



ANNUAL REPORT

2023

A DECADE OF MAIDSTONE CHURCHES WINTER SHELTER

2013 - 2023

maidstoneshelter.org.uk

Registered Charity No: 1156735



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A 10-YEAR JOURNEY

It would be almost impossible to summarise the journey that Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter (MCWS) has taken over the last 10 years. We could write many pages of stories of unexpected provision, answered prayers and transformed lives.

A lot has changed since MCWS first began. Each year we have met many new guests, all of whom have their own stories to tell and challenges to overcome. Over the years we have learned how to better support these guests, depending on their own individual needs.

Some of our volunteers have been with us from the outset, whilst many others have joined our teams and yet others have left for a variety of reasons.

We could also write about the many challenges we have encountered along the way, not least with the difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to continue supporting our guests through the winter, our provision during the worst of the pandemic had to change significantly.

However, throughout all the changes over the last 10 years, our mission and aims have remained the same:

- To provide hospitality and overnight shelter for homeless people in the winter months.
- To engage members of churches in Maidstone and other volunteers, in building supportive relationships with homeless people in Maidstone, without discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or religion.
- To support homeless people to find long-term accommodation.
- To undertake such other purposes in relation to the needs of homeless people as the trustees may from time to time determine

Since MCWS first opened its doors in December 2013, thousands of lives have been changed; not just the lives of our guests but also those of our volunteers and staff.

None of our work could have been achieved without the dedication of our volunteers and the financial support from our funders and donors, who make this all possible!

Hopefully the information contained within the pages of this report will give you an idea of what can and has been achieved by the working together of churches and volunteers, for the good of people who are going through the trials of homelessness or financial distress.

We love because he first loved us
1 John 4:19

IN THE BEGINNING

THE NEED

Ten years ago, a team of church leaders in Maidstone recognised a need in our town. They and countless others were meeting many people in need of help and in need of a home. That need still exists today.

The original planning team were especially concerned about the levels of street homelessness in Maidstone, particularly during the coldest winter months, so they set up a group to discuss how this need could be addressed. The initial plan and obvious response was to find an empty building in the town centre and set it up as a shelter for the winter. However, it was eventually decided that a church-based winter shelter would be the way forward, run mainly with volunteers – and so Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter began!

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS & WHY DO PEOPLE BECOME HOMELESS?

We all know that a home is more than just a roof over our heads. It is a place of safety and comfort, a refuge, a place where we feel comfortable, a place of belonging and often a place where there is family or community. To be homeless is not just about a lack of accommodation, but can often also be linked with a lack of security and stability, a lack of close community and a feeling of exclusion.

The causes behind homelessness are often more complex than we might think. Although one of the top reasons is 'loss of income', there are many factors behind homelessness including unemployment, national austerity, family and relationship breakdowns, mental or physical illness, addiction and/or substance misuse, debt or poor decisions, migration, poverty & debt, the struggle to return to independence after prison or care, and acute shortages of affordable housing. The list of reasons is endless.

Also, a minority of people refuse help and some drop in and out of support. Others, especially migrants, have no recourse to public funds and are especially isolated.

Often, one bad situation leads to another and eventually those situations may spiral and cause a person to become homeless. Also, each situation may have become really complicated, meaning the person needs support in order to unravel their problems and move towards a more stable life. The help required generally involves going beyond simply providing for their immediate material needs.

Homelessness does not only include people sleeping on the streets. In fact, the largest single category of homelessness is sofa surfing, but people are also homeless if they are sleeping in their cars, makeshift homes (tents, shelters etc) or living in temporary accommodation such as hotels and B&B's.

FACT
THE AVERAGE AGE OF DEATH
FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING
HOMELESSNESS IS 46 FOR MEN
AND 42 FOR WOMEN. [CRISIS]

MOVING FORWARD – OUR RESPONSE

Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter first opened its doors in December 2013, offering food, friendship, shelter and support over the coldest 3 months of each winter.

The original plan was not only to meet the immediate needs of those who were homeless by offering a bed and a meal, but also to offer true hospitality and care to those in crisis.

Our church venues willingly opened their doors as shelters and we had teams of volunteers who provided a warm welcome, hot meals and a bed for the night for our guests.

Our Project staff team had an initial meeting with each guest to discuss their current situation and to plan the next steps. In many cases, and by working closely with other services, our guests were given the support they needed to help them move forward. This was sometimes a slow process though, not an overnight fix!

Every guest's situation is unique, so the pathway out of homelessness or financial difficulty looks different for each person. Every guest who came through our doors was given one-to-one support in finding accommodation and taking steps forward to improve their situation.

Our offer of support has adapted and expanded in recent years, and now includes support for people who are potentially the future homeless: those who are struggling to pay the rent and bills plus put food on the table due to limited financial resources.

On pages 11 to 12 you can read about how our winter shelter has evolved over the years and how we have adapted to meet the ever-changing needs of people in our ever-changing world.

A significant factor of the change in the way we work relates to the successful way that Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) have responded to the increasing need for homelessness support. With the benefit of Government funding, their outreach program and homeless support service has enabled a significant reduction in the numbers of street homeless in our town.

Homelessness is an emergency and we work closely with MBC and other support services to ensure that nobody is left sleeping on the streets during the coldest winter months, when they are most vulnerable. Our referral process is fast, straightforward and safe and it's possible to get a place in our shelter on the same day if MBC are unable to help, or if they are unable to help at short notice.

We are truly grateful to everyone who has played a part in making our vision a reality throughout our first decade.



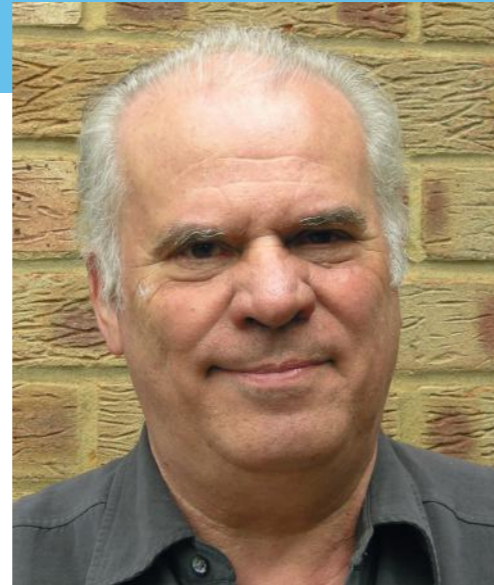
CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Gordon is the Chairman of the Trustees. He retired from work in 2016, after a 43 year-long career in railway operational management and transport information systems. He is a Licensed Lay Reader in a Church of England church near Maidstone. Gordon served as a Street Pastor in Maidstone from the start of the scheme in October 2008 until Covid restrictions were first imposed in early 2020. He was a Team Leader for many years as well as the Maidstone Co-ordinator for a period. He became involved in Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter from the first year, serving as a volunteer.

This is now the tenth year we have operated. We shall commemorate that but not celebrate it, as each year we have hoped we should no longer be needed; but sadly, poverty and homelessness are ongoing issues and we are glad we are able to do something to help.

This year even more than most, we really could not predict what we might need to do. Weather affects us not least in whether MBC make the decision to implement SWEP [Severe Weather Emergency Protocol] when temperatures are predicted to stay below zero, which happened this year (a much colder one than last). This directly affects the accommodation we might need to book.

As noted last year, the remit from government was generally not to utilise 'dormitory style' overnight accommodation as we had done up to 2019/20. Working closely with Maidstone Borough Council, we decided that we would provide overnight accommodation for what was hoped would be a small number of people who, for whatever reason, they would not be accommodating. This we did, although as the numbers began to rise against a backdrop of limited B&B accommodation available to both MBC and ourselves, we did prepare a standby plan utilising Church accommodation.



We again provided, as in previous years, more than just an overnight roof. We provided a warm place and food every afternoon, as well as each night to a much greater extent than previously. This has included a number who, though they may have some accommodation, are still in need. All of this has required not only paid staff including Claire Kehily, our new Project Manager, but also many volunteers and of course financial donations. We are very grateful to all those who have contributed in some way including MBC, who agreed to allow us to utilise the newly refurbished Trinity House building on one evening each week.

We are keen to build on what has been done this year and the lessons learned from that, to be able to provide an even better service to any guests next year, whilst working towards the eradication of homelessness and the day that we are no longer needed.

To all who have been part of this year, Thank you so much!

GORDON MACKLEY

OUR TRUSTEES



MARTIN HINCHLIFFE

Martin has a strong desire to help others less fortunate than himself. He is saddened by regularly seeing the homeless on the streets of Maidstone, London and other cities and attempts to play his part in supporting and reducing the number of street homeless. He has previously volunteered for Crisis at Christmas in London and has volunteered for ten years with MCWS. He has been a Trustee of the charity for 7 years. He has experience in managing operations and safety management, following a career in engineering and is the lead Trustee for shelter operations.



WENDY FOSTER

Wendy has over 30 years' experience as a senior Human Resources practitioner, mainly in public sector and not-for-profit organisations, and is the lead Trustee for this specialism. She is an active Christian and has good links with local faith-based groups. In addition, Wendy is a Trustee for Citizens' Advice Maidstone, a role that led to her increased interest in support for the homeless in Maidstone.



REVEREND JOHN TAPPER

Rev Canon John is a Chartered Accountant and is the charity's Treasurer. John has assisted the Shelter both as an overnight volunteer and also collecting items for the guests.



ZOFIA GRZYMALA

Zofia is well known for her passion and dedication to helping homeless people and influencing change in the services provided. She has a substantial knowledge of the homeless and housing sector. Her professional experience includes managing Homeless Care charity (supported accommodation, day centre and food bank) as well as her roles within the Origin Group and Sanctuary Housing. Through many years in the sector, she has developed a deep understanding of what it really means to be homeless and the support homeless individuals need the most. Zofia is currently working as General Manager of Kent Supported Housing.



GWYN MCPHERSON

Gwyn has been involved with MCWS since its inception and has undertaken roles as a Volunteer, Venue Lead (Volunteer in charge of the venue), Project Worker and then Project Manager – she held this latter role for 4 years! Gwyn retired from her role as Project Manager at the end of April 2022 and has subsequently become one of our trustees, bringing with her a wealth of experience.

