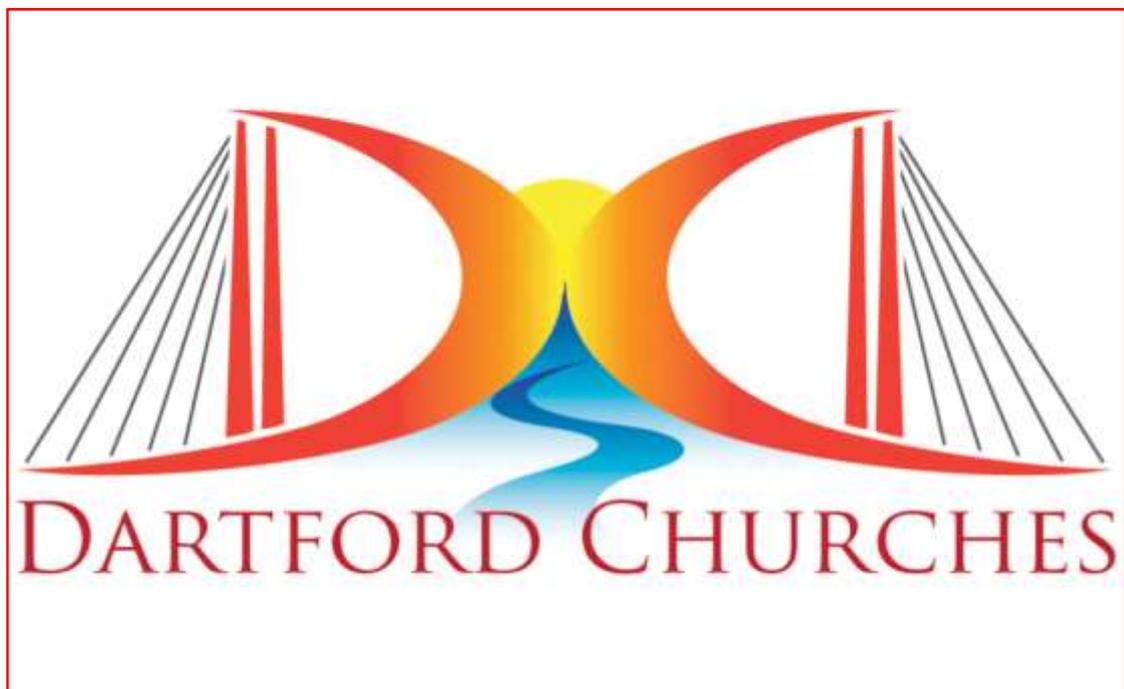


**Dartford Churches Cold Weather Shelter
Report
Winter 2014/15**



Prepared by Tracy Imevboe Project Coordinator

1. Background and purpose of this report

- 1.1 **Dartford Winter Shelter** is a project aimed at helping homeless adults from Dartford to stay warm and safe during the cold winter nights, and to assist them with finding somewhere more permanent to live.
- 1.2 The shelter had ten available spaces, which were offered on a first come first serve basis to homeless male and female adults over the age of 18.
- 1.3 The shelter provided each guest with a hot meal, light entertainment, companionship, and a warm and comfortable place to sleep. Guests were also provided with breakfast in the morning. In addition the Shelter aimed to act as a bridge leading to more permanent accommodation for Guests, by providing them with some stability before they moved into longer term accommodation. The shelter also served as a hub which guests used to access key statutory services, such as health care and welfare benefits.
- 1.4 Shelter was initially provided at five churches over five nights from 7pm to 8am. This was later increased to seven, when two extra churches came on board.
- 1.5 In addition to volunteers drawn from the various churches in Dartford and its environs, some local people from the area heard about the project via word of mouth, and the Shelter Facebook page, and also came along to volunteer. This year the shelter also had the opportunity to work with 5 members of Dartford Lions club, who volunteered across three different venues..
- 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 seven people were referred to the shelter over the 3 months it was open. Of the twenty seven, 19 were registered and offered accommodation. Three people were assessed but not registered because they were not from Dartford Borough. Two others had somewhere to sleep..

Of the 19 people registered and offered accommodation, 16 people accessed the shelter. One of the people who had been registered did not need the service, as he was offered accommodation elsewhere by Porch light, soon after registering. One was not seen in the area after being registered, and the other said they were staying with a friend.

