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Volunteer Handbook

04 January 2021 – 28 March 2021

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A warm welcome

for homeless people in the coldest months

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome and thank you for volunteering to be part of Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter (MCWS). We aim to ensure that all our Shelters are safe and welcoming for those who use them, whether as guests, visitors or volunteers. Please take some time to read this handbook carefully.

Winters 2013-14 to 2019-20 inclusive

Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter (MCWS) is a registered Charitable Independent Organisation, number 1156735. It began in October 2013 and, as its name suggests, it runs during the winter months. The shelter provides food, overnight accommodation, and support for homeless guests. The scheme is a rolling Shelter – one that is located at one of seven different venues each night of the week. Our key values at MCWS are hospitality and kindness.

The Shelter's aims are:

- ❖ Providing hospitality and overnight shelter for homeless people in the winter months.
- ❖ Engaging 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.
- ❖ Supporting homeless people to find long-term accommodation.
- ❖ Undertaking such other purposes in relation to the needs of homeless people as the trustees may from time to time determine.

We can accommodate 15 people per night. However, over the course of the Shelter, the total number of people helped is far greater than this, as our guests are housed or move on and new guests take their place.

Winter shelter 2020-21 (Covid compliant)

In line with the Government's Covid guidance, we are unable to provide overnight shelter during the winter of 2020-21. However, we are working closely with Maidstone Borough Council (MBC), who will provide temporary accommodation to ensure everyone is kept off the streets this winter.

We will be working alongside MBC, to provide continuing support to our local street homeless community by providing a hot dinner and some social interaction each evening, plus a breakfast/food pack for our guests to take away for the following day. This will ensure that those people in temporary accommodation still have access to a hot meal and social support from our volunteers, rather than being left alone in their rooms.

This support keeps mainly within the MCWS aims, but without the provision for overnight accommodation this winter. We are hoping to be in a position to offer overnight accommodation again in future years, but we need to remain mindful of all relevant guidance to support us all through the Covid pandemic.

SHELTER STRUCTURE

The day-to-day work of MCWS is undertaken by:

The Project Manager and Project Workers (Operations Team)

These are the people who liaise with external agencies, including MBC Outreach team, in order to assess and manage referrals to the Shelter.

The Project Manager is responsible to the Trustees. Our Project Manager is Gwyn McPherson, who is in her 3rd year in this role.

In view of the reduced nature of the shelter for winter 2020-21, we will only have one part-time Project Worker, Claire Kehily this year (we usually have 3 PW's). This is Claire's 2nd year as Project Worker. Claire will support Gwyn and will work mainly in the Venues to ensure each evening runs smoothly.

Both Gwyn & Claire will work to a rota, to ensure at least one of them is available at the shelter each evening. They will work closely with the Volunteer teams, to ensure everything runs well and to deal with any issues that may arise. Their contact details will be available in each Venue's information folder.

The Administrator

This is the person who manages the administration of the Shelter office. The Administrator, Mandy Fuller, is responsible to the Project Manager and can be contacted on 01622 296450.

The Trustees

Our Trustees have overall responsibility for the running of the Shelter. They are also actively involved in supporting it.

Gordon Mackley - Chairman

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. He has served as a Street Pastor in Maidstone since the start of the scheme in October 2008 and is currently a Team Leader. He became involved in the Shelter from the first year, serving as a volunteer.

Martin Hinchliffe – Operations

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 seven years with MCWS. He has been a Trustee of the charity for 4 years. He has experience in managing operations following a career in engineering and is the lead Trustee for shelter operations.

Wendy Tull – Human Resources

Wendy has over 30 years' experience as a senior Human Resources practitioner 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 Maidstone Citizen's Advice Bureau, a role that led to her increased interest in support for the homeless in Maidstone.

Rev John Tapper – Treasurer

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 – Partnership Support

Zofia has substantial knowledge of the homeless sector and brings this to her role as Trustee. She was the Manager of Homeless Care Maidstone Day Centre, one of the Shelter's key partners, for 6 years, but has now taken on the role of General Manager for Kent Supported Housing.

Richard Larkman – Fundraising

Richard has a commercial background in procurement, business transformation and property. He has volunteered at two locations within the Shelter and also volunteers and advises the Trustees of Homeless Care, Maidstone Day Centre.

Volunteers

Our volunteers are the people who make the Shelter happen on a day-to-day basis, from manning the Shelter during opening times to cooking, donating and providing extra activities for our guests.