She is also an authorised lay minister in a Church of England church in Maidstone and has served as a Street Pastor in the town since 2011.


ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



CHAIR OF TRUSTEES
GORDON MACKLEY



PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT
ZOFIA GRZYMALA



TREASURER
JOHN TAPPER



OPERATIONS/
VOLUNTEERS
MARTIN HINCHLIFFE



HUMAN RESOURCES
WENDY FOSTER

FUNDING
VACANT



HOMELESS SUPPORT
GWYN MCPHERSON



PROJECT MANAGER
CLAIRE KEHILY



ASSISTANT PROJECT MANAGER
MIKE LOUTH



ADMINISTRATOR
MANDY FULLER



PROJECT WORKER
TARA BECKETT



PROJECT WORKER
KAYE EL-SHAMMA



PROJECT WORKER
HOLLIE NEAL

PROJECT MANAGER'S MESSAGE



This was Claire's first year as Project Manager, although she had previously been involved in the Shelter for the last 6 years as a Volunteer, Project Worker and Assistant Manager. She was delighted to be offered the post of Project Manager when Gwyn (our former Project Manager) retired last year.

Claire previously organised the Rucksack Project in Maidstone, as well as working in Health and Social Care locally for over 20 years. She is also a Wedding and Funeral Celebrant.

I have been involved in supporting and volunteering with Homeless charities and events for the last 10 years, fuelled by a desire to fight social injustice and help the vulnerable. Volunteering at the Winter Shelter 6 years ago was a pivotal moment in my life, when I began to realise the breadth and depth of the problem locally and found a way that I could help to make a difference.

What an exciting shelter it has been this year. I really had to hit the ground running, which was particularly problematic when I managed to fracture my ankle in late February! Despite this and other odd issues, it was business as usual and we found creative and innovative ways to work round any hurdles we came across. I am really proud of what we have achieved and delivered this year, with our fantastic team: Mandy our legendary administrator, Mike the Assistant Project Manager and the Project Workers Tara, Kaye and Hollie. We've managed to meet the challenges that the current financial environment has presented to us, with an increased number of guests attending our registration for advice, signposting, meals, company, warmth and of course, the chance to have a cuppa and chat to a friendly face.

All of this would not have been possible without our wonderful volunteers and our amazing cooks and their teams, all of whom willingly gave up their time to support us, we really couldn't have done it without them – whether it was cooking meals, washing up, setting up tables and chairs, serving meals, making endless cups of tea and coffee or chatting with guests. The whole team and more importantly all of our guests, truly appreciate all their dedication and kindness.

We were also extremely fortunate to have the Don Doel Soup Run on board again, with Mary and her volunteers preparing soup and sandwiches for the guests every Sunday, as well as providing food parcels, company and friendship.

As we mark 10 years of our being in existence, it is a reflective time, a time where we have looked back at everyone who we have supported over the years, remembering those who are no longer with us and those who are still struggling. We do so with a sense of sadness,

and also with concern that despite huge inroads being made locally and the council being proactive and very efficient in their use of funding and schemes to eradicate the issue, the problems of homelessness and poverty are not only still present but on the increase too.

However, it is also a time to marvel that despite the constantly changing challenges that develop, and the continuation of social problems and issues that affect our guests, that so many people are still wanting and willing to do their bit to attempt to ease the problems people encounter and make life a little easier for our guests.

We have seen the return of familiar faces and spent many wonderful afternoons and evenings chatting and listening to our guests' life stories; often sad, inspirational or even both, sharing their worries and their joys and enabling people to find a way forward. We have shared their good news when accommodation has been found and helped people during their darker moments.

Some evenings have been livelier than others for a variety of reasons but, overall, the atmosphere of the shelter this year has been one of warmth and humour, of friendly conversations and of kindness, including many acts of kindness between the guests themselves, which has been simply humbling and an absolute privilege to be part of.



HOW THE SHELTER HAS EVOLVED

It hardly seems possible that 10 years have passed since we first opened our doors in December 2013. Since then, we have adapted and changed the way that we work and offer support, in accordance with our learned experience and life circumstances.

WINTER 2013-14

During this first winter of operation, the shelter was planned as a pilot, and opened with 10 bed spaces for a period of 8 weeks.

Our shelters were hosted by 7 different churches, each offering one night per week. From these church buildings we were able to offer our guests a hot dinner, support from our staff and volunteers, plus a bed for the night. This meant that, for the first time in years for many of our guests, they had a hearty meal and a safe, warm space to sleep.

2014-15 UP TO AND INCLUDING WINTER 2019-20

During these years we increased our overnight capacity to 15 beds per night, opening for 12-13 weeks over the coldest months of the winter.

Our shelters continued to be hosted by churches across Maidstone and operated on a 'rolling night shelter' basis, meaning the load was shared between church venues and teams. The host churches each offered their buildings for one night per week, from where we offered our guests a hot meal, a listening ear, a bed for the night (dormitory style in the church hall) and breakfast the following morning.

An additional church building was used to register our guests each afternoon and to provide drinks, snacks and a time to just 'chill' in a warm, comfortable setting. At these sessions, our Project Team took time to chat with the guests and encourage them to engage with Maidstone Borough Council, The Day Centre and other services, to obtain support and advice on benefits/jobs and housing, in order to help get them off the streets for good.

Unfortunately, in March 2020 we had to close our shelter a week earlier than we had planned due to the Covid 19 (Coronavirus) pandemic and associated lockdown.

WINTER 2020-21

Throughout winter 2020-21, at the height of the Covid pandemic, the Government stated that no-one should be placed in 'dormitory style' accommodation so our usual practice of setting up beds in church halls could not be used. However, Maidstone Borough Council received Government funding under the 'Everyone In' scheme, which enabled them to accommodate most of our local street homeless in hotel/B & B rooms or other types of temporary accommodation.

As much of the 'emergency' temporary accommodation lacked adequate cooking facilities and in order to continue providing support, MCWS liaised with Maidstone Borough Council and we offered hot, home-cooked meals to those people who had been placed in such accommodation, together with food parcels where required.

We originally planned to offer sit-down meals in 4 local church buildings, but the ongoing Social-Distancing restrictions made this impossible. We therefore decided the best way forward would be to offer our meals as takeaways instead. Whilst distributing the takeaways we had the opportunity to offer a listening ear plus provide advice and support to those who needed it.

During this challenging period, we also offered hot meals to individuals and families in need, distributing them via the local food bank at The Salvation Army. The pandemic meant that many people were struggling to make ends meet or had lost their jobs, with the unenviable decision of whether to pay rent and bills or

put food on the table. These people were potentially the future homeless, so the hot meals we distributed via the food banks hopefully helped to ease this burden in some small way.

WINTER 2021-22

Although Covid was still a concern, restrictions had eased somewhat by winter 2021-22. However, dormitory style sleeping was still considered to be a 'last resort' option. In view of this, we planned to operate in a similar way as earlier years, with afternoon registration sessions and evening meals in church halls, but with our overnight guests staying in a rented house rather than in the dormitory style arrangement we had used in the past.

Unfortunately, there were ongoing problems with the lease on our chosen rental property, so we placed our overnight guests in a local hotel whilst it was being sorted out. They still came to us for registration and dinner, with the ongoing opportunity for meals, support and company before returning to their rooms each evening.

By the time the rented property became available for our use, we only had 5 weeks left to run and both the time and costs involved in opening the property for the last few weeks were considered unviable by our trustees. Also, the number of guests requiring overnight accommodation was low, so we continued to accommodate them at a local hotel for the duration of the shelter.

Whilst our original plans didn't work out entirely as expected, we still provided the support, meals and accommodation that we had originally offered, but in an adapted way.

WINTER 2022-23

Based on the success of our adapted plans for winter 2021-22, we opened our doors each day in order to offer hot meals and support to homeless people, plus others who were genuinely in financial need. Due to the cost of living crisis at this point, the need for food and support was far greater than we had experienced in earlier years.

We also accommodated a number of people in a local hotel. Although Maidstone Borough Council continued to do a great job at supporting homeless people, the number of properties and hotel rooms available to them were often in short supply. We therefore accommodated people they were unable to support, or unable to help at short notice.

We did have an 'emergency plan' for overnight accommodation in church halls, dormitory style as we had offered pre-covid. However, for a number of reasons, this was not implemented throughout the 2022-23 winter season.

Our Project Manager, Claire, had put a lot of work into the emergency plan and named it 'Operation Dermot' in memory of one of our former overnight guests. Although it wasn't implemented last winter, it will certainly be given serious consideration in future years if there is still such a need for overnight accommodation.

