

ANNUAL REPORT // 2025 - 2026

maidstoneshelter.org.uk
Registered charity No: 1156735



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We Love because he first loved us *1 John 4:19*

IN THE BEGINNING – THE NEED

In 2013, a team of church leaders in Maidstone recognised a significant need in our town. They, along with many others, were encountering people in urgent need of help and without a safe place to call home. That need still exists today.

The original planning team were particularly concerned about the levels of street homelessness in Maidstone, especially during the coldest winter months. After much discussion it was agreed that a church-based winter shelter, run primarily by volunteers, would be the most effective response. And so, Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter (MCWS) was established.

MOVING FORWARD – OUR RESPONSE

Since opening our doors in December 2013, thousands of lives have been touched and changed — not only those of our guests, but also those of our volunteers and staff.

Each winter, our church venues generously open their doors to provide shelter. Dedicated teams of volunteers offer a warm welcome, hot meals and, where needed, a bed for the night.

Through our shelters, we meet the immediate needs of people experiencing homelessness by providing food and accommodation. However, we also seek to offer genuine hospitality, compassion and care to those in crisis, including individuals at risk of homelessness. Every person who seeks our support is treated as an individual, with dignity and respect.

Each guest's circumstances are unique, and therefore their pathway out of homelessness or financial hardship is different. By working closely with partner agencies and local services, we aim to provide the support needed to help individuals move forward. This process can take time and is rarely an overnight solution.

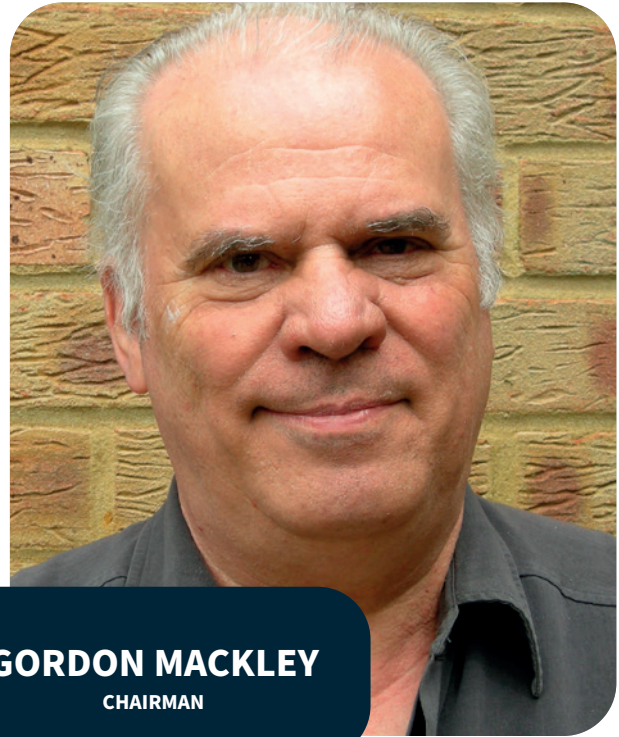
We liaise closely with Maidstone Borough Council (MBC), which operates a strong outreach and homelessness support service. Their work has contributed to a significant reduction in the number of people sleeping rough in our town in recent years. However, there remains a small number of individuals whom they are unable to accommodate or support for various reasons.

Homelessness is always an emergency. By working collaboratively with MBC and other support services, we aim to ensure that no one is left sleeping on the streets during the coldest winter months, when they are at greatest risk. Our referral process is fast, straightforward and safe, enabling placements to be arranged on the same day where MBC are unable to assist or where urgent support is required.

None of this work would be possible without the commitment of our volunteers and the generous financial support of our funders and donors. We are deeply grateful to everyone who has helped make our vision a reality over the past 13 winters.

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.



GORDON MACKLEY
CHAIRMAN

As I write this brief report for another year, I have again reflected on what has been very similar to previous years and what has changed.

We are still here and still providing shelter and food as we did in 2012, when we started. Each year we hope we shall no longer be needed. This year, although homelessness across the UK is worse than ever, there is a little more hope in that the Government have not only allocated some very large sums of money to help but they have also engaged with both statutory authorities and especially charities more than previously. We of course are a small part of the latter. There is widespread agreement that the lack of access to affordable housing is the core problem but it seems that building large houses in the country represents a better return for developers than affordable housing close to the amenities required in modern day living. We shall all have to wait and see how things develop.

In the meantime, many will still have nowhere to live, even in Maidstone, where much effort is put in by the Borough Council. Last year again was challenging in terms of our own resources. Our costs, like those of others, are ever increasing (now six figures!). We have shuffled the venues to cover all the nights with less available churches. Thanks are due to all of those who have helped in that regard. Trustees continue to be 'working trustees' but we now have less than in many previous years. The human side of resourcing remains a challenge especially in covering night shifts, both paid project workers and volunteers. Over this last year we have had to rely on outsourcing some night cover to an external company. Do please think about whether you could help with this next year (either paid or volunteer).

As always, to all who have made this year possible, staff, volunteers, donors both in money and in accommodation, food etc. and my fellow trustees.

3 *A big thank you!*

OUR TRUSTEES



REVEREND JOHN TAPPER

John was the charity's treasurer for several years but has now surrendered that title. He continues to cover the overnight volunteering shifts when required.



ZOFIA GRZYMALA

Zofia is an established leader in the homelessness and housing sector, widely recognised for her passion, commitment, and unwavering dedication to supporting people experiencing homelessness and driving meaningful change. With over two decades of professional experience, she has developed a deep understanding of the complex challenges faced by those without stable housing and the practical, compassionate support needed to help individuals rebuild their lives.

Throughout her career, Zofia has held a number of senior roles across the sector. She previously managed Homeless Care, overseeing supported accommodation, a day centre, and a food bank, and served as General Manager at Kent Supported Housing. She has also contributed her expertise through roles within Origin Group and Sanctuary Housing. These positions have enabled her to build extensive knowledge of homelessness services, housing management, and community support.

Zofia is currently working with West Kent Housing Association, where she continues to advocate for effective housing solutions and person-centred support for vulnerable individuals. Her work is driven by a strong belief that everyone deserves safe, secure housing and the opportunity to move forward with dignity, stability, and hope.



RICHARD WILLIAMS

Richard was born and brought up in Kent. After a career in Finance in the City he became a Vicar, including serving in Cranbrook. He is now retired.

Richard has a keen interest in supporting those who are homeless and became involved with MCWS during the summer of 2023. He is now one of our trustees and has assisted the shelter by covering some overnight shifts.



CHRIS HUTCHINSON

After careers in accountancy and logistics, Chris has now semi-retired.

However, not standing still, he has been a volunteer at the shelter since its second year as well as volunteering both at home and abroad for other charities.

He also spends time as a family man with a large number of grandchildren as well as playing tennis, golf, fishing, art and gardening.



GLEN AMOS

Glen first became involved with the shelter 8 years ago, helping prepare Christmas dinner for the guests. He enjoyed it so much that he decided to become a regular winter volunteer and still volunteers twice a week. Glen finds the role very rewarding and has made some great friends in both the guests and volunteers.

Glen ran his own plumbing and heating business for 38 years but now works in Maidstone prison. He is a keen sports fan and has previously managed boys' football for approximately 15 years, where he arranged three exchange trips to America, as well as orchestrating the fund raising for the trips.

FORMER TRUSTEES - THANK YOU!



WENDY FOSTER

Wendy has over 30 years' experience as a senior Human Resources practitioner, mainly in public sector and not-for-profit organisations and was the lead Trustee for this specialism for many years.

Inspired by her Christian faith and links with local faith-based groups, Wendy was a trustee of MCWS for 10 years before resigning this post in August 2025. However, she retains the role of HR Advisor for the charity, offering valuable support in this area when needed.



GWYN MCPHERSON

Gwyn became involved with MCWS from its inception and, over the years, she undertook 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 became one of our trustees, bringing with her a wealth of experience.

She subsequently retired in November 2025 and the current trustees would like to thank Gwyn for all her help and support over the years.

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS

AND WHY DO PEOPLE BECOME HOMELESS?

A home is more than just a roof over someone's head. It represents safety, stability and belonging — a place of security and connection. Homelessness is not simply the absence of accommodation; it is the absence of safety, permanence and often community. Its impact can be devastating, dangerous and deeply isolating.

