



a bed for the night

Reading Churches Night Shelter

2015

Report



Co-ordinated by



Co-authors

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Contents

	Page
Introduction and Acknowledgements (M P)	4
Background (M P)	5
Aims and Objectives of the Night Shelter (M P)	6
Planning (M P)	7
Co-ordinator	
Preliminary meetings	
Core Team	
Organisation & Structure	8
Venues & Method (C L)	11
Training (M P)	
Ops Box	
Records	
Final preparation (M P)	
How the venues worked (C L)	12
Incidents / Actions taken	13
Positive events	14
Statistics	15
Lessons learnt (C L)	16
Next year proposal (M P)	16
One church's experience	17



St. Laurence's Church Interior



St Laurence's Church Welcome Team



Introduction and Acknowledgements

It would be wrong to launch into this report without first acknowledging a certain key element. None of this would have been possible at all if the Holy Spirit had not prompted us and enabled us to carry this through.

From the very beginning when Jim McConnel took sandwiches out to a rough sleeper over 25 years ago, through the night shelter run in 2003, God has been speaking to us about the need to provide a roof over the head of rough sleepers.

More recently a seminar at the New Wine Christian Conference led our Chairman Nick Beard to recommend looking into the Housing Justice model of Night Shelter.

Initial discussion with a couple of senior Church leaders in the town led us to believe that this was both the right thing to do, but also feasible.

As Christians we cannot escape the weight of scripture which calls us:-

*to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?
to share your food with the hungry and
to provide the poor wanderer with shelter'*
Isaiah 58 v 6 +

*'I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me,
I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me...
I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'*
Matthew 22v37

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors,
and that the time of the Lord's favour has come."*
Luke 4:18-19

Love your neighbour as yourself - Jesus

*"The biblical basis for the project, and the importance of prayer to underpin it, was more clear here than in some church-based projects, which felt like a strength of the project without being uncomfortable to volunteers or guests of other faiths or none.
The emphasis on prayer to underpin its smooth running is a good model for other church-based Shelters to consider"*
Rachel Makin, Housing Justice



Background

Faith Christian Group has always been committed to setting up some form of provision for rough sleepers. Feeding guys of an evening only to leave them to return to their spot behind a bush or under a bridge has always felt very inadequate. Our 'articles of association' actually commit us to working towards a 24-7 model.

We currently have a small housing project aimed at men, mostly in recovery from addictions, who would otherwise be homeless. "Stepping Stones" is currently a two-phase project, like two rungs on a ladder. "A Bed for the Night" would provide the first rung up off the street.

In 2013 FCG's Chairman Nick Beard went to a Housing Justice seminar at New Wine and was taken by the simplicity and feasibility of the model. We were then encouraged by others to go for it!

In January 2014 a small team visited Southall and Ealing Night Shelter and were impressed with the how well the model worked. In this case they had 21 churches running over 3 months.

We were fairly confident that we could find 7 local churches in Reading that would catch the vision. Reading has a great history over the past 15 years or so of co-operation between congregations, even to the extent of often referring to there being only ONE Church in Reading. However, it was clear to us that to try to go for two or three months straight off would be ill-advised for very good reasons.

1. To ask any one congregation in Reading to contemplate more than 4 nights straight off was a big ask
2. We had no definitive data on numbers of rough sleepers. Published local authority figures were so low as to appear unreliable. We could only go on two factors:-
 - a. Numbers of people seen by Street Pastors and by our own Soup Runs
 - b. The size of the problem implied by St Mungo's Broadway employing 4 workers for the Reading Street Team

To have launched assuming, say 30 long term rough sleepers, needing help over 2/3 months, only to find half a dozen men in need of shelter, could have involved unnecessary costs and time.

We did some background research including assessing the likely costs of the Night Shelter and in September 2014 we introduced the vision to a group of Church leaders. The response was very positive and after a few email circulars and a couple of meetings we had come up with the full complement of 7 churches and agreed a timetable.

