

ANNUAL REPORT

2024



maidstoneshelter.org.uk

Registered Charity No: 1156735



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INTRODUCTION

IN THE BEGINNING – THE NEED

In 2013, a team of church leaders in Maidstone recognised a need in our town. They and countless others were meeting many people in need of help and in need of a home. That need still exists today.

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

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS & WHY DO PEOPLE BECOME HOMELESS?

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

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

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

Often, one bad situation leads to another until things spiral out of control, causing a person to become homeless. The circumstances surrounding each situation are often complex and each homeless individual requires support beyond simply providing for their immediate material needs.

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

Fact: The average age of death for people experiencing homelessness is 46 for men and 42 for women. [Crisis]

MOVING FORWARD – OUR RESPONSE

Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter first opened its doors in December 2013, offering food, friendship, shelter and support over the coldest 3 months of each winter. Since then, thousands of lives have been changed; not just the lives of our guests but also those of our volunteers and staff.

At our shelters we not only meet the immediate needs of those who are homeless by offering a bed and a meal, but we also offer true hospitality and care to those in crisis.

Our church venues willingly open their doors as shelters and we have teams of volunteers who provide a warm welcome, hot meals and, where required, a bed for the night for our guests.

Our Project staff team members spend time with each guest to ascertain their current situation and to plan the next steps. In many cases, and by working closely with other services, our guests are given the support they need to help them move forward. This is sometimes a slow process though, not an overnight fix.

Every guest's situation is unique, so the pathway out of homelessness or financial difficulty looks different for each person. Each guest who comes through our doors is given one-to-one support if required and, where relevant, signposted to work with our partners to find accommodation and take steps forward to improve their situation.

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

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

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

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

None of our work could have been achieved without the dedication of our volunteers and the financial support from our funders and donors, who make this all possible. We are truly grateful to everyone who has helped make our vision a reality over the last 11 winters.

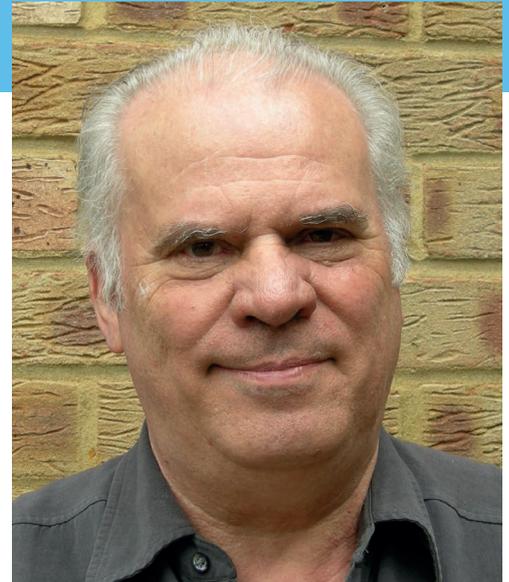
We love because he first loved us
1 John 4:19

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.

As I write this, it is the last week of the 11th year of the Shelter and approaching Easter. This is the first time in eleven years that the shelter has gone across the Easter weekend. We shall finish on the Tuesday morning after Easter Monday. If you have followed our story, you will know that this is the first time since Covid that we have again used church premises (along with Maidstone Day Centre) to provide the overnight accommodation. This was decided at our strategy meeting last year as there is very little suitable accommodation in the town. We again thank the churches and the Day Centre for their willingness to assist. Providing overnight accommodation again has not been without its problems especially after the 'Covid gap.' We have had to adjust to alleviate Covid risk in terms of how many people we can accommodate. Because of both the loss of many of our previous overnight volunteers and to further increase security, this year we provided paid Project workers to supervise overnight.

If you watch the news you will have noted that the number of homeless people is not reducing in accordance with the UK government targets but is increasing dramatically. We have seen this locally as well. 'No fault evictions' which the government



promised to legislate on (but have not yet got around to) have featured in the stories of some of our guests. Whereas when we started our guests tended to be older men with many from other countries, guests are now often of mixed age and gender and mostly from the UK. Unlike before, these are often people with paid employment but insufficient income to meet the bills.

