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WINTER SHELTER

THE VOLUNTEER

HANDBOOK

YEAR 2020

**It is important that all volunteers read this Handbook
and follow the guidelines therein.**

December 2019

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"...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me" **Matthew Chapter 25 (NIV)**

"Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." **Hebrews Chapter 13 (NIV)**

The Dartford Churches Winter Shelter is a shelter run by volunteers and provides a hot meal, warm place to sleep and breakfast to people who are experiencing homelessness in our community during the cold winter nights. The shelter is a partnership of churches in Dartford who have come together and pooled resources to provide this compassion ministry to our community. All volunteers are expected to respect the Christian ethos of the Dartford Churches Winter Shelter.

GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS

Welcome

Thank you for volunteering to work in one of the venues. Although Dartford Churches Winter Shelter will provide shelter at more than one venue over the days the shelter is open, please regard the different venues as one shelter at work. The shelter is an opportunity to be outward focussed, and to share God's love, compassion and practical care with adults who might otherwise have to spend the night in the cold without shelter, a hot meal and in some cases company.

We hope that your experience of volunteering this winter will be rewarding and that all Dartford Churches Winter Shelter venues will be safe and welcoming for those who use them whether as guests, volunteers or visitors.

Background and Context

Throughout this handbook we refer to the Dartford Churches Winter Shelter as the Shelter, and the users of the Shelter as guests. The Guests will be a minimum age of 18 years of old.

There are many cold weather/night shelters now operating in England and their collective experiences, and the guidance from the "Shelter in a Pack" from Housing Justice, and the successful pilot providing a winter shelter in Dartford (winter 2013- 2014) are the founding of the careful planning the Dartford Churches Winter Shelter Steering Group pursued to inaugurate this winter shelter for Dartford.

The Shelter has been introduced to help the homeless people of Dartford stay warm and safe during the winter's freezing nights, and from there, find a home of their own. The project will provide shelter this winter from January until early April 2020.

It is good to recognise that some of the guests who use the shelter have complex needs. Volunteers however need to remember always that the shelter has limited objectives, which are to provide food and shelter. Other local charities and statutory service providers have the expertise and resources to support with other needs for marginalised individuals.

So whilst, as a volunteer, you may feel a call to assist a guest in other ways, please keep in mind that you are here to assist the guest within the limited objectives of the winter shelter.

Wherever possible, guests will be assisted or sign-posted by the shelter to the right agencies and organisations that can help them address the problem. The project has employed two workers to support the guests through this process. Volunteers should be sympathetic listeners to guests, but should not be drawn into giving advice. If you feel that you are getting into conversations that you cannot deal with, please let the shift leader and/or church venue manager know. Under no circumstances should you feel obliged to do anything asked of you by a guest, nor should you put yourself in a situation where you agree to keep secrets that you are not comfortable with.

General

The shelter will operate from Thursday 2nd January to Sunday 5th April 2020. The shelter is supported by the churches in Dartford with resources, food, volunteers and venues to provide food and a place to sleep for 12 guests.

The shelter operates a referrals & registration process for guests who wish to access the shelter and guests will be notified if they have been offered a place for the night. A list of guests accessing the shelter and those on the waiting list will be available to the venue coordinator before the shelter opens for the night. The shelter does not operate a drop-in system. This is to ensure the health and safety of all our guests and volunteers.

The shelter is operated by the Dartford Churches Winter Shelter Steering Group. The Steering Group has overall responsibility for the shelter via the Shelter Project Administrator, who oversees the smooth running of the shelter, liaises with the venue managers and works the project coordinator and guests to identify more secure accommodation.

Each venue has a team of volunteers led by the Venue Manager. Each venue should also have a deputy venue manager who deputises for the venue manager if they are not available. The venue managers (and their deputies when standing in) are responsible for their church venue by ensuring that:

- The shelter runs smoothly and safely at the venue
- Provisions are available on site to prepare meals and clean up the venue
- Shift leaders are appointed to coordinate volunteers for each of the three shifts
- Allocating tasks to volunteers
- Taking key decisions when volunteers are unsure of the best course of action
- Supporting volunteers where necessary in responding to guests
- Arrange handover between shift leaders
- Each venue manager has responsibility for the Log Book and mobile phone,
- and for booking in guests at the beginning of the evening.

