



a bed for the night

Reading Churches Night Shelter

2017 Report

(Staff & Volunteer Version)



Co-authors

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In association with



Reading Christian Network and Reading Street Pastors





Overview

This was the third year of 'A Bed for The Night' running in Reading.

This year we had a new Church working with us – All Nations (with help from Reading Family Church volunteers).

Wesley Church hosted in January and All Nations took over in February.

We initially started with 2 guests on our first night, this rose to 10 by the end of the first week and remained around 10 per night for most of the project.

This year was different as 'rough sleepers' were *'thinking'* about taking a place on B4N. This was felt because begging is prolific in Reading at the moment and a lot of money can be made on the streets at night. So potential guests would rather be out making money to feed their addictions than inside having a bed and a meal and engaging.

The shelter ran smoothly on the whole, as per the previous two years, with a few incidents which we will touch on later in the Report.

There were no serious incidents occurred.

We started on Monday 2nd January (Bank Holiday) and finished on Tuesday 28th February.

Venues and Nights	January	February
Monday	Providence Chapel	
Tuesday	CiRDIC (St Giles and All Nations)	
Wednesday	LifeSpring Church	
Thursday	St Laurence Church	Carey Baptist Church
Friday	Greyfriars Church	New Hope Church
Saturday	Wesley Methodist Church	All Nations Church
Sunday	The Salvation Army	



Debrief

Shortly after the end of the shelter **venue co-ordinators** were invited to a **debrief session** where feedback was sort and discussion around issues occurred. Inevitably with so many volunteers (c. 350) there will be a whole range of opinions and ideas around rules and timings. It also became evident that the layout of the different venues, competing usage thereof and the skills sets of the key team members affects the way in which each venue works.

The following notes are an attempt to summarise and make sense of quite a wide set of opinions and comments.

Guest Files

This year Faith only sent round one file which held the guest register list and agreements. The file containing guests assessments sent to us from St Mungos was kept at the office with any relevant information passed on to the venue co-ordinators. This was to protect guest confidentiality.

We are open to the idea of providing a small summary background on each guest in file for co-ordinator use only so better understanding of guests and their needs

(we decided not to do this this year and to treat each guest as an individual – sharing with co-ordinators anything of any importance/relevance, was some evidence of volunteers reading sharing / discussing personal details of our guests)

Transportation of Bedding

Very Special Thanks needs to go to **Derek Gee** from Greyfriars Church who helped transporting beds/duvets and pillows in his own vehicle for us for the whole of January. Quite an undertaking – Thank you.

The beds and duvets and pillows were also moved around successfully by John from Providence Chapel/Trevor, Mark and Amanda from Faith and a small team of Salvation Army volunteers.

Bedding

Although we started with a **bedding bag register** and a system for each guest to have their own duvet and pillow this did not carry on through the project. Next year we would like to enforce this.

There has also been a suggestion that each guest is given their own **sleeping bag** which they have throughout the year. This will be discussed and decided by the Steering Group.

St Mungos

As in previous years the Night Shelter ran with St Mungos as our “gate-keepers”. Being the eyes and ears on the street they are well placed to know exactly who is in genuine need of a roof and a bed. They are also able to determine whether an individual has a local connection (see “**Access**” p 5 for more on this matter) and therefore whether they will be able to be found **long term accommodation**.

We have developed an excellent working relationship with St Mungos over the past two years and it would be difficult to run the shelter without their input.

The system stayed the same as the previous two years with St Mungos sending a list out each afternoon with guest names (and guest assessments) to Louise – Co-ordinator. This then went in the file and travelled with member of Faith Staff to each venue.



These are the figures and final report with figures from 2016 for comparison.

	2017	2016
No. of nights B4N ran	58	56
Referrals from St Ms.	52	38
Rahab Referral	1	
Number using B4N	33	38
No. housed <small>(including Hope into Action and FCG's Stepping Stones)</small>	17	22
Long term Hospital	1	0
Prison	1 ⁽¹⁾	1
Family / Friends	4	
Waiting List / Homelessness pathway	5	4
Left area	2	0
Waiting for Rehab	1	0
Used sporadically / Not engaging	4	
Waiting List / Ongoing no recourse	3	

⁽¹⁾Now in the Salvation Army

At the end of B4N only 2 remained with nothing in place

Guests

In general it seems that the guests during the first month were not as respectful and grateful as in previous years. Last year our guests would arrive, eat and stay for the evening. This year our guests would arrive at different times, come and eat, leave, come back – or not come back. Some trying to get back in after the shelter close time of 10pm or even early in the morning.

