

1st April 2012

Winter Night Shelter Project Report 2012

Introduction

On Wednesday 4th January 2012, FirmFoundation once again opened the doors of the Welldon Centre in Central Harrow to this year's Winter Night shelter, running seven nights per week, from 7pm - 8am. The shelter closed on the morning of Thursday 29th March 2012.

As the Welldon Centre was not available on Mondays until after 9.30pm, Harrow International Christian Centre (HICC) kindly arranged for the evening meal to take place at their church building, each Monday from 7pm -9.30pm for the shelter's duration. Guests and volunteers then made the five minute walk to the Welldon Centre for the night.

The shelter took referrals from:

- Harrow Council
- The Victoria Hall single homeless drop-in
- Harrow Citizens Advice Bureau
- Various London homeless services who contacted us through the Homeless link website. www.homeless.org.uk

The aim of the shelter was to provide safe dormitory style overnight accommodation for up to 10 male guests per night. FirmFoundation volunteers would then offer a warm, friendly atmosphere and provide an evening meal, breakfast and a packed lunch. Hot shower facilities were also available on site.

The hope was to get alongside each guest during their stay at the shelter and offer, where required, support in accessing local services, such as Benefit Offices and Mental Health Care. Where possible, we also helped guests find long-term accommodation.

Shelter Guests

A total of twenty-two male homeless guests stayed overnight at the shelter . Of these guests:

- Seventeen guests had a local connection to Harrow. A 'local connection' entails having lived in the area for a minimum of six months prior to being homeless. Most of these guests

were referred via local service providers. Of these seventeen guests, twelve had a lifelong connection to the borough, with the other five being Harrow residents for two years or more.

- The five remaining guests were referred to us primarily through the homeless team at Heathrow Airport.
- Only one person had no recourse to public funds, which sadly meant that we were able to offer little help with regards to finding long term accommodation and very limited support in accessing services.
- In total, ten guests were able to find accommodation during their stay at the shelter.
- Ten different nationalities were represented, with guests originally from Algeria, Cyprus, England, Ireland, India, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Sudan and Somalia.

Services Offered

- Well over one thousand meals were served at the shelter, offering a great opportunity for conversation and friendships to be built.
- With help and support from a local launderette, a Laundry Service was set up whereby guests were able to do their own laundry. Each week the shelter issued guests with a voucher giving a free machine wash and dry at the launderette. Over thirty vouchers were issued during the project, which was lower than expected.
- For the duration of the shelter, we distributed several Oyster Cards, containing weekly bus passes, enabling our guests to attend job interviews and medical appointments, look for long-term accommodation as well as travel into Central London to access support from larger Homeless charities.
- We distributed numerous items of clothing, from socks to thermal coats.
- We provided all the toiletries, as required by any of the guests.
- We provided four Home Starter Packs, consisting of food, toiletries and cleaning products. Those who needed it also received new bedding.

Accommodation

Ten guests were able to find longer-term accommodation. Support was given to each of these guests in moving into their new homes.

Mental Health Care Support

Four guests received support in accessing local mental health services. Although the majority of our guests suffered from manageable degrees of depression, some were in need of specialist mental health care. Owing to our relationship with local service providers in Harrow those who were in need were able to access specialist mental health services with relative ease.

Drug and Alcohol Support

Many of the guests experienced low to mid levels of drug and alcohol issues; however, two guests who were seriously addicted to drugs and alcohol were introduced to 'EACH' (Ethnic

Alcohol Counseling in Harrow) and COMPASS in Harrow, where they received the necessary support they needed.

Meal Only

Over the course of the shelter, four guests came for the meal and to use the shower facilities, but chose not to stay overnight. We were also able to give them advice with regards to local services.

Volunteers

During the 12 week period of the shelter, over ninety male and female volunteers from across the eight core church groups were involved in coming down to the shelter and befriending the guests each evening and providing the catering. A further twelve male volunteers slept on site, offering a supporting role to the shelter's overnight staff.

Comments and Feedback

We received plenty of encouraging comments from both guests and volunteers, the following quotes are two examples of how the shelter helped both volunteer and guest alike

"..Upon walking in I was made to feel welcome and it became my home straight away. A bed to sleep in, and the best food ever with great support. A little slice of heaven when I needed it most.." (Guest March 2012)

"It has been such a privilege to be involved with the shelter, I thought I would struggle to relate to the guests having never experienced homelessness. What I found was people very much like myself....that was a real eye opener and has definitely changed my views on homelessness" (Volunteer March 2012)

Conclusion

Overall we believe that the winter night shelter has been extremely successful. This year, although the numbers were lower than last year, the shelter better met the need of the homeless in Harrow. Although the problem of homelessness in Harrow and across London remains very complex and substantial, we believe that again we have played our part in providing a safe place to sleep, genuine friendship and access to services which have helped ten more men be taken off the street and placed into long-term accommodation.

The Future

At FirmFoundation, we are very committed to providing ongoing care and support for the homeless throughout the year and employ Michael Scott for two days per week for this purpose. Guests to the shelter, asked for ongoing friendship and opportunities to get together. Therefore, we are planning a monthly 'get together' with former shelter guests which will involve volunteers providing an evening meal and social time one night a month at HICC. This will also give us a place to invite and help anyone who is homeless that we may come into contact with in the future.

Following this year's success, we are already planning our Winter Night Shelter 2013, which will again be held at the Welldon Centre.

If you would like to support, financially or otherwise, either the ongoing work, or the 2013 Shelter, please do get in touch. We would love to speak with you about joining with us as we serve the homeless and marginalised in our community.

Winter Night Shelter Accounts

Please find enclosed a copy of the accounts for our Winter Night Shelter 2012.

Special Thanks

Our sincere thanks to everyone who has given financial support to the 2012 winter night shelter.

In particular;

Albert Hunt Trust

All Churches Trust

Homelessness Transition Fund

Lawton Trust

London Catalyst

North West London Community Foundation (Evening Standard Fund)

Marsh Christian Trust

Souter Charitable Trust

Numerous Churches in Harrow