



Merton Winter Night Shelter

December 5th 2016 – March 19th 2017

Season 6

Annual Report

Introduction

The Merton Winter Night Shelter provides meals, a safe and warm place to sleep, support and one to one case working for rough sleepers with low to medium support needs from Merton and the wider community. It operates during the coldest winter months between December and March.

Organisation

Facilitated by the YMCA LSW and overseen by the Centre Manager Wimbledon, the shelter is also supported by the staff team at Faith In Action. The shelter comprises of a project coordinator, a project worker and a number of donors, venues and volunteers.

This season we had 14 hosting venues, working in two blocks of seven, each venue opening its doors for the same night each week for 7 weeks. This year, our venues were:

Block 1:

- Wimbledon and District Synagogue
- Wimbledon Mosque using the Salvation Army Hall
- St. Mary's Church Wimbledon
- St. Winefride's Church Wimbledon
- Christ Church Colliers Wood
- St. Mark's Church Wimbledon
- Everyday Church Wimbledon

Block 2:

- Wimbledon Methodist Church
- Morden Baptist Church
- St. John the Evangelist Putney
- Holy Trinity South Wimbledon
- Oasis Church Colliers Wood
- Wimbledon Seventh Day Adventist Church
- Trinity United Reform Church Wimbledon.

Our venues were supported again this year by our long standing and much appreciated volunteer group from the Quaker Community.

New for this season

This season we were delighted to welcome a volunteer group from the Hindu Temple in Effra Rd, who provided the cooking team at Wimbledon Methodist Church in our second block. This new team really enjoyed their experience of the shelter and we certainly hope that this is the beginning of an ongoing and happy relationship.

Funding from the Wimbledon Foundation enabled me to come in to post as the Project Co-ordinator a month before the shelter opened to network with many different agencies in our borough and surrounding areas. We set up meetings with teams from Wimbledon Police Station, the Housing Options Team at Merton Council, probation officers at High Path, the Street Pastors, the homeless outreach workers from Thames Reach-London Street Rescue, Engage Merton-the drug and alcohol service, the CAB, neighbouring night shelters and updated our details on the Winter Night Shelter

Listings available on various homeless advice websites.

The purpose of this was to ensure that all organisations and agencies within the borough that might come into contact with people who are homeless were aware of our shelter, when we opened, how to access it and who it was for. This seems to have been a really useful exercise based on the number of referrals we received this season from a significant range of different agencies and sources.

Range of services

We look to improve and develop the shelter each season to benefit our guest group and improve their experience whilst they are with us. This season we had a number of new services that we brought in to the shelter;

The Green Light Medical Van – A team of trained doctors, nurses and medics who attended the shelter every other week to address the medical issues our guests were concerned about. They also brought along a team of young hairdressers from a London salon experienced in volunteering their services with the homeless community on the streets.

Sunday afternoon opening – We acknowledge that Sundays can be a difficult day for our guest group so we're delighted to have the offer from Christ the King in the first block and Trinity URC in the second block to host our guests in the afternoons. They were so grateful especially when it was wet and cold.

DWP Worker – A volunteer from the Job Centre Plus came to the shelter to offer support and advice relating to benefits and job searching. This was particularly useful for those guests who were working during office hours and had issues to be dealt with.

ESOL Teaching – A volunteer came in to assist our guests with their English language skills.

Chiropody – Foot issues are common with people who have been homeless so this was a very welcome addition to our services.

New Shower – The Synagogue installed a shower this year, which meant that 6 of our hosting venues were able to offer this invaluable facility.

Crisis at Christmas

Our guests spent a week at Crisis at Christmas again this season. We are really grateful to Nigel Lindsay from Dundonald Congregational Church who arranged a minibus from Kings College and drove our group to and from The Winters Residential Centre in Chalk Farm.

The feedback this year was incredibly positive; our guests were overwhelmed by this brilliant initiative and were so grateful for the opportunity to remain in one place for a week. One guest said she felt like she'd been a part of a really unique and special event and several felt that it was an experience they will never forget - in a good way. They felt the range of services on offer was so helpful and the link into Crisis Commercial Street for courses proved very useful for some.