Homelessness is rarely caused by a single event and its causes are often complex. It is typically the result of multiple, interrelated factors, often combining personal circumstances with external pressures. According to organisations such as Crisis and Shelter, key contributing factors include:

- A shortage of genuinely affordable housing
- Unemployment, insecure work or low income
- Poverty and debt
- Family or relationship breakdown
- Domestic abuse
- Mental or physical ill health
- Alcohol or Substance misuse
- Leaving prison, care or the armed forces without stable accommodation
- Migration and insecure immigration status

Some individuals — particularly migrants with “No Recourse to Public Funds” (NRPF) — are excluded from access to most welfare benefits and housing assistance, placing them at heightened risk of destitution and street homelessness.

Homelessness places people under extreme physical and emotional strain, often compounding existing challenges and making recovery more difficult.

The Reality of Rough Sleeping

While rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness, it only represents part of a much wider picture. People are also considered homeless if they are sofa surfing (staying temporarily with friends or family), sleeping in cars, sheds or garages, living in tents or makeshift shelters or staying in temporary accommodation such as hostels, hotels or B&Bs

Sofa surfing remains one of the largest but least visible forms of homelessness.

Those sleeping rough are particularly vulnerable. Research shows that more than one in three people sleeping rough report experiencing violence while homeless. Prolonged rough sleeping significantly increases the likelihood of trauma, deteriorating mental health, physical ill health and substance dependency.

According to the Office for National Statistics, the average age of death for people experiencing homelessness in England and Wales is approximately 45 for men and 43 for women — decades younger than the general population.



PROJECT MANAGER'S MESSAGE

Winter 2026 was Claire's fourth year as Project Manager, although she was involved in the Shelter for 7 years prior to this: as a Volunteer, Project Worker and then Assistant Manager. 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 and a Maidstone Borough Councillor.



CLAIRE KEHILY
PROJECT MANAGER

As I'm writing this, it doesn't seem possible that we've reached the end of yet another shelter. I know we have been a week shorter this year, but it really seems to have flown by. Once more we have again been blessed with a brilliant team, Mandy, our wonderful admin, doing a sterling job battling with rotas and what seemed like a million queries, and Mike our assistant project manager cheerfully whistling his way through the shelter, along with Jon and Darren both returning as project workers. They were also joined this year by Steph, and all went above and beyond in ensuring that we delivered a wonderful warm and safe space in our 3 month shelter which achieved all that it set out to do and more, all whilst navigating changing and sometimes challenging needs and situations, with compassion, warmth, and most importantly a smile on their faces.

We couldn't have done any of this without our army of Volunteers. It's truly wonderful to see so many familiar faces returning again this year and heartening to see lots of new faces too, all of them determined to play their part in making a difference to the guests when they need help and support the most. From getting up early to come in and pack down for the morning, easing our guests into another potentially difficult day with a smile and a cuppa, to being there through the lonely hours of the night, offering a friendly face and a smile when they need a chat whilst the rest of the world are sleeping, or giving up afternoons to come and make endless cups of tea or coffee with just the right amount of sugars. Then there were the evenings spent wrestling beds and sleeping bag zips and serving up dinners prepared by our wonderful volunteer cooks whilst working in strange kitchens with sometime unknown guest numbers, creating the fabulous homecooked meals that are so often remarked on by our guests as the best food they've ever had! Thank you all for so freely giving your time, your energy, your kindness and your love.

Unfortunately for those currently experiencing homelessness, the numbers are still high, and although we had fewer actual guests requiring a bed than last year, those who did come to us seemed to stay longer and we were still up on street sleeps saved overall, with an increase of around 12 % on last year's figures. The good news is that we were able to offer those guests not only a bed, but also access to health care – both physical and psychological, with support from

local health care professionals and by working closely with the Housing Solutions team at Maidstone Borough Council and also our friends at the Day Centre, to provide the support, care, advice and signposting to enable as many of our guests as possible to move on, something which I am delighted to say happened more effectively and promptly this year, with positive and stable outcomes for a higher proportion of guests.



With all this talk of figures and outcomes, and being driven by the goal of getting people into the system and ultimately housed, it could be easy to overlook the main purpose of our shelter - the guests themselves. Each year, they surprise us with their resilience, their determination, their humour, their camaraderie and their stories, and this year was no different.

One such poignant reminder this year was an evening, towards the end of the shelter, following a fun quiz that was organised by a former guest as a bit of entertainment. A question about TV show Gladiators resulted in an off the cuff comment from a guest about how she knew one of them in shall we say her mis-spent youth, which prompted a conversation about famous people everyone had met. Another guest told us he had met a former UK Prime Minister whilst at school and had been tasked with personally showing him round for the visit, whilst another when asked the most famous person he had met simply said the late Queen, and when asked for more details it transpired it was when he received a medal during his time in the Armed Forces.

These small details were a humbling reminder that our guests are so much more than the people we are meeting right now, in their current situations, and that they are so much more than the people who turn up at our door with their belongings, often their whole world in the suitcase. A reminder that they are simply just people just like ourselves, that for a variety of reasons have ended up homeless. People with real feelings, emotions and problems. They are people who have lived a myriad of different lives, lives that we often forget about and overlook.

It has been an absolute privilege to work with our guests again this year, to hear their stories, and share their highs and lows, to watch their delight when they get housed or find work, and also to provide a little comfort when they need it most, when it seems like the whole world is against them. Being part of this project has always been and continues to be an amazing, humbling and life affirming experience not just for the staff team, but for everyone involved, the Volunteers and Trustees too, our supporters and donors, and hopefully of course for all of the guests who find their way to our doors.

*"No act of kindness, no matter
how small, is ever wasted"*
Aesop

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE 2025-2026



**OPERATIONS/
VOLUNTEERS**
Chris Hutchinson



FUNDING SUPPORT
John Tapper
(formerly treasurer)



TREASURER
Richard Williams



ADMINISTRATOR
Mandy Fuller



**PROJECT
WORKER**
Darren Ellis



**PROJECT
WORKER**
Jon Dix

**CHAIR OF
TRUSTEES**

Gordon Mackley



TRUSTEE

Glen Amos



**HOMELESS
SUPPORT**

Gwyn McPherson
(resigned as trustee Nov 25)

**PARTNERSHIP
SUPPORT**

Zofia Grzymala



**HUMAN RESOURCES
ADVISER**

Wendy Foster
(formerly trustee)

**PROJECT
MANAGER**

Claire Kehily

**ASSISTANT
PROJECT
MANAGER**

Mike Louth



PROJECT WORKER

Stephanie McWalter

HOW THE SHELTER HAS EVOLVED

Since Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter (MCWS) began, our priority has been to support our local homeless community by providing hot meals, overnight accommodation, and support/signposting. The way in which this support has been delivered has evolved in response to experience, changing circumstances, and wider social factors, as outlined below.

WINTER 2013–14 TO WINTER 2019–20

During our first years of operation, the shelter was hosted by seven different churches on a 'rolling night shelter' basis. This meant that responsibility was shared between venues, with each church offering its premises for one night per week.

From these premises we provided guests with:

- A hot evening meal
- A listening ear and support from staff and volunteers
- Dormitory-style overnight accommodation in the church hall
- Breakfast the following morning

In our first winter (2013–14), we opened with 10 bed spaces for eight weeks. From our second year onwards, this increased to 15 bed spaces for 12–13 weeks, covering the coldest three months of winter.

We also used an additional church building for afternoon registration sessions. These sessions provided hot drinks, snacks, and a warm, welcoming environment where guests could relax. Staff and volunteers took time to talk with guests, register those requiring a meal and bed for the night, and encourage engagement with Maidstone Borough Council, the local Day Centre, and other support services for help with housing, benefits, and employment.

In March 2020, we were unfortunately required to close one week earlier than planned due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated national lockdown.

Winter 2020–21

During winter 2020–21, at the height of the Covid pandemic, Government guidance stated that no one should be placed in dormitory-style accommodation. As a result, our usual practice of setting up beds in church halls was not possible.

However, Maidstone Borough Council received Government funding under the 'Everyone In' scheme, enabling most local street homeless individuals to be accommodated in hotel or B&B rooms and other forms of temporary accommodation.

As much of this emergency accommodation lacked adequate cooking facilities, we worked closely with the Council to provide hot, home-cooked meals to those placed in such accommodation, along with food parcels where required.