The Log Book is important as it is the main vehicle of communication between volunteers in the venue teams taking part in the Shelter. It should be used to note any incidents that take place, to keep a record of attendance and monitoring statistics which can be used for future fundraising.

What is required of the volunteer?

- A heart for the vulnerable, poor and needy and a willingness to be challenged and changed.
- Sensitivity to issues relating to homelessness, including mental health issues and substance misuse.
- Ability to respond calmly but quickly in an emergency.
- Judgement of when to call for help.
- Basic knowledge of the venue especially the location of fire exits.
- Willingness to follow instructions from the Shift Leader and work as part of a team.
- Familiarity and ability to work within the Dartford Churches Winter Shelter policies.

General Guidelines

- Try to be on time. If running late or having a problem which prevents you from attending phone the Shift leader or the Project Coordinator on 07853 809155.
- Make sure you know the layout of the venue, especially the emergency exits and any areas that are out of bounds to guests.
- Treat guests with respect.
- Make guests feel welcome.
- Work as a team and support your Shift Leader. Do not challenge their decisions in front of other volunteers or guests.
- Address guests and volunteers by their first names only.
- Do not give or lend money to guests.
- Do not give out personal information especially street addresses, telephone numbers or email addresses. You may think there will be no problems but volunteers elsewhere have been pestered long after a shelter has closed with requests which are hard to refuse.
- Arrangements should not be made to meet with guests outside the Shelter unless it is an activity arranged by the Dartford Winter Shelter Project Administrator. If you think a guest may need spiritual advice discuss that with the Shelter Project Administrator with a view to making an appointment with a pastor.
- Make sure you are not left alone with a guest or leave a colleague alone. This is not only for your own safety but so that if anyone alleges an impropriety against you, there is a witness.
- When speaking to guests it is best not to make promises; people can feel very let down by a promise not kept. We need to build trust in order to be effective in finding appropriate help for guests. Broken promises can undermine this work.
- Do not take guests to your home.
- For your own safety do not wear or bring valuables to the Shelter.
- There should be at least two volunteers in the Shelter at all times.

CONFIDENTIALITY

When talking to guests it is important not to push for information. Please acknowledge that some guests may feel hurt or let down by some experiences and may not wish to talk about them. Others will like nothing better than to tell you their story. Please respect a guest's confidentiality and do not allow your conversation to become common gossip especially with other guests or volunteers.

Confidentiality is important for building trust; however it is not about keeping secrets and this should be made clear to guests. You may keep a conversation in confidence so long as you do not feel burdened or uncomfortable about what has been shared. If things become too demanding tell the guest that you may have to tell the Venue Manager what is being said in order to get appropriate help. It is then up to the guest as to whether they want to continue.

If you feel there is a threat to another person or to the safety of the Shelter you should tell your Venue Manager & Shift Leader immediately.

Gifts

From time to time guests may wish to give gifts to staff or volunteers. Small gifts may be accepted particularly if they can be shared. The general rule is that all gifts should be shared with the team and the guest should be told that this is the policy. In any case all gifts should be reported to the Venue Manager and recorded in the Log Book. Any gift deemed to be too expensive or in some way inappropriate should be gently returned to the guest. You should not encourage guests to give gifts.

RULES

We keep the rules to a minimum, but for everyone's comfort and safety please note the following:

- No alcohol or controlled drugs to be consumed in or around the premises.
- No violent, threatening, racist, sexist or other anti-social behaviour or language
- No offensive weapons
- No smoking (including the use of e-cigarettes) inside the building. Provision will be made outside close to the premises but this may be on the basis of periodic controlled sessions.
- Smoking (including the use of e-cigarettes) is not allowed between 11.00pm and 7.00 am the next morning.
- No pets
- Accredited place is forfeited if not taken up by 8.00pm.
- The Shelter is for those aged 18 years and above.
- Maximum stay normally limited to 28 nights.
- No guests to sleep together regardless of gender.

