

a bed for the night

Reading Churches Winter Night Shelter

2020 Report (Full)



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In association with



(Reading Christian Network) and Reading Street Pastors



Reading Borough Council and St Mungo's





B4N 2020 Overview

This was the sixth year of running 'A Bed for The Night' (B4N), Reading Churches Winter Night Shelter.

The **B4N night shelter planned to open for 12 weeks** this year. As a result of the lockdown put in place by the Government in response to COVID-19, **B4N closed 3 days earlier than planned**.

The night shelter **opened on Friday 3 January and the last night was Monday 23 March 2020**. As had been the case last year, FAITH received funding from the Government to implement B4N for a third month until the end of March 2020. The funding also covered payment for overnight supervisors. In addition, FAITH received a grant from Housing Justice which meant we could employ another member of staff to assist the B4N Co-ordinator with support plans and one-to-one support sessions for our guests.

In total 12 churches hosted B4N 2020. 1 new church hosted B4N for the first time - **English Martyrs Catholic Church**.

Salvation Army continued to provide emergency beds under the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) and 10 'sit up' beds used to provide shelter to rough sleepers in Reading.

Venues and Nights	January	February	March
Monday	Abbey Baptist Church		
Tuesday	CiRDIC		
Wednesday	LifeSpring Church		
Thursday	St Laurence Church	Carey Baptist Church	Argyle Community Church
Friday	Greyfriars Church	English Martyrs Church	New Hope Church
Saturday	Wesley Methodist Church	All Nations Church	
Sunday	Wycliffe Baptist Church		

As in previous years, the main referrer of rough sleepers to B4N was the **St Mungos** Rough Sleeper Outreach Service. We **also took referrals from Reading Borough Council (RBC), Launchpad** and the **NHS Liaison and Diversion** service, as well as rough sleepers who self-referred and were known to FAITH from our **ReadiStreet** outreach. **Referrals were not limited to those with local connection only**.

Of the 50 guests referred, **37 guests stayed at B4N in 2020**.

We averaged 19 guests per night over the course of B4N 2020. This compares to an average of 16 guests per night during B4N 2019. The maximum number of guests to stay on one night was 26. **We provided a total of 1,552 bed spaces to our guests this year**, compared to 1,310 last year.

At the time of writing this report, **we are aware of 4 guests housed with their own tenancy/licence agreements. 1 guest was successfully relocated and 1 guest has made fantastic progress in a residential rehab. 23 guests are currently being housed temporarily in B&B accommodation as part of Reading Borough Council's response to COVID-19 for rough sleepers.** None of our guests are known to be rough sleeping at present. However, once temporary accommodation in response to COVID-19 is withdrawn, many guests will still be in need of housing.

B4N 2020 ran smoothly on the whole with no serious incidents. COVID-19 began to impact B4N from the last week in February when we asked volunteers to stay away who had recently travelled. Volunteers over 70, those with pre-existing medical conditions or any symptoms were also asked not to attend. We managed to keep the night shelter open with reduced volunteer teams and implementing safety precautions in line with government guidelines and advice from Public Health England. This meant we could continue to provide food and shelter for our guests until the government announced lockdown. At this point emergency housing provision became available for our remaining guests from RBC. There were no cases of COVID-19 amongst our guests and we are also not aware of any of our volunteers contracting COVID-19 during the night shelter.

During B4N 2020, we were re-accredited by Housing Justice who provide the Quality Mark for night shelters. We are very proud to have been re-accredited as 'EXCELLENT'.



B4N 2020 Review

Volunteers

Over 350 volunteers helped us to run the B4N 2020 project; we had over 125 new volunteers and around 225 volunteers who had taken part in a previous year. We are so grateful for the commitment and dedication of the amazing volunteers we have – without them B4N would not be possible.

New volunteers this year came from English Martyrs Church joining B4N as a host venue for the first time.

In October and November 2019 we went out to speak at services in churches which were not B4N venues. This increased awareness of B4N and we had many new volunteers join from the wider Reading church community.

Overnight supervisors were appointed again this year to manage the team of overnight volunteers and ensure someone was awake at all times. This was a paid role for 10 hours from 10pm to 8am.

Volunteer Training

Training sessions were publicised earlier this year in October 2019. Four training sessions for new volunteers were held in November 2019 and December 2019. Despite being attended by over 100 volunteers, there was still demand for more training sessions from volunteers who could not make the training dates or approached us after B4N had opened in January 2020. Training is vital for those who volunteer on site at the night shelter whilst guests are there. Therefore, those who registered an interest in volunteering for B4N and agreed for their contact details to be retained will be contacted later this year regarding the training dates for B4N 2021.

This year we also ran four shorter one hour re-fresher training sessions for volunteers with 2+ years' experience. The refresher training sessions were, however, not very well attended with only 25 volunteers taking part. We will review again the training requirements for existing volunteers for next year's night shelter.

The drug awareness training sessions for B4N volunteers this year were run by Kate Stockdale from Change Grow Live (CGL) who are the new drug support service in Reading. The sessions were very well attended this year, mainly due to better publicity giving more volunteers the opportunity to attend.

Matt Farrow from Reading Borough Council (RBC) Homelessness Prevention team also ran Adult Safeguarding Training for B4N volunteers who wanted to attend.

