



## THANET WINTER SHELTER

### Thanet Winter Shelter 2016/2017 Report

#### **What is the Thanet Winter Shelter?**

The Thanet Winter Shelter is the community's response to the problem of homelessness in Thanet District Council area. It follows the Housing Justice model which runs across many London boroughs and other parts of Kent. For the three coldest months of the year (December, January, February), volunteers from churches and the wider community across the isle of Thanet come together to provide shelter, succour and hospitality every night for up to 20 people who have nowhere else to stay. Five church venues opened their doors one night a week for the full 13 weeks of the Shelter this year. Another four churches opened their doors one night a week for 6 and 7 weeks of the Shelter. For the three months, the Shelter venues opened from 7.30pm and provided a hot evening meal, a warm, dry and safe space to sleep and breakfast. The Shelter is staffed completely by volunteers, from the local churches and the wider community.

#### **Who stays at the Shelter?**

This year we provided shelter for 42 guests. Full statistics of this year's guests are attached. Our guests were very varied; they range in age from 19 to 65, and come from all walks of life. There were 31 male guests and 11 female guests this year. For all of our guests this was their first stay in the night Shelter. Like many Shelters across the UK, many of our guests are homeless because they have drug, alcohol or mental health issues but some are homeless due to adverse life circumstances i.e. relationship breakdown, debt, problems accessing benefits, eviction due to substantial rent arrears, etc.

#### **Why do the guests need somewhere to stay?**

All our guests have run out of housing options and have nowhere else to stay but their circumstances are very varied. More than half of our guests, 27 (64%), had been sleeping rough before they came to the Shelter. A surprising number 15 (36%) were new to the street due to being evicted for rent arrears caused by rent increases which were not covered by Housing Benefits. Many of our guests have alcohol or drug issues and some have mental health issues. Although most of our guests are entitled to Housing Benefit, the few social landlords in this area who are willing to accept tenants on benefits already have long waiting lists. The Shelter works with the Thanet District Council Housing Options, Porchlight and the Aspire Homeless Project to help our guests to get back into housing.

#### **Why doesn't the council provide them with somewhere to stay?**

Single homeless people rarely have priority need for Social Housing. Where there is a local connection, the District Council will provide whatever advice and assistance they can to enable them to secure accommodation. The waiting time for social housing for single homeless people can be many years. The situation is exacerbated by there being no emergency short-term hostels in the area serviced by the Shelter.

In very severe cold weather (e.g. if the forecasted night temperature drops below zero for 3 consecutive nights) the government requests local authorities to provide temporary emergency shelter so that no homeless person is at risk during cold snaps. Working with Thanet District Council Housing Options, we increased the number of guest beds at the Shelter from 20 to 25 to meet the

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additional demand during the period of Severe Weather Emergency Protocol. A total of 22 stays were taken up during the two SWEP periods.

## **How does the Shelter run/how is it resourced?**

The churches offer their premises free of charge, and cover the heating costs. Volunteers from the churches and the wider community provide and cook the meals. The generosity of the wider community provides food, duvets, pillows, bedding, towels, pillows, pillowcases, hand towels, toiletries, socks, beanies, gloves and underwear. Through funding obtained from the Thanet District Council, a private donor, companies, organisations, grants and individuals, the TWS funds the Project Manager, Project Worker, camp beds, training for volunteers, food for the evening meals and breakfasts, transport of the beds, bedding, the shelter kit and guests to the venues, and other minor running costs.

There were 390 people who volunteered to work in the Shelter. Of the total 180 (46%) from the faith Community and 210 (54%) from the Wider Community. Up to 26 Volunteers each day, over three shifts at each different Shelter venue, prepare the venues, cook and serve the food, eat with the guests, set out the beds, stay awake all night, prepare, serve and eat breakfast, see the guests off and then tidy and clean ready for the next day-time activity in the venue. The different Shelter venues have different atmospheres, with some being quieter and others more active and interactive (e.g. playing table-tennis, games of cards, scrabble, entertainment from a choir). Each guest received Christmas gifts.

## **What do the guests do during the day?**

The day-time is very hard for the guests as we are closed from 8am until 7.30pm and they have nowhere to go, nothing to do, and little or no money to spend. The guests are encouraged to attend the daytime activities provided by other local projects. Many of the guests engaged with the Aspire Homeless Project which provided them with tea, coffee, a meal each Friday, company, conversation, assistance accessing benefits, housing and services. A number of guests found the task of completing benefits forms very daunting and were grateful for the assistance from volunteers to do so.

## **Are any services provided to the Shelter guests?**

With the support of our TWS volunteer network, TWS Guest Support Group and the Aspire Homeless Project, we were able to find employment for 2 of our guests. The Aspire Homeless Project made access to Aspirations Centre courses available to our guests. Guests were able to access the rehabilitation services provided by Porchlight and Turning Point.

Due to a lack of a home address and their circumstances, many of our guests can find it hard to get medical care directly from a doctor's surgery. Dr Heather Scott and the Bethesda Medical Centre provided access to medical care to those of our guests who did not already have a doctor.

## **Mental Health services provided to the Shelter guests.**

Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust offered mental health assessments to all guests of the Shelter. If required, 1:1 time would then be offered regularly. The primary aim being to ensure that all guests were referred in to the most appropriate primary care/charity sector services for their needs. In total 42 guests used the Shelter, of these 22 (52%) engaged in assessments and/or 1:1s.