In parallel with this we approached Reading Borough Council to gain their approval for St. Mungos Broadway to work with us. It was then a case of drawing up documentation and designing suitable training for volunteers. This involved a huge amount of work to meet the requirements of the local authority in particular which we can really only now justify in terms of the night shelter recurring in subsequent years.

The direct cash costs of the Project totalled £7,450 of which £3,975 was funded by restricted donations from Churches, Organisations and Individuals.

[Back to Contents](#)



Aims and Objectives of the Night Shelter

The aim was to provide nightly accommodation in local church buildings throughout the month of January.

The proposal was to provide accommodation for up to 15 male and 3 female rough sleepers, at local churches, in January 2015. The model was simple and well-tried elsewhere. The seven churches model works on the basis that a rota of local churches offer one night per week each. Over a month, that would mean only 4 nights in all for any one participating Church.

It was felt as simply wrong that anyone should have to sleep rough in an affluent town. However we know that many rough sleepers are happy to cope outdoors most of the year, it is the cold winter months that hit hardest.

A permanent night shelter is objected to generally as it might become full of people who simply never move on

A temporary - winter months only - provision in various venues would:-

- remove any sense of permanence
- avoid the overheads of a permanent building
- spread the burden of provision
- allow for flexibility

Most towns already running this scheme have started by covering 4 weeks in January in the first year, then, finding that it is rewarding and possible, have gone on to cover a second month and possibly even three, in the second or third year.



[Back to Contents](#)



Planning

Most of the original planning was undertaken by Malcolm Peirce, Director of Faith Christian Group.

A strategy was devised by which to introduce the idea to Church leaders, build interest and confidence among key leaders and then formally launch the proposal. It was realised from the outset that Churches are incredibly busy places. Church leaders too are stretched in all directions and are often approached with new projects and ideas, which often call for finance. It was decided that we should promote this as a pilot scheme intended to see both what the real need was like out on the street and whether we could deliver what was needed.

FCG set aside funds so that from day one money was not an issue. Malcolm approached a few key leaders and sowed the idea. The interest from the beginning was very positive. By the time it came to more formally launch the proposal there was already buy-in from a number of leaders.

Co-ordinator

Research into existing Night Shelters suggested that we would need to employ a paid manager/co-ordinator to oversee the project so as to ensure consistency and safety; to act as the coordinator of the rota; to ensure that everything and everyone was in the right place at the right time; to liaise with St. Mungos-Broadway and to agree who is eligible to use the provision. The post commenced from October 2014.

Preliminary meetings

The first meeting of interested church leaders and other significant people decided upon a Steering Group / Core Team to take things forward and was able to establish the nights each Church would be responsible for. It was quickly agreed to include Street Pastors as a resource to support venues on the door.

Core Team

The Core Team consisted of:-

Malcolm Peirce (Director FCG & member of LifeSpring Church)

Claire Leonard (FCG – Night Shelter Project Manager & Co-ordinator for LifeSpring Church)

Iain Hudson (Corps Officer Central Corps – Salvation Army)

Christiaan (B4M Co-ordinator Central Corps – Community Worker Salvation Army)

John Davies (Minister Providence Chapel)

Sally Leonard (Street Pastor Co-ordinator & member of LifeSpring Church)

Lorraine Briffit (Mustard Tree Foundation / RAHAB & St Laurence's Church)

[Back to Contents](#)



Organisation & Structure

RESPONSIBILITY

Each church would have ultimate responsibility for the running of the night provision. Security of the building would need thought. Access to certain areas might need restricting.

VENUE CO-ORDINATORS/MANAGERS

Each Church appointed their own supervisor to head up their team of volunteers

INSURANCE

Public Liability insurance for volunteers was covered by FCG. Each church's own buildings, contents and public liability cover were checked for the unusual aspect of overnight sleeping.

RISK ASSESSMENTS

With help and support from FCG, each venue carried out its own Risk Assessment to ensure as best they could the safety of volunteers, guests and buildings.