We briefed the guests before they went to Crisis about the freedom of movement they would have during their week there and what was expected when they returned to us. This seemed to have had an affect because we didn't have the level of 're-entry' issues that we experienced last year. It was a pleasure to have them back.

Sleeping Bags and Mats

We bought 20 new sleeping bags at the beginning of the run that we were able to mend and wash for use by others as guests moved on from the shelter. We have approximately 10 sleeping bags in storage at the YMCA to start next season.

This Season

We began with the intention of offering 12 bed spaces per night but increased that to 14 as the weather deteriorated after New Year.

Approximately 300 volunteers took part in the scheme this year offering an impressive total of 8,016 volunteer hours over the shelter run.

This year the shelter was open for 98 nights, providing 1,226 bed nights to 29 different guests for 14 weeks over the 15 week period (including the week the guests were away at Crisis at Christmas).

We served approximately 3,500 meals, gave out 30 sleeping bags and celebrated 2 guest birthdays with cards, cake and candles.

33 different guests were given a place in the shelter and of those;

- 1 chap did not attend at all.
- 1 young woman was also referred straight on to MASH, a hostel specifically for young people under the age of 24 in the borough, who happened to have an available room, so she was moved on before she moved into the shelter!
- 1 young woman came to the shelter but left very late at night. She separated from her young child and was very distressed. We spoke with her the next day and know that she was due to move into private rented accommodation with her child 2 days later.
- 1 woman could not find the shelter venue and was angry and frustrated when we spoke on the phone as I tried to persuade her to come back. She wanted permanent accommodation and not the shelter set up.

5 women were offered a place in the shelter in all but only 2 became our guests. 1 had a very successful outcome from the shelter. The other guest had significant mental health issues that were a considerable concern to several agencies. Our duty was to manage her risk but she refused to engage with mental health services resulting in the breakdown of her relationship with us so she moved on. We know that another shelter is currently supporting her on and off as she drops in and out of contact.

Demographics:

Borough from	Number of Guests
Merton	19
Wandsworth	1
Croydon	3
Kingston	0
Lambeth	3
Other - Lewisham, Sutton, Greenwich	7

27 male and 2 female guests

Nationality: UK = 16, Non UK EEA (European Economic Association) = 15. Non UK Other = 2

This was a significant change from last season when we hosted 7 UK nationals.

Referral Source: of guests given a place

Source	Number	Source	Number
Faith in Action Drop In	16	Self Referral	1
Thames Reach LSR	1	Manna Centre	1
Spires Drop In	3	CAB Merton	1
Merton Council	2	Police	1
Sutton Uplift	1	Probation	1
Crisis Skylight Croydon	1	Sutton Night Watch	1
Church	1	Sal. Army Croydon	1

20 people presented on our opening day, December 5th at the assessment point at the YMCA. All were assessed and 12 were given a place based on vulnerability, medical need and local connection. 2 left before they were assessed and the remaining 6 were placed on the waiting list.

We also received well over 100 telephone enquiries and referrals from individuals, the CAB, No Second Night Out, Probation, St Georges Hospital, Spires, Oasis Church, Engage Merton (formerly The MACS Project), Refugee Action, Sutton & Wimbledon Police, Red Thread Young Peoples Domestic Abuse Team – St Georges, The Manna Centre, Prison, Street Pastors, Lambeth College Learning Support Team, Spear, Crisis at Christmas, KCAH (Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness), other night shelter projects etc. Many we invited in to meet with us but others who were too far away were all given details of emergency outreach teams and signposted on to other services.

We completed approximately 70 face to face referrals that were mostly added to the waiting list if appropriate. There were a number of referrals that we did not take due to acute mental health issues, aggressive, confrontational and volatile behaviour or really chaotic addictions.

Length of Stay:

Days	Number
1 to 31 (1 month)	14
32 to 63 (2 months)	6
64 to 98 (3 months) +	9

Age of Guests:

18 – 34 yrs.	9
35 – 44 yrs.	8
45 – 54 yrs.	10
Over 55 yrs.	6



Our Guests

This year, a total of 29 different guests were hosted at the night shelter.

