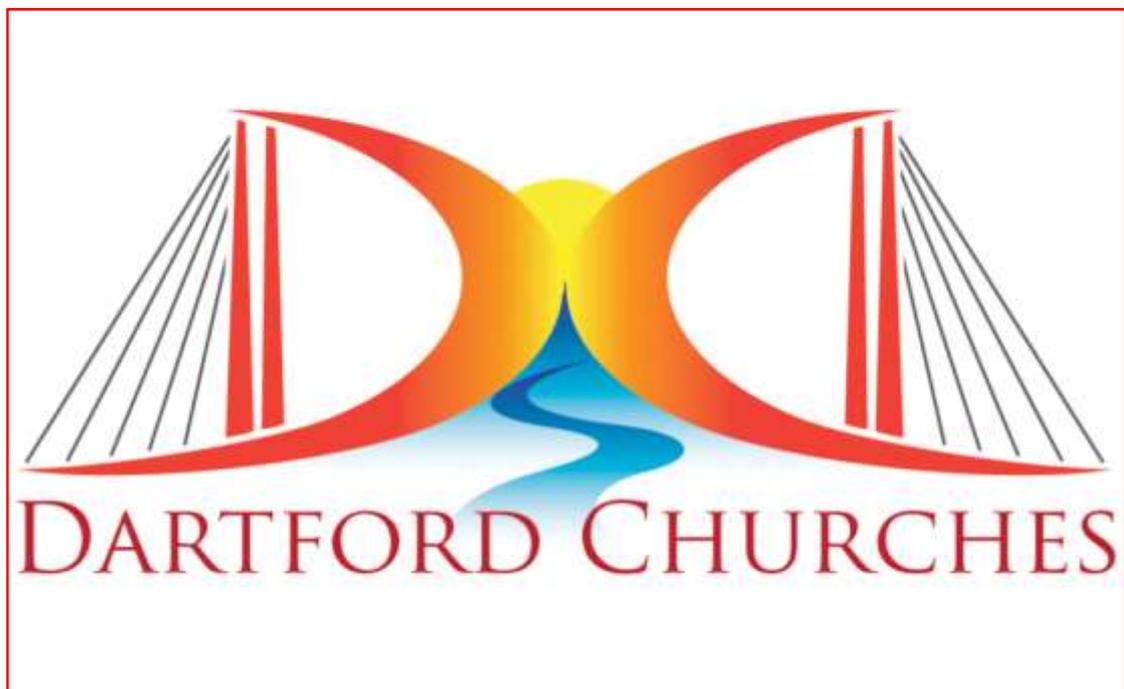


**Dartford Churches Cold Weather Shelter
Report
Winter 2013/14**



Prepared by Brian Mandisodza- Project Coordinator

1. Background and purpose of this report

- 1.1 Dartford Churches Cold Weather Shelter was a pilot project introduced to help homeless people of Dartford stay warm and safe during the cold winter nights, and from there be assisted in finding somewhere more permanent to reside.
- 1.2 The shelter was provided for male and female adults over the age of 18 years old.
- 1.3 The shelter provided a hot meal, entertainment and companionship, a warm and comfortable place to sleep, and breakfast in the morning. As well as the hospitality and accommodation the shelter served as a “stepping-stone” into more permanent accommodation allowing guests an opportunity for some stability before moving into hostels or supported housing. The shelter also served as a base from which guests can access key statutory services, such as health care and welfare benefits.
- 1.4 Shelter was provided at three churches over four nights from 7pm to 8am, overnight.
- 1.5 The shelter was staffed by volunteers pooled from the various churches in Dartford and surrounding villages and towns. Volunteer activity was coordinated by three venue coordinators, one from each of the churches offering accommodation.
- 1.6 The activities of the church coordinators were overseen by the paid project coordinator, who reported to employing church senior pastor representing the Dartford Cold Weather Shelter Steering Committee.

2. Who used the shelter and why

2.1 Demographics

Twenty nine people were referred to the shelter over the 3 months it was operational. Of the twenty nine people referred to the shelter twenty six were assessed and twenty four people were registered and offered accommodation. Three people were not assessed for registration (two did not attend the assessment appointment and one was not offered an appointment as she had two children below 18 years old). Two people assessed were not offered registration because one person was not homeless and wanted company, and the second was not from Dartford, and had travelled by bus from Chatham.