We initially planned to offer sit-down meals in four local church buildings, but ongoing social distancing restrictions made this impossible. Instead, meals were provided as takeaways. While distributing these meals, we were still able to offer a listening ear, advice, and practical support.

During this challenging period, we also provided hot takeaway meals to individuals and families in need via the local food bank at The Salvation Army. The pandemic placed many households under severe financial pressure, and we hope our contribution helped ease some of that burden.

Winter 2021-22 & 2022-23

Although Covid remained a concern in winter 2021–22, restrictions had eased somewhat. Dormitory-style sleeping, however, was still considered a last-resort option.

Our original plan was to operate afternoon registration sessions and evening meals in church halls, with overnight guests staying in a rented house rather than dormitory-style accommodation. Unfortunately, ongoing lease issues delayed access to the property. By the time it became available, the time and costs involved in preparing it for use made it unviable. We therefore accommodated overnight guests in a local hotel throughout the winter.

Although our plans changed, we continued to provide meals, support, and accommodation in an adapted format.

Following the success of this provision, we continued the same model in winter 2022–23: afternoon registration sessions and hot meals in church halls, with overnight accommodation provided in a local hotel.

At this point, we also extended our offer of hot meals and support to other local residents experiencing genuine financial hardship due to the post-pandemic cost-of-living crisis. Those struggling to pay rent, utility bills, and buy food were at risk of future homelessness, and early intervention was essential.

We continued to accommodate homeless guests in a local hotel during this period. While Maidstone Borough Council continued to provide excellent support to those experiencing homelessness, the availability of properties and hotel rooms was often limited. We were therefore able to accommodate individuals the Council could not support at short notice.

However, our overnight provision remained restricted due to the limited number of hotel rooms available and the significant financial cost of this model.

Winters 2023-24 – 2025-26

In order to support a greater number of overnight guests, we returned to providing dormitory-style accommodation in church halls, similar to our pre-Covid model.

This enabled us to:

- Accommodate up to 10 guests per night in 2023–24
- Increase capacity to 15 guests per night from 2024–25

We also continued to hold daily afternoon registration sessions and provide hot evening meals alongside ongoing practical and emotional support.

Please refer to the statistics on page 23 for full details of guest numbers across recent winters.

7am (8am on weekends)

The morning volunteers arrive. On weekdays, the guests go to the local Day Centre for breakfast and the volunteers clean/tidy the venue. At the weekends, volunteers also prepare breakfast for the guests, as the Day Centre is not open.

3.00pm (3.15pm on weekends)

Volunteers arrive at our registration venue and support the staff team in setting up the area, including making sandwiches & drinks in preparation for the guests to arrive.

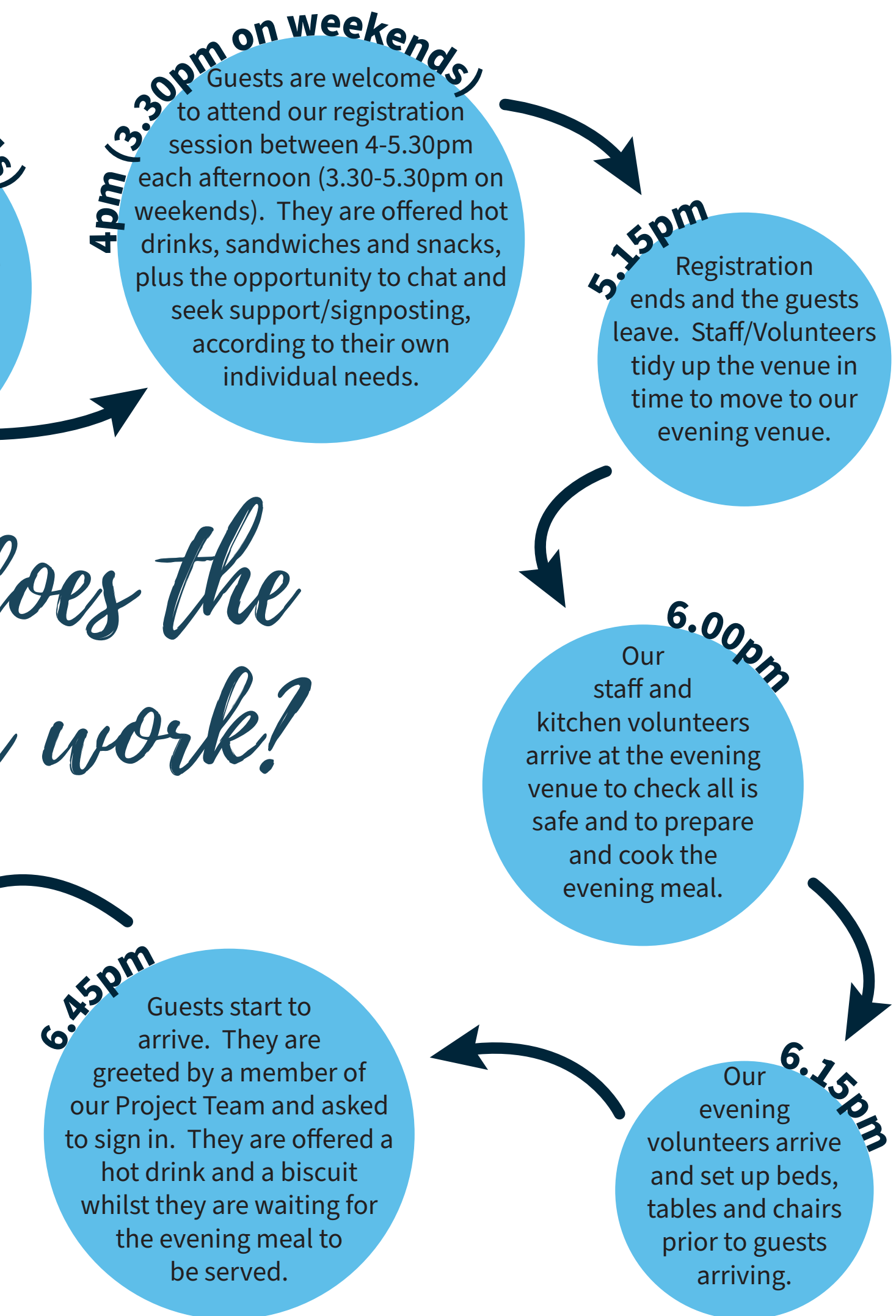
9.30pm

The evening volunteers and dinner guests leave and the overnight guests then start to settle down for the night. Our paid overnight worker and overnight volunteer arrive at 9.30pm, to meet the guests prior to 'lights out' at around 10pm.

7.30pm

The evening meal is served. Guests and volunteers sit down together at tables, to share dinner in a similar fashion to a family meal. Our guests have the opportunity to chat with our volunteers, which they generally welcome. We also have a hairdresser once a fortnight, plus regular visits from a nurse/mental health nurse. The evening sessions offer the opportunity for guests and volunteers to socialise.

How do we run the shelter



OUR AIMS

AND HOW THEY WERE FULFILLED

Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter was established on four core aims which, despite adaptations in delivery over the years, remain unchanged. During winter 2026, these aims were fulfilled as follows:

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

Shelter /'ʃeltə/(noun) *A place giving temporary protection from bad weather or danger.*

MCWS delivered this aim by providing hot meals, overnight accommodation and practical support/signposting to people experiencing homelessness and others facing financial crisis.

Those to whom we offered our support were welcomed as guests. Our shelter is rooted in hospitality: not simply delivering a service but offering a safe and inclusive environment where people feel valued and respected.

Our provision included:

- **Afternoon registration sessions** – Offering refreshments, conversation and support, with the opportunity to reserve a bed for the night.
- **Evening meal sessions** – Nutritious hot meals prepared by volunteers and shared in a communal setting, in the format of a family meal. This kind of setting fosters trust and encourages our guests to open up about any concerns they may have.
- **Overnight accommodation** – Dormitory-style provision within warm, safe church venues.

The stability of warmth, food and welcome enabled many guests to regain confidence and begin engaging more openly with support.

*Speak up for those who cannot speak
for themselves ... defend the rights of the
poor and needy. Proverbs 31:8-9*

2. TO ENGAGE CHURCH MEMBERS AND OTHER VOLUNTEERS IN BUILDING SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH SOME OF THE MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE IN MAIDSTONE, WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION.