We are very grateful to Kate from CGL and Matt from RBC for running these training sessions which were very much appreciated and praised by our volunteers. We were able to offer these training sessions to volunteers from other charities, New Beginnings and Sadaka, who also work with the homeless and those in need in Reading.

First Aid courses were offered to the co-ordinators and overnight supervisors at each venue to ensure there was always a volunteer with an up to date first aid certificate on site.

Praise and Thanksgiving for Volunteers

This year we held a Praise and Thanksgiving service at English Martyrs for B4N volunteers and some of last year's guests. The service was beautiful. Many thanks to Andre Jacobucci, Sister Vivian and Father Michael who led us in music and prayer. The service was held in December before B4N 2020 started and being so close to Christmas, not many volunteers could attend. In 2020 we plan to hold a service earlier in December if this is possible.

Prayer Teams

More of our churches this year provided a prayer team who prayed during the evening in a separate room at the venue. We feel very blessed to have this support and the power of prayer at work in our venues. We received answers to prayer on many occasions. English Martyrs held an all-night prayer vigil in the church for B4N on one Friday night followed by a Mass at 6am the following morning.



Reading Street Pastors

On the majority of nights we had at least one Street Pastor on the door at each venue. B4N are extremely grateful for this relationship and the invaluable support that they provide on a daily basis at B4N. Feedback from some Street Pastors in previous years has been that more information is required about who can attend for dinner only. This year information on 'dinner only' guests was provided by FAITH staff to Street Pastors each evening.

Volunteer Teams / Registers for Volunteers

As in previous years, each venue had teams of volunteers to help with setting up beds, cooking, evening hosting, overnights, morning hosting and breakfast.

Volunteer registers were completed at each venue with the venue Co-ordinator generally taking responsibility, sometimes prompted by the member of FAITH staff on duty. This year we improved at taking registers for our morning volunteers which had been completed much more sporadically in previous years. Keeping the volunteer attendance enables FAITH to keep an up-to-date record of volunteers and ensure venues are sufficiently manned.

COVID-19 Impact on B4N

After the first reported cases of COVID-19 in the UK in February 2020, B4N operated with a reduced number of volunteers due to the risks of the virus. We followed guidance issued by Government, NHS and Public Health England. In the last week of February, volunteers who had recently travelled to countries/regions where there had been an outbreak of the virus were asked not to attend. In the first week of March, any volunteers in high risk categories such as those over 70, those with pre-existing medical conditions or those with any symptoms, however mild, were asked to stay away. Many volunteers wanted to keep coming, and we had to turn some away so that the number of people at the shelter was no higher than necessary. All volunteers and guests were reminded of the guidelines around hand washing and social distancing. Volunteers were asked to wear gloves and the venues were set up with beds and chairs further apart to help guests keep social distance. Anti-bacterial gel and wipes were taken and used at all venues.

The commitment our volunteers and churches showed to B4N in the last month was amazing, including the prayer support from those no longer able to attend. This meant we could continue B4N and prevent our guests from rough sleeping until the point of lockdown when emergency B&B accommodation became available.

Transportation of Beds and Bedding

This year we were able to employ someone to transport the beds and bedding between church venues. **Ashley Vass** joined FAITH for the duration of B4N to help with transportation on all weekday mornings. Very special thanks also go to **George Joyce** who volunteered to transport the beds and bedding at the weekend. We are very grateful to both of you – Thank you.

Although the bedding bags were only supposed to have guest bedding in them, over the weeks guests took to leaving more of their clothes and some possessions in their bedding bags. This definitely needs monitoring as we cannot be held liable for anything that goes missing during transportation or storage at the venues. Guests were asked to remove personal items from their bedding bags on many occasions with varying degrees of success. Next year we plan to impose stricter rules from the start.

Bed linen

Bed linen was washed once a week instead of each night. Guests, therefore, had the same bed linen for a week which was transported from venue to venue in their own labelled bedding bag. This saved unnecessary laundry costs and time for B4N volunteers.

Guests were asked to strip their own bedding on Friday mornings and make their own beds with clean linen provided on Friday evenings.



Very special thanks to the **laundry teams at Greyfriars Church, English Martyrs Church and New Hope Church** who washed the linen each week and to the **volunteers at English Martyrs** who washed the towels used by the guests for showers at LifeSpring Church. We are very grateful.

Showers

Showers were available for our guests at LifeSpring Church every Wednesday evening and at English Martyrs Church on Friday evenings in February. The luxury of a shower was hugely appreciated by our guests. We operated a rota system where guests could sign up for a particular time slot (limited to 15 minutes). This worked well to ensure there was time for all those who wanted a shower to have one. There could also be some flexibility to change the order guests showered and most of the guests kept to time.

Spare toiletries were kept in the Ops box which was transported from venue to venue with the guests' beds and bedding. Spare underwear, socks and some items of clothing were also available each night should our guests need them.

Foot Care and Hair Cuts

This year we had the pleasure of welcoming two professional podiatrists to B4N. Anne Bingham from "Forgotton Feet" was joined by Ronke Tinker who came to provide foot care to our B4N guests on two Friday evenings.

A professional hairdresser also joined us one Thursday evening at Carey Baptist Church.

