

Students sleep in the slums

About 70 young people from St Dominic's Sixth Form College in Harrow, north-west London, build shacks as part of Fair World Week



Anna and Iris in their 'slum' (Photo: Erica Penman)

About 70 young people from St Dominic's Sixth Form College in Harrow, north-west London, took part in a Fair World Week, co-ordinated by college chaplain Angela Clapham in response to the Pope's call for Catholics to be concerned with social justice.

Building and sleeping in their own improvised shacks, working at a soup kitchen and helping at a refuge for asylum seekers has given students from the college a taste of what its like to be hungry and homeless this week.

A team of 27 students and six staff abandoned home comforts to spend 24 hours living in a "slum" built from old pallets, cardboard and plastic sheeting and without luxuries such as running water, mobile phones or make-up. The experience gave the group a glimpse of what life is like for the billion people worldwide who live in slums.

Sinead, 17, said: “It’s difficult to live as they do and we haven’t even done it properly!”

Chandini said: “It’s made me appreciate what I’ve got right now.” For many of the group it was the limited diet of bread, rice and vegetables that had the biggest impact.

Daniel said: “I’ve never been so thankful for two slices of bread in my life.”

The normally energetic Kemi was subdued. “I was so hungry I didn’t care what I was eating. I think we take a lot for granted, like if we are hungry we can just go down to the shops to get food,” she said.

The group has raised over £2,000 in sponsorship which will go to two charities: Toybox, working with street children in Latin America, and Revelation Life, whose work is changing the lives of children in the slums of Uganda.

A second group of 20 students and staff swapped life in the classroom for an insight into a day in the life of a homeless Londoner.

Working with the community based at the London Jesus Centre they experienced at first hand Christianity in action and spent time serving food and listening to the amazing life stories of some of the Centre’s clients.

At the Catholic Worker Farm in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, Scott and Maria Albrecht share their home with 10 destitute female asylum seekers and their children.

College Principal Patrick Harty and a group of 10 students spent a day helping on the farm and seeing how this family live out Catholic social teaching through showing mercy and hospitality.

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