Our dedicated Volunteers, both faith-based and secular, worked collaboratively to provide consistent and compassionate support. Teams ensured guests were safe, well-fed and treated with dignity at all times.

The shelter fosters a strong sense of community. Positive relationships formed between guests and volunteers, helping to reduce social isolation.

As **Mother Teresa** observed, “Of all the diseases I have known, loneliness is the worst.” Addressing loneliness remains central to our approach.

All engagement took place within clear safeguarding and operational boundaries, and we remain deeply grateful for the commitment of our volunteers.

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

The winter shelter is a short-term intervention. Project staff worked alongside guests to identify individual needs and encourage engagement with longer-term support services. This included facilitating appointments and signposting to specialist agencies.

Many guests face complex challenges, including mental health difficulties, addiction, learning needs and trauma. Our approach seeks to empower rather than create dependency, equipping individuals with the knowledge and confidence to access appropriate ongoing support and accommodation.

4. TO UNDERTAKE SUCH OTHER PURPOSES IN RELATION TO THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS AS THE TRUSTEES DETERMINE.

We continued to work in close partnership with **Maidstone Borough Council** Homeless Support Services to ensure coordinated support across the borough. Individuals not accommodated through statutory provision were welcomed into our shelter, with communication maintained to support appropriate move-on.

We also collaborated with **Maidstone Day Centre**, who provided weekday breakfasts and access to essential facilities and advice, including hygiene services, housing guidance and benefits support. Additional partnership working is detailed in ‘Our Partners’ on page 35.

GUEST STORY

PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW/WHY YOU BECAME HOMELESS?

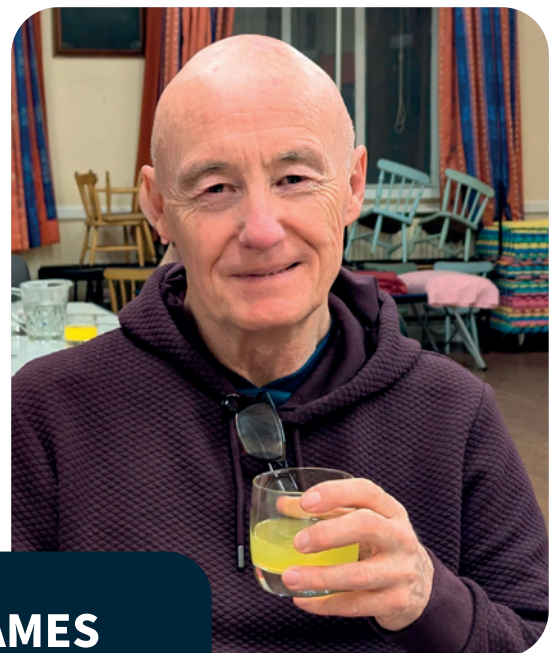
To be honest I never thought I'd get down this road and I don't think anyone really does in the first place, but sometimes things happen, things just conspire against you etc etc and also with your own failings and your own indecision about the things you should be doing and the things you don't do, you end up in a place where you least expect.

After much soul searching and coming to the same place three times it was obviously about time that I took stock of my life and made a decision for my own benefit, for the first time. So, I'd come across the church [shelter] and heard what it was all about through the friend of a friend and I decided it was now or never, so I went to the United Reformed Church and knocked on the door but there was no-one there. Then I came back again, knocked on the door and basically someone answered the door and said come back at 4, which is what I did.

From then on I went back and was told I could stay around for the duration of the time that the church is available, for a roof over my head, and this was around the middle of January. I stayed until the middle of February. [This time] was spent around the church and finding out what it was all about.

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

Basically to take stock and give me perspective and just give me some sort of a purpose and a kind of meaning and a reason to go forwards rather than backwards. I'd spent so much time just feeling sorry for myself and spending money that I didn't have, thinking I could get out of it myself, but I needed help and I didn't know it at the time.



JAMES

The interaction with all the fellow people in my situation from different backgrounds, who all have a story, and it was a case of my eyes [were opened] and there are people out there that are worse than you, there really are people out there worse than you, but there are also people out there that want to help you, all of us. I found myself helping as well and it's almost like a vocation of sorts and I've just found myself in the right place at the right time.

It gave me the opportunity, in liaison with the Day Centre in Knightbridge Street, to get a hold of everything that I needed to do to be part of the system. With the help of many people, but most of all certainly Claire Knight, Mike, Nick, Jan, Steph & Claire (everyone seems to be called Claire!), but they are all part of this and without them I wouldn't be where I am now, with my foot on the ladder to some kind of normality and it's a kind of big success for me as I was going backwards all the time.

With my Parkinson's, which is one of the main reasons I felt vulnerable and I had to do something about it, they have given me the drive and seeing how they help people made me aware that things could be done and I want to give back to the church. I want to give back some of my time later, next year obviously. If you find yourself down and out in the winter for whatever reason, these people are there to help you, there's so many people behind the scenes. It costs a lot of money, you don't realise how much, and all in all they're just one big family. They made me feel very welcome, part of something bigger, I'm very grateful for everything and all that they've done.

Following the support offered to James both by Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter & Maidstone Day Centre, James is now housed.

GUEST STORY

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

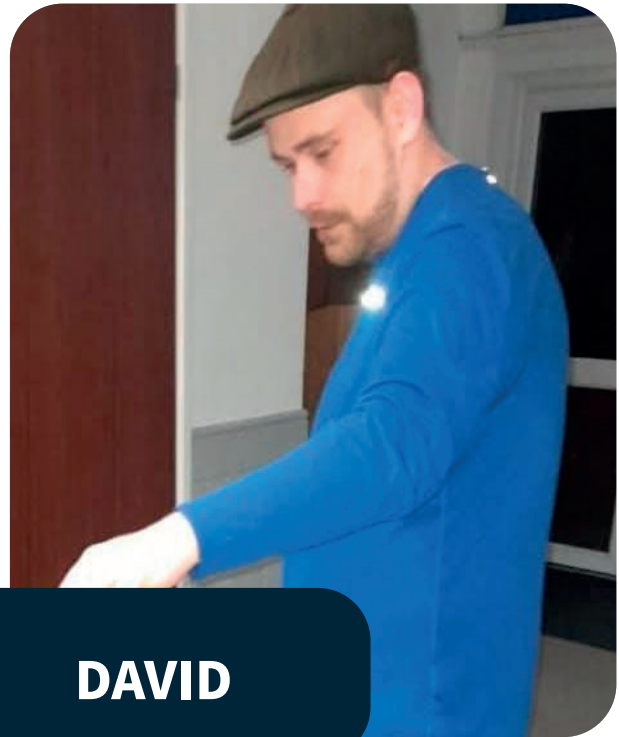
I moved to Maidstone, Kent 2 years ago from Newcastle, as I finally got in contact with my real dad after all them years of no contact with me being in care.

Anyway I came down and made an effort as he wanted to be part of my life, but now only bothers with me and his kids when it suits him.

I ended up with no accommodation so my dad's girlfriends brother brought me to you [Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter (MCWS)] and put me in the right direction to get help whilst I wait for the council to house me.

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

You [MCWS] have helped me massively with a meal every day, and night accommodation which I really appreciate. As well as a nice



DAVID

loving/welcoming every day you [are] all like family to me. The staff are all as loving, caring and supportive.

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

You have been a massive help 1000%. I just hope we can stay in touch when you're shut.



GUEST STORY

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

Following the death of my parents I became very depressed. This resulted in some very bad decisions and serious mistakes. I regret these mistakes, but they have had a lasting effect on my life. The most recent consequence was losing my job two days before Christmas. This also came at a point where I thought I would be able to start rebuilding my life. The losing of my job stopped this from happening. I don't think I realised how much support my parents gave me until I didn't have that support anymore.

After losing my job I tried to get another job, but the time of year and other factors, caused by my mistakes, made this difficult.

When my rent was two weeks overdue I was kicked out of my accommodation. I stupidly did not have a formal tenancy agreement in place, so I had no argument. I had no job and nowhere to say and very little funds (not enough for a hotel stay).

I was directed to Trinity, who directed me to the Winter Shelter.

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

I have never been in this situation before. The whole experience was scary for me. However, the moment I walked in Jon was so lovely to me and kept checking in on me throughout the night. The same care came from Mike and Claire over the next few days. They gave support, encouragement and just made me feel human at a time when life was very difficult. The place to stay was a lifesaver for me, as I don't know how I would have coped without it. The council was



DARREN

delaying helping me initially as they could not contact my landlord to confirm my housing situation.