Of the twenty four people registered and offered accommodation, eighteen people accessed the shelter. Of the six people offered accommodation who did not access the shelter, three individuals said that they were staying at friends, one said that she was expecting a flat and not sharing facilities, and two people did not say why they did not access the shelter.

2.2 Gender

Of the 24 guests that were registered 33.3% ($n=8$) were female and 66.7% ($n=16$) were male.

Guests slept in the church halls. Guests were separated by a screen according to gender. The highest number of female guests who accessed the shelter on a single night was two.

2.3 Age

Table 1- Age profile of registered guests

Age	Number of Guests
18 - 29	8
30 - 39	3
40 - 49	5
50 - 59	4
60 - 69	4
70+	0

2.4 Ethnicity

Table 2- Ethnic profile of registered guests

Ethnicity	Number of Guests
White British	15
White EU	4
Black British	1
Black British African	4
Black Other	0
Asian	0
Other	0

2.5 Tables 3 & 4 show where people registered for shelter slept before registration

Table 3- Where people slept before registration.

Where People slept before registration	Number of Guests
Long-term rough sleepers	8
Individuals who had recently started sleeping rough	8
People who had just become homeless, but had not yet slept rough	4
People long-term sofa surfing	3
Ex-offenders recently released from prison	1

Table 4- Reason for Homelessness

Reasons for Homelessness	Number of Guests
Alcohol abuse dependence/abuse	7
Drug dependence/abuse	7
Relationship breakdown	4
Debt	1
Recent Migrant	2
Out of Choice	3

3. How the Shelter was staffed

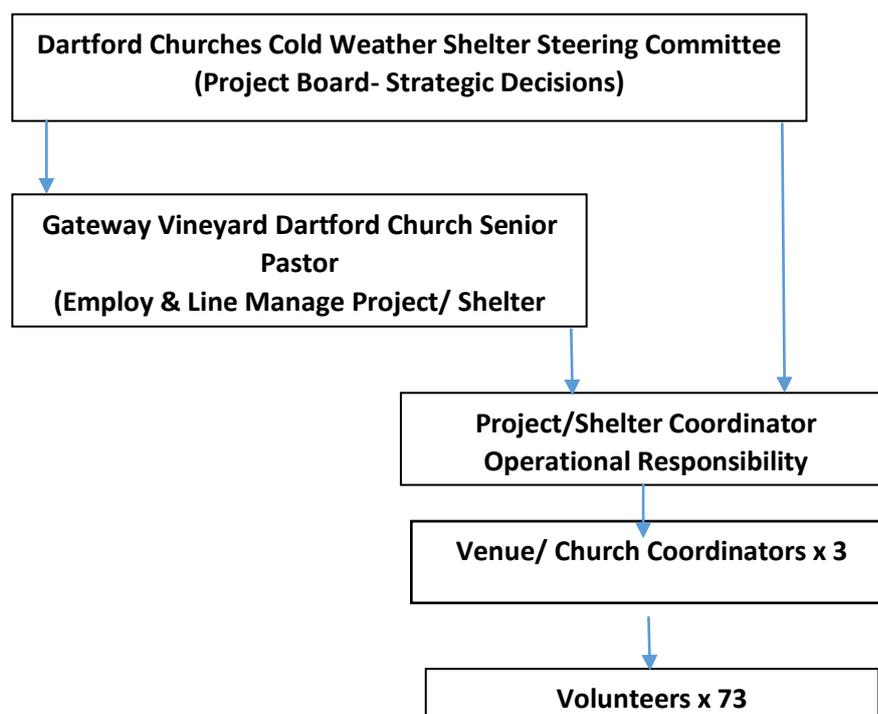
3.1 The shelter was staffed primarily by volunteers. The majority of volunteers were recruited from Dartford Churches. There were 76 volunteers across the three venues including the three Venue/ Church coordinators (27 male, 49 female). The age-range of volunteers was between 20 years old and 70+ years.

Guests received two induction training sessions. The first of the induction sessions was delivered by the Shelter/Project Coordinator. These were 3 training sessions introducing guests to the aims of the shelter, focussing on volunteer roles, expected conduct of volunteers, and management structure were held prior to the shelter opening in January 2014. These sessions were open to volunteers from all venues. The presentation discussed the Shelter Handbook and allowed volunteers to discuss and ask any questions on their roles. Due to the timings of the training sessions (Christmas holidays) the sessions were not able to capture all volunteers.

