

ACT business leaders rough it for charity

By Jacqueline Williams

The territory's second highest paid woman braved the icy temperatures overnight armed with nothing more than a piece of cardboard and a sleeping bag.

ActewAGL's general manager of retail Ayesha Razzaq said she took part to help her understand what needed to be done to help people whose only option was to "sleep rough". She said there was no excuse for homelessness in Canberra and the corporate community needed to get behind eradicating it.

"Tonight's just one night - at least I can wake up in the morning knowing I've got a bed to go to and somewhere to sleep," she said.

"I don't have to wake up thinking, 'I've got to do this all over again'. I'm in a fortunate position.

"Hopefully [it] will give me a really good understanding of what needs to be done to fix this problem."

Thousands of people in Canberra need homelessness support each year. And winter's freezing temperatures are a reminder of just how dangerous sleeping rough can be.

Ms Razzaq was among 155 other notable Canberrans who gave up the comforts of home last night in temperatures forecast to drop to two degrees to raise money for and awareness of homelessness.

Some participating in the Vinnies CEO Sleepout admitted to experiencing homelessness at some point in their lives. But the majority



AWARENESS: Louise Curtis, of Lollypotz, and Ayesha Razzaq, from ActewAGL, at the CEO Sleepout. Photo: MELISSA ADAMS

of those sleeping rough at the National Gallery of Australia overnight did so for the first time.

Canberra businesswoman and director of Lollypotz, Louise Curtis, said she was excited about participating in the sleepout for the first time.

"There is a lot to be achieved - not just raising money but raising awareness about homelessness," Ms Curtis said.

"This year in particular the plight of homeless women has been brought to my attention. I'm a businesswoman, I'm an advocate for

businesses with women, and all my franchise owners are women, so we thought as a group our whole business would contribute to it."

The group of ACT CEOs raised more than \$369,885 yesterday, which will go towards Vinnies' services for the homeless in Canberra.