Even after receiving temp accommodation, the evening meals were so beneficial, not only because of my lack of funds, but the social/human aspect of the Winter Shelter. Just being with supportive staff and volunteers (who make you smile and provide such valuable encouragement) and other homeless people in similar situations to your own, really helped.

Overall, the winter shelter has been so important for my physical (having a place to stay at night) and mental health (having so many kind and amazing people making you believe that things will get better. They were right).

Thanks to the help and support I received I am on my way to repairing my life. Thanks to everyone, especially those at the beginning – Jon, Mike, Claire and Steph. All of the staff, volunteers and trustees are amazing and so supportive – 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, through the Winter Shelter I gained knowledge and access to the Day Centre and soup/breakfast places that help with food. They also provided helpful advice, which led to the council finding me a permanent address.

GUEST STORY

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

Basically, I had a family breakdown with the Mrs and the house, and also a breakdown with my parents. I was using drugs which was a big part of the problem and where I lived it was difficult. Being over here [Maidstone], I've changed that. I haven't used [drugs] since the day I've been here.

HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT US AT MAIDSTONE CHURCHES WINTER SHELTER?

I was down at the river fishing and staying in my bivvy. I was based down there and some people saw me there for a couple of weeks and asked me what I was doing, and then they mentioned you guys which I never even knew about. Someone showed me up to you and here we are.

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

It was something I didn't have back then, the help. I never think that anyone will help me, but when it really came to the crunch, I came into you guys and you had open arms. And I've got a lot of appreciation for you guys because I wouldn't be here now, doing what I'm doing.



CHRIS

SO WHERE ARE YOU NOW IN YOUR JOURNEY?

I've got a house now, I've got a few bits in there that I've had in storage since we sold the house [family home] and it feels a bit more like home.

My parents brought me duvets and bits and bobs, so things are a bit better. My dad stays in the car as there's history there, but now I've got somewhere and am planning to go back to work.

I'm working with CGL and I'll carry on with that, but I needed to get away from where I was and there's no-one here [from my past] and that's what I've got to focus on, so I've got a fresh start.

Without you guys seriously I don't know where I'd be now. It was kind of strange at first, but I have a lot of appreciation for the shelter. Thank you very much.

GUEST STORY

PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW/WHY YOU BECAME HOMELESS?

I came here to live with my wife, but she lives with her daughter and we don't get along. My wife was in the middle, between me and her daughter, and she had to choose – so she chose her daughter. We therefore had a relationship breakdown.

It is better for the man to be sleeping on the street or in a car, and I was able to sleep in my wife's car. I was sleeping in the street when she passed with her daughter and I was in the cold and the rain.

Sleeping in the streets, you wake up in the morning and you're all white and cold and you're thinking no, I cannot do it [any more]. I see some people who are staying here now [in the shelter] and it feels like family.

Everyone here accepts that no-one is perfect. I come in here to have peace.

I have respect for what you have done for me, even someone to just give me a hug.

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

You never think you will become homeless, I never hurt anyone, and I didn't think this would happen to me.

Everybody here [in the shelter] has done lots, you always are here for us; everybody is here for us. If we did not have this place to sleep in, we would still be in the streets.



FAYCEL

I want to give back to this place, to give something back, because everybody here has helped us. No-one is angry with us and everybody that works here is giving their time to help us. If we ask for something you find it. It's a big help. Nice food, nice people who giving everything from the heart, cooking from the heart, nice home-cooked food.

No-one here is bad, everyone is amazing. We never see anyone being bad or angry with us, everyone is happy. They are using their time to help us when they could be at home with their families, but they give their time to help us. They give love and if someone is upset you care for them. You have achieved a lot to help us. I think you should all be on a pedestal.

I am happy to tell my story because this is the truth. I've made lots of friends here who have become like family. Being in the shelter it's easy to forget [what you're going through] and you feel like family. I feel rich in the heart, which is the most important thing. All the people working here, it just feels like family.

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

I picked up my keys today. It's all coming together because of what you've done for me, for us. Everyone has worked together and everyone has helped each other and I am happy because I've now got somewhere to live and can have a fresh start. I will go back to work and can move forward from here.

The photo shows Faycel with the key to his new accommodation and we all hope he will be very happy as he moves forward into a more settled and secure future



Guest Comments

I was in Maidstone winter shelter and ... I've moved as my sister said she'll put me up for the foreseeable. I really appreciate everything that the team there have done and I hope at some point I can come give them a visit and donate. Maybe even volunteer to help too.

Jack

IMPACT OVER THE YEARS

	2023 - 2024	2024 - 2025	2025 - 2026
	Overnight Support		
NUMBER OF BEDS USED / STREET SLEEPS AVOIDED	Dormitory in church halls: 609	Dormitory in church halls: 625	Dormitory in church halls: 654
NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL OVERNIGHT GUESTS	47 Male: 39, Female: 8	51 Male: 43, Female: 8	43 Male: 30, Female: 13
NUMBER OF PEOPLE ASSESSED FOR OVERNIGHT SUPPORT	49 Male: 41, Female 8	63 Male: 53, Female 10	46 Male: 33, Female 13
	Meals and additional support		
EAT-IN HOT MEALS	1401	1530	1058
TAKEAWAY MEALS	56*	36*	17*
FOOD PARCELS	NIL**	9	10**
INDIVIDUALS SEEN FOR MEALS AND SUPPORT	110	137	121
LENGTH OF SHELTER	13 weeks	13 weeks	12 weeks and 1 day
SHELTER DATES	Opened: 2nd January Closed: 2nd April	Opened: 31st December 2024 Closed: 31st March 2025	Opened: 5th January Closed: 31st March
NUMBER OF PAID STAFF	8	7	6

* guests were encouraged to come into the venues for meals, social interaction and support rather than just collecting takeaways, hence only a minimal number of takeaways.

** For guests who required food parcels, we helped them complete applications for the local food banks to ensure ongoing support, even after the shelter had closed.





OUR VENUES

The churches who generously offer their premises for use as shelters vary in size and facilities, yet each adapts well to the Shelter's needs. We are deeply grateful for this practical support and for the trust church leaders place in us to use their buildings safely and effectively.

During winter 2026, we operated across five local church venues:



From these venues we provided hot evening meals, overnight accommodation and on-site support, as well as cooked breakfasts on weekend mornings (weekday breakfasts were available through Maidstone Day Centre).

The evening meals were prepared and served by volunteers, with staff and volunteers dining alongside guests in a shared, family-style setting. This created space for relaxed, 'normal' conversation and provided opportunities to identify concerns and offer further support where needed.

The venues also enabled us to host additional services, including haircuts and nursing support, as well as to distribute donated clothing and footwear. For guests with very limited possessions, the opportunity to receive good-quality 'new' clothes and shoes was deeply appreciated.

We remain profoundly thankful for the continued partnership of our local churches and extend our sincere thanks to each venue for once again opening their doors to support the Shelter.

Thank you all.

OUR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteering has always been a core value of Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter, and each year we are immensely grateful for the compassion and generosity of our volunteers. Quite simply, the shelter could not operate without them. We deeply value the time, commitment and dedication they bring to their roles.

Volunteers are at the heart of our work, with many returning year after year, bringing experience and encouragement to newer team members. Last winter, 121 volunteers registered to serve across our venues during the three months the shelter was open, each making a meaningful difference to the lives of our guests. We extend our heartfelt thanks to every one of them.

Working in teams, volunteers ensured the smooth running of the shelter. Their roles included serving drinks and snacks at afternoon sessions; cooking hot evening meals; setting up dining and sleeping areas within our church venues; welcoming guests and sharing meals with them; listening and offering conversation and support; providing overnight cover alongside our project workers; preparing weekend breakfasts; and clearing and resetting venues each day. Every task was essential and depended upon the teamwork, communication skills and goodwill of our volunteers.

OUR COOKS

We are especially grateful for the care and thought given to providing nutritious, filling meals that our guests greatly appreciated. Most evening meals were prepared on site by volunteer cooks. In addition, our dedicated 'Sunday pudding club volunteers', Pat, Jayne & David, prepared puddings at home and delivered them each Sunday evening, ready to be served. We are sincerely thankful for their kindness and faithfulness.