Before coming into the shelter; 17 guests were street homeless, 13 were new to the street and 3 were considered to be hidden homeless.

1 guest had lived between the 5 terminals at Heathrow for 5 months before he found his way to us. Another guest had spent 5 months camped out on Wimbledon Common.

Many found themselves in their current situations due to a relationship breakdown.

Our guests came from a wide range of professions; builders, a TV producer who'd had his own companies, a baker, a salesman, a bailiff, students and lorry drivers.

We worked with each guest individually to assess their needs and support them in whichever way appropriate to help achieve the best possible outcomes.

Benefits

2 guests were assisted with benefit applications and 1 with obtaining a National Insurance Number.

Most EEA guests were either not entitled to or not interested in claiming benefit over finding work and supporting themselves. We supported those who were eligible to benefit to make a claim for either Job Seekers allowance, Employment Support Allowance or the newer Universal Credit (not easy) if appropriate. Many of our guests had always worked to support themselves and had never claimed benefits before.

Housing

25 of our 33 guests given a place at the shelter moved on in a positive way.

Housing outcomes:

Outcomes 2016/2017	Number
Private Rented Sector	9
YMCA Surbiton	4
MASH Hostel for under 24's	2
Council Property	1
Missionaries of Charity Hostel –NRPF*	2
Joel Project – Permanent Night Shelter Kingston	1
Other Night Shelter Projects	5
Hostel	1
Friends & Family	2

*NRPF – No Recourse To Public Funds

Work

With the stability of the shelter 8 guests found a job and worked consistently during their stay enabling them to save for a deposit and rent in advance for private rented accommodation.

Health

- 11 guests had an issue with problematic alcohol use.
- 4 guests had an issue with problematic drug use.
- 12 guests had significant physical health issues.
- 6 guests had some level of mental health issues.

Actions

Kryisia worked tirelessly to address the health needs of our guests.

8 of our guests were registered with a local GP.

Kryisia accompanied our guests to GP, dental and optician appointments.

3 guests were very unwell when they came into the shelter all with chronic chest infections. 1 had an underlying heart condition that was being investigated, so when his condition deteriorated further one evening experiencing chest pain and vomiting we called an ambulance. He was taken to hospital for further tests and observation before being discharged back to the shelter. A 2nd chap was so poorly and worryingly underweight when he came to us. He was registered with a GP immediately and prescribed medication straight away. With time and good nourishment his GP was very happy that he put on over a stone during his stay in the shelter. All 3 men required 2 courses of antibiotics to tackle their infections effectively.

We had a guest who was an insulin dependent diabetic who struggled to remember to move his insulin from venue to venue when he first arrived at the shelter. Kryisia and some wonderful volunteers had to do a little running around Merton to collect his medication from wherever he'd left it the night before on a few occasions.

We had 3 guests on crutches at one point! 2 had long-term pre-existing medical issues that were being addressed. We supported both with weekly travel passes for the duration of their time in the shelter to assist them to travel to GP and hospital appointments and to travel from venue to venue as easily as possible. The 3rd chap sprained his ankle during a game of table tennis.

Many of our guests were able to reduce or stop their drink and drug use during their time in the shelter. They were all encouraged to link with support services and groups as appropriate and given details of all local meetings. Several did attend.

Additional Help

We provided financial help to cover travel costs for guests to attend appointments at the job centre, GP and hospital visits, job interviews and those starting new jobs, English classes and vocational courses at Crisis and for those with acute health issues.

We covered the cost of 24 Weekly Bus Passes, 25 Daily Bus Passes and 26 Single Bus journeys.

We put out a request to our volunteer network for unused oyster cards and received about 23 that

we used throughout the shelter run. Some had credit already loaded so saved the shelter approximately £100, we are very grateful. We have given the remaining oyster cards to Faith In Action to assist others in need over the course of the year.