The weather has been mild but very wet and this is not good news if you are on the street! We have again provided a warm dry space every afternoon.

In regard to Trustees, as none of us get any younger we have now added two to our number and you can see their details in the Trustee section.

It has not been an easy year and we shall reflect on what we have done in our upcoming Strategy meeting to decide how we proceed for winter 2024/25. A very big Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this year.

GORDON MACKLEY

OUR TRUSTEES



MARTIN HINCHLIFFE

Martin has a strong desire to help others less fortunate than himself. He is saddened by regularly seeing the homeless on the streets of Maidstone, London and other cities and attempts to play his part in supporting and reducing the number of street homeless. He has previously volunteered for Crisis at Christmas in London and has volunteered for eleven years with MCWS. He has been a Trustee of the charity for 8 years. He has experience in managing operations and safety management following a career in engineering and is the lead Trustee for shelter operations.



WENDY FOSTER

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



REVEREND JOHN TAPPER

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



ZOFIA GRZYMALA

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



GWYN MCPHERSON

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

Gwyn has also been a Project Worker at Maidstone Homeless Care since September 2022. In addition to this, she is an authorised lay minister in a Church of England church in Maidstone and has served as a Street Pastor in the town since 2011.



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 and runs a B&B with his wife.

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.



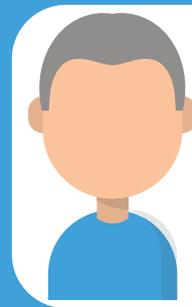
CHRIS HUTCHINSON

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

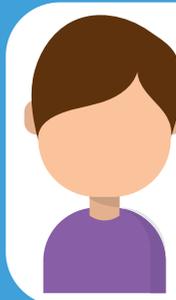
However, not standing still, he has been a volunteer at the shelter since its second year as well as volunteering both at home and abroad for other charities.

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

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



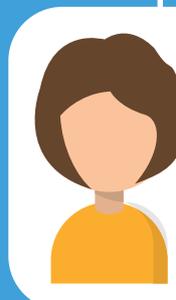
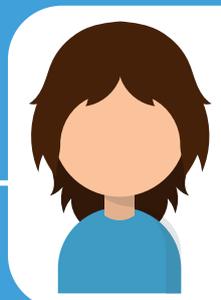
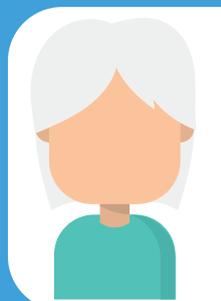
**OPERATIONS/
VOLUNTEERS**
MARTIN HINCHLIFFE



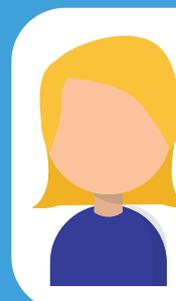
**PARTNERSHIP
SUPPORT**
ZOFIA GRZYMALA



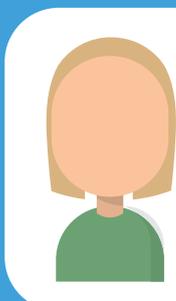
TREASURER
JOHN TAPPER



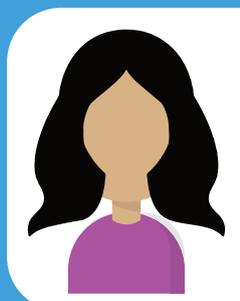
ADMINISTRATOR
MANDY FULLER



**PROJECT
WORKER**
HOLLIE NEAL



**PROJECT
WORKER**
JAN CROUCHER



**CHAIR OF
TRUSTEES
GORDON MACKLEY**



**HOMELESS
SUPPORT
GWYN MCPHERSON**



**NEW TRUSTEE
CHRIS HUTCHINSON**

**HUMAN
RESOURCES
WENDY FOSTER**



**FINANCE/
FUNDING
RICHARD WILLIAMS**

**PROJECT
MANAGER
CLAIRE KEHILY**

**ASSISTANT
PROJECT
MANAGER
MIKE LOUTH**

**PROJECT
WORKER
PRIYA JETHWA**



**OVERNIGHT
PROJECT
WORKER
DARREN ELLIS**



**OVERNIGHT
PROJECT
WORKER
ALAN TOMPSETT**

PROJECT MANAGER'S MESSAGE



This was Claire's second year as Project Manager, having previously been involved in the Shelter for the last 7 years as a Volunteer, Project Worker and as Assistant Manager.