OVERNIGHT VOLUNTEERS

Although a paid overnight worker remained awake at the shelter each night, at least one overnight volunteer was also required to support safeguarding arrangements. For the volunteer this was a sleeping shift, with the understanding that they would be woken if needed.

Recruiting overnight volunteers remains one of our greatest challenges, yet we are profoundly grateful to those willing to serve in this way. Their quiet commitment plays a vital role in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of everyone within the shelter.

The Trustees of Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter extend their sincere thanks to all our volunteers for their outstanding contribution and dedication throughout the winter season.

Volunteers don't get paid, not because they're worthless but because they're priceless.

Sherry Anderson

VOLUNTEER COMMENTS



This has been my first year volunteering, and it has honestly been an amazing experience for me. I have really enjoyed being part of the team and supporting people in our community who need help. It has opened my eyes to the challenges some people face, and it has also helped me grow in confidence and understanding.

I feel proud to be part of such a caring and supportive organisation. Even the small things we do can make a real difference, and that means a lot to me.

I am truly grateful for the opportunity this year and I am very much looking forward to volunteering again next year.

Yusuf

A friend of mine got me involved in the winter Shelter. I had retired in June and this is something I have wanted to do for 21 years. Now I had the time, so off went the volunteer form. Mandy [administrator] rang me up and here I am now. I do alternate Tuesday [afternoons] at the United Reformed Church, where the Clients come and register for a meal or for a bed. Also, Allington Baptist Church on Monday [evenings]. We all close our doors and curtains at night and forget that world that exists out there.

These people are real. Their ages range from 18-70 and, for whatever reason, they have been brought to us to care of them just for 3 months.

They come into us most of them with smiles on their faces, some with their worries and they need a chat, a friendly face and advice. And sure enough they have come to the right place.

The people who run the Winter Churches in Maidstone, each and every one of them, puts their heart and soul into this project and I for one am pleased to be part of it. I walk away after my shift feeling truly Humble and even chuffed as I am part of this project. Thank you all.

Lyn



Giving up my time on a Wednesday evening at the Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter has shown me that the simplest act —cooking a meal — can become the greatest gift: warmth, kindness, and a reminder that someone cares.

Claire

MESSAGES FROM RETURNING VOLUNTEERS



This year is my fourth year of volunteering with the Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter. Each evening, when we open the doors and welcome our guests in from the cold, I'm reminded how powerful simple acts of kindness can be. Offering a warm bed and a hot meal may seem small, but to someone facing homelessness or vulnerability, it represents safety, dignity, and hope. All the volunteers come together with a shared purpose, working as a team to cook, set up beds, and spend time talking with guests. The conversations over dinner are often the highlight of my week — hearing people's stories, their humour, and their resilience is inspiring. The shelter isn't just about meeting physical needs; it's about restoring a sense of belonging. Being part of that has been incredibly rewarding and humbling.

Sally

It was pleasing to see how appreciative a number, if not most, of the guests were, of their overnight accommodation. They were helpful and cooperative, with one person even doing the washing-up when we were a volunteer short one morning. It makes the volunteering even more worthwhile.

Bryan

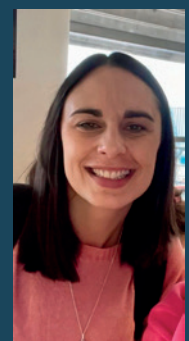


If you are considering volunteering then 'Go for It!'. Everyone is welcoming & friendly and we all help each other out and work as a team. You don't have to commit to every week but whatever time you can spare is valued. There is always someone on hand if you need guidance. I have thoroughly enjoyed my volunteering with MCWS - lots of fun and laughter and met some lovely people.

Ros

I have been volunteering for MCWS for the past few winters and each year I feel very honoured to be able to play a small part in supporting this amazing charity. I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to get to know some wonderful guests and volunteers. It is always amazing to see the positive impact the shelter has on those that it supports, both during the winter and beyond.

Nicola



A MESSAGE FROM AN OVERNIGHT VOLUNTEER



Overnight Volunteering: making hot drinks, a bit of washing up and most importantly the willingness to listen to people who may want to talk, but all this is only a tiny bit of what I do to help, as mostly I sleep. For the past few years I have helped at the Winter Shelter by doing an overnight shift once a week. It's usually a fairly quiet shift, apart from some snoring, mine included, because as the volunteer I am permitted to sleep the night away. My role is to be there to support the member of staff if required. I have only been woken on a very few occasions, usually when there is a lot of noise in the hall caused by complaints about particularly loud snoring; eventually people settle down again and then I return to sleep.

Rosemary



MY VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE

SCOTT'S STORY



Volunteering for the homeless shelter has been such a gratifying & rewarding experience and I have met some of the kindest & most interesting people in the shelter too. Human beings who may have made mistakes in life, made wrong choices that may have led them to where they currently are today. I wanted to be someone who made them feel that despite their past, they are still loved and never alone.

Having lived many years of substance/ alcohol addiction & prison, I wanted to give back to the community I once was a menace to. I wanted to be there to give someone the hope, faith & courage when they need it most. To give them the belief in themselves that if I can get through it, so can they.

A couple of weeks ago I was able to be there for someone who was really struggling emotionally with the consequences of their addiction. Sometimes all people need is to be listened to.

Thank you, Maidstone shelter, for allowing me to be of service.

*Therefore
encourage one
another and
build one
another up,
just as you
are doing.*

1 Thessalonians 5:11

MY VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE

DAVID'S STORY



Volunteering with the Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. What makes this project so special is not only the practical support it provides, but the genuine compassion and dignity that every guest is shown.

The shelter is far more than simply a warm place to sleep during the coldest months. It becomes a safe and welcoming community where people who are going through incredibly difficult times are treated with kindness, respect, and humanity. From the moment guests arrive, they are greeted with warmth, a hot meal, conversation, and a sense that they truly matter.

What has struck me most as a volunteer is the incredible spirit of collaboration between the churches, amazing volunteers & coordinators and local supporters who make the shelter possible. People from many different backgrounds come together with a shared purpose: to care for our neighbours who need help the most.

The impact of this work is profound. A warm bed, a meal, and a friendly conversation might seem like small things, but for someone facing homelessness they can restore hope, rebuild confidence, and remind them that they are not alone.

I feel privileged to be part of such a compassionate community. The Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter is a shining example of what can happen when people come together with kindness, generosity, and a genuine desire to support others in society.

*For I was hungry and you gave
me something to eat, I was thirsty
and you gave me something to
drink, I was a stranger and you
invited me in.
Matthew 25:35*

FROM VOLUNTEER TO STAFF MEMBER

STEPH'S STORY

My name is Steph and I have had the privilege to be part of the project team this year for the shelter. I first volunteered for MCWS back in 2016, doing a Saturday overnight sleepover with the guests. I loved sitting with them, chilling out, playing board games and even letting them steal my pizza even after they had been fed their dinner! After this I took time out but the shelter was always on my mind.

In 2025, I was made redundant from my previous job and applied for the project worker role. I have absolutely loved doing this. No two days have been the same and there have been some challenges along the way but I would not change it for the world. It has been amazing to stand alongside our guests as they journey & navigate through the shelter for a variety of reasons.

I would encourage anyone who is reading this to consider volunteering for the shelter, it has been an amazing experience and I wish I could do this full time.

I want to thank all the staff, volunteers and trustees who have helped me through the past 3 months, I have learned so much and look forward to seeing you again in 2026/2027 season.



CORPORATE SUPPORT

FROM GVE COMMERCIAL SOLUTIONS

Four members of staff from GVE Commercial Solutions volunteered their time to support the winter shelter during afternoon sessions in January & February 2026. They assisted with preparing and serving hot food and drinks, while taking time to sit and talk with guests.

Quantity surveyors Luke Parham, Karolina Lukosiunaite and Andy Inchmore, together with programmer Naomi Sanger, each joined us during various afternoon sessions, contributing practical help and positive engagement.

They were moved by the experiences of those staying at the shelter and expressed admiration for the commitment shown by the MCWS staff and volunteers in supporting Maidstone's homeless community during the coldest months of the year.

GVE has supported our charity financially through team fundraising initiatives in recent years and they welcomed the opportunity to become involved in a more hands-on capacity, reflecting the company's commitment to supporting social values within the local community.