Failure to meet the above conditions will result in a first warning, which may be in the form of a one night ban from the shelter. Two warnings or a serious incident will result in a permanent ban from the shelter in the current year. Such action will be taken by the Project Administrator in consultation with the Venue Managers. Guests agree to observe these rules prior to being offered a place at the Shelter.

Timetable Of Shifts

Shifts generally have a 15 minute overlap to allow for a briefing between shifts. This timetable is for guidance only. Venues are obviously free to vary the timings so that the venue can run smoothly, in consultation with the volunteers.

6.00 pm- 10.15 pm EVENING SHIFT

- Venue Manager &/or Shift Leader open up and check the physical security of the premises regarding doors to be locked and opened.
- Venue Manager and Shift Leader assemble the volunteer team, introduce and induct new volunteers, and allocate duties for the shift. They also check that volunteers have been adequately trained and are aware of the fire exits and the evacuation procedure.
- Duties for this shift include preparing hot meal, setting up tables and chairs, and serving the hot meal; setting up sleeping area (male & female if we have guests of both genders; setting out relaxation area, including newspapers, board games & DVD; serve hot drinks throughout the evening; ensure toilets are clean and have toilet paper and soap.
- Doors open at 7pm. Guests booked in for the night by the Shift Leader.
- New guests will be shown around and shown fire exits.
- At 8pm applicants on the reserve list are admitted to places not taken up by those on the principal list. Show reserve list guests toilets and fire exits.
- 8.15pm Begin to serve the evening meal.
- Wash up and tidy up after the meal.
- Organise social activities for the guests
- Record any incidents in the Log Book

10.00 pm- 7.00 am NIGHT SHIFT

- Doors opened and volunteers welcomed, logged in and shown layout of the venue noting particularly fire exits. Shift Leaders confer about any matters arising during the Evening Shift and the log book and mobile phone are handed over to the Shift Leader of the Night Shift.
- Evening Shift Volunteers leave the venue and the building is secured.
- Make sure everyone is comfortable and settled in for the night.
- 11pm Lights out. All guests should adhere to lights out and quiet.
- At least two volunteers should be awake at any given time.
- Record any incidents in the Log Book.
- Shelter Administrator can be contacted in emergencies and for advice.

6.45 am – 9.00 am MORNING SHIFT

- Doors opened and welcomed, logged in and shown layout of the venue noting particularly fire exits.
- Night Shift Leader gives Morning Shift verbal report from the previous night and hand-over the Log Book, making sure all relevant information has been recorded in it.
- Morning shift make tea & coffee, and prepare breakfast.
- Wake up guests. Note - do not touch guest.

- Guests should be encouraged to clear up their own bedding and store it in their allocated bag.
- Serve hot drinks and breakfast.
- 7.55am guests leave and clear up starts. Washing up and tidying up. It is advised that volunteers who handle used bedding should wear rubber gloves.

A REMINDER ON PERSONAL SAFETY

- Never give your home/mobile phone number or address to a guest, or invite a guest into your home.
- Avoid being alone with a guest, especially one of the opposite sex.
- Leave your valuables at home. If there is a necessity to bring a valuable item (eg mobile phone) ensure this is kept on your person.
- Do not give money to guests – if you are concerned about their financial situation, refer them to the Project Administrator.
- When dealing with lost property, never put your hand into a bag or pocket. Tip contents onto a flat surface so you can see what you are handling.

Volunteers should act safely and not put themselves or other volunteers or guests in any danger. If you feel intimidated at any time during the shift, inform the Venue Manager or Shift Leader. Please take directions at all times from them, especially with regard to matters of personal safety.

ANY PROBLEMS

If you experience any problems whilst volunteering please speak initially to your Venue Manager or the Project Coordinator.

We hope you enjoy volunteering with us in 2020.