At the start of the evening, guests could be reluctant to sign up. However once a few guests had taken the plunge, others followed in number and were able to benefit from and appreciate some much needed self-care.

St Mungo's

As in previous years, St Mungo's were the main referrer of guests to B4N this year. As the rough sleeper outreach service commissioned by RBC, St Mungo's are well placed to know who is in genuine need of a bed, and of any other health or wellbeing needs. St Mungo's provide B4N with a guest risk assessment and a signed 'consent to share' form for each referral. They are also able to access information regarding whether the individual has a local connection and, therefore, whether they will be eligible for support from RBC to find long term housing in Reading. We have developed an excellent working relationship with St Mungo's over the past six years.

St Mungo's attended morning sessions at B4N on average twice per week to meet with their referred guests. Last year average attendance was once a week and we very much appreciated the additional support this year.

Referrals from other services

This year we also took referrals from **Reading Borough Council (RBC), Launchpad** and the **NHS Liaison and Diversion** service, as well as rough sleepers who self-referred and were known to FAITH from our **ReadiStreet** outreach. **Referrals were not limited to those with local connection only.** Each referrer provided us with a risk assessment and obtained the individual's consent to share. For self-referrals, the individual completed a risk assessment with a member of FAITH staff prior to being admitted to B4N.

For those B4N guests who had not been verified as rough sleepers by St Mungo's, we worked with them to identify their support needs and signpost them to the relevant services.



Outreach Navigator

This year we received some additional funding from Housing Justice so that we could employ another member of staff to assist the B4N Co-ordinator. Many thanks to Andy Dutton for joining the B4N team as an Outreach Navigator. Andy provided one-to-one support sessions for some of our guests and linked them in with other local support services. He also helped to secure one of our guests a place at a residential rehab.

Reading Borough Council (RBC)

B4N worked closely with RBC again this year and received some referrals directly from the council. We also attended meetings with RBC and St Mungo's to discuss the housing options for B4N guests. **Matt Farrow** from RBC attended several evening sessions at B4N to talk with our guests and offer them advice on their next steps to find housing. This included making appointments for some of our guests with the Housing Advice team at the council. Matt's presence at B4N was hugely appreciated by us and the guests who benefitted from his advice.

HOLT Nurses

The Health Outreach Liaison Team - HOLT nurses attended B4N in the morning sessions once a week on a pre-arranged day. This gave FAITH staff the opportunity to advise guests when the nurses would be at B4N the following morning. Guests felt relaxed and would approach the nurses if they needed medical assistance or advice on their physical or mental health. The nurses' attendance was extremely helpful and we are very grateful for the HOLT team's commitment to B4N.

Hope Counselling Service

This year part of the Government funding RBC received was allocated to counselling for the homeless. We were able to offer guests the opportunity to speak to a trained counsellor on most Wednesday and Sunday evenings. The proportion of guests who engaged in one-to-one counselling was small despite many of our guests being diagnosed with mental health issues. Although a private space was available, we accept that many guests will find it challenging to talk and open up within the night shelter surroundings. However several of our guests with more severe mental health problems benefitted from having a counsellor there to talk to and listen in times of high anxiety and crisis. We are very grateful for Deborah and Elaine from Hope Counselling for giving their time.

Launchpad

Representatives from Launchpad's 'supported housing' and 'floating support' teams visited B4N this year to help make B4N guests aware of the drop in sessions and housing support they offer.

It is great to have had the support of so many other services that support the homeless this year.



The Guest List (including 'Reserves')

Entry to B4N is usually only granted to guests who have been referred. We operated a 'guest list' system as we've done in previous years. As the main referrer, St Mungo's sent us a list by secure email each afternoon with guest names (and assessments for new referrals). The guest list, together with guest sign-in sheets and guest signed agreements, were kept in a file that travelled with a member of FAITH staff to each venue.

A separate file containing guests' assessments was kept at the FAITH office with any relevant information passed on to the venue Co-ordinators. This was to protect guest confidentiality. Only information pertinent to guests' welfare, dietary needs or volunteer safety was given to the venue Co-ordinators.

The total number of guests on the guest list each night often exceeded the maximum capacity of bed spaces (15 males and 3 females). The guest list was essentially split into a 'main list' of up to 15 men and 3 women with a guaranteed place and a 'reserve list'.

If the 'main list' was full, any additional referrals were added to the list as reserves on the basis that they could have a bed for the night if there was a spare bed space at 10pm. This was clearly explained to guests on their first night at the shelter if they were being admitted as a reserve. It was ensured that guests fully understood that a bed could not be guaranteed each night until a space on the main list became available.

As not everyone on the guest list showed each night, the reserve system worked well and there was no occasion that a guest on the reserve list needed to be turned away. This is the second year that we have operated a reserve system. Having guests on a reserve list means that many more bed spaces can be filled and the B4N occupancy rate has increased significantly in the last 2 years as shown in the table below.