CHRISTMAS MEALS

Over the Christmas 2022 period, hot meals were offered by:

Christmas Day - Maidstone Salvation Army (at their own church)

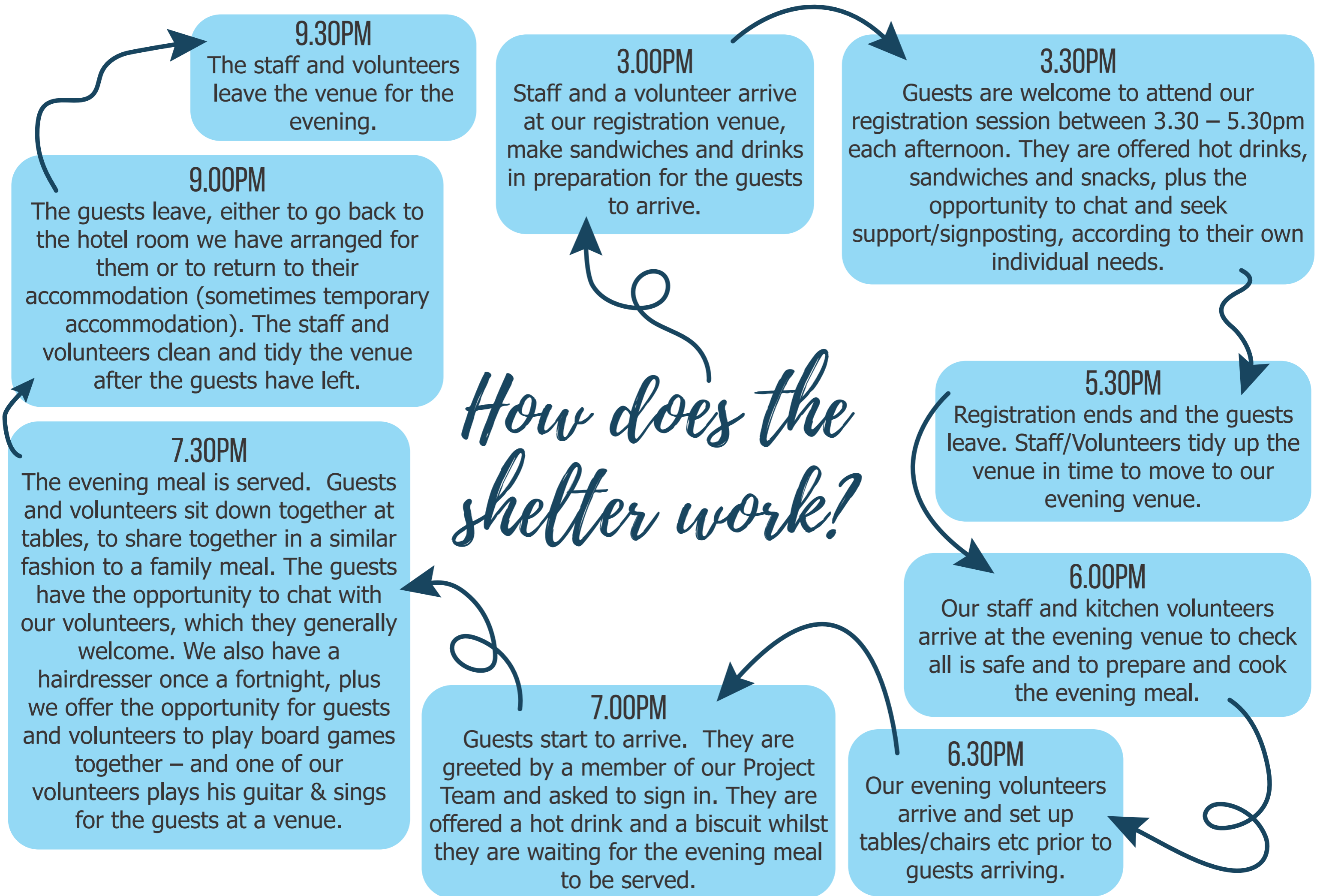
Boxing Day - Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter (from Union Street Methodist Church)

Both organisations liaised with one another to ensure that people most in need were invited to attend these sessions.

The meals were made available to anyone who was homeless or in temporary accommodation, plus others who were desperately in need of a hot meal, support and/or company during the Festive season.



How does the shelter work?



OUR AIMS AND HOW THEY WERE FULFILLED

TO PROVIDE EVENING HOSPITALITY AND OVERNIGHT SHELTER FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE IN MAIDSTONE, USING CHURCH BUILDINGS AND VOLUNTEERS THROUGH THE COLDEST PERIOD OF THE WINTER.

Shelter /'ʃeltə/

(noun) A place giving temporary protection from bad weather or danger.

Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter achieved this aim, providing hospitality, a warm space and overnight shelter to both homeless people and others in financial crisis.

Those to whom we offered our support were welcomed as guests. MCWS is all about hospitality – inviting people who were strangers into our venues and drawing alongside them as they also draw alongside us. It is not just about providing a service, but more about offering an invitation.

Hospitality was offered at both our afternoon registration sessions and the evening meal sessions. We ensured that each of our venues was warm and comfortable for our guests, especially in view of the significantly high energy costs over the winter which meant that many people were unable to afford the costs to sufficiently warm their own homes.

At registration, guests were offered hot drinks, sandwiches and snacks, plus the opportunity for a chat and additional support according to their needs.

At our evening sessions, guests were provided with hearty, healthy hot meals prepared by our volunteers. The guests and volunteers sat down to meals together to share food, hot drinks and conversation, all in the format of a 'family meal'. This opportunity for an informal chat in a comfortable setting encouraged our guests to 'open up' about anything that was worrying them, and our volunteers were always ready with a listening ear. The effects of a good diet began to show quickly in the increased energy and wellbeing of our guests. Being hungry and cold is not conducive to thinking about anything other than staying warm.

As can be seen throughout our report, our overnight guests last winter were accommodated in a local hotel, meaning these people were kept safe and off the streets in warm, dry, comfortable accommodation overnight. We had overnight guests every night we were open.

A natural and ongoing concern with night shelters is that they will attract an influx of homeless people from neighbouring towns. In our case, there was no evidence of this happening.

Some of our guests initially arrived feeling very quiet and withdrawn, but after a short while of feeling safe and valued, they really start to open up and we could see the smiles appear slowly!

TO ENGAGE CHURCH MEMBERS AND OTHER VOLUNTEERS WITH SOME OF THE MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE IN MAIDSTONE, WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION ON THE GROUNDS OF RACE, GENDER, DISABILITY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, OR RELIGION.

Our dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers (both secular and non-secular) worked together in friendly teams to extend a warm welcome to our guests, ensuring they were fed, comfortable and felt valued. Both guests and volunteers enjoyed getting to know one another and found it a mutually rich and rewarding experience.

Often our guests just needed someone to listen to them and their individual concerns. Telling someone their worries and talking it through often made the issues seem less significant and also meant that help and support could be found when needed, rather than keeping everything bottled up.

Loneliness is a significant affliction for many people who are homeless or struggling. Mother Teresa once said "Of all the diseases I have known, loneliness is the worst." Within carefully set boundaries, MCWS brought

strong, stable volunteers into friendly contact with vulnerable guests.

Supportive relationships began to form as guests got to know each other and volunteers throughout the shelter. Projects like this are known for their strong sense of community and the shelter is no exception. Friendships continue beyond the period of the shelter, helping to reduce the pain of isolation so frequently felt by homeless and hungry people.

Our volunteers were fantastic with all aspects of support for our guests and we are incredibly grateful for the time and commitment they each brought to their roles.

TO SUPPORT HOMELESS PEOPLE TO MOVE ON TO APPROPRIATE ACCOMMODATION, RESISTING DEPENDENCY ON THE SHELTER.

Being supported in a winter shelter can become an easy option and take away the frustration and feelings of loneliness and desperation. However, the shelter only provides temporary support. Our project team therefore work with our guests, meeting each of them at their individual point of need, then supporting and encouraging them to liaise with other organisations who can help with their ongoing needs. This sometimes involves making appropriate appointments for them and encouraging them to attend.

Many of our guests have mental health issues, learning difficulties and low self-esteem. Also, with the personal traumas so often behind homelessness, and financial need, they could very easily become too dependent on the project's support. Our aim is to discourage dependency on the support offered, but to encourage and empower independence and self-sufficiency by giving them the resources and knowledge they need in order to access ongoing support as they move forward on their journey through life's challenges.

Our guests are offered clothing and footwear, and we also have the volunteer services of a local hairdresser who offers professional haircuts and beard trims to our guests. The effect of a good haircut should not be underestimated! It builds confidence and gives people a real boost. This really raises their spirits, enhances their feeling of being cared for and aids their wellbeing.

We collaborated closely with Maidstone Borough Council, who kept the majority of people safe and off the streets throughout last winter. The people they were unable to support became our overnight guests, but we remained in close contact with them to ensure the support for our guests was ongoing.

We also worked closely with Maidstone Day Centre. They provided additional support such as information on health and housing, applying for the right benefits and obtaining any further help, according to individual need.

By working together with other organisations, we can help our guests to flourish in the midst of adversity.

UNDERTAKING SUCH OTHER PURPOSES IN RELATION TO THE NEEDS OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AS THE TRUSTEES MAY FROM TIME TO TIME DETERMINE

We work alongside our guests as equals, meeting them at their individual point of need, and we always do our best to help them obtain the support required according to their specific circumstances.

We achieve this by working and liaising closely with other organisations who are able to provide a variety of different support options, as our guests arrive with a variety of different needs. These other organisations complement the support we provide.

In order to continue providing ongoing support within our town, even when the shelter has closed for the season, we prepared a basic recipe booklet a couple of years ago with the aim of distributing it to clients of the local food banks, but also for people going into temporary accommodation who have limited facilities or limited knowledge of cooking. Further details of this recipe booklet are given on page 32 of this report.

HOMELESS LINK HOUSE OF LORD'S RECEPTION

A REPORT FROM CLAIRE, OUR PROJECT MANAGER

I was absolutely delighted to receive an invite to attend a reception at the House of Lords, to mark the 10th anniversary of Street Link. It must be something about the number 10 this year! Street Link was created to be a nationwide phone service to quickly and effectively report somebody who is homeless and, whilst it's a shame that it is needed, it's good to know that 10 years on, people are still wanting to make a difference. For me personally, it also marks 10 years of being involved with, volunteering with, or supporting homeless people and projects in Maidstone, so although it's only my first year as Project Manager, it seemed fitting that I attended.

Myself and Zofia, one of our trustees, also managed to witness Volodymyr Zelensky arriving and leaving as he met with parliament, so it really was an auspicious day. After being told off for trying to take photographs in the waiting room, Zofia and myself made it into Cholmondeley Room right by the terrace on the River Thames, where we had a rather delicious afternoon tea, served on House Of Lords monogrammed crockery of course. More importantly, we spent a while listening to some speakers talking about the progress that had been made in preventing and reducing Homelessness and supporting people who have found themselves in this situation over the last ten years.

One of the speakers was Felicity Buchan, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing and Homelessness, as well as other people connected with Homeless Link including their CEO Rick Henderson. However, by far the best speaker was a guy called Terry who told his own story: one of over 20 years of addiction and living on the street, before he found the right support. In his words, "people put their faith in him" and helped him with his journey in overcoming addictions and some of his demons. This resulted in him being able to move forward and he now works as a peer mentor in his local area.

