

# **Bexley Winter Shelter Project – 2020**

## **A report back**

### **Management and Administration**

A meeting took place in early July 2019 when the steering committee agreed that they sensed God was asking us to go forward to plan and run a Winter Shelter for the Bexley rough sleepers from January 2<sup>nd</sup> until March 29<sup>th</sup> 2020. All members of the steering committee were happy to be involved in a future project.

During the preceding months, members of the Steering Committee agreed that it would be good if BWS began as a registered charity rather than stay as a community project. Five trustees were appointed and we heard that our application to the Charity Commissioners was approved and that the Bexley Winter Shelter could now operate as a Registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation, No 1184243.

We were again able to appoint a part-time paid Volunteer coordinator and following advertising and interviewing a suitable person was duly selected.

We were also able to establish a Bexley Winter Shelter web site viz [www.bexleywintershelter.org.uk](http://www.bexleywintershelter.org.uk)

The steering committee were very pleased to hear that we had been awarded Housing Justice's Good Practice Quality Mark.

We were also able to meet locally with Housing Justice representatives concerning possible grants from the London Mayor through their organisation. Our application was successful and there are more details in our finance section report below.

Cornerstone were also pleased to be involved again with both training, follow ups and case work.

The steering committee met on eleven occasions over the period of the project. With the BWS now being a charity, it was to be expected that formal minutes should be kept and a volunteer took on the role of minute secretary.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of October we remembered the national Homeless Sunday with a service at Trinity Baptist led by Cornerstone. Afterwards Ian and a couple of other folks spent the night out in the Borough's streets and had some interesting observations to report back to us at a committee meeting.

Of course, the Coronavirus issue started in the middle of March and so two further planned meetings were not able to be held.

### **Venues**

So, we then set about seeking venues as we were advised that one used last year would not be available due to refurbishment plans and neither would another due to some fire safety work that needed doing. Fortunately, we were advised that another church's hall could be available for two nights per week. So, Praise the Lord we were all set with five venues.

### **Volunteers**

We made the usual appeal for volunteers by contacting folk who have served in previous years and through the local churches. In the end we had some 208 people come forward of which 79 had not served in a shelter before.

We held four training sessions for volunteers, a couple for team leaders and for cooks. Once again, the emphasis was on the safety and security of the volunteers. Several folks took advantage of completing the level 2 Food Hygiene certificate and an Emergency First aid certificate we are able to offer in house.

We also had some 16 folks sign up to be part of our very valuable and ongoing Prayer team and we sent out four or five prayer letters -some with urgent requests – which were of course answered. From the application forms, which were completed, we concluded that some 33 churches had been involved.

The Volunteer Coordinator did a great job in arranging and organising people so that each shift had a full complement of volunteers. Some folk were kind enough to take on their second and even third choice venues and times in order for the Volunteer Coordinator to reach this outcome.

One aspect we had this year was to have a list of people who could be called up at short notice to offer emergency cover and this proved vital and was used on several occasions thus ensuring the shelter could open safely every night.

## **Equipment**

As in the previous year we continued with the blow-up mattresses and individually assigned sleeping bags. New laundry bags were the main item of purchase. We will not be having the same storage premises for much of our equipment as in the previous years but, arrangements have been made with another church in Bexley to store it until needed next winter and we are very grateful for them coming forward.

## **Catering**

This proved to be satisfactory in terms of meal provision but there were several occasions when last minute cooks had to be found. Attention to allergies for both guests and staff was given much emphasis in the training sessions run by our catering convenor.

## **Finance**

NB please note all the financial figures below are an approximation at this time and subject to being finalised when all receipts have been actioned. This year we will be able to benefit from Gift Aid while the accounts will need to be appropriately audited for the Charity Commission.

Once again, we thank God for His wonderful financial provision.

### ***Housing Justice Grant***

For the first time we received a grant from Housing Justice which was funded by the London Mayor's Office. This grant could only be used for specific purposes, this is in addition to our usual income and expenditure. This has enabled us to provide our guests with additional help and support. This included employing a caseworker which has resulted in a better outcome for many of our guests.