Percentage Use of B4N	2020	2019	2018
Total Number of nights guests attended (A)	1,552	1,310	517
Maximum nights available (Nights x Bed Spaces) (B)	81 x 18 = 1,458	84 x 18 = 1,512	64 x 18 = 1,152
Total usage / occupancy rate (A/B)	106%	87%	45%

The occupancy rate was greater than 100% in 2020 as the rate is calculated based on a maximum capacity of 18 bed spaces per night. The maximum capacity of 18 bed spaces is the capacity of the smallest of our venues. However in the larger venues where space allowed we often accommodated more than 18 guests per night. **The maximum number of guests to stay on one night was 26!**

We hosted 2 guests on the first night of B4N, followed by 18 guests on the second night. The reason for the large increase was one night's overlap with the New Beginnings night shelter at the Queen's Arms converted pub. New Beginnings received Government funding to open their 'All Night Cafe' every night in December 2019 and they stayed open till Friday 3 January 2020 when B4N opened.

Numbers remained high and we ran at full capacity for the majority of B4N 2020, **averaging 19 guests per night.**

Individuals who turned up "on spec" were assessed on a case by case basis. Whether or not they could be offered a bed depended on availability of bed spaces, their vulnerability, and whether B4N staff were able to access risk information and verify them as genuinely homeless. Admittance would also depend on access to St Mungo's which is more limited at the weekend. If SWEP (the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) was in operation, an individual would be asked to call the Out of hours Emergency Duty Team who provide emergency accommodation in severe weather, potentially at Salvation Army, Willow House.

If an individual could not be admitted and SWEP was not running, we offered a sleeping bag or other bedding and notified St Mungos of the individual's planned sleep site via StreetLink.

StreetLink is a national organisation the public can use to report the location of someone who is rough sleeping. StreetLink pass on the information to the local outreach team (St Mungo's, Reading) who will search for the rough sleeper at their reported location, usually within a couple of days but potentially the very next morning!



B4N 2020 Referrals and Outcomes

These are the figures for B4N 2020 with figures from previous years reports included for comparison.

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Number of nights B4N open	81*	84	64	58	56	31
Referrals from St Mungo's	26	34	28	52	38	26
Other Referrals (incl Red Cross, RBC, Launchpad, Rahab in 2017)	5	6	0	1	0	0
Church Referrals	0	0	2	0	0	0
Self-referral (of individual known to FAITH)	19	13	10	0	0	0
Total number of guests referred to B4N	50	53	40	53	38	26
Number using B4N	37	42	34	33	38	22
Number housed (including Launchpad, SArmy, Private, Hope Into Action)	4	18	11	17	22	7
Residential Rehabilitation	1	0	0	0	0	0
Successful relocation	1	0	0	0	0	0
Temporary housing – COVID-19 response (with recourse)	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Temporary housing – COVID-19 response (no recourse)	17	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Long term Hospital	0	1	0	1	0	0
Prison	1	1	1	1	1	1
Sofa surfing with Family / Friends	5	5	0	4	0	2
Waiting List / Homelessness pathway	0	0	5	5	4	0
Left area	0	0	0	2	0	0
Waiting for Rehab	0	0	0	1	0	0
Used sporadically / Not engaging	0	0	6	4	0	4
Waiting List / Ongoing no recourse	0**	8	3	3	0	0
Return to accommodation (after regaining access)	1	0	0	0	0	0
Lost Contact	1	9	4	0	0	0

* B4N 2020 closed 3 nights earlier than planned as a result of COVID-19.

** Guests with no recourse in 2020 are included with those in temporary housing – COVID-19 response above.

Of the 50 guests referred in 2020, **37 guests stayed at B4N this year**. This compares to 42 guests who stayed at B4N last year.

At the time of writing this report, we are aware of **4 guests housed with their own tenancy/licence** agreements, two at Salvation Army and one at the Hope into Action housing project. **1 guest was successfully relocated** during B4N once his travel papers were issued **and 1 guest has made fantastic progress** in recovery after spending over three months **in a residential rehab**. **23 guests** are currently being **housed temporarily in B&B accommodation** as **part of Reading Borough Council's response to COVID-19** for rough sleepers.

RBC's Response to COVID-19 for Rough Sleepers

The last evening of B4N 2020 was Monday 23 March. The following day, all of our remaining guests were offered a place in self-contained accommodation to enable them to isolate, in line with the government's request for lockdown to minimise the spread of the COVID-19 virus. RBC offered temporary accommodation to remaining guests either in a B&B or a room in a shared house. The majority took up this offer although a few initially chose to stay with friends. Importantly the accommodation is only temporary, as an emergency response to COVID-19. Once this provision is no longer deemed necessary, many of these guests will still be in need of housing.

In the table above, the 23 guests housed temporarily in response to COVID-19 are split between 6 guests who have recourse to public funds (i.e. those who are entitled to receive benefits and assistance with housing from the local council) and 17 guests without recourse to public funds as non-British nationals.



Guests with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

This year we had a larger proportion of guests with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). 20 out of our 37 guests were NRPF and the majority of these guests were from Poland. It is very difficult to offer guests without recourse direct support with housing, as they have no access to housing or other benefits. Finding accommodation currently relies on them maintaining work and earning enough to pay for a deposit and rent.

However we were able to support some of our guests from Poland by arranging appointments for them with Citizen's Advice Bureau for support with applying for the EU settlement scheme. This is a scheme for EU citizens who were living in the UK before we left the European Union. Depending on how long an EU citizen has been living in the UK, they may qualify for EU settled status which would mean entitlement to benefits and assistance with housing from their local council. Once an application for the EU settlement scheme is made, it can take many months for a decision to be made. Although this doesn't help the immediate housing need, it is a step in the right direction for housing options in the future.