GUEST REFERRAL PROCESS

The Winter Shelter is an open access shelter. We operate our own assessment referral process, liaising with other agencies. Referrals are received and reviewed by the Operations Team.

Risk assessments are carried out for each guest, for the health and safety of all our guests and volunteers.

GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS

It is important to recognise that the guests who use the Shelter often have complex problems, which the Shelter and its volunteers are not equipped to deal with. Although we may want to, we cannot solve peoples' problems. We are there to provide basic support and a listening ear.

Whilst guests are being kept safe and fed during the coldest part of the year, the Operations Team work with support agencies and organisations, where relevant, to ensure our guests get support to help them address their problems on a longer-term basis, so please do not try to take on too much. If you are getting into conversations you cannot deal with, let the Operations Team know. Under no circumstances should you feel obligated to do anything asked of you by a guest, nor should you put yourself in a situation where you are keeping secrets that you are not comfortable with.

(See 'Respect and Confidentiality', p8)

What is required of Volunteers?

- ❖ Understanding of your own limitations and boundaries in engaging with guests.
- ❖ Willingness to follow instructions from the Shelter Operations Team and to work as part of a team
- ❖ Ability to respond calmly but quickly in an emergency.
- ❖ Being able to judge when to call for help.
- ❖ Familiarity and ability to work within Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter policies and guidelines, especially regarding Health and Safety procedures.
- ❖ Knowledge of basic First Aid would be useful, but is not essential to volunteering.
- ❖ Sensitivity to issues relating to homelessness, including mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse.
- ❖ Basic knowledge of the building, especially the location of fire exits. (This information will be provided at your first volunteer session)

Volunteers should

- ❖ Be reliable and arrive on time, sign in and out in the signing book, including confirming contact details for Covid Track & Trace purposes
- ❖ Make sure you know the venue layout, especially the emergency exits, and any areas that are out of bounds to guests.
- ❖ Treat guests with respect.
- ❖ Be friendly and make guests feel welcome.
- ❖ Work as part of a team and support your Operations Team. You must not challenge their decisions in front of other volunteers or guests as you may not be aware of information to which you are not privy.
- ❖ Not make arrangements to meet guests outside the premises unless it has been arranged by MCWS staff.
- ❖ Not make promises when speaking to guests. People can feel very let down by a promise not kept. MCWS needs to build trust in order to be effective in finding appropriate help for guests. Broken promises can undermine this work. ('I will try...' not 'I will...')
- ❖ Not wear or bring valuables to the Shelter as MCWS cannot be held responsible for their safekeeping or any loss – there may not be anywhere to store valuables safely.
- ❖ Wear appropriate and sensible clothing.
- ❖ Wear the correct PPE, as required by Government guidelines

Respect and Confidentiality

When talking to guests it is important not to press them for information. Please acknowledge that some guests may feel hurt or let down by past experiences and may not wish to talk about them. Others will like nothing better than to tell you their story. Respect guests' confidentiality and don't allow your conversation to become common gossip - especially with other guests or volunteers.

Although confidentiality is important for building trust, it is not about keeping secrets and this should be made clear to guests. If at any time you feel there is an issue, let a member of the Operations Team know immediately. Likewise, if you feel a conversation is getting too demanding, tell the guest you may have to let the Operations Staff know what is being said, in order to get appropriate help. It is then up to the guest if they want to continue.

Gifts

From time to time guests may wish to give gifts to staff or volunteers. Small gifts may be accepted, particularly if they can be shared. The general rule is that all gifts should be shared with the team, and the guest should be told this is the policy. In any case, all gifts should be reported to the Operations Team and recorded in the Logbook. Any gift deemed to be too expensive or in some way inappropriate should be gently returned to the guest. Guests should not be encouraged to give gifts.

Golden Rules

- ❖ Check identities – know who people are.
- ❖ Do **NOT** give personal information especially your address, telephone number or e-mail address and **NEVER** lend your mobile phone to any of the guests.
- ❖ Do not invite or take guests to your home.
- ❖ Make sure neither you nor a colleague is left alone with a guest. This is not only for your own safety, but so that if anyone alleges an impropriety against you there is a witness.
- ❖ Do not give or lend money to guests.
- ❖ We have a no alcohol policy on the premises.
- ❖ Do not touch guests unexpectedly.
- ❖ No drugs (other than prescribed) or alcohol allowed.
- ❖ Do not intervene physically to stop a fight.
- ❖ Do not give any medication to guests, not even aspirin, paracetamol etc.
- ❖ Report any concerns you have, confidentially, to the Operations Team, who will take appropriate action.
- ❖ Do not invite any outside agencies into the shelter. Please refer them to the Project Manager who will invite them if appropriate.