We supported our guests by assisting with CV writing, birth certificate applications, National Insurance Number applications, passport applications, job applications, attending property viewings, liaising with lettings agents, storing important documents securely, advocating, making housing referrals, benefit claims and opening bank accounts (so much harder than it sounds!) etc.

Kryisia and I accompanied guests: to the Polish Consulate, to register documents with an employment agency, to Probation and to the Drug and Alcohol Service.

We bought shoes for 2 guests, 1 who needed a huge size 13 and 1 who needed a very small size. Both were really delighted that we were able to help.

Resettlement – This season a number of our guests moved into accommodation that was unfurnished. We met a contact who has a business staging show homes for sale who offered her help for our guests. She donated a van-load of furniture and furnishings including a bed, sofa, lamps, pictures for the walls, bedding, dining-chairs etc., and delivered it to a property in Mitcham. This was the most amazing gesture that helped make an instant home.

Dress For Success – 1 guest was referred to this organisation that supports people who have experienced homelessness or difficulty by offering a complete outfit from top to toe appropriate for interviews and starting work. This service is available for both men and women.

Home For Good – 2 guests were referred to this project for ongoing support when they moved on from the shelter into their own accommodation. Home For Good is run by The Passage and match local volunteers with those starting the next part of their journey to help ensure it is a successful experience.

Issues

4 guests lost their places in the shelter. 2 did not attend for 2 consecutive nights due to their alcohol use. 1 guest displaying significant issues refused to engage with mental health services and then refused to engage further with us so the relationship broke-down and she moved on to another shelter project. 1 was drunk and aggressive towards other guests and volunteers. Several others received warnings for being drunk and or bringing alcohol into the premises. We acknowledge that many of our guests struggle with addictions and that some will not manage to adhere to the rules of the shelter.

1 guest had a gambling issue and was really struggling. We advised him about the services in place to support him and made sure that he had all of the information he needed to access that help.

A bout of flu affected several of our guests again this season which is inevitable with a group of people living in such close proximity to each other over a winter period. All we can do is to manage the situation by ensuring there are heavy duty disinfectant materials on site to reduce the risk of further infection.

1 venue had a problem with a broken boiler which meant no heating or hot water. Very quickly, St

Mark's stepped in to offer their venue, which saved the day.

1 guest had been reported as a missing person before he came into our shelter. As soon as we were made aware of this we contacted the police who came to the YMCA to meet with him and verify that he was safe and well.

We hosted a couple of guests with significant mental health issues that certainly brought its challenges. Some of our guests showed incredible kindness and really got alongside them. We tried to engage both guests with mental health services for support but neither chose to engage before they left the shelter.

We had some squabbles and personality clashes to manage which we dealt with by bringing guests together with a third party to talk through their differences. To their credit, everyone managed to find a respectful path forward.....eventually!

Some of our working guests struggled with a level of tiredness getting up and out early 7 days a week. Sunday afternoons at Trinity URC helped though, where guests could lie down and catch-up on some much needed sleep.

Luggage issues surfaced only a couple of times this season and was dealt with immediately. We stored quite a bit of stuff for our guests that was really appreciated, thank you YMCA.

The Joys

It was very humbling to witness how so many of our guests supported each other during their time in the shelter. There really was a feeling of an extended family as the group moved through this experience together. It was very heartwarming to see how people facing such adversity were able to reach out to each other and form such supportive relationships. This was of course enhanced by the volunteers from all venues who offered warmth and friendship which made the environment so safe for all to enjoy.

Chess brought this group together in a way we have not seen before. Hundreds and hundreds of games were played over the course of the shelter that transcended all language, cultural, gender, age and role differences across our shelter community. Of course it was a very serious business and I still have no idea how to play, so many rules, but it was wonderful to see.

We are very grateful to so many of our hosting venues who donated household items as our guests moved on from the shelter into independent accommodation. This kind of very practical help was really appreciated as the cost of setting-up home is significant. Thank you for your generosity.