We are sincerely grateful for their continued and practical support.



OUR PARTNERS

No single organisation can meet all the needs of people experiencing homelessness. Many of our guests require support that spans health, housing, wellbeing and practical day-to-day assistance. By working in partnership with a wide range of local agencies and charities, we are able to provide a coordinated and compassionate response that offers both immediate help and pathways towards longer-term stability.

Over the years we have developed strong partnerships with organisations that are vital to the success of the shelter and the wellbeing of our guests. During winter 2026 we worked closely with the following:

HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT:

- Rough Sleepers Specialist Mental Health Nurse – mental health support (fortnightly visits)
- Complex Care Outreach Nurse for Rough Sleepers – health support and outreach (fortnightly visits)
- Sexual Health Nurse – sexual health advice and support (monthly visits)
- Hepatitis C Nurse – advice and testing (monthly visits)
- CGL (Change, Grow, Live) – drug and alcohol addiction support (fortnightly visits)

PRACTICAL SUPPORT AT THE SHELTER:

- Don Doel Foundation Soup Run – soup and sandwiches for guests (Sunday afternoons)
- Volunteer Hairdresser – haircuts for guests (fortnightly visits)

FOOD AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT:

- Maidstone Day Centre (Homeless Care) and Food Bank – breakfasts, showers, laundry facilities, food parcels and advice/support (weekdays)
- Salvation Army Food Bank – mutual referral support
- Hungry Hearts for the Homeless – soup run (Mondays and Wednesdays)
- Time for the Homeless – soup run (Tuesdays)
- Breakfast Buddies – soup run (Saturdays)
- The Vine Food Bank at St Nicholas, Allington – food and household items
- Open Arms Pantry – various days

HOUSING, ADVICE AND WIDER SUPPORT:

- Maidstone Borough Council Homeless Support Services – housing advice and support
- MADM (Making a Difference to Maidstone) – community support for vulnerable residents
- Maidstone Probation Service – probation support where appropriate
- KCC Social Services – statutory support where required
- The Worley Day Trust – benevolent funding to support move-on needs

These partnerships play a vital role in ensuring our guests receive the wide range of support needed to move towards greater stability and independence and we would like to thank them for their continued support and collaboration.

GUEST CARE AND SUPPORT

HAIR BY NIKI

We are incredibly fortunate to receive volunteer support from Niki, a talented hairdresser who generously gives her time to visit our shelters on pre-arranged evenings to provide haircuts and beard trims for our guests.

The impact of a good haircut should not be underestimated. It can boost confidence, lift spirits, and remind our guests that they are valued and cared for. Niki's time and attention make a real difference, helping our guests feel more human and enhancing their overall wellbeing.

We are deeply grateful to Niki for her kindness and dedication — the positive effect she has on our guests is clear and truly appreciated. Thank you so much, Niki!



SUPPORT FROM NHS SERVICES / MENTAL HEALTH

For many of our guests, accessing healthcare is not just difficult—it can feel impossible. A lack of stable housing, a transient lifestyle, past negative experiences with authorities, and low self-worth all combine to create barriers that have a devastating impact on health and wellbeing. The reality is stark: in 2021, the average age of death for someone experiencing homelessness was just 45 for men and 43 for women*—a heartbreaking reminder of the urgent need for support.

This year, we were able to bring a truly comprehensive health and wellbeing programme to the shelter, offering our guests care that could make a real difference to their lives. Fortnightly visits from Claire, our local Complex Care Community Outreach Nurse, and Mariama, our Mental Health Nurse, meant that some of the most vulnerable guests could access essential appointments quickly. The Mental Health team made additional visits, the Sexual Health Nurse attended monthly to provide advice and referrals, and the Hepatitis C Nursing team offered discreet testing and preventative support to those most at risk.

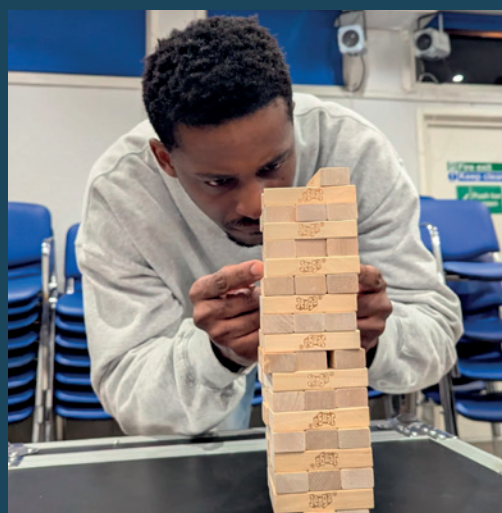
These services do more than treat illness—they offer dignity, reassurance, and a pathway to a healthier future for people who often feel invisible.



**2021 Census Figures as quoted by Crisis*

SHELTER ACTIVITIES

After our evening meals, guests and volunteers came together for some light hearted social activities, from Jenga and jigsaws to dominoes and card games. These simple games created a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere, sparking easy conversation and plenty of laughter. For many who may not often have moments like this in their daily lives, these shared pockets of joy offered something quietly powerful: a chance to unwind, connect, and feel part of a community.



X-BOX EVENING

As a bit of a treat, our lovely former guest Van Darren popped by for dinner and brought his Play Station and projector and set it up for the guests to have a go..

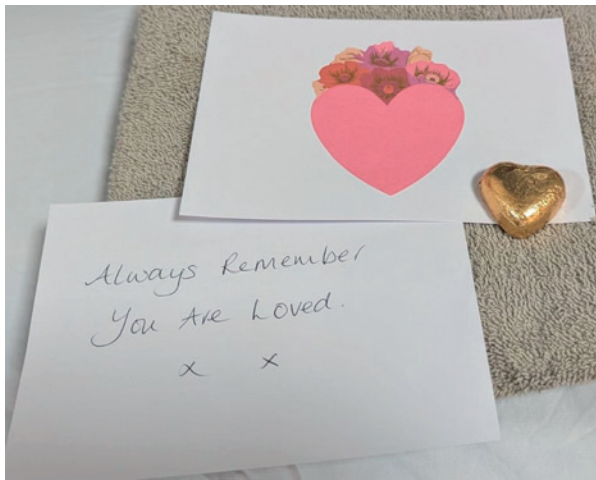


VALENTINES DAY

On Valentine's Day, our Project Manager, Claire, transformed the dinner table into a quiet celebration of care. She placed a gold heart shaped chocolate at every setting and wrote a hand crafted card for each guest. It was a simple gesture, but one that carried real weight.

For many of the people who come through our doors, feeling seen, valued, or remembered isn't something they can take for granted. Claire's thoughtful touches did more than decorate the table — they reminded our guests that they matter. That someone took the time to think about them. That love and dignity belong to them, too.

Moments like these ripple far beyond the evening itself. They help create an atmosphere where people feel safe, supported, and genuinely cared for. And in a shelter, that sense of belonging can make all the difference.



*You matter, you're welcome and
you're worth celebrating*



FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

Every year, the Winter Shelter opens its doors to offer warmth, safety, and support to some of the most vulnerable members of our community. But none of this would be possible without the generosity of our donors, funders, and volunteers. Your compassion turns hope into action, ensuring that every guest has a safe place to sleep, a hot meal to eat, and the care they need to get through the coldest months of the year.

Running the Winter Shelter for just three months each year still requires a significant investment to provide essential support. We are profoundly grateful to all our funders and donors—your generosity truly makes a difference in the lives of people experiencing homelessness in our community.

Our trustees would like to offer heartfelt thanks to everyone who has supported the Winter Shelter, whether through financial contributions, volunteering, or in-kind donations. Every gift, large or small, helps us open our doors and offer safety, warmth, and care to those who need it most.

A full list of our funders and donors from last winter can be found on the following pages.

HELP OUT TO EAT OUT

In winter 2021, we launched ‘Help out to Eat Out’, a simple way for supporters to make a tangible impact by donating just £10. This pays for sandwiches and snacks, a hot evening meal, hot drinks and breakfast for one or more of our guests. Thanks to everyone who has contributed to this scheme—your generosity ensures no one goes hungry during the cold winter months.

ANNUAL FUNDRAISING MEAL

Our annual fundraising dinner at Frédéric Bistro on 21st October 2025 was a wonderful evening of community support. We are especially grateful to Frédéric Bistro for donating a portion of the cost per meal to the Winter Shelter.