The second of the training sessions were conducted by the Venue/Church Coordinators at their respective shelter venues. These sessions were venue specific and addressed health and safety procedures for the venue. Volunteers who joined the team after the shelter went operational also received this venue induction training prior to assuming volunteer roles.

Chart 1 below shows the organisational structure of the shelter.

Organisational Chart Cold Weather Shelter



3.2 Listed below are the volunteer roles.

- Food shopping
- Preparing meals
- Serving meals
- Washing up after meals
- Setting up at church venues
- Clearing up church venues after shelter
- Transporting equipment between venues
- Receiving guests
- Interacting with guests
- Coordinating shifts
- Offering basic first aid when required
- Providing advice, support and sign-posting on issues around welfare benefits, health and housing
- Provide pastoral care to guests as and when needed with support from the Venue Coordinators
- Staying awake at night to supervise and serve guests
- Participate in conflict resolution

3.3 The majority of volunteers worked at single venues. There were some volunteers that were able to work across venues. Volunteer activity was coordinated and supervised by the 3 Venue Coordinators at their individual church site. The Venue Coordinators were responsible for

- Ensuring all shifts and roles were adequately covered
- Allocating duties to volunteers
- Purchasing food and other provisions for the Shelter
- Volunteer induction at venues
- Health and safety of all individuals at the venue when shelter was in operation
- Ensuring venues were cleared up following shelter in time for other activities in the church venue
- Supporting volunteers in their roles and providing feedback on their performance
- Recording shift activity and incidents in the Shelter Log Book
- Supporting Shelter Coordinator with registration of guests
- Providing pastoral care and support to guests and to volunteers
- Day to day decision-making for the individual venues
- Support Shelter Coordinator as part of the senior management team for the shelter
- Liaising and updating their Church leadership on Shelter activities
- Supporting Venue Coordinators from each of the 3 venues offering accommodation

- Supporting guests and coordinating volunteers' support of guest in the provision of advice, support and sign-posting on issues around welfare benefits, health and housing

3.4 The Shelter Coordinator role was a paid post. The Shelter Coordinator was employed by Gateway Vineyard Dartford Church on behalf of Dartford Churches Cold Weather Shelter Steering Committee. The Shelter Coordinator had overall operational responsibility for the Shelter. The Shelter Coordinator was responsible for

- Developing the Operational Policies for the Shelter
- Identifying and coordinating purchase of all equipment required for the Shelter
- Recruitment and training of volunteers
- Liaison with partners & referring agencies, local authority and police neighbourhood support services
- Supporting Venue Coordinators day to day shelter activities
- Assessment & registration of guests
- Supporting Venue coordinators in managing guest conduct
- Managing access to Shelter
- On-call to offer advice and direction to Shift & Venue Coordinators
- Attend Dartford Cold Weather Shelter Steering Committee meetings and provide feedback to steering committee members
- Ensuring effective communication between venues
- Conflict resolution

4. The Shelter Venues

4.1 The Shelter provided hospitality and accommodation for four nights a week at three different venues. It was open on Thursday & Friday nights at Vineyard Centre; Saturday night at Brent Methodist Church; and Sunday night at The Salvation Army. The Shelter was not able to provide hospitality and accommodation on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday nights because there were no churches able to offer the use of their premises.

4.2 The Vineyard Centre provided accommodation and hospitality in two halls and a room, on two floors. The downstairs church hall had tables and chairs set up and was used for meals, socialising, board games and DVDs. The upstairs hall was used for guests to sleep in. Female guests were separated from male guests by screens. A room attached to the hall upstairs was used by guests on their breaks during the night shift.

Providing the Shelter, using two rooms, on separate floors presented a challenge to volunteers. Although lights out was at 11pm, some of the guests chose to retire early. This meant that the team of volunteers on

the evening shift was split during the busiest period of the shift, when some volunteers were washing up after dinner, some socialising with guests and also the need to supervise guests who have gone upstairs to bed. Guests left their property by their bedsides and it was necessary to supervise in order to protect property from theft. Guests with bulky property had to leave their property downstairs overnight, thus presenting a security risk. In one particular case it was also necessary to supervise the sleeping area to safeguard one particular female guest vulnerable to sexual exploitation from having sexual contact with males.