## Results

Across the 90-day period, 23 sessions of Mental Health input were provided, equating to 80.5 hours. During this time, there were 134 contacts across the 22 individuals. Of these 22, 11 (50%) were

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referred to IAPT services for talking therapy, 16 (73%) were advised and encouraged to engage with Turning Point and 3 (13%) were referred to LiveWell. 3 (13%) were already under secondary mental health care and given input from the Shelter, 1 individual was planned to be discharged from secondary services. 0 were referred into secondary services.

The costs saved to the health economy by these interventions alone are approximately £35,510 (134 contacts at £265 per contact). This of course does not account for any additional costs saved by holding individuals in Primary care.

## Conclusions

There is an abundance of research which highlights the prevalence of mental illness amongst the homeless population. The interventions offered and engaged with, and indeed the use of numerous charities and primary care input, highlights that there is appropriate care in primary settings for what is often considered a “hard to reach” population.

No other Shelter in Kent offered mental health input, and it was the structured support (all guests and volunteers knew when sessions were scheduled to take place) and relationship building that led to positive outcomes.

Whilst this was a pilot project which evolved throughout the duration of the Shelter, it must be argued that such interventions and input should be worth pursuing in future Shelter projects, given the positive outcomes and costs saved.

## **How long do the guests stay at the Shelter?**

The Shelter was open for 13 weeks (1st December 2016 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017). Twenty-seven of our guests (64%) stayed in the Shelter for 3 weeks or less, fourteen (34%) stayed between 3 and 9 weeks and one of them (1%) stayed for 9 weeks or more. When places become available with social landlords, Porchlight, The Old School Lodge, hostels, B&Bs and managed housing, we can move guests on fairly quickly if they are eligible and suitable. But guests who are not eligible for Housing Benefit, who have rent arrears, or who have more complex needs (e.g. alcohol dependency) cannot generally be easily placed so may end up staying in the Shelter much longer as we try and support them to find other accommodation options.

## **What happens to the guests when the Shelter closes?**

TWS staff work hard during the period the Shelter is open to try and find more sustainable accommodation for our guests. This includes placing guests in year-round hostels, private rented accommodation; helping guests bid for council housing; working with the TDC and alcohol or drug rehabilitation agencies, etc. A number of our guests have found themselves homeless due to relationship breakdown with their families over the Christmas/New Year period. We encourage and support these guests to reconcile with their families so that they may return home. This year 20 (80%) of our guests have been found more sustainable accommodation. A further 3 (12%) have been found temporary accommodation. Two of our guests have resigned themselves to sleeping rough or in tents or cars. One of the hardest things in running the Night Shelter is when, on the last evening and morning, several guests ask, with visible anxiety and trepidation “Where will we sleep tonight?” TWS can only advise them on places that are more or less safe to sleep rough and encourage them to keep engaging with the Aspire Homeless Project and TDC Housing Options while they try and find somewhere better. The situation is exacerbated by there being no emergency short-term hostels in the area serviced by the Shelter.

## **Housing Justice Quality Mark Accreditation**

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Housing Justice assessed the Thanet Winter Shelter for the Housing Justice Quality Mark Accreditation. The assessment involved rating the Shelter against 17 Excellent Practice standards and 22 Safe Practice standards. The Thanet Winter Shelter was awarded the highest possible Excellent Practice accreditation level because the Shelter met all 39 standards.

## How can you help?

- You can volunteer to help at the Shelter;
- You can provide specialist services (e.g. chiropody, dentistry, entertainment, etc.) at the Shelter;
- You can donate towards the funding of the Shelter;
- You can donate goods (especially food, new pants, socks and toiletries).

For more information, please visit the TWS website at [www.thanetwintershelter.org.uk](http://www.thanetwintershelter.org.uk)

## Thank you

We are very grateful to all the volunteers, especially the venue coordinators, who give their time and effort and without whom this project would not work. Also to;

- The 9 churches (see list below) that provide the venues, facilities and heating;
- The Referral Agencies (see list below) staff who refer guests to the Shelter;
- The TWS staff who assess the referrals, distribute the guest list every day, coordinate the shifts and the volunteers and who work with the guests to sort out their benefits and find move-on accommodation;
- Kent Winter Shelter Network - who provide a Forum where Night Shelter project managers from across Kent can meet regularly, encourage each other, and share ideas, advice and good practice;
- Housing Justice who provide training for the TWS staff, guidance, and advice on best practice;
- Our funders and commercial supporters (Thanet District Council, Alan Bown, Local Churches, Rotary, St John's Lodge, Waitrose, Paramount Independent Property Services LLP, Peters Fish Factory, The Community of the Presentation Trust, Batchelor's Bakery, the Catering Department at East Kent College Broadstairs, St John the Baptist church, the knitters of St Philip's Church, Marianne's Christmas blessing bags and all the individual donors) who have donated funds, food and resources;
- Dr Heather Scott and Bethesda Medical Centre who provided care and medical services to guests,
- The Kent Police for their continuing support;
- The Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust;
- The Aspire Homeless Project who provided support services to our guests; and
- The Salvation Army Ramsgate Corps who coordinated the project; provide office space and logistical support.

## Churches hosting the Thanet Winter Shelter

St John the Baptist Church Margate  
St Philip's Church Palm Bay  
St Lawrence's Church Ramsgate  
St George's Church Ramsgate  
St Luke's Church Ramsgate  
New Life Family Church Margate

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Hardres Street URC Church Ramsgate  
St James Church Westgate  
St Paul's Church Cliftonville

## Referral Agencies for the Thanet Winter Shelter

Thanet District Council  
Porchlight  
Kent Police  
Aspire Homeless Project

Ian Buckland  
Project Manager  
Thanet Winter Shelter  
March 2017