VOLUNTEER TEAM

Each church provided a team supplemented where possible or necessary by people from other churches, perhaps those unable to provide a venue themselves. All volunteers were required to undergo training by Faith Christian Group. Each evening required:- a supervisor; hospitality team (3 plus); kitchen team (at least 2); recommended 4, at least 3, overnight volunteers – at least one female



LifeSpring Church Team

[Back to Contents](#)



SLEEPING

Camp beds, duvets and pillows were provided by Faith and moved from venue to venue each day. Duvet covers, sheets and pillow cases were provided by each venue. All bed linen was washed each week



The Salvation Army “Bedroom”

FOOD

A hot evening meal was provided by each venue, along with breakfast the following morning. This required a fresh couple of volunteers arriving very early.



An example of the Quality Fayre provided

[Back to Contents](#)



HOSPITALITY

Hospitality had to be right at the top of our priorities. Anyone rough sleeping has found themselves there through a complex set of circumstances, some probably of their own making, others imposed upon them. Many in our experience will have been through the care system, yet others the armed forces. All need love, care and a great deal of patience. Friendship is the big requirement, however, various activities, table games, T.V. etc. would really help make guests feel at home.



Providence Chapel Team

WASHING

Toilet facilities were provided together with some basic washing facility.

ACCESS

Once the local authority felt reassured that the scheme would be run safely, permission was given for [St Mungos Broadway](#) to “gate-keep” the access list. Each day they provided a list of eligible guests. A limit of 15 men and 3 women was set on numbers accepted - i.e. number of available beds. This was based on the available size at the smallest venue and an assessment of how many people it was felt would be safe to house together. Experience proved that to have been a remarkably accurate estimate.

“The Health and Safety policy is a good example of how an over-arching policy can helpfully highlight the ethos and aims of a policy area rather than simply bringing together all the related material from other policies.” Rachel Makin, Housing Justice

[Back to Contents](#)



Venues and nights



Andy – one of our lovely Street Pastors

Night	Venue
Sunday	Salvation Army
Monday	Providence Chapel
Tuesday	CiRDiC (St. Giles and All Nations)
Wednesday	LifeSpring
Thursday	St Laurence
Friday	Greyfriars
Saturday	Wesley Methodist

Training

All participants were signed up with FCG as volunteers and required to undergo training, in order to ensure Public Liability Insurance cover. Training involved a minimum of two hours of explanation of safety issues and procedures, all documented in a manual. (see page 12) One practical point learned for 2016 has to be that more emphasis needs placing on drugs awareness.

“The Volunteer Handbook is the best I have encountered - it is really readable in lay-out and style, and gives a clear background as to why and how the Shelter runs, as well as very practical lists of dos and don'ts for the volunteers to follow.” Rachel Makin, Housing Justice

Ops Box

One of the best ideas put forward quite early on came from the experience of Street Pastors. The “Ops Box” idea is to have one or two large plastic boxes which can be moved from venue to venue containing all the vital files, documentation, mobile phone, sharps box, etc. This proved to be highly effective and will be repeated in future.

Records

With the benefit of having visited an operational Night Shelter and example documents from Housing Justice we found that we had all the documentation in place that we needed. The only changes that we envisage for 2016 would be simplification and possible removal of one of the record documents that proved unnecessary and unused.

Final Preparation

Sufficient preparation had been done that there wasn't too much last minute panic over anything. The major task was ensuring that all beds and bedding were in place for the first night. Also the records file took a while to put together.

[Back to Contents](#)



How Venues worked

Each venue ran virtually the same way apart from Providence chapel, which has been running a food hand out on a Monday night for the last 10 years. They opened their doors on a Monday night as usual at 7:45pm and served their meal to over a 100 people. They then closed their doors at 9:00pm to everyone and set up the venue ready for the B4N guests on the list.