The guest group were invited to the All England Lawn Tennis Club for Sunday lunch and a guided tour of the grounds and museum in March. This was such a treat to be out doing something lovely together. We have some fabulous photos of the group in the press room ready to be interviewed! They really enjoyed the outing and the club have said they'd be more than happy to do the same every year.

Finances

Expenditure Item	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Project Coordinator & Assistant Salary (4 months)	£5000	£5000	£7500 £5000	£15,000
John Innes Expenses	£251.79			
Bus Travel – weekly pass for disabled/ill guests	£298.80	£217.60	£525.90	£296.80
Travel for guests/volunteers to job centres, GP visits, Hospital and Housing appointments	£39.03	£54.55	£154.85	£364.00
New Oyster Cards			£50	
Travel for guests to Putney venue (excess)	£134	£182.40		£32.90
Guest deposit for YMCA	£45			
Shelter mobile phone / Office Supplies/Sundries(Birthdays, padlocks)	£66.69	£51.82	£168.27	£209.55
Travel to and from Crisis at Christmas		£147.20		
Sleeping mats		£75	£100	
Sleeping Bags		£90	£270	X20= £400
Storage shed		£150		
Total	£5,835.31	£5,968.57	£13,769.02	£16,303.25

This season we were awarded £10,000 by the Wimbledon Foundation to help fund salaries. We are very grateful to the AELTC for their financial assistance again this year.

We also received a number of generous donations from individuals both within, and outside of our shelter community, from the YMCA Sleep Easy fundraising event and also from a number of our venues into the shelter central fund.

We were very happily surprised that several guests repaid money that was spent on providing travel passes when they began new jobs. They were so grateful for the support we'd been able to offer to get them started.

Recommendations and Developments

This was the first season that both Krysia and I were in post at the beginning of the shelter run which made a huge difference in preparing for the run, supporting our guests and being at the venues each evening to support our volunteers teams. The feed-back certainly suggests that all involved found this useful. We would therefore recommend at least the same staffing level for next Season.

Crisis Skylight Croydon – Krysia and I went to visit the very newly opened Crisis Skylight building in Croydon in March and met the people running the service. This facility will be such a great asset to future guests in our shelter offering so many practical, vocational and social activities, courses and services. There is a comprehensive timetable of activity in everything from Yoga to painting and decorating accredited courses.

Volunteer Database – It would be incredibly useful to have a database of all shelter volunteers for

several reasons. Firstly just to be able know exactly how many people we have in our network and those that have attended the shelter training but also for those who are willing to share details of any particular skills, a valuable resource for when we need a piece of advice or support for shelter guests.

- 1 shelter volunteer offered her sewing/mending/alteration skills to assist our guests.
- Another volunteer who is a qualified chiropodist came to the shelter to treat those who needed it.
- We had a volunteer who is a qualified psychotherapist who came forward to offer 6 counselling sessions to a young guest who we felt would really benefit from some additional support.

We tend to stumble across this help by luck rather than design.

Sunday Opening – Following on from our recommendation at the end of last season, Christ the King in Wimbledon Park came forward and opened their church hall on Sunday afternoons from mid-January this season. They offered light refreshments and a warm and dry place for our guests to be between 1-5pm, which was very well received by a small number of our guest group. The others in the group felt it was too far to walk.

Trinity URC, who are the hosting venue on Sunday evenings in our second block, then came forward and offered to open early from 3pm for our guests from the end of January.

This was ideal as our guests could then be in the one place all the way through to Monday, which worked very well.

Christ the King felt strongly that they wanted to continue to offer their hall in the second block as well. The uptake by our guest group was very low, so it was possibly not the best use of resources.

In order for the majority of the guest group to benefit, the ideal would be to ask permission from Trinity URC, to open their venue from 1pm, staffed and supported by a volunteer team from Christ the King or another community who would like to help.

Training – Having spent so much time at the shelter, it appears that many volunteers have not attended any training at all and some were unaware that any training was offered. We have always said that we ask that all shelter volunteers attend the training in November to best ensure consistency across our shelter project.

It has been suggested that we run training in November for all and then a further session in January for anyone involved in the second block especially.

