

Photography project aims to help homeless survive winter

By Kai Kong



The homeless artist, Richard Fletcher, and the founder of MyLondon, Raul Ryan. Photograph: Kai Kong

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A photography project is raising money for homeless people as winter looms. It has run a stall, selling greeting cards and calendars in an East London market since last week.

Since 2013, The MyLondon project has given 100 disposable film cameras to homeless people to take photos of the city every summer. The best photos are printed on greeting cards and calendars for sale.

The project received more than 2,000 photos taken by 85 homeless photographers this year.

The top 28 photos were printed as greeting cards, with 13 chosen for the 2024 calendar. They have been on sale at Spitalfields Market, East London, since last Monday.

The photographers can receive all the greeting card profits. Some of them are hired as vendors who can share half of the profits from the calendar sales to support their livelihoods, according to Paul Ryan, the founder of MyLondon.

“It’s not just about learning skills. It’s about connecting with people...a way that people can be supported as part of, like, a community,” Ryan said.

He has also helped seven other cities to set up their own project: Sao Paulo, Sydney, Budapest, New Orleans, Toronto, Brighton, and Mumbai.

Richard Fletcher, 63, a homeless artist who has taken part in the project for over seven years, said: "It's the only source of my income unless I'm selling my artwork."

The artist, who used to sleep in a railway station, can now pay for accommodation by selling these print products, keeping himself off the street for at least five days a week during winter.

His photo of Kensal Green Station, Brent was chosen as one of the best photos last year and was printed on the 2023 calendar.

"The graffiti was the main attraction, but we had people waiting on the platform...the lines of the track going out leading outwards...houses...a bit of nature... I'm trying to think of different things in one picture," he said, describing how he took his photograph. "I had to take it really quick because there was a train approaching...so I took it within like three seconds, real fast."

He said art is about more than making money.

"This job that I'm doing now, selling the calendar, is enjoyment because I've got a visual sense," he said, "art is my salvation. It's something that I am good at, whatever kind of discipline it is."