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Winter Night Shelter Project Report 2013

Introduction

FirmFoundation's Winter Night Shelter opened its doors for the third consecutive year on Thursday 3rd January 2013. The shelter ran, as before, at the Welldon Centre for 7 nights per week for the next twelve weeks closing on Thursday 28th March 2013. Harrow International Christian Center (HICC) once again offered the use of their church building helping us to overcome the problem of the unavailability of the Welldon Centre site until after 9.30pm on Mondays.

FirmFoundation's continued aim was for the shelter to provide a warm and friendly atmosphere and safe dormitory style overnight accommodation for up to 10 male guests per night.

Volunteers provided food onsite, consisting of a two course evening meal and a cooked breakfast at weekends. A cooked breakfast was provided every weekday morning at Trinity Church, Hindes Road 5 minutes walk from the shelter.

Hot shower facilities and necessary toiletries were also available on site.

Potential shelter guests were referred through Harrow Street Pastors (HSP), Harrow Council, Victoria Hall single homeless drop in, Harrow Citizens Advice Bureau, London Street Rescue, Heathrow Travel Care and other London homeless services who were able to contact us through the Homeless link website www.homeless.org.uk. All of these organizations made successful referrals to this year's night shelter.

During their stay at the shelter we got alongside each guest and offered support, where required, in accessing local services such as benefit offices and mental & physical health care. Where possible we helped guests in finding long term accommodation.

Shelter Summary

A total of 17 male homeless guests stayed overnight at the shelter.

- Well over 1000 meals were shared at the shelter, offering a great opportunity for discussion and trust to be built.
- 13 guests had lived in the Harrow area for a minimum of 6 months prior to being homeless. Of these 13, 2 guests had a lifelong connection to the borough; a further 5 had lived in the area for over 5 years.
- 8 guests were referred directly through Harrow Street Pastors who also provided volunteer support at the shelter during the evenings.
- 5 had no recourse to public funds, which sadly meant that we were far less able to help with regards to finding long term accommodation and accessing local services.
- In total the shelter accommodated people from 10 different nations (England, Ireland, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Poland, Romania, Somalia, Sri Lanka & Trinidad)

Services Offered

- Laundry Service - with help and support from a local launderette the shelter set up a washing voucher system whereby guests were able to do their own laundry. Each week guests were entitled to a voucher that ensured one free machine wash and dry at the launderette. Over 60 vouchers were issued during the course of the project.
- Assistance with travel - for the duration of the shelter, we distributed numerous Oyster Cards containing weekly bus passes. Many of our guests had mobility issues and not having to travel on foot to medical appointments, potential accommodation interviews and to do laundry was of great benefit to them.
- Clothing –winter packs consisting of thermal hats, gloves, scarves, socks & jumpers were distributed to every guest at the shelter.
- Home Starter Packs - we provided 6 Home Starter Packs, consisting of food, toiletries and cleaning products. Those who needed it also received new bedding.

Medical care

- 5 guests were in need of immediate medical care on arrival at the shelter. The practice at St Peters Medical Centre West Harrow, provided emergency access to a GP and Nurse. As a result all 5 were able to access appropriate medication for their respective conditions.
- 2 guests were referred to Northwick Park Hospital where they were able to receive further medical attention previously unavailable to them.
- 2 further guests were helped in addressing their poor eyesight resulting in 1 new pair of glasses and a new set of contact lenses being purchased on their behalf.

Drug and Alcohol Support

- With the help of EACH (Ethnic Alcohol Counseling in Harrow) and COMPASS in Harrow, 2 of our guests were able to get the necessary support they needed.

Meal Only

- 2 extra street homeless men came to the shelter 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.

Exclusions

- 3 guests were excluded from the shelter for breach of shelter policy with regards to violent or threatening behavior. Contact between the shelter coordinator and the guests was maintained and continued support outside the shelter was provided to them.

Accommodation

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

Volunteers

During the 12 week period of the shelter over 70 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 team of 8 male volunteers slept on site offering support to the shelters overnight staff.

Conclusion

We firmly believe that the winter night shelter has once again been a success. Although the numbers have again been lower than the previous year, due to a further year's worth of experience, we have been better equipped to offer a greater level of support to the guests.

With many changes to the welfare system over the last year and the present alterations to the benefit system, the problem of homelessness in Harrow and across London remains very complex and substantial, and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. In light of this FirmFoundation is delighted to be able to say that we do and will continue to play our part in addressing this ongoing problem.

The value to our guests of being provided with a safe place to sleep, genuine friendship, access to services and in the case of 7 guests, long term accommodation, is immeasurable.

FirmFoundation would like to thank the following donors for their continued support.

Agape Prayer Fellowship
Belmont School
Brent Addiction Counseling Service
Homelessness Transition Fund
Rotary Club of Northwick Park
Six Crown Street
Souter Charitable Trust
The Albert Hunt Trust
The Churches in Harrow
The Lawton Trust
Mr. Rob Moles
Waitrose Ltd

FirmFoundation would also like to acknowledge the tremendous support and generosity of numerous individuals who wish to remain anonymous.

Yours sincerely

Michael Scott

Project Coordinator
FirmFoundation