We also arranged Emergency First Aid training in November run by the Red Cross in Wimbledon for volunteers from our first block venues with the intention of running it again in January for second block volunteers. This did not happen however as we were just too busy. Next season we'll make sure that we organise this training for all.

Housing Justice run a day's course throughout the year called 'An Overview of Homelessness' covering Issues around homelessness, mental health awareness, drug & alcohol awareness and

managing challenging behaviour. There is a personal cost of £40 per participant but it is very useful for anyone interested in increasing their knowledge of the homeless field.

If you would like to find out more, do contact Mark Brennan on:

m.brennan@housingjustice.org.uk

Collections/Donations – There are some items that we have come to realise are incredibly useful to our guests that perhaps we could all start collecting ready for next winter.

1. Small rucksacks and backpacks
2. Oyster cards – ideally not with a negative balance!
3. Hotel-type towelling slippers. It really seems to make a difference to our guests to put on slippers when they come back to us at the end of the day. The hotel ones are good because they weigh nothing and can tuck away easily into a bag without really taking up any space.

Several people have asked how they can make a donation to the night shelter. We now have a Virgin Money Giving page if anyone should ask. They should go to

<http://m.virginmoneygiving.com/mt/uk.virginmoneygiving.com/fundraiser-web/fundraiser/showFundraiserPage.action?userUrl=MertonWinterNightShelter&pageUrl=2&isTeam=true>

Resettlement Fund – We received a really kind donation from 1 of our venues to assist guests with items they might need when they move on. We were able to order some essential items online and have them delivered easily. Perhaps we could look at allocating an amount of money for this purpose for the season ahead.

Many other venues helped enormously too by collecting household items for our guests to take on with them. What we learnt however, was trying to arrange the transport of large donated items of furniture was a real problem. Perhaps our new database would tell us if anyone in our network owns a van and could possibly help with this type of thing.

Faith in Action Homeless Project – Many of you have expressed an interest in continuing your voluntary work in this field and I know that FIA would be delighted to hear from you. FIA run a Drop In for the homeless every Wednesday and Friday, 10am -3pm, 52 weeks of the year. Please do contact the Team on 07843 280 419 or team@mertonfaithinaction.org if you would like to find out more or arrange a visit.

Conclusions

We enjoyed a very positive run this season with some great outcomes for our guests. We continue to learn and develop year after year and strive to offer the best possible service to those who need us.

The feedback this year from so many of you was that this year was ‘the best ever’. You clearly enjoyed our guest group as they enjoyed and valued you. We had a much more balanced group of English and non-English speaking guests this year, which was perhaps due to our many referral sources but also maybe, just the people who happened to need our help this year. Many guests had not been homeless before and I believe that by picking people up quickly and offering support, they were able to get back on their feet before things became any worse. Many commented that they could not believe that projects like ours existed with so many good people in the community who just wanted to help; they were very moved by your commitment and kindness. They felt safe, cared

for, supported and hopeful again which is exactly what we are here for.

Acknowledgements

Once again this season we are so grateful to Anna Swidlicka from the Polish Church for organising a rota to ensure we would have a Polish speaking volunteer at the shelter each evening. I feel that Kryisia & I should look at taking this rota on as part of our work now that there are 2 of us to release Anna from this extra piece of work that she so kindly established for us many years ago. Thank you so much Anna for all that you have done and continue to do.

I would also like to thank the Reception Team at the YMCA for their very practical support and help at all hours throughout the 14 week run. We found them all so supportive of the shelter and always willing to assist. Thank you.

We are so grateful to The Terrace for hosting our shelter celebration this year to thank our fabulous volunteers. It was a lovely opportunity to come together socially in such a wonderful setting and feedback a little of the success of this year's shelter run. Everyone really seemed to enjoy themselves and for Kryisia and I, it was a rare opportunity to meet many of our unsung heroes who cover the night shifts and very early morning breakfast shifts. Whatever role you played, you are all amazing and we just feel so privileged and proud to work alongside you all so that collectively, we can make this project happen.

Thank you.

