

Boyhood dream comes true

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Security officers foiled gem raid

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WIN See England take on Denmark

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Firefighters battle blaze at car showroom

More than two dozen firefighters spent more than an hour tackling a blaze at a car showroom in Romford on Monday night.

Four fire engines and around 25 firefighters were called to a fire in the Glyn Hopkin Nissan car showroom and workshop in London Road at 7.56pm on Monday, February 17.

Eyewitnesses described seeing the London Fire Brigade (LFB) briefly close part of the

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road to tackle the fire.

Emergency services are believed to have been on-site for just under two hours.

An LFB spokesman confirmed one motor vehicle was destroyed by the fire and another was damaged. Part of the garage's workshop was also damaged by the fire.

There were no reports of any injuries and the fire was declared under control by 9.10pm.

Fire crews from Dagenham, Wennington and Ilford fire stations attended the scene.

The London Fire Brigade has confirmed the cause of the fire is currently under investigation.

The Metropolitan Police are not believed to be involved at this stage.

Glyn Hopkin declined to comment.

Soup kitchen success



Visitors enjoying food and hot drinks at the soup kitchen in the grounds of the Havering Islamic Cultural Centre in Romford Picture: KEN MEARS

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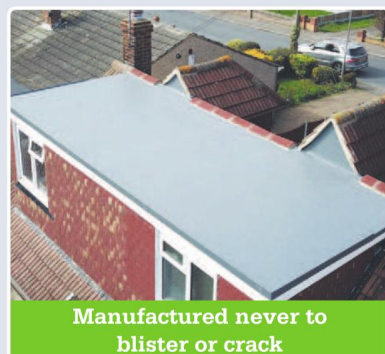
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NEWS

An amazing soup kitchen like no other helping those in need

When Tabby Hussein reached her 40th birthday, she wanted to do something to give back to the community.

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She secured a sheltered hut built by Havering Islamic Cultural Centre (HICC) in Waterloo Road, Romford, and she and Cheryl Simpkin, who had already started up her own kitchen in Romford, came together to run the Soup Kitchen at HICC.

"I was just so shocked at how many people I saw sitting in shop doorways when I was walking around in Romford. When you sit and talk to them, their stories are unbelievable," said mum-of-two Cheryl.

But this is not a soup kitchen like any other, the guests receive top quality restaurant meals, served to them at their table.

After the volunteers served everyone tea and coffee, they waited

patiently in their seats for what seemed like the main event.

Before long, a man in a trim satin blue suit, straight from waiting the tables at swanky Mangal Meze in South Street, came in with crates from his Turkish kitchen. They sell at around £14 a dish, of which he donates 50 a month.

"I do because it I really believe in helping the community," said Remzi Erdogan. "Being here makes you realise that people aren't just here because they can't be bothered, becoming homeless could happen to any one of us overnight."

The kitchen receives donations from a collection of restaurants around Havering - Hornchurch's

Tandoori Lounge, Poppin's Cafe, Dixy Chicken and Pizza Go Go - an eclectic rotating menu!

Among those enjoying a delicious Turkish feast were four army veterans, 20-year-old twin sisters, both recent mothers, and a mix of people living on the streets and in accommodation, but still living on a shoestring.

Kelly Jones, a Hackney native, found the soup kitchen while suffering a bout of homelessness, which occurred through a change in family circumstances. Now back on her feet, after an epiphany moment that led to her turning her life around, she still comes regularly to reduce her isolation.

"It's more for people in need, and I'm not always in need, and so I did taper off for a little while. But I missed the company of it and where I am it is only me, and my dog, and I don't get visitors or phone calls so, and so once a week, I come," she said, while batting off all the people trying to get her attention.

"It's nice to be able to get out, I was homeless myself so I can relate to a lot of people here," said Ian Kassmer, who also has now been rehoused but still depends on the kitchen at times. "We're lucky because other boroughs are quite bad for it, with few shelters and kitchens."

As well a shelter, a hot meal and company, organisers provide vital social support to anyone who asks for it.

"I've been recently been to the GP with her," Cheryl said pointing to a lady dressed in a sari, "making she gets everything she needs for her baby."

Tabby adds: "Yeah, just now Alex asked me for a reference [for a job] asking me to say how long I've known him and to prove he's never been abusive." The volunteers go out of their way to change the lives of the those who come to the kitchen.

Mitch Ryan, a volunteer from May and Baker Rugby Club which donates clothes and food, is taking on a 20-year-old to start at his asbestos specialist company. Only a few weeks



Cheryl Simpkin and Tabby Hussein



For Kelly, the soup kitchen has reduced her isolation dramatically

NEWS



Smiles all round for visitors at Havering Islamic Cultural Centre

Pictures: KEN MEARS



Army veteran Bernard Owen enjoys a meal and good natter at the Romford kitchen



Volunteers handing out food.

ago his new employee was sleeping in a bike shed.

Doing their bit to chip in, manning the second-hand clothes pile, secondary school students from the Royal Liberty school laugh and chatter with the guests.

Eren Bozacigurbuz, 15, explained: "When I started I was a bit nervous, I didn't

know what to do, why I was there. And literally after the third week, it was like a family.

"I didn't really understand why people are in the situations they are in - we need to understand that there are people who are in difficult situations and it's not always their

fault."

The soup kitchen at HICC is open 6pm to 7.30pm every Wednesday. Anyone wanting to donate or help out with the wonderful work the team are doing for the community is encouraged to contact Cheryl on the Facebook page,

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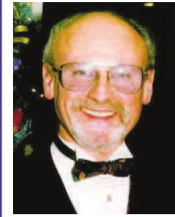
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