### ***Income excluding grant***

We were very blessed with many generous gifts and donations from churches, individuals, businesses and other organisations; amounting to over£16,000. We really appreciate every gift both

great and small; some of the notable contributions were: Our Lady of the Angles again put on a Rock Choir concert raising £1,500. ASDA Bexleyheath gave us a cheque for £1,000 through their green disc initiative, a bucket collection at Sainsbury's Bexleyheath raised £869.29 and a Carol collection at Tesco Welling brought in another £741.04. Also, thanks to Belmont Baptist who donated £1,379.86 from their tithe offering, we received £1,000 from Avery Hill Christian Fellowship, £2,000 from the Skipton Building Society and £500 from Apex Lifts. Lastly, we would like to give a special thanks to Form 8RPP from Bexley Grammar School whose enthusiasm and hard work raised £115.29 and collected an amazing number of toiletries, clothing and other items for our guests.

### ***Expenditure excluding grant***

So far this year we have spent about £9,500. The largest expense was the food purchases; with possible further claims to come this currently amounts to £3,804.16.

### ***Summary***

Overall, we should see a surplus of about £6,000 which will help to ensure that the Shelter remains financially sustainable next Winter with or without another grant from Housing Justice.

We are also very grateful for gifts of clothing, toiletries and some “blessing” bags.

### **Guests**

Posters for shops etc and business type cards that could be handed to a rough sleeper were made available to everybody who wanted them and could use them.

Cornerstone assessed 25 men during the winter session 2020, all of which were subsequently offered an invitation. 31 other appointments were made for assessments, but the men did not turn up. The following information is based upon the 20 guests that chose to access the shelter for one night or more- the statistics are based on their disclosure at their initial assessment. NB six of the guests had accessed the shelter in previous years.

We had two women enquire, one of which was subsequently housed through our referral to No First Night Out.

None of the guests presented with any pets.

Again, we were able to offer all forms of clean clothing and footwear to those that wanted it. Haircuts were provided and advice and support from the Citizens Advice Bureau was very welcomed.

The Appendix below gives statically values and compares them in most cases, with previous years information (we are indebted to Cornerstone again for recording and producing this year's facts and figures).

Several interesting points arising from this year's information can be drawn out.

- a) The number of guests who had only been homeless for a very short time.
- b) Most of the referrals had come via direct contact with Cornerstone.
- c) The number of rough sleepers that had not registered with the Council and almost all had not received help from any other source.
- d) The number that did not or where not permitted to access the shelter further.
- e) The number housed
- f) And sadly, that six of the guests had used the shelter in previous years

NB The coronavirus issue arose during the last two weeks of the shelter and although some accommodation was provided, in the end we were required to close in the last week. The Council in collaboration with the Mayor of London were supposed to take over and provide accommodation. This was not a smooth process by any means and a lot of time was spent looking after our last remaining guests, and many hours on the phone with the Council etc. to eventually achieve this.

## Conclusion

The Bexley Winter Shelter ran smoothly (in terms of volunteers, meal provision, warmth and sleeping) and offered accommodation etc to some 20 men over the opening period. Sadly, some of the guests could not comply with our community code and so their invitations had to be withdrawn.

The real achievement was of course the fact that seven of the man where housed during the shelter period with a further six at the close as a result of the Covid-19 provision for the homeless. In some cases, the Cornerstone Freely project was also able to help in supplying these places with domestic items and equipment.

Sadly we have been unable to arrange a Thanksgiving service due to the coronavirus but, would ask each of you reading this to give God thanks for all that went on, your role in the project and the way we hopefully touch our guests lives with some getting places to live - off of the street and for the ongoing work of Cornerstone who will continue to follow up whoever they can.

Prepared on behalf of the steering committee by Melvyn French (project coordinator)

## Appendix

Referrals from	2017	2018	2019	2020
Cornerstone	2	0	7	14
Foodbank	1	4	3	1
Dartford Shelter	2	0	0	
Bexley Council	6	3	3	3
Citizens Advice Bureau	1	2	0	
Street Pastors	1	0	0	
North Kent College	1	0	0	
Another Guest	2	0	2	
Signpost	1	0	0	
Job Centre	2	1	3	1
QE hospital	0	0	1	
Salvation Army / Church	3	1	1	
Thames Reach	1	2	0	
St.Mungo's	0	0	2	
Greenwich Council	0	0	1	
Dartford Mental Health	0	1	0	
Social Media	0	2	0	