Reductions in numbers housed

Despite the complications involved with ending B4N 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the figures in the table above do show a reduction in the number of guests who were able to find appropriate move-on accommodation from B4N this year compared to 2019. This is due in part to a different mix of guests in terms of nationalities and support needs, but also the limited access to housing for them. These are some of the factors involved:

- We had a **larger proportion of NRPF guests** this year (54% in 2020 compared to 21% in 2019). Housing options are limited for these guests who have **no access to benefits** and are **not eligible for assistance from RBC** in terms of access to the Housing Pathway for supported accommodation, the Rent Guarantee Scheme or Deposit Guarantee Scheme.
- Some guests had **no local connection to Reading** and so were also **not eligible for assistance from RBC**
- We noticed **increased waiting times** for our guests for appointments with housing advice at RBC
- Two of our guests had assessments for supported housing with Launchpad but were rejected as their support needs were too great. We continue to investigate housing options for these guests who are being housed temporarily in B&B accommodation as part of the COVID-19 response.
- COVID-19 is also likely to have impacted the flurry of activity seen in previous years to house guests towards the end of B4N. This year circumstances were different and it is likely that more permanent housing may have been found by now for those with recourse to public funds who are currently being placed in temporary accommodation for the lockdown.

Comments from guests:

Everyone at B4N were awesome, the food was awesome, awesome staff and volunteers and I'm so grateful for them getting me the supported accommodation I needed, fantastic.

The B4N experience was 'pukka' the staff, the food 'pukka'. There was lots of lovely people.

Nice people, so glad B4N got me to rehab, I had nowhere, hated my life, I now look forward to my future, I'm enjoying Bible studies and so glad I don't need to score. Without everyone's help I wouldn't feel better.

I'm so grateful for everything you have done. What I know if that I have to be patient, pray to God and He will answer my prayers.



Guest behaviour

In general, guests were well behaved and courteous and would happily undertake set up/clear-up duties if asked. In fact some of our guests were so keen to help that we had to stop them taking over the job of our set up volunteers! Although their help was greatly appreciated, letting guests into the churches to help with set up did cause some issues as guests could not be left unsupervised. Furthermore some of our set up volunteers had not attended B4N training as they did not expect to be in contact with any of the guests. Therefore it was decided that guests should not be allowed to help with set up, however honourable the intention.

Some guests did volunteer to help pack up and load the van in the mornings. Former guests also enjoyed coming back for meals even when housed.

On the whole guests got on well, however there were some accusations of bullying reported and some arguments broke out, mainly concerning who slept next to who and where their beds were placed in the venues. To be fair to all, we insisted that beds were allocated on a first come first served basis. Any guests who were accused of bullying or seen to be arguing were spoken to separately by the B4N co-ordinator or another member of FAITH staff to find out more information. Warnings were given to guests where necessary.

Our guests loved music. Guests enjoyed listening to records over some speakers (reggae and 80s classics were particular favourites!) or singing and playing instruments themselves. We had some very talented pianists and guitarists stay at B4N this year.

The introduction of a games box this year was a great new addition. Guests often played cards in groups, there were some more serious chess matches and several memorable and hilarious games of Jenga with many guests involved.

Several guests requested Wi-Fi, not all venues had this but where possible a code was given to the guests.

We had a young couple stay at B4N this year. Their relationship caused no issues in terms of the rules of the night shelter. However it was evident that the stresses of being homeless caused a lot of strain on their relationship. We also had a relationship develop between two guests who met at B4N.

Several of our guests had significant mental health problems and complex needs. We had many guests suffering with addictions to drugs, alcohol or gambling.

One guest's behaviour could become erratic in terms of a drug induced hyperactivity. Volunteers were vigilant to this and the guest's behaviour did not cause us any concern for the safety of others. We worked with this guest to secure him a place at a residential rehabilitation centre. Three months in and he has engaged really well on the program and progressed through various stages of the rehab. He's calm and collected and speaks like a totally different person when we call to offer encouragement and see how he's doing!

Mental Health

Some of our guests this year suffered with severe anxiety. Our volunteers were sensitive to this and helped guests by talking with them and reassuring them when needed.

One guest suffered with panic attacks and health anxiety. One of the counsellors who attended B4N from Hope Counselling service was able to provide support in terms of helping the guest understand their anxiety better and offering advice on ways to manage their anxiety and panic attacks. The guest was also able to speak with a mental health nurse from HOLT and was signposted to CPE (Common Point of Entry for mental health services in Berkshire).

Another guest had night terrors and fits in his sleep during which he would shout out and afterwards he could become quite dis-orientated. Our overnight teams dealt with this brilliantly by encouraging him to return to his bed and back to sleep and reporting to B4N staff the following morning. We worked with this guest to connect him with the relevant healthcare professionals and remind or accompany him to attend medical appointments and scans.

Some other guests kept mental health problems hidden most of the time. B4N staff made themselves available to lend a listening ear should a guest want to talk but we also had to respect the fact that some guests were not yet ready to seek or accept any help on offer.



Impact of COVID-19 on Guests

The last few weeks of B4N 2020 had a very different atmosphere. The mood was much more subdued as we put in place measures to protect guests and volunteers from the spread of COVID-19.