We also extend our thanks to the local businesses and individuals who generously donated raffle prizes, helping to make the evening even more special. Together, this event raised £2,212, including raffle proceeds—funds that go directly towards keeping our Shelter running and supporting those who rely on it.





FINANCIAL INFORMATION

ESTIMATED FOR YEAR ENDING 31ST MAY 2026

ESTIMATED INCOME AND EXPENDITURE		
FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST MAY 2026	2026 Estimated	2025
Income	£	£
Corporate Grants	64,925	69,118
Giving Agencies and other income	1,636	2,261
Individual Donations	15,438	12,814
Churches and other groups	12,571	12,339
Other	4,984	4,617
Dividends from COIF	1,270	1,522
Total Income	100,824	102,671
Expenditure		
Salaries	52,593	67,412
Overnight staff support	17,878	6,075
Food and Support	9,502	9,502
Insurance	1,524	1,463
IT and phone	1,590	1,119
General Office Expenses	5,092	7,615
Rent	4,820	4,547
Other Inc. equipment and utility costs	6,887	3,439
Total Expenditure	99,886	101,172
Surplus/(deficit) for year	£938	£1,499

COMMENTARY FROM THE TREASURER

Expenditure continues to be closely controlled. As last year, income just covered annual expenditure with a small surplus forecast to 31 May 2026 of £938 (2025: £1,499). Income is at a similar level, although slightly down on last year, at £100,824 (2025: £102,671). A decline in corporate grants has been largely matched by an increase in individual donations. A major change in the year was the increased use of outsourced overnight staff support which has helped us to control salary costs.

Richard Williams – Treasurer

THANK YOU VERY MUCH...

Our winter shelter simply couldn't run without the incredible support of our Church venues, volunteers, staff, and trustees. Our heartfelt thanks go to each of them for their kindness and commitment last winter, helping to provide food, warmth, shelter, and support to our guests.

Huge thanks also go to our many funders and donors. Opening our doors each winter comes at a considerable cost, but thanks to your generosity, our professionally run, volunteer-intensive shelters can offer outstanding support and real-life outcomes for our guests – the very reason we exist. Thank you so much!

OUR STAFF:

This year, our staff team included:

- Claire Kehily (Project Manager)
- Mike Louth (Assistant Project Manager)
- Jon Dix, Darren Ellis & Steph McWalter (Project Workers)
- Mandy Fuller (Administrator and Volunteer Co-Ordinator)

Together, this team worked seamlessly with each other and alongside our volunteers to provide a positive, supportive experience for our guests. Extra special thanks go to Claire and Mike, who worked tirelessly to ensure the shelter ran smoothly each day. Claire also dedicated significant time liaising with other organisations to support guests with their 'moving forward' needs.

We also thank Mandy for supporting the Project Managers and staff, and for providing continuity between each winter programme. Her experience and diligence in applying for funding, maintaining records, and preparing volunteer rotas ensures the shelter runs efficiently and effectively every year.

TMS OVERNIGHT STAFFING:

Due to previous challenges in employing overnight project staff, we engaged TMS to cover our overnight shifts. Their team was fantastic, flexible, and excellent with our guests, and we are incredibly appreciative of their support.

OUR TRUSTEES:

Our trustees are volunteers who generously give their time and dedication behind the scenes. Many also support various venues directly, helping further the work of the charity. To our trustees: thank you for your ongoing commitment and leadership.

OUR GUESTS:

Finally, we wish to thank our guests – people who often enter our shelters in desperate need, carrying incredibly challenging stories. We are grateful for the trust they place in us at a vulnerable time in their lives. Their presence has touched the lives of so many and enriched the wider community. Thank you for allowing us to work alongside you as you seek your path out of homelessness and poverty, with the support you need.

DONATIONS



GVE Commercial Services kindly donated this amazing delivery of pot noodles for our guests.

We truly appreciate your support.



Thank you to Lorraine and the staff at N-Fuze for their donations of pot noodles, hygiene items and new warm socks. Many thanks for your kindness.



Thanks go to Dawn for this fantastic Pot Noodle donation, safely delivered by one of Tesco's finest delivery guys. Thank you so much!



The Homeless charities in and around Maidstone work together really well and these donations were delivered to us by the lovely Bridget from Hungry Hearts for the Homeless. Thank you - it's very kind of you!



We received some very useful donations from our lovely friends at the Open Arms Pantry, which were used by our cooks to create their amazing and nutritious meals for our guests. Thank you for your support!



This large delivery of crisps was kindly shared with us by Maidstone Homeless Care... Many thanks for your generosity!



Our guests were really grateful for these warm hats, gloves and individually wrapped biscuits which our friends at Time for the Homeless shared with us. Many thanks!



These delicious treats were donated by the lovely Edna and her friends, as they were scrummy left overs from their annual community tea box afternoon. Thank you for thinking of us.

IF YOU WISH TO DONATE



If you wish to make a donation towards the ongoing work of our charity, this can be made in one of the following ways:



Online - this is easy and secure via: <https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/18270#!>
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%.



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



BACS* - One off donations or regular standing orders can be made directly into our bank account. No fees are paid on these transactions, meaning that MCWS will get 100% of your donation. Please contact our office on Tel: 01622 296450 or email: mcwsoffice@maidstoneshelter.org.uk if you wish to make a BACS donation.



Will/legacy donation - By leaving a legacy gift to Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter in your will, you can help ease the cruelty of homelessness in the future. Your gift could one day transform someone's life, bringing safety, security and hope. If you wish to provide a legacy gift to MCWS in your will, please contact our office on Tel: 01622 296450 or email: mcwsoffice@maidstoneshelter.org.uk



QR code – you can donate in this way using the following code:



**If you are a UK taxpayer there is an option to add Gift Aid, which will increase your donation by 25%. If you wish to add gift aid, please ask for a Gift Aid form.*

We hope this report provides an insight into what can be achieved when churches, volunteers and supporters come together to support those facing homelessness or financial hardship.

Thank you for taking the time to read about our work and the difference it makes within our community.

OUR FUNDERS & DONORS

Abbott, T	Daly, J, Ms	Horsefield, W, Mrs
Albert Hunt Trust, The	Davis, L, Mrs	Hubble, J
All Saints Church, Ulcombe	Delta House Maintenance	Humphries, R
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Colyer-Fergusson Charitable Trust	Gurnett, J	Marks, T, Dr
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Moore, D, Ms	Rawlins, A, Mrs	Thomsett, J, Mrs
Moore, M, Ms	Rotary Club of Maidstone, The	Till, K, Mrs
More Park RC Primary School	Rutland, J, Mrs	Ulcombe Community Breakfast
Morrisons, Maidstone	Rutter, R, Rev	United Reformed Church Staplehurst, The
Nash, A	Sampson, H, Mrs	Valley Invicta Primary School at Eastborough
Netherton, V, Miss	Scott, S, Ms	Verrall, D
N-Fuze	Sehmer, S, Ms – Bockingstock 2025	Vincent, M
Nicholson, G	Shirley, K	Watts, C, Mrs
Oates, R	Shirley, S, Mrs	Weeden, G
O'Brien, R	Sinclair, B, Miss	Wells, P
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Pearson, M	Steer, D, Mrs	
Pethurst, G	Sturrock, S, Mrs	
Philip and Connie Phillips Foundation, The		
Phillips, C		
Pilbeam, B, Mrs		

THOSE WHO PROVIDED ALTERNATIVE SUPPORT:

A huge and heartfelt thank you goes to:

- The Friars, Aylesford; Maidstone Prison; and Monarch Laundry – for their incredible generosity in laundering our sleeping bags throughout the winter. Your practical support made a real difference to the comfort and dignity of our guests.
- Mariama Bah & Claire Knight – for the compassionate physical and mental health support you provided through the NHS. Your care has been invaluable.
- Cara Garton – for your ongoing dedication and creativity in designing our Annual Report.
- Carol Hemmings – for your tireless commitment in sourcing donations for the shelter and tracking down specific items needed by our guests. Your persistence and kindness never go unnoticed.

The unknown donors:

A HUGE thank you to you all!

DONORS



Cobtree Charity Trust
Ltd

**Bennett Pain
Charitable Trust**



Garfield Weston
FOUNDATION



The Worley Day Trust

**The Hillier
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Charitable
Foundation**



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