Complaints

There are policies, available on request, about dealing with complaints by guests.

There will always be at least one member of the Operations Team present at each Venue from 6.00pm until 10.00pm.

RULES FOR GUESTS

- ❖ Only guests who have been allocated a place by the project team will be allowed into the Shelter.
- ❖ Only the Operations Team can authorise guests coming into the Shelter.
- ❖ Guests will not be allowed into the Shelter if under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- ❖ No possession of alcohol or illegal drugs on the premises.
- ❖ No offensive weapons.
- ❖ Violent, threatening, discriminatory or other anti-social behaviour or language will not be tolerated.
- ❖ No smoking inside the building (There will be an area available to smoke outside)
- ❖ No pets.
- ❖ Guests must arrive each night by 7.15pm and will be requested to leave by 9pm at the latest.
- ❖ If this is your first night at a venue, please ask a volunteer to show you around and make sure you know where the fire exits and assembly points are.
- ❖ Guests are not allowed in the kitchen.
- ❖ Please do not ask volunteers for money or give gifts to volunteers.
- ❖ Please do not ask the volunteers for any of their personal contact details.
- ❖ Please only use areas of the building designated to the Shelter
- ❖ Once you have taken up your place at the Shelter you can't leave and come back that evening.
- ❖ Please remember to take all your items with you when you leave.
- ❖ The Shelter is for those aged 18 years and above.

The Shelter rules are for the safety and protection of all persons. If you break the rules you may be asked to leave, excluded for a week or permanently barred from the Shelter.

TIMETABLE OF SHIFTS

Cooking Team: 6.00pm – 9.00pm

- ❖ Prepare and serve the evening meal. Dinner will be served at 7.30pm
- ❖ Wash up and clear away all items used
- ❖ Sanitize the kitchen, in accordance with the Covid guidelines

General volunteers (non kitchen teams): 6.30pm - .9.30pm

- ❖ Set up tables and chairs
- ❖ Ensure Signing in lists are available, including Covid Track and Trace contact list
- ❖ Welcome guests from 7pm and show them to a table.
- ❖ Serve guests at the tables, including serving tea and coffee over the course of the evening
- ❖ Clear and tidy away tables
- ❖ Clean & Sanitize all areas, including the toilets
- ❖ Ensure any incidents are recorded in the Logbook

Volunteers will be encouraged to chat with our guests for the duration of their time in the shelter each night.

Dinner will be served to guests (table service) at 7.30pm. Volunteers are encouraged to sit and eat with guests.

After dinner, there will be a short time for continued chat or socially distanced games, before guests are asked to leave at 9.00pm. This will allow time for our volunteers to ensure all areas are clean and sanitized before leaving the building each evening.

VENUES

The operations team (or one of the other volunteers) will ensure the following information is communicated to all volunteers at their first shift in a Venue:

You must be familiar with the building. In particular you must:

- ❖ Know where the fire exits and fire extinguishers are.
- ❖ Know where the First Aid Box and list of emergency numbers are.
- ❖ Make sure that fire exits are unlocked and not blocked.
- ❖ Make volunteers and guests aware of the venue's Fire Instructions.
- ❖ Know the evacuation procedures in the event of a fire.
- ❖ Make sure any areas where you do not want guests to go are secure.
- ❖ Tell volunteers where guests can and cannot go.
- ❖ Identify a safe area where volunteers can leave their belongings.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Our policy is to provide and maintain, as far as is reasonably practicable, safe and healthy working conditions, equipment and systems of work for both volunteers and guests using the Winter Shelter. We aim to provide such information, training and supervision as is needed for this purpose, adhering to strict Covid guidance.

Objectives

- ❖ To provide a working environment that is healthy and safe, with satisfactory amenities.
- ❖ To ensure Health and Safety legislation, regulations and codes of practice are observed.
- ❖ To provide and maintain safe premises and equipment including appropriate protective clothing/PPE.
- ❖ To ensure the use, handling, storage and transportation of food, equipment, articles and substances are safe.
- ❖ To ensure the systems of work are safe and to provide or locate appropriate training and advice for volunteers in these matters
- ❖ To promote effective communication between the Shelter Trustees, Operations Team, Church/Venue Coordinators, Volunteers and guests on safety matters in each church
- ❖ To ensure all volunteers and guests using the premises are safe and not risking their health.
- ❖ Clean up any spillage immediately.