What an inspirational tale! It really did make us think about all the work that everyone has been putting in, both nationally and locally, and the very real differences that it makes to the individual. Something that I also took away from his words was the wonderful thought that every one of us, those at that Grand Parliamentary Reception and all of us here at our Shelter are a small cog that turns in a huge chain of events, that help people move forward, overcome issues, often without us realising the impact we have had or the part we played in the bigger picture.



GUEST STORIES: ALAN



PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW/WHY YOU BECAME HOMELESS OR NEEDED SUPPORT WITH MEALS?

After being made redundant from my job of ten years and despite keep applying for work, I ended up running out of money. I had my house repossessed. Not knowing where to go for help I ended up firstly sleeping in a tent in various locations and then finding a squat with other homeless people, to living in a disused garage.

I should say this was all due to a downward spiral from the death of my 13-year-old daughter in 2015 and the breakdown of my marriage following my daughter's death.

PLEASE LET US KNOW HOW MAIDSTONE CHURCHES WINTER SHELTER HELPED YOU.

The staff informed [me] of when and where I could attend for hot meals daily and supplying a stay in a hotel as well as being emotionally supportive by being a friendly face to talk to, helping in any way possible to make my life easier in a very difficult time for me. The staff go above and beyond for my help and welfare.

I have no doubts in my mind that without all the hard work the staff do in supporting me, I would still be living rough and finding food from people's bins to eat.

They put me in contact with the MBC Housing and Inclusion team and the DWP to apply for Universal Credits.

Alan has now moved into temporary accommodation and is currently looking for work. He hopes to be able to save a deposit for a home of his own as soon as he gets a job.

GUEST STORIES: PHIL

PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW/WHY YOU BECAME HOMELESS OR NEEDED SUPPORT WITH MEALS?

I am a single male, unemployed and no family in the area. I get Universal Credit once a month and find it hard to feed myself at times. Although I am housed, I have used the Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter for the last few years. I believe it provides a valuable service for people like myself who have little to do, few places to go, somewhere they can get a hot meal and interact with other people.



PLEASE LET US KNOW HOW MAIDSTONE CHURCHES WINTER SHELTER HELPED YOU.

The staff are always happy to help out with housing, unemployment, health and well-being issues, or just someone to have a friendly chat with. I formed good relationships with people during my time there.

GUEST STORIES: MATEUSZ

PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW/WHY YOU BECAME HOMELESS OR NEEDED SUPPORT WITH MEALS?

I came from Southampton and was homeless. Maidstone Winter Shelter helped me so much, very lovely people. I sleep on streets before I found winter shelter. [I] am so happy for all the help. I'm still working and I now share a flat with a Polish guy.

PLEASE LET US KNOW HOW MAIDSTONE CHURCHES WINTER SHELTER HELPED YOU.

[MCWS] helped me with accommodation and food. [They] explained to me how to get accommodation and help me with hotel room when I look for accommodation. They gave me hot meals and clothes, plus a warm place to stay.



DID YOUR STAY AT MAIDSTONE CHURCHES WINTER SHELTER SUPPORT YOU WITH THE NEED TO ENGAGE WITH OTHER AUTHORITIES, TO OBTAIN MORE PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION?

Winter Shelter helped show me how to get accommodation and hot meals. [They] gave advice when needed.

Mateusz has a job and has managed to save enough money as a deposit on a shared flat. We wish him all the best for the future.

GUEST STORIES: ALEX

Not sure how to keep this short because more has happened in the past three months than I can write in an essay, let alone a quote.

All I can say is that after being left on the streets in sub-zero conditions trying to care for my ex-partner, Claire was an absolute legend for helping us when no one else would and I honestly think her "safeguarding" was a life saver, as Colin was so ill at the time he was taken to hospital in February and actually died there. Those nights of respite from the cold in the Travelodge made such a difference!

Despite being thrown out of the Travelodge for my smuggled chicken (earning a firm telling off from Claire) the Night Shelter still helped me rebuild my life.

They are amazing, decent and compassionate people who don't judge and are willing to help when the council were unable to help us. The staff will listen to your problems and try to solve them - providing genuine support, dealing with some really complicated and awkward customers and providing a lifeline in crises.

Literally can't thank them enough for the dinners and the free coffee sessions, nights in the hotels, and building a homeless community in Maidstone that is far more civilised than the normal world!



The night shelter's sessions in Fremlin walk gave me a chance to meet countless other homeless people and they [some other guests] let me stay in a disused caravan that was down by the river.

That was how I met and fell for Sam, who helped me move my entire flat full of stuff to the caravan, in shopping trolleys!

I didn't have much faith in people after two deeply messed up relationships but when I got to know Sam he was on a different level to everyone I've been around in the past and it seems like I've found another person in this crazy world that I trust completely and have fallen in love with....

Enough said.

Thanks to Claire and Mike and the rest of the staff - you are all brilliant and I honestly don't think we could've got this far without you. If we're all still alive next year I look forward to more memories and reunions.

Much love

Alex

GUEST STORIES: STEVE

PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW/WHY YOU BECAME HOMELESS OR NEEDED SUPPORT WITH MEALS?

My situation occurred because of a relationship breakdown after 8 years of marriage. [I] was made to leave my home and had to sleep rough at fishing lakes in a tent, with nothing but dark thoughts & despair as my future. I gave up with people and fake promises. But due to a handful of people, firstly a lady called Yemi from Lily [Smith] House who never gave up and made me feel human and listened to. She then in turn put me in touch with a lady 'Claire' who is a true trooper, I gotta say. Do not **** with her!! She showed me that good true people are still there. All the staff, Mike, Kaye, Holly, [Tara] too many names to remember!!! All amazing caring and I mean truly caring, gave me food but most of all gave me some belief!! Because of their help I am moving into a temporary room which I am so grateful [for]. I cannot thank them all enough.

PLEASE LET US KNOW HOW MAIDSTONE CHURCHES WINTER SHELTER HELPED YOU.

As above, you guys (too many to recall names) but you are the best. I thank you so much. I'm a very humbled man. Thank you.

DID YOUR STAY AT MAIDSTONE CHURCHES WINTER SHELTER SUPPORT YOU WITH THE NEED TO ENGAGE WITH OTHER AUTHORITIES, TO OBTAIN MORE PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION?

Yes. Claire kicked butt and got it sorted. Amazing lady, a pleasure to have met her and all of the other staff.



ANY OTHER COMMENTS

Would like to mention Matt & Tracy from the Day Centre in Maidstone and the ladies for all their hard work ensuring I was ok in the mornings and had everything I needed. Also, a lady called Sinead from Porchlight who has or is in the process of placing me in temp accommodation and sorting my bank account and benefits. She was the first person [who] picked me up in December at The Lakes in snow, which has made this possible to get where I will be and [she] is actually driving me to the place, so kind of fitting – from start to finish!

Thank you all from the bottom of my heart & THEY SHOULD ALL GET A RAISE!

© I TRIED GUYS! ©

PS – you won't get rid of me that easy. I'll be visiting and hopefully helping other people like they helped me. Very inspiring people.

Steve has been placed in temporary accommodation, with a view to moving into more permanent housing when a property becomes available.

GUEST FOLLOW UP: ROBIN

Robin was one of our guests during winter 2022. After working away from home on a contract in Dubai he was unable to return to his home in The Philippines due to the strict Covid restrictions there. He was therefore sent to the UK, the country of his birth.

Robin has now safely returned to his wife and family in The Philippines and we're over the moon that things have worked out well for him.

I often think about my time with all you guys and the wonderful work you all do for the homeless. Until I became one myself you don't realize how easy it is to become homeless, it was a real eye opener.

I will never forget all that you all did to keep me safe and fed, and one of the things I do think about is the time Claire [Project Manager] & I made Claire [Project Worker] laugh so much that she had to get away from us. She was crying with laughter.

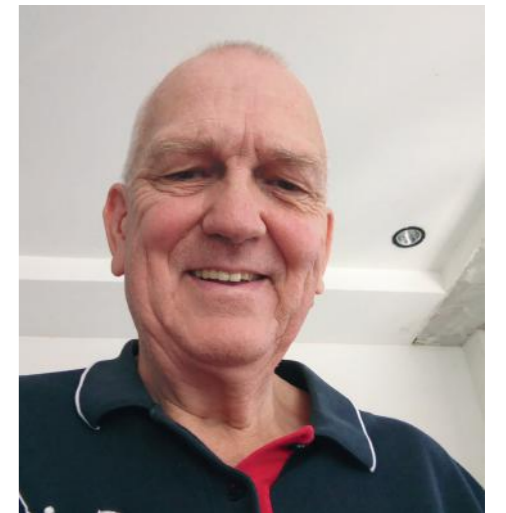
Looking back I was very lucky to find you all. What really surprised me was none of my [UK] family would help me. That's what hurt the most.

All is well here, all pleased to see me back home, a little strange as it was 2017 my last visit to the Philippines.

I have a lot of work to do on the house that keeps me busy.

I have to do visa runs every 2 months which is a pain ...at least it can be done while you wait about 1 hour and it's about 1 [hours] drive so not too bad. Visa runs out at the end of May, but I can now become a resident. Slowly getting sorted out with everything.

Just a few photos [from] the taxi, we don't have buses as such:



GUEST FOLLOW UP: CHARLIE

Charlie became one of our overnight guests during our first winter of operation. At that point he had been street homeless for many years. Although he is now housed, he sometimes comes to us for meals, additional support and social interaction each winter.

PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW/WHY YOU BECAME HOMELESS OR NEEDED SUPPORT WITH MEALS?

I first became homeless due to my relationship breaking down. I had nowhere to go, so I stayed in a tent down by the river. I was on my own for a few years, but eventually other homeless people settled there too. I made some good friends. I was there for nearly 20 years. We used the soup runs to get through it. There were good times, but it was tough too – I was in hospital for 2 months.

I first came to the MCWS when it opened in 2013. From there I got a place a few years later in Marsham Street, before moving into a shared house 3 years ago, then a temporary flat and finally my own place near Mote Park 2 years ago.