5:00-5:30pm – Dave Bolton the mini bus driver from The Salvation Army would arrive at the venue with the camp beds, bedding and ops box. The venue co-ordinator would be there along with a few other volunteers to help set up the beds.

5:30-6:00pm – Camp beds were erected and beds made by volunteers. Catering team would arrive and start the food preparation.

6:30-7:00pm – B4N co-ordinator Claire Leonard would arrive at venue with the guest list and discuss any new guests or issues that had arisen the night before.

7:00-7:15pm – Co-ordinator and volunteers would gather together to pray before opening the doors to the guests.

7:30-8:00pm – Guests would start arriving and firstly be greeted by a Street Pastor. They would then be greeted by the co-ordinator and volunteer who would tick them off on the guest list. On the first night only they would have the guest agreement sheet read out to them by a volunteer so that they fully understood the rules and regulations. They then signed the guest agreement form against the relevant date. The guest's bags would then be taken from them, tagged with their names and stored in a locked room overnight.

8:00-9:00pm – Guests and volunteers would all sit down together and eat dinner and chat amongst themselves.

9:00-11:00pm – Guests and volunteers would chat, play games, watch a DVD or just chill out.

10:00 -10:15pm – Over Night shift volunteers arrive, short debrief with coordinator about any issues or instructions for the morning. Evening staff leave.

11:00-7:00am – Everyone in bed and lights out for the guests

6:30-7:00am – Breakfast catering team arrived and start preparing breakfast. Morning clean up team arrive.

7:00-8:00am – Guests were woken up and breakfast was served. Cleaning of kitchen and other areas starts.

8:00-9:00am – Beds were stripped and linen bagged ready to be taken and washed.

Beds taken apart and packed ready for collection at 8:45 am. Guests all left by 9 am.



Dave moved the bedding to the next venue

Variations

Each team had their own little variation in some way or another. For example LifeSpring Church put on a DVD night as they have various meeting rooms in their venue so there was the space for this to happen. St Lawrence's Church in general caters for the youth and therefore already had the space and equipment for table tennis and snooker as did The Salvation Army and Greyfriars. Cirdic and Wesley were the two smaller venues and at times were quite crowded when we had a full list. The guests were still content on these nights' playing card games and just generally chatting. Although lights out was 11pm, we noticed that in the first 7-10 days the guests were going to bed earlier. As the weeks went and they had got used to having a hot meal and warm bed for the night getting the lights out at 11pm sometimes was a little harder.

[Back to Contents](#)

Incidents

Police visit

On the third evening the police turned up at LifeSpring Church wanting to arrest one of the guests for an outstanding offence. After speaking with Claire Leonard they agreed that they wouldn't arrest him but arranged for him to go to the police station for an interview the following day. Although at first the arrival of the police caused an uncomfortable atmosphere amongst the guests this soon faded once they left.



Ambulance – drug overdose

The ambulance crew were called to an incident, which happened near the end of week 3 of the project, for a drug overdose. Although the guest involved wasn't actually on the list for that night B4N had agreed to let him stay with the project for the weekend. The guest arrived at the venue around 7:15pm sat on the wall outside and then proceeded to go into what first looked like a deep sleep. The colour quickly drained from the guest and it was then recognised that this was an overdose. Claire Leonard quickly called the ambulance whilst two other volunteers held the guest and tried to keep him conscious. The ambulance arrived within a few minutes and the guest was given "Narcam" to bring him out of the overdose.

The guest was then taken inside with the paramedics who did further tests on him to make the decision either to take him in for observation at the hospital overnight or whether he was well enough to stay at the venue. After spending about 30-40 minutes with the guest it was decided both by the guest and the paramedics that he could stay at the venue. The paramedics advised that he drink plenty of water and when he was ready to sleep that he was checked on at least every half an hour to ensure he was still breathing properly etc. Although at first there seemed to be a bit of excitement and a concerned atmosphere this soon settled and the other guests got on with the night. This incident was dealt with swiftly and in the right manner.