Claire has been involved in supporting and volunteering with Homeless charities and events for the last 11 years, previously organised the Rucksack Project in Maidstone as well as working in Health and Social Care locally for over 20 years. She is now a Wedding and Funeral Celebrant.

I was delighted to be invited back by the Trustees as Project Manager for another year. Like so many of the volunteers and staff, it has become a huge part of my life over the last 7 years and something I look forward to after a break over the summer. This year has proved to be another exciting challenge and reaffirming experience for not just me, but everyone involved.

Along with the Trustees, this year we made the decision to return to overnight accommodation in the churches. Whilst some current thinking is that it is outmoded, we chose to do this to be able to extend the offer of accommodation to more people who genuinely needed it and to deliver an improved model with the addition of our overnight project workers for increased safety and support. It was a decision well made!

The staff team this year has once more been amazing. I was joined again by Mike our Assistant Project Manager, and our team of Project Workers Hollie, who returned from last year, alongside Jan and Priya as well as our overnight Project Workers Alan and Darren, and of course our legendary Admin Mandy, who works so hard behind the scenes to help ensure everything runs smoothly. What a team they have been - the calibre of the service delivered was outstanding, with all the staff genuinely going above and beyond to provide support for our guests during some of the most difficult moments of their lives and to enable and empower them to overcome barriers and obstacles to move forward with their lives, as you will see from the guest comments further on.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without our wonderful army of volunteers and cooks, who give up their precious time, energy and patience to ensure that the Shelter happens each year. Whether that is preparing and cooking the fabulous meals that we are famous for, washing up a mountain of plates and cutlery, setting up sometimes temperamental beds, making endless cups of tea or sandwiches, preparing yet another pot noodle, listening to someone at 2am when the rest of us are asleep, or getting up at the crack of dawn to help pack up in the morning and ease people into the day. The whole team and more importantly all of our guests, truly appreciate all their dedication and kindness.

We were also extremely fortunate to have the Don Doel Soup Run on board again for the fourth year running, with Mary and her volunteers joining us at registration, preparing soup and sandwiches for the guests every Sunday, as well as providing food parcels and vital supplies. Working together, combining our knowledge and experience, we were able to reach even more people who were experiencing homelessness or were at risk of it.

The shelter is not just about accommodation and food, it is about holding people safely with kindness and compassion; when they are often at their lowest ebb, helping them traverse that part of their journey, enabling them to see a way through it and beyond it, or sometimes just keeping them safe, or even alive. The guest's stories are often heartbreaking, their situation unfair and sometimes almost unbelievable, but sadly true.

Whilst we don't possess magic wands to make all of their problems disappear, we are able to lighten their load by providing warmth, humour and joy in no small quantity. This year's shelter has once again been characterised by community and laughter, with many nights spent sat together with a mug of tea, playing games, relaying funny stories and anecdotes, putting the world to rights or just reminiscing, as well as long conversations with good company, including His Grace, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby when he visited us in Holy Week and had many interesting chats with Guests, Volunteers and Staff alike.

As I look back over this year's shelter, it is with a mixture of emotions, it is partly with disbelief and anger that so many people slip through the net and still require our help and support in today's society, and sadness that so many people are living in such conditions or are merely just existing. However, I take great comfort and reassurance in knowing that so many people want to do something to alleviate the suffering of others, that there are so many people, people of all faiths and those of none, who gladly work and volunteer together, determined to extend the hand of friendship, community and support to those in our society who need it the most.

What a thing we are part of, what a wonderful and joyous thing, a celebration of all that is good about the human race and something that I am proud and immensely grateful to be a part of.



HOW THE SHELTER HAS EVOLVED

Since Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter (MCWS) first opened its doors in December 2013 we have adapted and changed the way that we work and offer support, in accordance with learned experience and life circumstances, as follows:

WINTER 2013-14 UP TO AND INCLUDING WINTER 2019-20

During these first years of operation, our shelters were hosted by 7 different churches on a 'rolling night shelter' basis, meaning the load was shared between church venues and teams, with each church offering their premises for one night per week. From these premises we offered our guests a hot evening meal, a listening ear/support from our staff and volunteers, a bed for the night (dormitory style in the church hall) and breakfast the following morning.