I've progressed to having my own tenancy with Golding Homes – which is huge for me and I was really proud that the head of Golding Homes and also the head of housing at MBC visited and called me a model tenant.



PLEASE LET US KNOW HOW MAIDSTONE CHURCHES WINTER SHELTER HELPED YOU.

They took me in and looked after me when I needed it. I was usually the first one in my bed, sometimes eating my pudding there and also stashing any spare mince pies.

DID YOUR STAY AT MAIDSTONE CHURCHES WINTER SHELTER SUPPORT YOU WITH THE NEED TO ENGAGE WITH OTHER AUTHORITIES, TO OBTAIN MORE PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION?

Yes – from here I got me in to work with MBC and got my first place and I've really bettered myself from there.

It is always really lovely to see Charlie and to know how far he's come since those early days of seeking help.

GUEST FOLLOW UP: JASMINE & CLEMMO

Jasmine & Clemmo were happy to share this story of their journey with us:

Jasmine and Clemmo have been together for over 20 years and spent well over 10 years of those living on the streets, down by the river in tents or whatever was available. Together with the community that grew down there, they got through some tough times and made good friends. They were regular visitors to the old Day Centre at Lenworth House and to the newer one in Knightrider street.

Ten years ago, they were amongst the first guests to come into the Winter Shelter, where Clemmo jokes that they used to have to go to bed early and hold hands through a wicker screen partition due to the separate male and female sleeping arrangements!

Jasmine's favourite meal was always the roast dinner on a Sunday evening at Tonbridge Road Methodist Church and Clemmo has very fond memories of Father Bill [Reverend Bill Miller] and Major Grayson Williams [who were involved in the original planning process for the winter shelter in Maidstone].

Not so fond are Clemmo's memories of the nightly snoring that ensued by certain guests, which resulted in them either being tipped out of bed or their camp bed being dragged into the hallway outside, complete with snoring occupant!



From the early days in the winter shelter, Jasmine and Clemmo progressed into various hotels and temporary accommodation with Maidstone Borough Council, before finally getting their own flat in 2018. They settled in well and have lived there ever since.

As Clemmo said, "The shelter probably saved our lives".

Jasmine & Clemmo often still come for dinner or snacks, especially now the cost of living is so high, and also to catch up with old friends and volunteers.

GUEST COMMENTS

[The] Winter Shelter helped me move away from domestic abuse. [They] put me up for a while to help me move on with my life and looked after me during lunch and dinner. I am so very grateful.

Love Ronae X X

There was a gas leak at the house I was living in, so they took me to a hotel. My rent wasn't paid for 4 months while I was at the hotel. The landlord didn't take me back afterwards because of this, so I was evicted.

[At the winter shelter] I was given a jacket and hot meals. I was introduced to Trinity [homeless support centre] and put up in the Travelodge.

Josh

Josh has been offered temporary ongoing accommodation in Trinity, whilst they work with him to help secure his future.



IMPACT OVER THE YEARS

2020
-
2021

2021
-
2022

2022
-
2023

NUMBER OF BEDS USED / STREET SLEEPS AVOIDED

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL OVER-NIGHT GUESTS

NUMBER OF PEOPLE ASSESSED FOR OVERNIGHT SUPPORT

EAT-IN HOT MEALS

TAKEAWAY MEALS

MEALS DELIVERED TO TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

FOOD PARCELS

INDIVIDUALS SEEN FOR MEALS AND SUPPORT

LENGTH OF SHELTER

SHELTER DATES

NUMBER OF PAID STAFF

Overnight Support

	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023
NIL (COVID)	Dormitory in church halls: None	Dormitory in church halls: None *	Dormitory in church halls: None *
	Hotel rooms/beds: 169	Hotel rooms/beds: 346	Hotel rooms/beds: 346
NIL	7	30 (23 Male, 7 Female)	30 (23 Male, 7 Female)
NIL	10	31	31

Meals and additional support

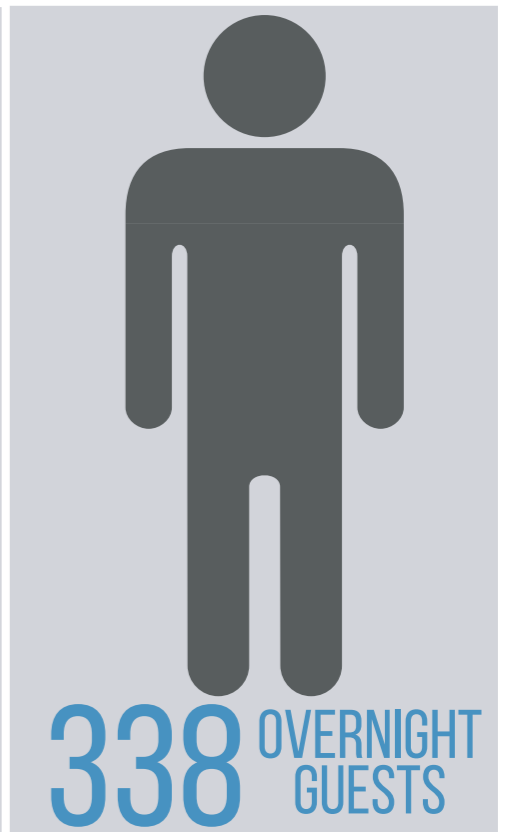
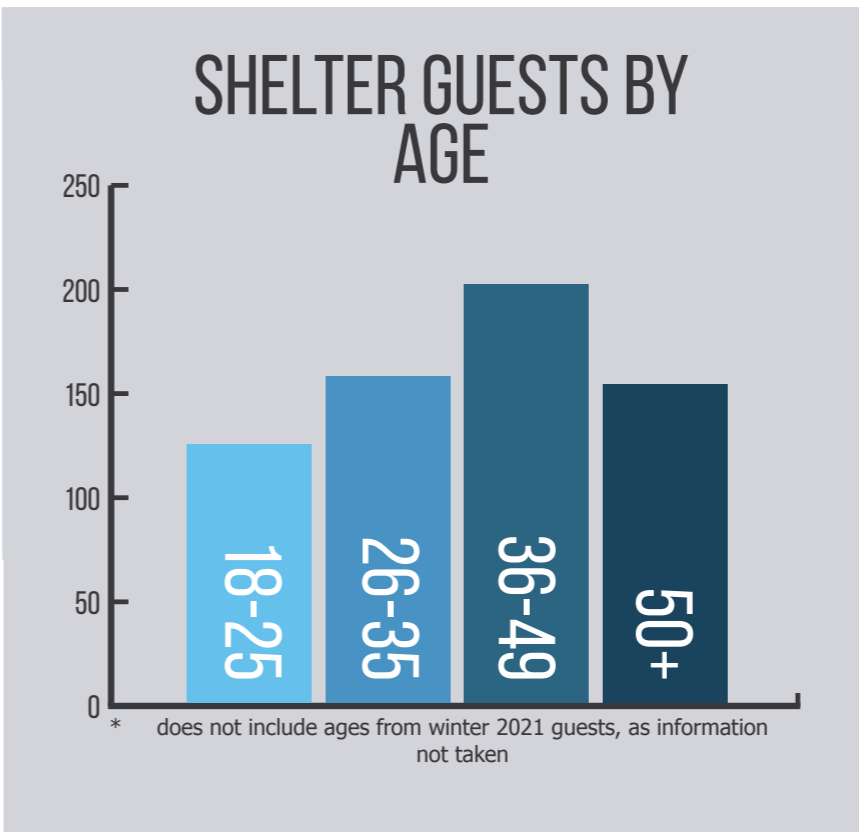
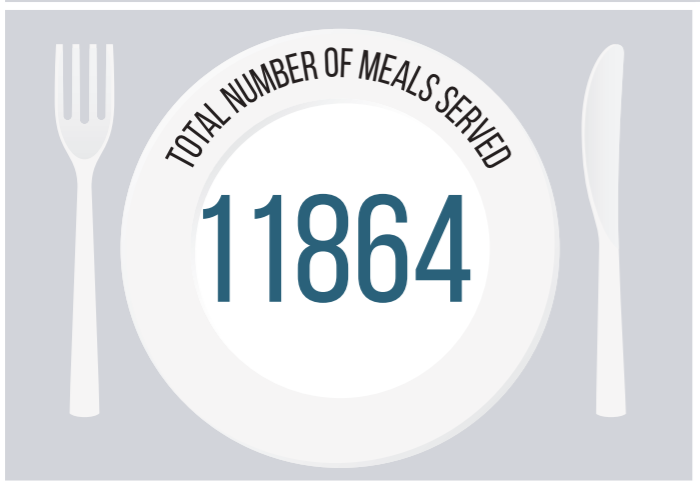
NIL (Covid)	1193	1765	1765
1319	371	216	216
313	39	NIL	NIL
73	29	31	31
32	130	132	132
12 weeks	12 ½ weeks	13 weeks	13 weeks
Opened: 4th January Closed: 26th March	Opened: 3rd January Closed: 31st March	Opened: 3rd January Closed: 3rd April	Opened: 3rd January Closed: 3rd April
3	6	6	6

*Due to the post-pandemic restrictions, the recommendation was for dormitory accommodation to be avoided. We therefore used hotel rooms for our overnight guests, with a provision for emergency dormitory accommodation in church halls if overnight guest numbers were excessive.