FIRE INSTRUCTIONS

Volunteers need to be aware of the fire instructions for the venues at which they are volunteering. They must familiarise themselves with the procedure in case of fire. All venues must have fire instructions clearly displayed on the wall.

MANUAL HANDLING

There are some basic principles that each volunteer should observe prior to carrying out a manual handling operation:

- ❖ ensure that the object is light enough to lift, is stable and unlikely to shift or move
- ❖ heavy or awkward loads should be moved using a handling aid
- ❖ make sure the route is clear of obstructions
- ❖ make sure there is somewhere to put the load down wherever it is to be moved to
- ❖ stand as close to the load as possible, and spread your feet to shoulder width
- ❖ bend your knees and try to keep the back's natural, upright posture
- ❖ grasp the load firmly, as close to the body as you can
- ❖ use your legs to lift the load in a smooth motion as this offers more leverage, reducing the strain on your back
- ❖ carry the load close to your body, with elbows tucked in
- ❖ avoid twisting your body as much as possible, by turning your feet to position yourself with the load.

FOOD HYGIENE AND KITCHEN SAFETY

All kitchen volunteers should have an up to date 'Food hygiene certificate', issued within the last 3 years.

However, here are some general points for **all** volunteers to be aware of. Cooks and those storing, preparing and handling any food, including serving, should follow these guidelines or refer to the comprehensive Food Hygiene and Kitchen Safety guide which will be available on request.

Preparation

Food should be thoroughly cooked to a core temperature of at least 75°C and kept at that temperature for at least two minutes. (If you are cooking a casserole, the core temperature should be taken from the centre of a piece of meat.)

Cooling

Cool food before putting in the refrigerator. Food should not stand around for more than ninety minutes, at which time deterioration will begin.

Reheating

The practice of reheating should be avoided. However, if this is unavoidable, the food should be heated until it has reached a core temperature of at least 75°C and held at that temperature for at least two minutes.

Microwaves

If food is being cooked or heated in a microwave oven, be especially careful to ensure that every part of the food is thoroughly heated. Microwaves often heat food unevenly, so you may need to stir and move the food around to ensure temperature consistency. Further, it is important to allow at least 2 minutes after removal from the microwave before eating.

Serving

Hot food must be served at a temperature of at least 63°C.

(Information from 'The Food Safety Handbook' by Graham Aston)

ALLERGY GUIDELINES

As a charity, MCWS does not have to provide information for guests, volunteers and staff about allergens present in the food as ingredients. However, the Food Standards Agency recommends charity operations consider the risks of allergens in the food they are preparing and inform those who will be consuming the food of any potential allergens within the food being prepared. Details of allergens can be found on the Food Standards Agency website <http://www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/allergy-guide>

PROCEDURES FOR PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE

Although MCWS does not expect violent incidences, it is important to recognise that actual or potential violence may be a problem whilst working with homeless guests.

The following guidelines were issued by the London Rough Sleepers Unit. They are used by both Shelter & Crisis and are intended to offer direction on the most effective ways of preventing violent behaviour and protecting from its consequences.

The Health and Safety Statement included in this booklet acknowledges the responsibility to provide direction and support to volunteers; in addition, all volunteers have an individual responsibility never to put themselves, their colleagues, guests or members of the public at risk. These procedures should be viewed within the context of that shared responsibility.

Although these guidelines focus on the extreme end of violent behaviour, this does not mean to imply that only physical assault is of concern. Threats and verbal abuse, for example, are also recognised for their intimidating and undermining impact and, where appropriate, these guidelines should apply to all forms of aggressive behaviour.

General guidelines for managing violence and aggression

It is natural to be frightened of violence, and this needs to be taken into account in the expectations of oneself or others when dealing with actual or potential violence or threatening behaviour.

In responding to violence or potential violence, one's own safety and that of colleagues and the client group must be seen as the first consideration.

Guidelines can never cover every eventuality. Volunteers must also draw on their experience, skills and common sense when faced with aggressive situations.

All volunteers should co-operate in taking a consistent approach to confronting guests about unacceptable behaviour and supporting the decision, by the Operations Team, in banning or excluding guests from the building. As far as possible, one volunteer should not be identified as the instigator of a ban – these should be presented as team decisions, and all volunteers must actively support the decision even if they have a different opinion.