2.2 Gender

Of the 19 guests that were registered, only two were female and only one of them accessed the Shelter.

The Males who were offered places at the shelter were separated from this female by a screen.

2.3 Age

Table 1- Age profile of registered guests

Age	Number of Guests
18 - 29	1
30 - 39	4
40 - 49	6
50 - 59	5
60 - 69	3
70+	0

2.4 Ethnicity

Table 2- Ethnic profile of registered guests

Ethnicity	Number of Guests
White British	13
White EU	6
Black British	0
Black British African	0
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	10
Individuals who had recently started sleeping rough	5
People who had just become homeless, but had not yet slept rough	0
People long-term sofa surfing	1
Ex-offenders recently released from prison	3

Table 4- Reason for Homelessness

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

3. How the Shelter was staffed

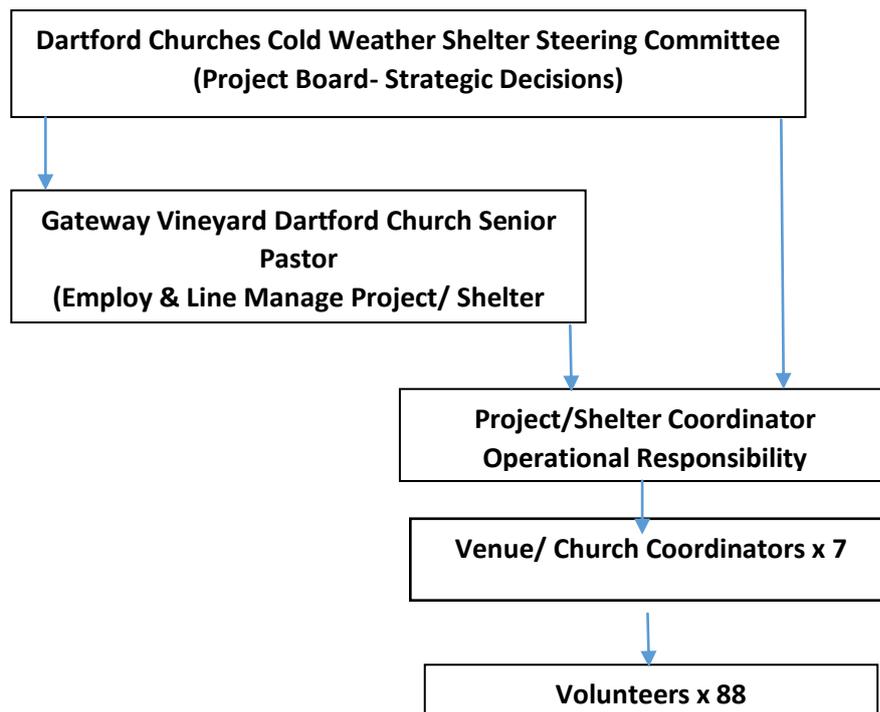
3.1 The shelter was staffed primarily by volunteers. The majority of volunteers were recruited from Dartford Churches. A total of 88 people volunteered across the seven venues including the seven Venue Church coordinators. Of this number, seven were not from any church. The age-range of volunteers was between 19 and 72 years old.

Training:

Induction training for volunteers was offered at delivered at Dartord Community Church, Net church, Brent Methodist and at Gateway Vineyard. Volunteers received further health and safety venue specific inductions on their first shift

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 Although majority of the volunteers worked at single venues, some were able to work across venues. Volunteer activity was coordinated and supervised by the 7 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 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

- Identifying and coordinating purchase of all equipment required for the Shelter
- Recruitment of volunteers On-site Training of volunteers and new venue coordinators
- 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
- Ensuring guest conduct is maintained
- Providing emergency cover where necessary
- Transferring equipment from venue to venue

4. The Shelter Venues

4.1 This year, although initially starting with 5 church venues which covered only 5 nights, the Shelter was eventually able to provide hospitality and accommodation from seven venues over each night of the week.

4.2 Apart from .St Edmonds and Grace Outreach Church who operated between 8 pm and 7am, due to operational reasons, all the other venues where open to Guests between 7pm and 8pm.