10 YEARS AT A GLANCE

Our statistics over the last 10 years, since MCWS first opened its doors

543 MALE GUESTS 124 FEMALE GUESTS

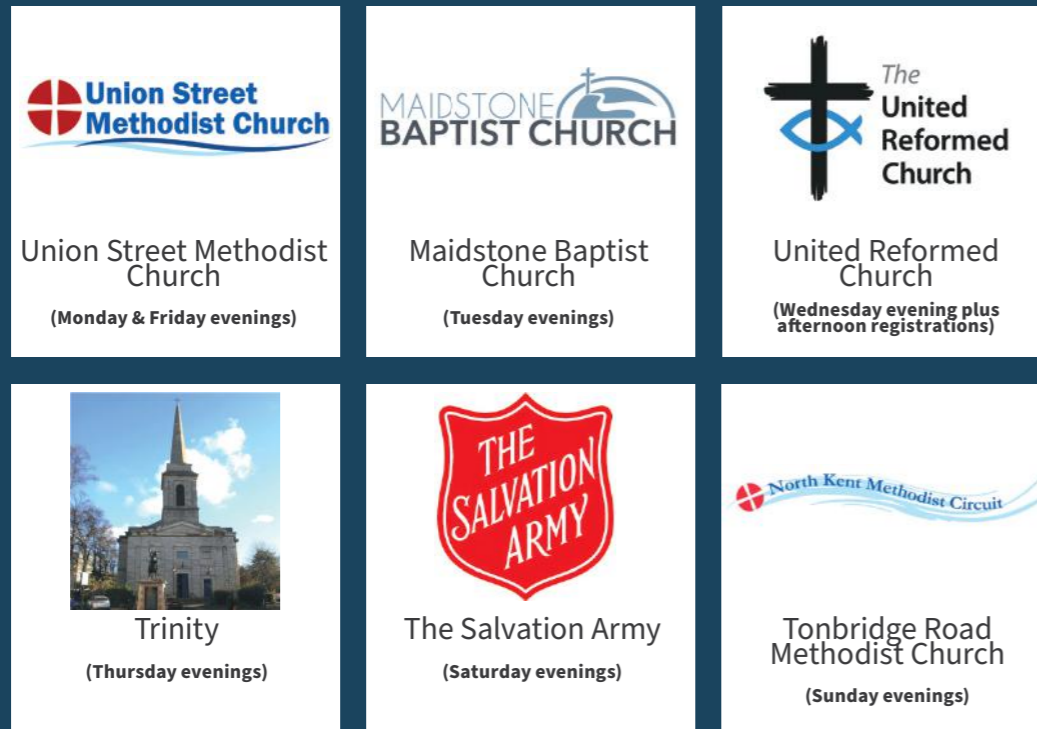


OUR VENUES

Our church venues vary in building size and facilities, but all adapt well to the Shelter's needs. We are always incredibly grateful for the support offered in this manner and for the trust that church leaders place in us to use their buildings effectively and safely.

Not all of our trustees are members of churches and neither are all of our volunteers, staff or donors. However, each member of the team is there for the same purpose: to provide a hot meal, hospitality, shelter and hope to guests who come through the doors each evening.

During winter 2023 we used 6 of our larger church venues, to ensure we could continue maintaining some Social Distancing following the pandemic. Not all of our attendees had been vaccinated against Covid-19, and we still needed to ensure we could keep our guests, volunteers and staff as safe as possible. The venues we used were:



From these venues we offered hot meals which were prepared and served by our volunteers. Staff and volunteers then sat at the tables and ate dinner alongside our guests, in a similar manner to a family meal. This gave our guests the opportunity for some 'normal' conversation and a chance to talk about any concerns they might have – which often led to additional support according to their needs.

We also offered takeaways for people who were unable or unwilling to come indoors for their meals, to ensure that nobody was left hungry.

Each year we are incredibly grateful for the support from our local churches and we would like to extend a huge thank you to each of the above venues for their willingness to open their doors and support the shelter for yet another year. It is a humbling thing to see the churches extending their calling to those people we seek to help. All provided a vital, life-saving and life-enhancing welcome.

Thank you all!

OUR VOLUNTEERS

The Trustees of Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter would like to offer their sincere thanks to each of our volunteers for their contribution and commitment over the winter period. We recognise that our volunteers are at the heart of our work and we truly appreciate the fact that they freely donate their time to show love and kindness to people in need in our town. Their commitment, compassion and innumerable acts of kindness don't go un-noticed! Many of our volunteers return year after year, bringing experience and support for some of our newer team members.

Last winter we had 108 volunteers making a huge difference to the lives of our guests and we want to say a big thank you to every single one of them. We could not successfully undertake our work without the support of our volunteers! There is no kinder act than helping someone less fortunate than yourself and our volunteers each bring their own uniqueness and energy, for the benefit and success of the Shelter.

Our volunteers once again worked together in teams to ensure that the shelter ran smoothly. The tasks covered include:

- Serving hot drinks and snacks at our afternoon registration sessions, plus listening/chatting to our guests and ascertaining any support needed.
- Cooking meals.
- Setting up the evening dining area. Welcoming our guests into the shelter and serving their meals.
- Sharing meals with our guests whilst listening/chatting to them, if they wanted to talk.
- Clearing up afterwards and sanitising all the equipment and areas used.

All of these jobs are essential to the smooth running of the shelter and couldn't be achieved without the support, communication skills and teamwork of our volunteers.

Volunteering has always been a core value at Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter. Words cannot begin to express how grateful we are for the dedication, care and kind-heartedness of our volunteers who gave so much to ensure that the Shelter opened safely each night. Our successes this year would not have been possible without them!

VOLUNTEERS 'END OF SHELTER TEA'

At the end of each shelter season, our volunteers are invited to an afternoon tea as a thank you for their support over the winter. These events are usually well attended and are a great opportunity for all volunteers, staff and trustees to meet together. Volunteers from all our venues are invited to attend, giving them the opportunity to socialise with the team members they have worked with, but also to often meet volunteers from other venues for the very first time. Our guests sometimes attend this event too and it's really good to see how they have progressed since they first attended our shelters.



HAIR BY NICOLA

Over the last few winters we have been very fortunate to have volunteer support from Nicola, a hairdresser who offers her time to come into our shelters on pre-arranged evenings to provide haircuts for guests. She also provides beard trims where required.

The time that Nicola spends with our guests is invaluable and helps them to feel more human again. After all, a good haircut is often a pick-me-up and especially so for people where every day is a struggle.

We are so grateful that Nicola is willing to do this and we really do notice a difference in the wellbeing of our guests when she has given them a good trim.

Thank you so much, Nicola!



Before...



After...



RECIPE BOOKLETS



Our former Project Manager, Gwyn, had an idea to prepare a basic recipe booklet that could be handed out to clients at the local food banks, alongside their food parcels.

This idea came about after she volunteered at a food bank and realised that food donations were being distributed to clients, but that some of those clients may not know how to cook with the ingredients they were given.

We therefore asked the volunteers of Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter for any easy-to-cook recipes that could be distributed with food parcels and we were fortunate to receive many lovely recipes which have been included within the booklet.

We are very thankful to our volunteers for their time and thoughtfulness in providing these recipes and we are also thankful to a further volunteer, Liam, who offered his time and design skills to incorporate the recipes into the final booklet.

Whilst the initial plan was to distribute the booklets with food parcels via the local food banks, they are also being given out to former homeless guests who have been moved into temporary accommodation but have limited facilities and minimal knowledge of cooking.

The booklet includes recipes that can be cooked either in a microwave or on a hob/oven, as not all of our guests have access to a conventional oven.

Although these booklets are being distributed to those who need them, we are also offering them for sale at a cost £4.50. The sum of £4.50 covers:

- the cost of a booklet for yourself, including P&P
- the cost of a booklet that will be given to a guest at a local food bank or in temporary accommodation.

By purchasing a booklet for yourself you are therefore also supporting a food bank/former homeless client, aiding them with the ability to cook tasty recipes from the food donations they are given and encouraging their ability to become more self-sufficient with their meals.

Sales of the original couple of batches of the book moved quickly and we have now had further copies printed.

If you wish to purchase one of these booklets, please email our office on mcwsoffice@maidstoneshelter.org.uk for further information.

VOLUNTEER COMMENTS

This has been my first year volunteering and I have really enjoyed spending time with the guests and volunteers. During one of my first weeks a guest told me that the service provided is a real lifeline during the winter months for a lot of people. I feel incredibly privileged to have played a small part in the amazing work done by MCWS this winter.

NICOLA

I have thoroughly enjoyed my volunteering experience. I have enjoyed meeting and chatting to the different guests each week, as well as serving (and eating!) some delicious food. The charity staff and volunteers are a great bunch of people – it is an experience I hope to repeat next year!

SALLY

This is my second year working with the MCWS and I have enjoyed seeing some familiar faces but have also met some lovely new guests. I count myself very lucky to have had the opportunity to meet the guests and spend a few hours putting the world to rightsand helping eat some wonderful apple crumble.

KATHLEEN

This is the 2nd time I have volunteered for the Winter Shelter, and this time round I committed to do every Thursday evening, some of the best 3 hours of my working week. I find that the project team and fellow volunteers are great to work with, and all come with the same aim and desire to make the evening a success. No request from the guests is too big, be it an extra portion of something or an extra milky coffee with one and half sugars stirred anti clockwise, consider it done.

The guests are so thankful, that it's hard not to support this great cause in the future.

JASON

First off I would like to say how honored I feel to be a part of this program. I have been volunteering for several years now. This year I was at the Salvation Army and I have to say I have enjoyed getting to know each and every person from the project managers, kitchen staff, to new volunteers and new guest faces and some returning guests. Everyone has been so nice and friendly. I have to give an extra shout out to the kitchen staff who have been amazing. The menus were unreal. Loads of options for all the guests. Don't get me started on Chinese night. Can't wait for next year.

TERRY

I have loved volunteering with such great people. It's so good to give something back to our community and support those that need it.

SAM

OUR COOKS

We are always incredibly grateful for the care and thought that goes into providing healthy and filling meals for our guests, and winter 2023 was no exception.

A huge thank you goes to our volunteer cooks who provided meals throughout the winter. At most Venues the meals are cooked on site by our volunteers, but in other places we have a number of willing volunteers who cook meals at home and then deliver them ready to be served. Thank you so much for the time and effort that goes into this preparation. Our guests have been very appreciative of their hot meals every night!