We reduced the number of volunteers attending to the minimum numbers required and asked all volunteers over age 70, those in high risk categories with pre-existing medical conditions or those with any symptoms to stay away. Volunteers were asked to wear gloves and keep social distance as much as possible within the venue which meant less interaction with the guests.

Guests were regularly reminded of the government guidance on washing hands and given anti-bacterial gel to clean their hands when they arrived at the night shelter. They were also given their own personal shower gel / hand wash to use. To help our guests to maintain social distancing, we set up tables for dinner with chairs spread apart. Guests' beds were placed 2 metres apart or as far apart as was possible given the space available.

The majority of guests dealt with these changes very well, understanding why they were necessary and appreciating the continuation of B4N in difficult circumstances. Inevitably some guests were anxious about the risks of contracting COVID-19 and how the pandemic would affect their housing options after the night shelter closed. Medical advice was sought for any guests with cough or cold symptoms and guests were supported to engage with one of the HOLT nurses and either contact their GP or NHS 111. None of our guests were found to be symptomatic so we were not faced with the problem of needing to isolate any guests. However, we had contingency plans in place at each venue in case we needed to isolate anyone.

Incidents

Three guests were banned on separate occasions for abusive language and aggressive behaviour towards volunteers and other guests. The police were called on one of these occasions when the guest involved became aggressive whilst under the influence of drugs and alcohol and would not leave the premises. He was moved on after about an hour and did not cause any other issues. Abusive language and aggressive behaviour are not tolerated at B4N and this is made clear to the guests in the guest agreements that they sign on their first night. Therefore we do not hesitate to ban guests for breaching this rule with unacceptable behaviour.

Drug, alcohol and smoking use on premises was evident at B4N but only on few occasions when cigarette butts were found in bins or toilets and a wine bottle confiscated from a guest's person. Drug paraphernalia including clean needles was also found in the toilets on one occasion. No guests were excluded solely for drug/alcohol use because unless caught in the act it becomes very difficult to exclude any particular individual for using at a venue.

There were no thefts reported of guest or volunteer belongings.

The **police were only called to B4N on one occasion** this year as described above.

Medical Issues / Ambulances

An ambulance was called to B4N on **seven occasions** this year – six times for guests and once for a volunteer.

Ambulances were called for four guests in total. One guest had severe chest pain and difficulty breathing and was taken to A&E on several occasions. Another guest called for an ambulance with similar symptoms but was not taken to hospital as symptoms subsided. Paramedics were called when one of our guests had a fit/seizure in his sleep lasting a significant time. He refused to go to A&E but was closely monitored for the rest of the night. One of our guests became very ill towards the end of the night shelter and was taken to hospital by ambulance. He stayed in hospital for 5 weeks including an initial spell in intensive care. I'm pleased to report he has now been discharged from hospital having recovered from an infection and is in a much better state of health.

An ambulance was also called for one of our volunteers who fell and injured her knee during set up at one of our venues, but did not need hospital treatment. It certainly was a year with a lot of medical emergencies!

On another occasion a taxi was called to take a guest to hospital after calling NHS 111 for severe tooth ache.

Paracetamol and Ibuprofen were added to the first aid kit and it was noted on the daily venue report sheet if it was needed by a guest for routine ailments.



HOUSING JUSTICE QUALITY MARK RE-ACCREDITATION

Housing Justice is a homelessness charity which supports over 145 shelter projects across its winter night shelter network. B4N is one of the night shelters it supports.

During B4N 2020, an assessor from Housing Justice came to visit us one evening to assess B4N against the Housing Justice Quality Mark. The last time B4N was accredited with the Quality Mark was in its first year in 2015.

The assessment went very well and B4N has been re-accredited as 'EXCELLENT'.

Here are some of the comments we received in the report and covering email from Housing Justice.

Well done! It is certainly one of the most impressive shelters that we have visited, and the extent to which you are linked in with other services locally is a real example to shelters across the country.

Alastair Reeves, Best Practice and Innovations Manager, Housing Justice

The briefing was excellent with input from staff and volunteers, a tour of the building (including fire exits) for new volunteers and a time of prayer.

Comprehensive paperwork is available within the Volunteer handbook. Policy and procedure is organised well and in a folder available at every venue.

Guests seemed relaxed and said they appreciated the project and volunteers giving up their time.

I observed conversations and games between guests and staff/volunteers and it was obvious that a rapport has been developed between them. Guests were recognised and acknowledged on entry.

Tenancy sustainment is offered once guests have moved on. Guests have a support plan.

Thanks to the staff, volunteers and guests at B4N as the experience was excellent. The venue space was one of the best I have seen.

Vanessa Nicholls, Best Practice & Innovation Officer, Housing Justice

SPECIAL THANKS IN 2020

ALL of our churches and volunteers, street pastors and prayer teams whose commitment throughout B4N 2020 was amazing, particularly amidst the outbreak of COVID-19.

All those who donated bedding, bed linen, towels, clothes, underwear and food for our guests.

Volunteers who made cards and table decorations for our guests, and **all those who washed laundry.**

Andre Jabobucci, Sister Vivian and Fr Michael who led us in music and prayer at the Praise and Thanksgiving service.