Managing a violent incident

Should an incident occur, it is the responsibility of all volunteers to alert colleagues at the first sign of aggression and to act co-operatively to diffuse the situation.

One or two volunteers should talk to the individual(s) concerned, remaining calm but firm, and trying to create opportunities for the guest(s) to back down without feeling humiliated. Where possible, the guest(s) should be taken aside.

Other volunteers should remain at a reasonable distance but pay attention in case the situation escalates. Volunteers who are not directly involved with the main protagonists should attempt to keep other guests calm, and prevent them from becoming involved unless they are friends who can assist positively.

In particular, one volunteer should ensure that any vulnerable person is removed from the area and if possible, potential weapons such as plates or cutlery should be removed from the area as quickly and quietly as possible.

Space should be created to ensure that people are not crowded into a confined area. All those present should be mindful of their own and others' 'safety escape routes' in case it should be necessary to get out of the way fast.

The Project Manager or Project Worker should be in a position to telephone for police assistance should this become necessary.

If an incident escalates and the guest(s) cannot be calmed, then volunteers should be prepared to vacate the area. Personal safety must be put before the protection of property. The police should be summoned immediately.

In exceptional circumstances, if retreat is not possible, volunteers should take appropriate measures to defend themselves. In the unlikely event of an attack, only use force sufficient to stop the attacker and prevent injury to self, colleagues or other guests. Reasonable restraint is acceptable.

After an incident has occurred

If an incident does occur, it is likely to be very unsettling for everyone involved in the Shelter whether volunteer or guest. Some things that can be done include:

- ❖ Providing First Aid where necessary.
- ❖ Providing reassurance and help everyone to calm down.
- ❖ Recording details of the incident. This should be done by a member of the Operations team or a nominated volunteer.
- ❖ Arranging for any volunteer that has been scared or hurt to leave the shift, accompanied if appropriate.
- ❖ Arranging longer term support if and when necessary.
- ❖ Discussing the incident and trying to draw out constructive lessons for avoiding a similar incident in the future.

- ❖ Considering providing other guests with brief details of what happened and how it was dealt with; this is to prevent rumours and provide reassurance that incidents are dealt with effectively.

Personal Safety

In order to promote safety in the Shelter, always remember to observe these rules:

- ❖ Check the identity of each guest arriving at the door by asking for their name.
- ❖ Never give your home telephone number or home address to a guest, or invite a guest into your home.
- ❖ Make sure you are never alone with a guest.
- ❖ Leave your valuables at home, or, if necessary, in the nominated safe place at the venue
- ❖ Do not give money to guests – if you are concerned about their situation, refer them to the Operations Team
- ❖ Do not touch any guest, even to wake them up.
- ❖ When dealing with lost property, never put your hand into a bag or pocket. Tip contents onto a flat surface so you can see what you are handling.
- ❖ Volunteers should act safely and not put themselves or other volunteers or guests in any danger. If you feel intimidated at any time during the shift, inform the Operations Team. Please take directions from them at all times, especially with regard to matters of personal safety.
- ❖ Do not offer guests any medication.

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL INFORMATION / PROCEDURES

The following general guidelines are adapted from those used by Crisis at Christmas winter shelters.

Drugs or alcohol must not be used/consumed on the premises by any guest or volunteer:

- ❖ Drinking alcohol whilst on shift is not allowed.
- ❖ Volunteers should not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs when coming on shift.
- ❖ Guests will not be admitted if inebriated or under the influence of drugs

Action to be taken if policy is breached:

If guests are found drinking on the premises or if they are found to be drunk having gained entry to the Shelter, they will be asked to leave the venue. This can be done that evening by a member of the Operations Team or a nominated volunteer.

- ❖ If guests are found taking drugs on the premises they will be asked to leave the venue.
- ❖ Anyone found dealing drugs will be asked to leave the venue.
- ❖ Volunteers who suspect that someone is violating these policies must inform the Operations Team. Volunteers should not police a night Shelter but they should not be negligent either.
- ❖ Any bans will be enforced by the Project Manager
- ❖ MCWS reserves the right to offer 'one chance' but this is completely at the discretion of the Project Manager, in consultation with the Project worker/Volunteers who were present at the time of any incident.

Communication

- ❖ Guests will be advised of this policy on entering the Shelter, when they sign the Guest Agreement.
- ❖ If anyone is excluded from a venue as a result of breaching the policy, it may be extended to all Venues.