Mobile phone theft

The final incident that took place in the last week was the theft of a mobile phone. One of the volunteers around 8:30am put his phone on charge in a public area. He thought it would be safe as the guests were starting to leave. Whilst he had his back turned a guest decided that he was going to steal it. The discovery of the theft didn't happen until about 9:30am when all the guests had left. Claire Leonard was called back to the venue where she sat with the volunteer and watched the CCTV and identified the guest. As the phone had been turned off it was decided that the police needed to be notified. The guests name was given to the police who stated they would get an officer out for statements etc. in the next couple of days.

As the guest was clearly identified on the CCTV Malcolm Peirce and Claire Leonard decided that the guest should no longer be allowed on the project. So the following evening when the guest arrived, Malcolm and Claire approached him and advised him of the CCTV and that the police had been notified. The guest was unable to give back the phone as it had already been sold that morning. The guest did open up and say that he had been bullied into stealing the phone and there seemed to be a lot of personal remorse. He left the venue and then proceeded to hand himself in at the police station. Sadly the phone was not retrieved and we understand that the guest was taken to court then prison.

Apart from the above three incidents the only other incidents we had were:

- A needle being found inside a bed when being stripped.
- Guests spending long periods of time in the toilet either alone or with another guest, we suspect drug use going on.
- First aid incident when a guest arrived with a very infected hand, which was cleaned and bandaged.

"a high level of confidence that they could deal with any difficult issues, and this was evidenced in their Log Book by the capable way they had dealt with a couple of recent incidents" R M, H J

Positive events

Overall the whole project was a positive event within itself. It ran extremely smoothly with each venue having various different skilled volunteers at hand. There were no complaints about the food although the first week pasta bake was served three times.

What was noted by St Mungos was the change in character of some of the guests. They commented on one guest in particular, who suffers from ADHD and has issues around alcohol, that this was the calmest and most settled and relaxed that they had seen him for years.

The guests were always polite and courteous to the volunteers. There was no violence or threatening behaviour either to the volunteers or other guests. (not that we witnessed anyway)

After having a very long and in depth conversation one night with a volunteer a guest gave his life to the Lord. There were also several prayer requests taken.

"The Shelter was very welcoming, with care given to making the Shelter homely too ("Where is the matching pillow case for this duvet?") so it brings together a clear, safe, professionalism with a friendly, individual personal approach." Rachel Makin, Housing Justice



STATS

Total No of referrals from St Mungos	26
Total No of referrals that used the project	22
Total No that never used project	4
Total No of guests housed	7
Prison	1
Moved in with sister	1
Moved in with partner	1
Went into SWEP	12

SWEP = Severe Weather Emergency Protocol



St Giles Team @ CiRDic

[Back to Contents](#)



Lessons learnt

Venue safety

The toilets were quite a big issue at certain venues. There are drug users that access the shelter and we are aware of that and no matter what we are not going to stop an active user from using when they want to. We can monitor the toilets as this seems to be the area that they will go to use. How we tackle this next year I am a little unsure. We could put a sharps box in all venues and advise the guests that it is there but we do not want to promote that we will allow using on the premises.

Security

Security came up as an issue. The phone theft from a volunteer has already been mentioned. A guest also reported having a mobile phone stolen within the first week. Unfortunately that guest decided not to use the safe way of charging his phone in a locked room, and left it in the communal area over night. Volunteers also need to be vigilant around their personal belongings as well and not leave them in the communal areas. Although we stated all this on the training and at every venue before the doors open, the theft of a volunteer's mobile phone still happened. One venue had two radio microphones stolen. This could have been simply avoided by safe storage and was an oversight.

Training

The first training session contained a lot of unnecessary material which we left out of later sessions. We can leave out background information on the statistics and causes of homelessness. On the other hand we should cover a few other areas around running a night shelter, such as some training around drug use, paraphernalia, behaviours, drug overdose and safety around needles etc.