Reading Buses who donated bus passes for our guests to travel to English Martyrs, and to **John Ennis, Lead Councillor for Housing at RBC** who organised the passes.

Citizen's Advice Bureau for their support with appointments for our guests applying for EU Settled Status.

Hope Counselling service who provided counselling sessions for our guests.

The podiatrists at **Forgotten Feet** who provided foot care.

Franca Manca who donated pizzas to one of our venues.



COMMENTS FROM RBC, HOLT AND ST MUNGO'S

Comments from Matt Farrow, RBC

B4N 2020 marked another year of a close working relationship between Faith CG, Reading Borough Council and St Mungo's. The aim as ever was to provide a safe place to stay for those who found themselves to be street homeless or at risk of being street homeless in Reading during the cold winter months. That said, B4N and its volunteers provide much more than just somewhere to sleep, warm food, activities and a chance to talk can make a massive difference to the lives of the guests that stay. The ongoing support from the Navigators and B4N co-ordinators ensures that people that want support can access it.

This year the service offer expanded to include 1-2-1 counselling from Hope Counselling Service, support from Reading CAB to help people from outside of the UK that are eligible apply for settled status and in addition another church was added to the list of venues, all of which is testament to the desire of all of those involved to work collaboratively to secure a positive outcome for the guests.

For health and safety reasons the global COVID-19 pandemic forced the provision to close early but good communication and hard work from all the services involved ensured that all of the guests had access to an accommodation in order to help them comply with the social distancing guidelines from Central Government, and it meant that nobody had to return to or to start rough sleep as a result of the unexpected closure.

Thank you to all the Faith CG staff and volunteers that made it happen, all the churches and all the services involved. You made a real difference to a lot of people's lives.

Comment from Amanda, HOLT nurse (Health Outreach Liaison Team)

HOLT attended Bed for a Night once a week to offer support to the team and homeless clients during period Jan-March. We always found Mary and other members of staff approachable and excellent communication routes were maintained. Mary telephoned us directly with any concerns regarding physical and mental health and support was offered to the clients.

The ongoing support offered to the vulnerable clients was always of a high standard and I'm sure every service user benefited when they were accommodated in the Bed for a Night provision in 2020.

Comments from St Mungos

St Mungo's team feedback for B4N 2020.

- Gave St Mungo's an ideal opportunity to engage with clients in a safe place
- Gave those clients with No Recourse to Public Funds a much needed respite from rough sleeping
- Clients reported that they felt valued and listened to as human beings
- Difficult having to manage those that were not St Mungo's Clients
- At times difficult when more guests were allowed in than initially agreed - this would occasionally prevent a verified rough sleeper accessing a bed
- Clients struggled to understand why that at times there appeared to be different sets of rules
- Clients receiving a hot meal



FEEDBACK FROM VOLUNTEERS

After B4N closes each year, **volunteers** are usually invited to a 'thank you' event and asked to provide feedback.

This year we have not been able to hold such an event due to the restrictions in place for large gatherings of people as a result of COVID-19. We hope to hold a thank you event for B4N 2020 volunteers as soon as all restrictions have been lifted.

We have received some feedback from volunteers via email. The following quotes summarise the feedback received so far.

The best bits about B4N

This experience was life changing for me. Being new to reading and new to Bed for the night - it absolutely changed me as a person. The volunteers and their kindness and friendship was outstanding, the bonds that were built at B4N on Tuesday's with the guests is something I won't forget. I never wanted to miss a week for fear that the guests thought I wouldn't be back. Thank you for the opportunity to help!

I feel incredibly fortunate and privileged to have been able to play a small part in such a wonderful venture.

This was my first experience of volunteering for B4N and I would be very happy to do so again.

Witnessing how quickly guests accept and appreciate the love, hospitality and care that B4N provides.

Hearing about the guests who have been helped with accommodation, employment and health issues.

Working alongside and meeting such wonderful people, helping to do all we can for our guests and the great camaraderie and atmosphere in the shelters.

Meeting new people guests and volunteers; all the helpers were a lovely group of people and it would be lovely to think we could meet up sometime in the future.

Everybody interacted over time and was very relaxed. Although I can't speak for the clients, I hope we made them feel welcomed and made to feel at home as much as a situation like that can offer.

Spending the whole evening playing card games with guests, this was during one of the last nights of the shelter and everyone was rightfully worried about COVID-19 but we were all able to relax together that evening.

It was nice to see some familiar faces and one of the guys helped my failing memory by testing me on how he took his drink... it did the trick and I soon learned!

Having a faith-filled prayer team, praying so faithfully and reliably every Friday evening alongside us. Their prayers were answered on many an occasion.

The guys laughing as they played table tennis with great humour.

The kindness and willingness of one young guest to translate for and help look after another guest when he became unwell.

Welcoming a previous guest for dinner and hearing his great testimony. Great he wanted to come back to be with us.

God's provision of our food. Always enough, over and above. All praise to Him.

What worked well this year?

The whole set up is amazing mostly run by volunteers, it was very well organised everyone knew what to do and just got on with it. Important procedures were clearly explained.

The friendliness of other volunteers.

Always really rewarding to see our meals go down so well.

I provided the guests with some herbal teas which were really appreciated.