4.3 **Mondays:** Grace Outreach was one of the churches who came on board this year, following their move to East Hill Dartford. They provided accommodation and hospitality in one large hall which was split in two by screens. One part was used as the sleeping area for Guests while the other was used as a TV lounge and eating area. The TV lounge was cleared up after lights out (11pm), and the TV was transferred to a sitting area, just outside the hall, where the night volunteers could relax while on duty. The Volunteers used a hall opposite this as their sleeping area.

Grace Outreach Church kitchen and serving area are of a very good standard, and conveniently located for access from the designated dining area. Only light snacks were provided in the evenings, as the guests had their meal provided by Salvation Army, which runs an evening drop in service, every Monday, which provides meals for homeless people and those on low incomes.

Grace Outreach venue experienced very little difficulty covering the night shift, and on most Monday nights the Shelter had 3-4 volunteers covering the night shift. Grace Outreach also provided volunteers for other venues. The Shelter Coordinator was at this venue on most Monday evenings to provide guidance and support to the Venue Coordinator and volunteers.

Incidents: There was one incident of a guest becoming verbally abusive to a volunteer because he wasn't allowed to have a smoke after lights out. The guest was given a verbal warning by the Shelter Coordinator and the Chair of DCWS.

4.4 Tuesdays: Christ Church also joined the project this year. They provided accommodation and hospitality in two small rooms. One room was used as the sleeping area, while the other was used as a TV lounge and eating area. The Volunteers on the night shift took turns sleeping in a small office if there were up to 3 on night shift. However, if there were only two; they slept in the cleared eating area, for security reasons. As the room where the guests slept wasn't very large, and could only accommodate 8, the sleeping area had to be extended into the TV lounge area and separated by screens to accommodate two extra guests.

The Kitchen at Christ Church is small but well equipped, and of a good standard. It is conveniently located for access to the designated dining area.

Incidents: A syringe was found at this venue, and a guest admitted having used it. He was given a warning. Another guest who was on drugs at this venue was also given a one night ban.

4.5 Wednesdays: Spital Street Methodist church also came on board this year. They provided accommodation and hospitality across two floors. The upstairs room was used as an eating area, as this is close to the kitchen, which is well equipped and of a very good standard. The downstairs area was split into a sleeping area, and also used as a TV lounge and an area where Guests and Volunteers could play games. There is also a small kitchen downstairs, which the volunteers on the night shift have access to, for tea and coffee making.

Incidents: On one occasion volunteers found a cigarette end in the toilets. One guest received a ban for breaching guest rules.

Thursdays: St Edmonds Church also joined the project this year. This venue opened the doors to volunteers at 8pm, and Guests had to leave by 7am the following morning, because the building is shared with other partners who also use the building as a GP Surgery and a Sure start Drop in. Shelter was provided in the main church hall, this has underfloor heating, which the guests loved. Meals were provided in the church reception area, which has a fully equipped kitchen conveniently located for access to the designated dining area. There is also a TV in this area. Volunteers on the night shift were given access to the computers in the reception area. A side room was used as a sleeping area for Volunteers on the night shift.

This venue experienced very little difficulty covering the night shift, and on most Thursday nights the Shelter had 3-4 people on duty.

The Shelter Coordinator was at this venue on most Thursdays, to provide guidance and support to the Venue Coordinator and Volunteers.

Incidents: There were no challenging incidents at this venue.

4.6 Fridays: The Vineyard Centre used two halls on two different floors to provide shelter and meals to the guests. The downstairs church hall was

used as an eating area/TV lounge, while the upstairs hall was used as a sleeping area. A room attached to the hall upstairs was used by volunteers on their breaks during the night shift. Using two rooms, on different 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.

One challenge at Vineyard Centre are the kitchen facilities which were not adequate to prepare the evening meals. On most occasions, hot meals were prepared there, with the use of slow cookers; however, this was not always possible depending on the number of volunteers and guests. On some occasions, when this was not possible, guests were given takeaway meals such as fish and chips or kebab.

Incidents: Accommodating guests 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 or the night and one individual who wasn't registered, attempted to gain admission to the shelter. On a few occasions volunteers found cigarette ends in the male toilets.

