the kitchen cooking for the other companions, PAT testing electrical goods so they can be resold in our shops, and serving customers which I really enjoy.

"My life is completely different compared to four years ago and I have even been able to help others in the position I once was. I regularly join others from Emmaus Hertfordshire on the monthly trips to Calais to transport items to homeless migrants, and I recently completed a 220ft abseil to help raise money to build new rooms in other Emmaus communities across the UK."

Robert is calling on local people to help the charity that gave him his life back: "The generous donations of furniture, household goods, clothing and much more helps us to support each other

and change our lives for the better. If anyone has items in saleable condition that they don't need, they can call us to book a free collection."

Tony Ferrier, Chief Executive at Emmaus Hertfordshire, said:

"We have five van crews out each day, visiting over 7,000 homes a year to collect items from a very generous public to be sold in our six charity shops. Many of the people seen in our shops and collecting donations from the public are people trying hard to rebuild their lives following the stress and isolation of homelessness. When someone donates to Emmaus Hertfordshire, it means that they are not only contributing to a local homelessness charity, but also doing their bit to reduce items unnecessarily sent to landfill."

Now in its 15th year, Recycle Week is a celebration of recycling, organised by WRAP under the Recycle Now brand. The aim of the week is to encourage the public to recycle more, by demonstrating the benefits of recycling items from all around the home. This year's theme is 'Recycling. We do. Because it matters.'

To book a free collection for unwanted furniture, please call 01727 817297 or visit <https://www.emmaus.org.uk/hertfordshire>

ENDS

For media enquiries please contact Stacey McDevitt at Emmaus on [stacey.mcdevitt@emmaus.org.uk](mailto:stacey.mcdevitt@emmaus.org.uk) or 07787522963

1 Photograph attached:

Robert Branson, Emmaus Hertfordshire companion

Notes to Editors

About Emmaus Hertfordshire

- Emmaus Hertfordshire supports up to 39 formerly homeless people by giving them a home, meaningful work in a social enterprise and an opportunity to regain lost self-esteem to help rebuild their lives.
- There are currently 29 Emmaus communities across the country, supporting more than 800 companions (formerly homeless people) in the UK. In addition there are four Emmaus groups, all of which are working towards setting up an Emmaus community in their area. Emmaus aims to offer 1,000 companion places by 2020.
- Social enterprise is central to the Emmaus model as it provides meaningful work for companions but also generates funding to maintain communities. Companions living in Emmaus communities are expected to sign off all benefits, with the exception of housing benefit, which is used to help to support the community. The rest of the funding that is needed is generated through social enterprise and fundraising.
- Emmaus communities deliver a significant return on investment. Research shows that for every £1 invested in a community, there is an £11 return, with savings to the benefits bill, health services and a reduction in crime reoffending.
- To find out more visit [www.emmaus.org.uk/hertfordshire](http://www.emmaus.org.uk/hertfordshire)

- <https://www.facebook.com/stalbansemmaus/>