Really nice to see bigger numbers than in some previous years (obviously not nice if there is a greater need, but I got the impression that the increase in numbers was more down to greater accessibility).

Guests on the whole were really polite and appreciative and nice to see the camaraderie between them.

I found the guests to be friendly and helpful this year.

A very good group of guests; new volunteers that came on board were great; we were blessed with the weather not being too harsh. Great having English Martyrs on board this year and the way they fitted in straight away.

I worked the breakfast/clear-up shift at CiRDiC and thought the whole operation worked smoothly. It was noticeable how some guests helped with the clear-up. As the guests left the venue in the morning an appreciable number gave a genuine 'thank you' and a smiling 'see you next week' which was really great to hear.

I was based at Wycliffe and Simon Bird's organisation and communication was excellent. We were well supported with messages via the What's App group and there was a good system for knowing when your shift was due and for swapping if required. The guests during my shifts were polite, appropriately friendly and often thanked us for the support being offered. I did not witness any challenging behaviour during my shifts and the guests were generally respectful of each other. I was really impressed with this. During one week when I was concerned regarding one guest and his rather 'unusual behaviour' there was a clear channel for me to report this through. The food was excellent, there was plenty for guests to eat and enough for the volunteers to if they required it. This was welcomed. The hall was warm even on the very coldest of nights. The atmosphere was welcoming for the guests and volunteers. I meet some amazing people - both guests and volunteers.

It worked well when there were smaller groups of greeters in addition to the cooks.

It's good to know that all the people were found accommodation and I hope the government keeps to their word to make sure people are found somewhere to live in the future.

What was difficult?

Talking to the guests, at first this was difficult but got easier as I got to know them.

I really struggled to erect the camp beds I just found them really difficult. I just thought they were a really complicated design.

We did have a couple of issues with not getting dietary requirements through beforehand and so having to contend with a couple of guests who couldn't / wouldn't eat what we'd provided, which is always a little embarrassing. But once we knew we were able to adapt in the following weeks.

The young man who had to be asked to put a shirt on when he was in the room where breakfast was served.

It was upsetting to see the deterioration in health of one guest particularly who was taken into hospital, to A&E, near the end of B4N period.

I was saddened to see a few 'old faces' amongst the guests who had been with B4N in 2019 and wondered if some were 'on the street' through personal choice or if something just hadn't worked out for them.

It was difficult when there were too many volunteers in one evening.

Some nights I felt surplus to requirements; it was difficult when I didn't have much to do.

Both the night supervisor and myself were concerned that the rule of no one in after 10pm was to be broken for one guest because he had special circumstances.

I would have appreciated more specific info on guests that had problems at other venues. As Coordinator I felt I need to know situations we might encounter at our venue.

One difficulty I found was where guests were told one thing at one venue, and then another at the one I was at. For example one guest was allowed out past 11 to smoke at the previous venue but we didn't let them out and they got very angry.

We had difficulty getting out of the car park on a couple of the cold dark evenings, as a lone female that was a bit of a challenge.



Ideas for improvements

Plastic luggage labels, which wouldn't fall off, so over-night bags could be identified easily.



A box of games that could go from venue to venue, so guests knew what would be available every evening.

A speaker to play music, guests really enjoyed music, it lightened the atmosphere.

On a Monday night, most guests wanted the food on offer, so could we change that to be included in the same way it is on the other nights. Feedback from guests was that if they queued for food at the other place offering food they would be late at the Abbey B4N.

Although I have knowledge of substance misuse I would have liked to have updated myself with the training that was offered. However I couldn't get to a session, so perhaps more would have been good.

Not having so many volunteers in one evening and, if a volunteer shift needed to be cancelled, to have plenty of notice, not as one is leaving home.

There seems still to be an administrative gap for volunteers such as myself (from parishes without an overnight venue) who are not being fully integrated into teams, and communicated with, at an early stage in the process.

Added option to donate - whether it be clothing or toiletries- sharing a bit more about how to contribute if you choose to!

More co-ordination on dinner menus.

PROPOSALS AND CHANGES FOR B4N 2021

With all the uncertainty remaining around COVID-19 and the associated restrictions on group gatherings, the arrangements for B4N 2021 are also uncertain at this time. There may need to be significant changes. We are awaiting guidance for night shelters from Housing Justice which is due to be issued in July 2020.

That being said, if B4N can go ahead using the current night shelter model, these are some of the changes under consideration:

- DBS checks to be done for co-ordinators and overnight volunteers before B4N starts
- More notice and publicity of the praise and worship service before B4N
- Offering more sessions of the drug awareness training
- Using plastic luggage labels for guests' bags
- Providing more games and music speakers
- Opening at the same time on Monday evenings
- Making sure we don't have too many volunteers on the rota for any one night
- Making sure volunteers from other churches are added to rotas earlier and receive all communications
- Making sure car parks are not locked before all evening volunteers have left!
- Making sure information on dietary requirements is fed back to the kitchen volunteer teams
- Asking venues to provide some breakfast options that guests could take away with them, such as breakfast bars or fruit, for those who do not want to eat a cooked breakfast first thing.
- Finding a way for the kitchen volunteer teams at each venue to communicate with each other so they know what meals had been served to guests in the previous week
- Letting volunteers know how to donate and what is needed