Another challenge at Vineyard Centre was staffing the Shelter on a Thursday night. There were less volunteers for the night shift on a Thursday due to work commitments on Friday mornings. This meant that the Venue Coordinator was on the night shift every Thursday for the duration of the period the Shelter was open.

The kitchen facilities at Vineyard Centre were not appropriate to prepare the evening meals. Hot meals were prepared at Net Church and transported to Vineyard Centre on Thursday evenings. On Friday evenings meals were prepared at Vineyard Centre in slow cookers. On some occasions when this was not possible guests had fish and chips from a local fish & chip restaurant bought and brought in for them. The Salvation Army kitchen was also used to prepare one meal.

Accommodating guest who smoke was also a challenge. Guests smoked at the front of the building. This compromised security and on a few occasions some people who were not on the guest list attempted to gain admission to the shelter. On a few occasions volunteers found cigarette ends in both the male and female toilets.

4.3 The Brent Methodist Church provided accommodation and hospitality in two halls and a TV lounge on the same floor. One hall room was a dining area, the second hall room had the beds laid out for the sleep area. Guests and volunteers had access to the TV lounge which was adjacent to the kitchen. The TV lounge was also used by volunteers after lights out.

Brent Methodist Church kitchen and serving area are of a very good standard, and conveniently located for access from the designated dining area.

Because of the location of the designated smoking area, it was a challenge for the smoking policy to be robustly observed. Guests smoked throughout the night, and this then presented a challenge for the other two venues where due to their location it was necessary to enforce the rules on smoking.

Brent Methodist Church venue also experienced difficulty covering the night shift at the start of the Shelter. This improved with recruitment of more volunteers for the night shift.

4.4 The Salvation Army provided accommodation and hospitality in the main church hall. Volunteers had access to a room adjacent to the main hall where they could rest and take their breaks. Due to the size of the building it was not possible to provide more rooms from guests. Tables and chairs were arranged in the middle of the room. The sleeping area was along the walls, either side of the tables. Female guests' sleeping area was on the stage in the main hall, separated from view by screens.

As with the experience of the other venues, guests staggered their sleep which also presented a challenge in that some guests would be trying to or asleep, while other guests and volunteers are socialising and playing board games.

The kitchen at The Salvation Army is of a very good standard and the serving area was accessible to guest.

Sunday night proved to be a very difficult shift to recruit volunteers for. This was to do with people having to go to work on Monday morning. The Venue Coordinator had to cover all but one of the night shifts for the duration of the Shelter. Monday mornings were also a challenge to cover for the clear up, again requiring the Venue Coordinator, following a night duty, to clear up the venue in time for other church activities.

5. Incidents

5.1 In the 3 months the Shelter was operational there were very few incidents of concern. Listed below are the incidents that occurred in the 3 months

- Four one night bans were issued in the 3 months. Two to one individual who breached the alcohol policy on two occasions. One to an individual who verbally abused volunteers and did not observe shelter rules, sleeping in a non-designated area. One to an individual who provoked another guest into a fight because the other resident had been snoring.
- There were reported thefts of both volunteers and guest property at one venue. Thefts were reported on two occasions. Two guests' bags had property removed from them. Three volunteers had their handbags and purses searched, with cash taken away.
- Individuals not registered or registered but not booked in attempted to access Shelter.

6. Guest Feedback

6.1 Feedback from the guests was very positive. Feedback was provided verbally and also through a satisfaction survey questionnaire.

- Guests understood and accepted the process for accessing the shelter.
- All guests, bar one said that they have been treated with respect, dignity and courtesy by volunteers.
- Guest said that they enjoyed most of the meals they were served.
- Guests said on the whole they found their beds comfortable in the shelter. They did however say their preference was air mattresses compared to camp beds.
- One guest said being allowed to participate in small chores around the shelter would enhance “guests’ sense of worth”.
- Guests said that they would have wanted the Shelter for 7 days a week not 4 days a week. Some guests expressed a fear that they would lose their “pitch” by accessing the Shelter
- Some guests asked for the opening time to be earlier. They said that the Priory shopping mall shuts at 6pm and that there is no shelter from the elements between the shopping mall shutting and the Shelter opening

7. Volunteer Feedback

7.1 The response to request for feedback from volunteers was poor. All volunteers were sent a form asking for feedback. Only two volunteers responded to the request. One volunteer expressed frustration at the closure of the shelter; that the guests were “returning to the streets”. The volunteer said they wanted the Project Coordinator to be “far more visible at the venues on a regular basis”. The volunteer also said the Shelter “needs to be extended to more venues and be open 7 nights a week, and to recruit more volunteers for the night sessions to relieve pressure on existing staff”.