Some of our cooks have given feedback as follows:



“ My first year as lead cook has been very rewarding. Having some of our guests going out of their way to say how much they've enjoyed the meals we've prepared for them has been great. My kitchen team have worked very hard to get the meals out on time. The whole crew at The Baptist church have been brilliant this year creating a very welcoming and cheerful atmosphere. Looking forward to next year already. ”

JO

“ Tracy-Ann and I are part of an incredible team on a Saturday. We get many compliments about what we have cooked for the guests. We do many takeaways and we are always asked if there are seconds. ”

MARION

WORKING TOGETHER WITH THE SUNDAY SOUP RUN / DON DOEL FOUNDATION

Once again, the Don Doel Foundation has greatly appreciated the opportunity to be part of MCWS instead of being out in the cold on a Sunday afternoon. We have been made very welcome by the other volunteers and those who come to our soup run have been able to sit inside in the warm for the afternoon. Thank you for giving us this opportunity once again.

Mary

Sunday Soup Run Co-ordinator

Last winter was the second year that the Sunday soup run team came into our registration session each Sunday afternoon, as part of our working together initiative. They offered their usual meals, hot drinks and support but were grateful to be able to do so indoors, at our afternoon venue.

By working together in this way, the soup run guests could also be offered additional support from our Project Staff in order to help them with any longer-term needs.

OUR PARTNERS

It would be rare for a single provider to offer everything an individual needs, particularly those who are homeless or in financial crisis. The needs of our guests are complex and often require a bespoke multi-agency approach. Partnership working is therefore beneficial – in fact, it is essential! More guests receive support when organisations pull together with the same aim. We therefore maintain contact with other local agencies in order to follow through with a joined-up approach for support.

Pivotal to the success of the Shelter is the work of our Project Team in building trust with our guests and encouraging them to access the support they require, appropriate to their individual needs. During winter 2022-23 we worked closely with the following organisations in developing partnerships that are so vital to the success of the Shelter and the benefit of our guests, as we have done in previous years:

 <p>For showers, laundry facilities, food parcels and general advice/support</p>		<p>LOCAL FOOD BANKS</p>
 <p>Street Homeless Outreach Team, for housing support and advice</p>	 <p>West Kent Drug & alcohol wellbeing service</p>	
	<p>SOUP RUNS</p>	

We also worked with:

- Kent Police
- Maidstone Probation Service
- Community Mental Health Workers
- Lily Smith House – Temporary supported accommodation

A VISIT FROM HUSSAM: VOLUNTEER DENTIST

We were incredibly fortunate to receive an offer of support from Hussam, a dentist who sometimes offers his spare time to homeless charities over the winter months. Hussam is very aware of the fact that, often, people who need dental help the most are the least likely to receive it.

He arranged to come into our shelter one evening to chat with our guests and provide some basic oral advice. At this visit, Hussam handed out some basic oral health kits, which included items such as toothpaste, a toothbrush and some information on dental hygiene.

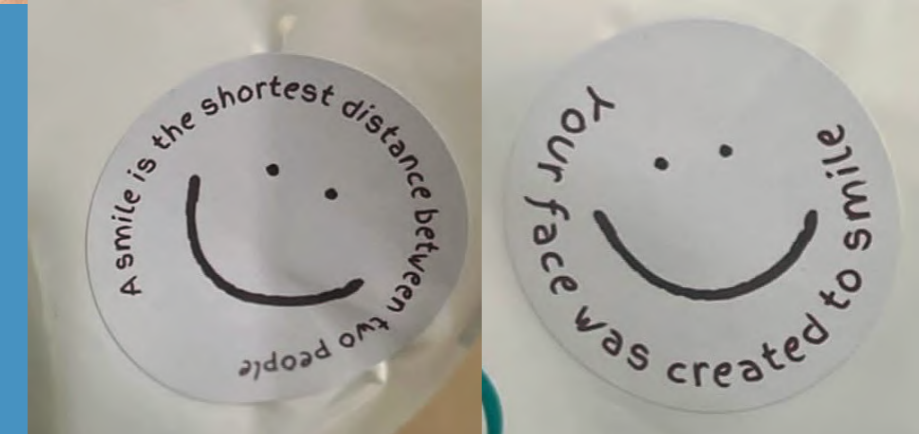
Hussam talked about the importance of brushing teeth, shared some cleaning techniques and then offered an opportunity for the guests to ask any questions so that he could offer tailored advice to them.

He spent time chatting with guests who were suffering with dental pain and offered to try and organise follow-up appointments, to deal with any problems which needed more support than he could give in the shelter.

To make the evening more fun, he organised a ‘guess how many mini toothpastes in a jar’ quiz, with the winner getting an electric toothbrush!

As a final treat for our guests, Hussam bought pizza for everyone – a whole lot of pizza!

Wouldn't it be lovely if all dental appointments ended with pizza.



FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

Each winter we see many examples of people's compassion and commitment to helping those in need in our community and we are incredibly grateful for their support.

The outstanding spirit of generosity that exists within the Maidstone community is clearly reflected in the donations we receive. Thank you so much to everyone who has donated to the Winter Shelter, both financially and otherwise. Your donations enable the shelter to keep running each winter and they are all very much appreciated!

FILEDER LONDON TO BRIGHTON CYCLE RIDE 2022

The staff team at Filerder celebrated their 40th anniversary year by participating in various charity fundraising events, including taking part in the London to Brighton Cycle Ride to raise funds for Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter.

Twenty enthusiastic employees took part in this event. They trained in all weathers and were completely focussed on smashing their targets, raising almost £3000 to support our work! Thank you so much! They also donated some fantastic aprons with our logo, for use by our kitchen volunteers.



HELP OUT TO EAT OUT!

During winter 2021 we launched our 'Help out to Eat out' scheme, whereby people could support our work by donating £10. This sum pays for a meal, hot drinks and snacks for one or more of our guests over the winter.

The scheme has continued to be advertised on our website, providing additional financial support for our 'evening meals' service.



ALL SAINTS CHURCH, LOOSE

The donations collected at the church harvest festival in October 2022 were, once again, donated towards our work. Thank you very much for these generous donations of food and toiletries.



CHARITIES AID FOUNDATION

Each winter, the staff at Charities Aid Foundation amaze us with their generosity and, once again, we were very grateful to receive these fantastic food donations in support of the 2023 winter shelter.



ANTAC

The office staff at Antac kindly purchased and donated toiletries, hats, scarves, socks and some food items in support of our work.



2ND SHEPWAY BROWNIES & GUIDES

thoughtfully collected and donated bags of tinned and packet food, plus some hygiene care items for our guests.

Whilst undertaking this project, the Brownies & Guides enjoyed taking time to think about the fact that there are so many people in need in our town.



GOOD INTENT PUB

The staff and customers donated food and toiletries in support of our work.

The pub also made collection boxes available for small change – and a total of £157.05 was raised.



TESCO

Another huge thank you goes to Tesco, who sent many donations of food, personal and cleaning products for use within our shelters over the winter. Above is a photo of just some of the items donated.

FINANCES



TOBY

Toby baked delicious cakes and cookies and donated them to the shelter, which gave our guests an extra treat to enjoy each week.

He undertook this as part of his skills and volunteering section, for the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh award.



VIVIENNE

Vivienne very kindly baked many delicious cakes for our guests. Some of these were served alongside sandwiches and snacks in our afternoon registration sessions, but others were used as desserts and served with custard or ice cream in some of our evening venues.

All were greatly enjoyed – thank you Vivienne!



STEVE

At the beginning of the 2023 winter shelter, Steve very kindly donated these large sacks of vegetables to be used in our evening meals.

They contributed to many dishes including roast dinners, casseroles etc.

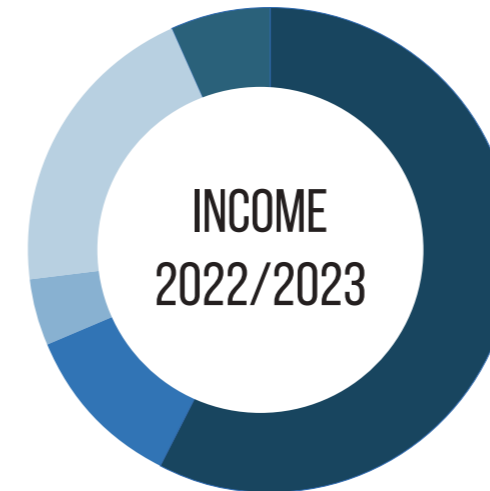


KA2 STAFF



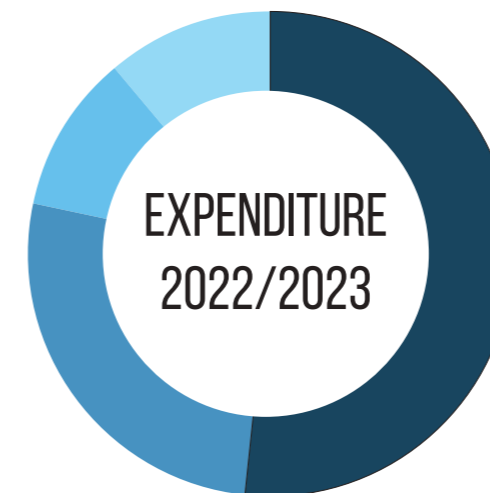
The staff team at KA2 very kindly collected and donated 36 cans of soup, 48 cans of tinned meals, 24 packs of microwave rice to go with the meals and 24 pairs of men's boxer shorts, plus other treats for our guests.

SCHEDULE OF FINANCIAL INFORMATION (ESTIMATED) FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST MAY 2023



- Grants from Corporate Bodies: £33,244.27
- Churches and groups: £6,434.88
- Agency fees: £2,572.39
- Personal Donations: £11,546.54
- Other £3,830.79

Total Income £57,628.87



- Salaries: £44,773.29
- Accommodation for guests: £23,282.22
- Food and Support: £9,067.20
- Phone, Office costs, Rent & Insurance: £9626.05

Total Expenditure: £86,748.76

Excess of expenditure over income: £29,119.89

Over the last couple of winters we have been fortunate to build up some Reserves, which have been used to support the deficit between Income and Expenditure for this year.

As with any charity, our formal accounts are sent annually to the Charity Commission and these are available publicly online.



ANNUAL FUNDRAISING MEAL

Thank you to everyone who supported our fundraising dinner at Frédéric Bistro on 18th October 2022 and special thanks to Frédéric's themselves for generously donating £10 per head to the Shelter. We raised £1177.20 at this event, including the proceeds from the raffle.