There was not such a sense of cohesion in January as we had enjoyed in 2016. There was some grumbling among guests and less of a “family” feel.

Interestingly though since we have had messages from guests expressing their gratitude.

On Facebook "hello mate, just a quick message for u because i would like to thank u for having me on b4n because if u did not then i would still be on the streets now and if it was not for the services i received from jan-feb then i would still be in the dark place i was then,, the help and respect i got in that time was impeccable and i appreciate the help and quick thinking i received when i was a st laurence when i had the seizure (epileptic) keep doing what u do because i am really appreciative of it 😊❤️"

Behaviour

One guest was banned for using drugs on premises.

Another guest was banned from one venue because of disrespectful behaviour, he was told if he apologised the following week he could return. He chose not to and ‘slept out’ on this evening for the remainder of the project. This particular guest caused difficulties throughout the project and in hindsight maybe should have



been banned from the beginning. However, he caused quite a division – some Churches thought he was no problem and others found him to be easy to get on with.

In the second half of January Malcolm went to discuss his behaviour with him and to ban him, however, after the discussion Malcolm issued him with a final warning. He has since been housed at the Reading Family Church project and is doing well.

There was a consensus at the Co-ordinator's debrief meeting that he should simply have been banned as of the first serious incident. However it was also felt that had he been banned he might still be out on streets. Some decisions are simply very difficult to call.

Police Visits

The Police were rung on two occasions. Firstly because a guest was asked to leave and refused to. The guest then left before Police arrived.

Secondly they were rung by a venue during the night because they wanted advice concerning drug use at venue.

The Police also visited B4N on two separate occasions, due to concerns for missing people, one of whom was a guest who had left the area following threats. The other, a guest who was with us. He had not spoken with his family and they were simply concerned for his safety. The Police were able to see him at the venue, talk to him and reassure his family that he was safe.

Mental Health Team

One of our guests stopped using his medication during period of B4N and his mental health deteriorated rapidly causing all of us concern for him. The mental health team visited on a Tuesday evening and by Thursday they had decided he needed to be sectioned under the Mental Health Act.

The team tried to get everything in place on the Thursday evening / Friday evening / Saturday morning, Saturday evening / Sunday evening and finally attended in the early hours of Monday morning where our guest was woken and spoke with the mental health team professionals. The Police and Ambulance were also in attendance and he went with them willingly.

Medical Issues / Ambulances

An ambulance was called to B4N on two separate occasions.

1. One of our guests sat next to Louise saying he felt unwell and then went into a seizure. An ambulance was called and he was treated at the scene. It was advised he went with the ambulance staff to be checked over at hospital however he refused to go with them.
2. One of our guests was very poorly during the night following a traumatic event for him the previous day. An ambulance was called and assessed him at the venue. It was felt he had taken a 'dirty hit' (bad drugs) the previous day. An appointment was made for him to see doctors that lunchtime and arrangements were put into place for him to be accompanied there by Malcolm and Louise. However at the time he refused to attend.

Access

Much discussion has occurred around the sensitive issue of '**Local Connection**' as it obviously excludes rough sleepers who are out there from elsewhere. As Director of FCG Malcolm is very conscious of the desirability, for the sake of the whole Church in the town, of maintaining good relations with **Reading Borough Council**. It is a central part of the ethos of **Reading Christian Network** to work with and not against RBC. We currently have a very good reputation with them for co-operation and delivering a **safe** and **effective** Night Shelter which they



desire to see continue. It is appropriate to try to explain why they apply **local connection** to housing rough sleepers.

Homelessness is a **national issue** and the numbers of rough sleepers is **increasing** throughout the United Kingdom. Each local authority has responsibility to house anyone from their town or city who is homeless who has been there for at least five years or have historic family connections. With tightened budgets councils everywhere are applying the rule. Reading has a particular problem for a number of reasons. First we are a very wealthy town which will attract those looking to beg and support their drug habit. Second as, we state on our website, **“Reading is full”!** We even have single mums living in B & B’s in Slough because there is nowhere for them here. Why then should RBC try to help people who have come here from elsewhere (refugees an obvious exception).

Two church leaders have suggested that we **reserve** a certain number of beds that B4N ourselves control access to. Our capacity is currently restricted by the size of the smallest venue to 15 males and 3 females. FCG feel that we could easily be seen as showing favouritism to random people rather than sticking to a consistent policy the end objective of which is to house people.

The Good Bits

The success of B4N again speaks for itself with number of our guests being housed and engaging with services.