4.7 Saturdays

The Brent Methodist Church provided shelter 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. Brent Methodist Church venue experienced difficulty covering the night shift at the start of the Shelter. However this improved with recruitment of more volunteers for the night shift towards the end of the project.

Incidents There were no incidents reported at this venue.

Sundays:

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 room 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. The Female guest slept 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 guests.

Initially, 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 every night shift for the duration of the Shelter. Monday mornings were also difficult 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.

This did improve over time.

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

- Two one night bans were issued in the 3 months were given to guests who breached shelter rules.
- One individual not registered attempted to access Shelter at the Vineyard on two Friday nights.

6. Guest Feedback

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

- All guests felt that they had been treated like human beings, with respect, dignity and courtesy by every volunteer..
- Three guests said they would have committed suicide if they hadn't been offered places at the shelter.
- Two guests said they were made to feel like people not numbers.
- 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.
- Guests said that they were pleased that they could access the Shelter for 7 days a week.
- One guest said 'I can't believe how my life changed in a week, one minute I was thinking of how to end it all, the next minute I was in

the shelter experiencing a love and kindness I didn't know was possible.

- Another said, 'I've met so many kind people here, I've realised money isn't everything. All I want to do now is help others in any way I can, and that's what I'll be doing once I'm back on my feet.
- Two guests said they had made friends with others guests and hoped to maintain these new relationships..

7. Volunteer Feedback

7.1 Volunteer feedback was verbal.

7.2 The overwhelming feedback from volunteers was the frustration that the project was not running all year round. It was felt that the Guests needed continued support, and that all the efforts put into working and supporting the Guests would be undone.

7.3 Majority of the Volunteers said they would happily volunteer all year round.

7.4 Majority of the volunteers said their view of homeless people had changed for the better and that they would now feel confident enough to speak to homeless people on the street.

7.5 Majority of volunteers said their views about Dartford had changed. They felt it was a vibrant town with a lot of goodwill.

7.6 Some non-Christian volunteers_ said they had a real respect for the Christian community in Dartford, and now realised that Christians were not 'strange people'.

7.7 Many loved the fact that they had met people from the various different congregations in Dartford, and planned to maintain the friendships that had been formed over the last 3 months.

8. Conclusion & Recommendations

8.1 The Shelter achieved its aim of providing shelter for each day of the week to help homeless people of Dartford stay warm and safe during the cold winter nights .However, only one guest could be rehoused, due to a lack of available suitable housing stock.

There were no serious incidents for the duration of the Shelter.

Relationships between volunteers and guests developed as the shelter went on. Volunteers came out of their shells and got to know one another, as well as each guest by name.

Volunteers got to know the guests and found out some interesting things about them. ie two guests are very good Artists, two have University degrees, one in Political Science, and another in Computer Science, One guest is a whizz at Scrabble and another at Chess!

This led to the project coordinator coming up with the slogan

'Homeless people are still people', which is used on the shelter Facebook page. This is still running and aims to challenge people's views about

homeless people, and also to keep awareness of the project alive throughout the year. Hopefully this will make it easier to recruit volunteers when the shelter opens for its third year.

Amongst the Volunteers, there are two amazing Chefs, who whipped up delicious dishes which the guests loved!

There were nurses who saw to it that guests got treatment, advice and first aid when necessary.

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.

By the second week in March, three guests and one Volunteer were beginning to ask questions about God, and many interesting positive , promising conversations were had between Christian Volunteers and unchurched Volunteers. ie One volunteer was able to share her story of how Jesus saved her from Drug use. By the end of the shelter five guests had started attending at various congregations within Dartford, and three have helped with painting and decorating at one local church. Two unchurched Volunteers have also indicated that they are considering joining a local church.

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.

A few other churches are also looking into whether they can also provide meals for guests during the week.

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

8.2 This report makes the following recommendations for the future.

- Project Coordinator should be in post by beginning of November so that they can be trained, and also so that they can meet with all Venue Coordinators before the shelter opens.

- From September, there should be ongoing publicity of the shelter at different churches, via newsletters and church websites, to improve the recruitment of volunteers,
- 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.
- Improved access to healthcare services for guests within the shelter.
- There should be an increase of available spaces to 12, so that more registered people can access the shelter.
- There should be a greater focus on what happens after the shelter closes.