We would also like to extend our thanks to the many local businesses and individuals who so generously donated raffle prizes. Your support is truly appreciated.

ON REFLECTION...

Whilst this year marks 10 years for Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter, it also reflects 10 years of churches opening their doors, 10 years of many volunteers giving up their time for the sake of others, 10 years of supporting guests into accommodation and 10 years of providing hot meals for people who would otherwise have gone hungry.

Looking back, we are amazed and encouraged by how our values and vision have never changed. Although the service we offer has changed and adapted, we have not drifted from the charities' aims.

The last 10 years have not gone without their challenges though. Over the years we have gone through many changes and some have significantly impacted the way we have run the shelter; in particular the arrival of the Covid pandemic.

Looking back, it is easy to see the impact that faithful men and women had in laying the foundation for the start of a winter shelter in Maidstone. 10 years ago, they could not have known how the shelter would adapt and progress, but we believe the information and statistics shown in the pages of this report clearly show how much a winter shelter was needed in our town, and how it is still needed albeit in an adapted manner.

Huge thanks goes to everyone who has been involved within the shelter over the last 10 years. Many people's lives have been positively impacted as a result of your support!



THANK YOU'S

The Trustees would like to take this opportunity to highlight the fantastic support from our host Venues (Churches), Volunteers & Staff. Thank you so much for all you have done to provide food, warmth, shelter and support to our guests.

We hope we have thought of everyone who contributed to supporting our work last winter. We are extremely grateful for the invaluable kindness and commitment of all who support the shelter, in so many varied ways.

OUR STAFF

Our staff team this year consisted of:

Claire Kehily (Project Manager)

Mike Louth (Assistant Project Manager)

Tara Beckett, Kaye El-Shamma & Hollie Neal (Project Workers)

Mandy Fuller (Administrator and Volunteer Co-Ordinator)

These staff all worked extremely hard to ensure the shelter ran smoothly and that our guests were helped in the ways most appropriate for their particular needs. All the staff worked well together as a team, both with each other and with our different groups of volunteers, to provide a positive and supportive experience for our guests.

Extra special thanks goes to Claire who worked tirelessly to ensure our plans ran smoothly and successfully. She worked incredibly hard to ensure our guests received the support they most needed.

Special thanks also goes to Mandy for supporting the Project Manager and staff, and for the continuity she provides between each winter programme. Her built experience and diligence in applying for funding, maintaining our records and building the volunteer rotas ensure the shelter is run efficiently and effectively each winter.

OUR TRUSTEES

To our Trustees, thank you for your passion, commitment, and leadership!

All our Trustees are volunteers who generously give their time and a high level of dedication behind the scenes. Some of them also volunteer at various venues, to provide additional support to the work of the charity.

OUR GUESTS

We also wish to thank our guests, the people who have touched the lives of so many of us, showing such great determination and perseverance in attempting to move their lives on with our support, in the face of desolation and despair. Thank you for allowing us to work alongside you to alleviate homelessness and poverty in our town. At times we saw great courage in the midst of despair.

Our guests have such varied, colourful stories and life experiences and they have enriched others by walking through the doors of our various venues.

OUR FUNDERS & DONORS

2nd Shepway Brownies & Guides
Adesokan, O
Albert Hunt Trust, The
All Saints Church Loose
Allen, M, Ms
Allington Baptist Church
Antac Support Services
Atalabi, T, Ms
Bailey, F A, Miss
Bath, C
Batt, A, Mrs
Bearsted Golf Club, Ladies Section
Bearsted Methodist Church
Big Cat Sanctuary, The
Birt, D
Bole, E, Mrs
Boodle, P, Ms
Boughton Monchelsea Primary School
Bowers, Mrs C & Master M
Buckley, J, Lady
Bushnell, R, Mrs
Byrne, C
Chantler, M, Mrs
Chaplin, R & K
Charities Aid Foundation
Chounta, A, Mrs
Churches Together
City of London Red Cross Lodge
Cleverly, G Ms
Cloude, S
Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd
Cochrane, C
Coxheath Book Project

Davis, L, Mrs
Dobinson, P, Ms
Eagle Pub, The
East Farleigh PCC
Endersby, N
Essex, G
Everest, M, Mr and Mrs
Farrington, D & the late Mrs F
Fearn, V, Miss
Fieder Filter Systems Ltd
Flemming, W, Mrs
Force Self-Defence
Gardner, R
Gibbons, J
Golubov, N
Good Intent Pub, The
Goodhew, H
Green, R
Gutteridge, J, Mrs
Hallford-Nye, E
Hallford-Nye, S, Mrs
Hand, J, Pr
Harding, S, Miss
Henry Smith Charity, The
Henson, G, Mrs
Hewett, J, Mrs
Hiam, R & A
Hitch, D
Hospitality Finder
Inchmore, A
Involve
James, S
KA2 Ltd
Kalimex Ltd
Kapaj, D, Mrs

Keddy, H, Ms
Khan, S, Mrs
Kilbourne, J A, Mrs
King, S
Lane, A
Langley Park Primary Academy
Laser Energy
Ledger, P
Linton Road Free Church
Lone, Hussam
Luddington, J, Mrs
Lythgoe, P
Macgregor, D
Maidstone Lions Club
Maidstone Relief in Need
Maitland, A, Mrs
Marden Come & Sing group
Marks, T
Martin, K
Martin, S
MBC Community Resilience Fund
McCarthy, V, Ms
McGeorge, H, Ms
More Park RC Primary School
Mothers Union, Lenham branch
Nash, A, Mrs
Oates, R
O'Brien, A, Mrs
O'Brien, R
Owen, G
Pearson, M
Petherbridge, J, Mrs
Picken, J

Providence Baptist Chapel
Pryor, D, Mrs
Rees, J, Mrs
Rotary Club of Maidstone, The
Rudd, J, Mrs
Rutland, J, Mrs
Rutter, R, Rev
Shave, K
Smith, M, Mrs
Smith, P
Snodland Church
Spragg, P
St Michael & All Angels, Marden
St Nicholas Church
St Paul's Church

Steer, D, Mrs
Sutton, B, Mrs
Taylor, A, Mrs
Taylor, M, Dr
Taylor, V, Mrs
TESCO, London Road
The Arts Society Mid Kent (TASMK)
Thompson, A
Thomson, M, Mrs
Toby
Treays, P
Trimmer, A, Ms
Underdown, K, Mrs
Valley Invicta Academies Trust
Verrall, D

Waterman, Mr & Mrs
West Malling Baptist Church
Whitelegg, R G & Mrs J A
Wickens, M
Wilcox-Smith, A, Miss
Williams, P
Willington Players, The
Wood, A, Mrs
Wood, M
Worley Day Trust, The
Worrall, P
Wrighton, A, Mrs

Those Who Supported In Other Ways

Among those who have supported in other ways are the following:

Carol Hemmings – for her tireless and ongoing support when needed
Involve Kent – empowering people and communities
The family of the late Roger Sawtell
The family of the late Margaret Smith

Bequests

Donations received in memory of the late Ivy Barrett

The unknown donors:

A HUGE thank you to you all!

HOW TO DONATE

Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter is funded mainly by donations from trust funds, churches/church members and supportive groups or individuals. This funding enables our guests to receive the support and shelter they need each winter and every donation is truly appreciated.

If you wish to donate to MCWS, there are a variety of ways in which you can do this, as follows:

DONATE ONLINE

Giving online is easy and secure. You can use this option to make a one-off donation or to set up a monthly donation. If you are a UK taxpayer there is an option to add Gift Aid, which will increase your donation by 25%.

To donate online, just enter the following into your web browser and follow the instructions given:

cafdonate.cafonline.org/18270

DONATE VIA CHEQUE

Cheques can be made payable to 'Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter' and posted to:
MCWS, 6 Buckland Road, Maidstone, Kent
ME16 0SL

If you are a UK taxpayer and wish to add Gift Aid to your donation (which will increase your donation by 25%), please contact us for a form at:

mcwsoffice@maidstoneshelter.org.uk

DONATE VIA BANK TRANSFER

One off donations or regular standing orders can be made directly into our bank account. No fees are paid on these transactions, meaning that we receive 100% of your donation.

Account name: MCWS

Bank: Reliance Bank

Sort code: 60-01-73

Account number: 0021 5200

If you make a donation directly into our bank account, please send an email to mcwsoffice@maidstoneshelter.org.uk to notify us of the payment/your details.

If you are a UK taxpayer and wish to add Gift Aid to your donation (which will increase your donation by 25%), please contact us for a form at:

mcwsoffice@maidstoneshelter.org.uk

WILL/LEGACY DONATION

By leaving a legacy gift to Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter in your will, you can help ease the cruelty of poverty and homelessness in the future. Your gift could one day transform someone's life, bringing safety, security and hope.




We understand that your loved ones will be your top priority when planning your will, but once you've provided for those closest to you, a gift to MCWS could help to change the lives of those struggling to survive on the streets of Maidstone.

If you wish to provide a legacy gift to MCWS in your will, the information your solicitor/will writer will need is:




Charity: Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter
Address: 6 Buckland Road, Maidstone, Kent
ME16 0SL

Charity number: 1156735






-  **Under 35's Helpline**
-  **0800 068 4141**
-  **papyrus-uk.org**



-  **24/7 Text Service**
-  **Text SHOUT to 85258**
-  **giveusashout.org**






-  **Helpline for Men**
-  **0800 58 58 58**
-  **thecalmzone.net**



-  **24/7 Helpline**
-  **116 123**
-  **samaritans.org**



-  **24/7 Text Service**
-  **Text YM to 85258**
-  **youngminds.org.uk**



-  **Helpline**
-  **0300 123 3393**
-  **mind.org.uk**

DONORS



Maidstone Relief in Need
& Government Community Resilience Fund (via MBC)



**The Worley
Day Trust**



MAIDSTONESHELTER.ORG.UK
01622 296450
CHARITY NO: 1156735
6 BUCKLAND ROAD, MAIDSTONE, ME16 0SL