No First Night out				1
Totals	23	16	24	20

Age Range	2017	2018	2019	2020
18-25			4	2
25-35	8 (under 30)	1	7	3
35-45			5	8
45-55	4 (30 -50)	0	3	5
55-65	4 (50+)	5 (50-59)	4	2
65+		1	1	0

Ethnicity	2017	2018	2019	2020
White British	13	14	19	16
Black British/European			3	1
Black African			2	3
Mixed race (B/W) British	1	1		
Other	2	1	0	

On First Assessment	2017	2018	2019	2020
Unemployed	13	8	23	18
Work	2			2
Retired	2	1	1	
Unable to work		4		
Student	1			

Period of Homelessness	2017	2018	2019	2020
Less than 1 week				7
Less than 1 month	10	7	13	2
1-6 months	2	3	4	6
6-12 months	3	2	2	2
1 year but less than 5 years	1	4	3	2
5 years or more	0	0	2	1

*N.B. This does not reflect that some guests have had multiple periods of homelessness prior to this.*

Reasons for Homelessness	2017	2018	2019	2020
Eviction/Repossession / Tenancy lost	8	7	3	
Relationship Breakdown	7	5	7	4
Unsafe to remain in home	1	3		

Ill health and mental health		1	3	1
Landlords wanting property back			2	4
Benefit loss / Job loss			3	2
Addiction issues			6	7
Released from prison				2

<i>N.B. The reasons are often complex and, in reality, usually include several categories</i> <b>Registered Homeless with Local Council</b>			
<b>Council</b>	2018	2019	2020
Bexley	4	13	6
Not Registered	11	8	13
Greenwich		2	1
Lewisham		1	
Dartford	1		

<b>Help from other Agencies</b>	2018	2019	2020
Thames Reach	2	2	1
Dartford Mental Health	1		
St Mungo's & St Giles	1	1	
Local Church	1	1	1
None	11	18	18
Citizens Advice Bureau		1	
Peabody		1	

<b>Registered with GP</b>	2018	2019	2020
Locally	13	20	14
Not local		2	5
No GP	3	2	1

<b>Disclosed Health Problems</b>	2017	2018	2019	2020
Physical		4	10	
Mental	10	5	18	11

Physical & Mental		6	7	5
None		1	3	4
Addiction issues Alcohol/drugs	8		16	12
No addictions				8

<b>Debt situation</b>	2018	2019	2020
None	6	16	8
Utilities	1	3	
Rent Arrears	2		1
Court fines	1	1	4
Phone contracts	1	1	
Credit Cards		2	5
Overdraft		1	
Other (loans)	3		2

<b>Disclosed Criminal Convictions</b>	2017	2018	2019
Yes	8	7	6
No		9	18

<b>Addiction issues</b>	2018	2019	2020
Alcohol	7	10	7
Drugs	2	6	5
Alcohol & Drugs	2		
None	5	8	8
Smoker	15	21	16
Non smoker	1	3	4

*N.B. Have categorised the main addiction, although some guests had issues with both.*

<b>Former Residence</b>	2017	2018	2019	2020
Bexley Borough	12	14	19	19
Dartford Borough		2		
Greenwich Borough			2	1
Lewisham Borough			1	
Other			2	

<b>Situation at the end of the Shelter period</b>	2017	2018	2019	2020
On the guest list on closing night		9	10	6*
Moved to another shelter		1		
Housed	3	2	2	7



Lost contact / stopped attending	3	4		7**
B&B		1		
Seeking to share accommodation – caravan!		3		
Seeking private rent		3		
Sofa surfing with family/friends	2	2		1
Admitted to mental health unit	1			
Returned home	3			
Still homeless	4			
Had to be declined access to the shelter	1		7	5
Returned to prison (breaching bail conditions)				1

During the winter session, five men were declined further access to the shelter. Two due to irregular attendance and three due to bringing drugs or alcohol to the venues.

\*Six guests were housed via Bexley Council directly after the shelter due to the Covid-19 situation

\*\*Seven guests stopped attending through choice, although we only lost contact with two. We believe the reason for more than half of those leaving was due to anxiety/poor mental health.

Seven guests were housed through No First Night Out whilst the shelter was in operation.