Training needs to be organised into at least two levels. Those volunteers offering evening hospitality or meal provision, evening or morning do not need the intensity of training that must be given to those in a more supervisory role or intending to stay overnight. It is likely that the low level training could be done within an hour or so, possibly in an evening. The more in depth procedures training might take more like 3 hours. This change must be addressed before 2016.

Next Year

The feedback from the churches and volunteers involved has been overwhelmingly positive. There is no doubt that there is enthusiasm and determination to not only repeat this year, but to extend to two months. That will need careful planning and consideration, not least in that supervising for the month took its toll on Claire and to simply have the same person oversee both months on the same basis would be foolish.

As of February 2015 we already had churches putting entries in their diaries and others offering to help. The challenge now is to keep the grassroots enthusiasm bubbling along and plan for an even more successful Night Shelter in Reading in 2016.

It is recommended by Housing Justice that we put in place for next year

1. An Emergency Evacuation Procedure for each venue.
2. A means of guests providing feedback
3. A shelter policy for sharing the Christian faith

[Back to Contents](#)



We will end this report with an article written for Wesley Methodist Church magazine.

“Six months ago I wouldn’t have believed Wesley could do it.” The prospect of “*A Bed For The Night*” was scary. We’d never done anything like it as a church before. It had been mentioned – Margaret Cox (the deacon in the circuit until last September) used to say that Wesley was well-placed for work with the men who hang about by the Kennet. A few of our members had considered becoming Street Pastors, and recently a soup kitchen had been proposed for 84 Queen’s Road.

But we hadn’t actually done those things. So when Malcolm Peirce, Director of FAITH, asked whether Wesley would join a scheme to provide overnight shelter for homeless people, it was still well beyond our comfort zone. David Shaw and Penny Parkinson met Malcolm, took the plunge and signed up. It was still scary as we went through the training and 10th January drew near, when we would be opening our doors for the first time.

After all that, it was “fantastic”; “better than I could have imagined”.

Commitment, prayer and teamwork were the foundation. David inspired us to put aside misgivings and led us in prayer each Saturday night. We drew in volunteers from a wide spectrum of Wesley’s fellowship, who offered support in cooking and greeting, maintaining the overnight watch, or clearing up on the Sunday mornings. And team spirit remained strong, even when we were not quite sure what we were doing.

Commitment came not only from Wesley. The backing of FAITH, Street Pastors, St Mungo’s, people from other churches, even occasionally from no church, all added to the strength of the team. Beyond all that, Norman Smart got the backing of his employer, Circle Hospital, who provided all the bed linen and towels, and even laundered them each week. Brilliant.

For us at Wesley, the whole experience was, as Norman puts it, uplifting and humbling, both for the fellowship of the church and in the interaction with the guests. Julie Fisher really enjoyed chatting to the guests and getting to know them a little, and her sentiments were shared by many.

It was good for Wesley: what about the guests? We like to think that we made a difference by offering a warm, safe, comfortable and friendly place. Some of the visitors were reading the Bible at Wesley and even talking about it. If they were doing that at all the churches, we can have hope.

Everybody I’ve spoken to says we should do “*A Bed For The Night*” again. For Julie Fisher the experience has been further encouragement for the idea of a soup kitchen in 84 Queen’s Road.

I haven’t mentioned God in all this, but each Saturday night the team committed everything to him in prayer, and his presence was clear from scary beginning to exhausted end on 1st February.”

Thanks

Our thanks go to everyone who involved themselves in this project, from agreeing to use venues, to funding, to volunteering. Special thanks of course go to the Core Team, to Venue Co-ordinators and most especially to those slightly mad, courageous people who manned the night shifts! Thank you everyone and God Bless you. Together we have ensured that Housing Justice are considering granting us an “Excellence” status alongside the Kite mark.

Malcolm Peirce – Director FCG

Claire Leonard – Support Worker FCG & Night Shelter Co-ordinator 2015

[Back to Contents](#)





Wesley Kitchen



Greyfriars



Claire



Malcolm