



# 24 hours of carols to help the homeless

By **Kevin Doyle**

MORE than 100 people will spend Christmas night sleeping rough in Dublin.

But a creative new initiative by the Dublin Simon Community hopes to raise €100,000 so that they can be given a Christmas to remember.

The charity is looking for hundreds of volunteers to sing their way through the longest night of the year in an effort to raise the much needed funds.

At least 12 choirs will be joined on Grafton Street by singers of all standards for the 24-hour 'carolathon'.

Paddy Casey, the Guggenheim Brothers, the Heathers and Mighty Stef are all expected to appear alongside the choirs at some stage as well as performing at a special benefit gig in the Button Factory.

The carolathon plan is to get groups of choirs singing through the shopping rush and overnight.

The jingle bells will begin at 12 noon on December 21 and continue without pause until 12 noon the next day.

Figures show that there are now 2,015 homeless people in Dublin. The majority stay in emergency accommodation at night.

But the accepted minimum number sleeping in the now

sub-zero outdoor temperatures is 111. And the real number is likely to be substantially higher because many homeless people are not found or do not want to be found by volunteers who work throughout the city.

Plans are now well under way to organise Christmas dinners around the capital for these people, but Dublin Simon's communications manager Lorna Cronnelly said financing is becoming a serious problem.

The organisation is currently operating with a budget deficit and needs to fundraise €4m a year just to keep service ticking over.

## INCREASE

"With the Longest Night campaign, we are hoping to say that when someone is homeless every night is long, even in summer," explained Ms Cronnelly.

"We have seen an increased demand this year, certainly compared to the first six months of last year," she added.

However, Ms Cronnelly noted that while the number of homeless people has remained steady during 2008, the organisation is expecting a jump in demand next year.

More information on the charity carolathon and Button Factory benefit gig can be obtained from the website [www.longestnight.ie](http://www.longestnight.ie).