The second volunteer who provided feedback said “The Shelter certainly succeeded in its aims, providing a warm and welcoming shelter, good food and companionship and a safe place to sleep for a number of vulnerable individuals in the coldest months of the year. I think the Shelter was somewhat of an eye-opener to a couple of the volunteers, who I think were rather taken aback by the whole experience and in many cases it

was these people who found the situation more of a challenge than some of the guests.

The Shelter did some of its best work in the earlier months, with some strong bonds of trust formed between guests and volunteers. I was pleased to see some guests moving into more permanent accommodation.

It will be interesting to see how the project evolves during 2014 and I would be willing to participate in this again.”

8. Financial Statement

Dartford Churches Cold Weather Shelter Financial Statement – Year 2013/2014

Income

Dartford Churches	£ 20,793.10	
Street Pastors	£ 3,000.00	
Bluewater Community Forum	£ 224.85	
Individual Donations	£ 1,460.00	
Accrued Gift Aid	<u>£ 25.00</u>	
		£ 25,502.95

Expenditure

Staff Costs	£ 4,609.84	
Purchase of Equipment (Beds etc)	£ 695.23	
Computer/Telephones	£ 406.98	
Food Purchases	£ 2,103.04	
Cleaning	£ 199.44	
Transport	£ 59.25	
Sundries	<u>£ 90.00</u>	
		£ 8,163.78

Surplus for Year **£ 17,339.17**

This statement has been compiled from information supplied by Dartford Gateway Vineyard Church which kindly administered all accounting/financial operations for the year.

The surplus is held in the bank account of Dartford Gateway Vineyard Church (on behalf of Dartford Churches Cold Weather Shelter)

Michael Pethick
Treasurer – Dartford Churches Cold Weather Shelter
12 July 2014

9. Conclusion & Recommendations

9.1 The Shelter was a success. It achieved its aim to help homeless people of Dartford stay warm and safe during the cold winter nights, and from there be assisted in finding somewhere more permanent to reside.

Some of the guests at the Shelter were able, through assistance from volunteers and partner agencies, to move into more stable longer-term accommodation. Two guests went to House of Mercy in Gravesend. Unfortunately one found the house rules difficult to keep and was asked to leave. Two guests were in the process of being housed in Gravesend and Chatham when the Shelter came to an end in March 2014. One guest was housed by the local authority in a sheltered, warden supported accommodation for older people.

There were no serious incidents for the duration of the Shelter. Relationships between volunteers and guests developed as the shelter went on. Volunteers knew guests by name, and knew guests' stories; Guests were not "the homeless man", but rather a person with a story, a life, no longer invisible. Throughout the Shelter, at all venues, this was a sentiment expressed by volunteers.

The Shelter allowed relationships amongst volunteers to develop. Residents from the town and surrounding areas, who go to different churches, had the opportunity to serve the community together, forming new friendships.

Volunteers were able to demonstrate the love of God to the guests. Two guests started attending church regularly, and one of them gave their life to Jesus and was baptised.

The Salvation Army has continued to provide a meal once a week for people in the margins of the community and those that are experiencing homelessness. This is safe space where people can seek support from volunteers over matters they may be needing support and advice.

Vineyard Centre continued to host the Saturday breakfast through the shelter. The breakfast has continued to be a place where homeless people and people on the fringes of the community continue to come for friendship and support.

The Shelter was provided within the financial resources available, within budget.

9.2 This report makes the following recommendations for the future.

- Shelter is provided 7 days a week during the cold weather months. Some guests and potential guests were reluctant to access the shelter for fear of losing their pitch while they were in the shelter.
- Recruitment and training of volunteers should be conducted earlier than a month before opening. The experience this year was that it was not possible to recruit and train all volunteers due to people having other plans around the Christmas holiday period.
- Recruitment of volunteers who are able to volunteer during the working week (Monday to Friday).
- There is a consistent approach to addressing rules on smoking, lights out & access to the shelter.
- Improved communication between venues in regard to shift rotas for volunteers working at multiple venues in order to avoid double-booking.
- Improved access to healthcare services for guests within the shelter.
- Greater clarity of inclusion criteria and service provided by the shelter to partners and refers.