Some guest comments:-

‘Thank you so much for all you have done for me, I am sure I have put on 2 stone during time I have been with you – going to miss you all’ a guest

‘Thank you’ a guest

‘Without support from all of you I could not be doing what I am doing now’ a guest

‘Thank you Miss Faith. Thank you for all you’ve done for me. I now have faith’

‘Thank you for all the fantastic work again this year’ – Jenny, IRIS.

‘It was really beneficial for St Mungos to work with B4N again this year. It was great to see our clients responding so well to the environment. We had excellent results getting clients into accommodation. We are especially pleased that so many clients we never thought would use it, accessed B4N and flourished. Looking forward to working with you next year.’ Wendy, St Mungos



Proposals / Changes

Steering Group

Firstly it is generally agreed that not having a Steering Group this year was a mistake. Having a core team representing Faith, Street Pastors and Venues among whom ideas and issues can be quickly referred really helped in previous years. Thus in September / October 2017 we will pull together a new core team.

“Authority”

It is vital that **co-ordinators** and **overnight volunteers** know that they have the **right** to give a guest a formal warning if their behaviour is in breach of the **Community Code**. They need to also know that if they consider the violation to be serious enough they have the **authority** to evict a guest and furthermore, their decision will be upheld by B4N right across all venues. (Warnings should be relayed to the FCG co-ordinator and preferably Malcolm, we would then want to back you up the next evening with a **reminder** to the guest).

Training

It is unanimously agreed that training requires review. We were very conscious this year that volunteers coming back for the **third year** really did not need the full training once again and did introduce a **two tier system**. But, even that felt too much to some. We actually ran **8 training sessions** this year. We are actively planning a different approach for next year. However, even **basic training** of any new volunteer who will interact with guests needs to be around **two hours** to be comprehensive.

- **Co-ordinators and overnight volunteers** clearly require a more intensive and detailed training, definitely enough to give them confidence to fulfil their role. First Aid is vital, probably also drug awareness. (There needs to be a **co-ordinator** and a **deputy** trained to the same level)
- Where co-ordinators do not stay through the **night** or return in the morning, there needs to be a separate **morning Co-ordinator** appointed and properly trained so as to engage with St Mungos and the FCG member of staff. Passing information from the night before needs looking at.
- We will consider offering **optional training** evenings in specialisms notably drugs but possibly things like conflict resolution; causes of homelessness.
- Training for **hospitality teams, kitchen staff, set up and set down volunteers** clearly needs to be full in the first year but possibly only a matter of signing an update sheet in subsequent years.
- **Co-ordinators** could be given responsibility for training their own teams, but this might get tricky where volunteers from elsewhere are allocated to a church.
- **Earlier notice** needs to be given for training dates.

Prayer

It was noted by a couple of people that prayer had slipped off the agenda at the venue. It is vital that the team have an update session before opening of an evening and that time should include prayer. We would like to raise the profile of prayer surrounding B4N. That would ideally be, as two venues already do, much in line with ‘Prayer Pastors’, to have a group of people praying in a separate room on site. This could be for as long as possible but certainly for an hour or so through the evening.

Bedding

The system of numbered bags for bedding didn’t take off this year but we would like to ensure that it does happen next year. Someone suggested the use of **sleeping bags** for each guest instead of bedding? We are open to discussion on this but at the moment feel that proper bedding is a more homely option.



Other possible developments

Befriending

Follow on befriending came up last year as a desirable development, but few people contacted us to move it forward.

Daytime activities – what guests do during the day, particularly on Saturdays and Sundays is something that could be looked at - encourage guests to attend Church on Sundays? (on a Sunday whichever Church is hosting have an area for coffee, more relaxed, see if want to go to service?)

More external agency involvement? – Mental Health? **IRIS** did come last year and were invited this year come in for drug advice.

Story sharing we have always encouraged feedback around positive stories as well as issues. More sharing of such stories between venues might assist feeling more connected. Perhaps each co-ordinator could email on to the next night?

Consistency

All venues need to stick to NOT allowing guests in after 10pm

Any guest wanting to leave a venue during the night should be given their bag and told they will not be allowed back in

FCG need to be clearer about venue “Times”

e.g. “breakfast will be served between ...”, “beds will be collected at”, “dinner is served between ...”, “guests must be up by", “guests must leave the building by ...”

Other matters

FCG staff should only be present at venues in a **supporting/advisory role**. They should be **referred to** but not **deferred to**. Church co-ordinators are responsible for their venues.

Encourage team members, especially co-ordinators, to **visit** other venues to see how others work.

Volunteers should serve food to the guests at their tables, eat with them and actively discourage taking food to beds.

Involve guests more, e.g. serving food to tables, stripping own beds if they are willing (needle safety!)

Work to avoid mentality of **us** and **them**

Louise Cross & Malcolm Peirce