During the first winter (2013-14) we opened with 10 bed spaces for a period of 8 weeks, but this was increased to 15 bed spaces for 12-13 weeks from year 2, covering the coldest 3 months of the winter.

We also used an additional church building for the purpose of registering our guests each afternoon. At these sessions we provided hot drinks, snacks and a time to just 'chill' in a warm, comfortable setting. Our Project Team took the opportunity at these sessions to chat with the guests and encourage them to engage with Maidstone Borough Council, the Day Centre and other services, to obtain support and advice on benefits/jobs and housing in order to help get them off the streets for good.

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

WINTER 2020-21

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

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

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

During this challenging period, we also offered hot meals to individuals and families in need, distributing them via the local food bank at The Salvation Army. The pandemic meant that many people were struggling to make ends meet, with the unenviable decision of whether to pay rent and bills or put food on the table, so the meals we distributed via the food banks hopefully helped to ease this burden in some small way.

WINTER 2021-22

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

However, there were ongoing problems with the lease on our chosen rental property, so we placed our overnight guests in a local hotel whilst it was being sorted out.

By the time the rented property became available for our use, we only had 5 weeks left to run and both the time and costs involved in opening the property for the last few weeks were considered unviable by our trustees. We therefore continued to accommodate our guests at a local hotel for the duration of the shelter.

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

WINTER 2022-23

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

We also accommodated a small number of people in a local hotel. Although Maidstone Borough Council continued to do a great job at supporting homeless people, the number of properties and hotel rooms available to them were often in short supply, so we accommodated people they were unable to support, especially at short notice. Our overnight provision was restricted though, due to the limited number of hotel rooms available to us and the considerable cost with this provision.

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

WINTER 2023-24

In order to extend our provision and support a greater number of overnight guests than the previous couple of winters, we offered dormitory style overnight accommodation in church halls this winter, in a similar manner to our offer pre-Covid. This meant we could accommodate up to 10 overnight guests per night.

We also continued to hold daily afternoon registration sessions and to offer hot meals and support each evening. Please refer to the statistics on page 22 for full details of our guest numbers this winter.

7-7.30AM

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.

9.00PM

The evening volunteers and dinner guests leave and the overnight guests then start to settle down for the night.

Our overnight project worker and volunteer(s) 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. The guests have the opportunity to chat with our volunteers, which they generally welcome. We also have a hairdresser and a nail technician once a fortnight, plus we offer the opportunity for guests and volunteers to socialise, watching TV/films and playing board games together. The staff and volunteers clean and tidy the dinner areas.

How do shelter

6.45PM

Guests start to arrive. They are greeted by a member of our Project Team and asked to sign in. They are offered a hot drink and a biscuit whilst they are waiting for the evening meal to be served.

*Does the
work?*

3.00PM

Staff and a volunteer arrive at our registration venue, set up the area and make sandwiches & drinks in preparation for the guests to arrive.

3.30PM

Guests are welcome to attend our registration session between 3.30 – 5.30pm each afternoon. They are offered hot drinks, sandwiches and snacks, plus the opportunity to chat and seek support/signposting, according to their own individual needs.

5.30PM

Registration ends and the guests leave. Staff/Volunteers tidy up the venue in time to move to our evening venue.

6.00PM

Our staff and kitchen volunteers arrive at the evening venue to check all is safe and to prepare and cook the evening meal.

6.30PM

Our evening volunteers arrive and set up beds, tables and chairs prior to guests arriving.

OUR AIMS AND HOW THEY WERE FULFILLED

Since MCWS first began, we have met many new guests each year, all of whom have had their own stories to tell and challenges to overcome. Over the years we have learned how to better support these guests, according to their individual needs.

We have also met many willing volunteers, some of whom have been with us from the outset, whilst many others have joined our teams and yet others have left for a variety of reasons.

Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter was planned on the foundation of four aims and, despite changes to our provision over the years, these aims have unwaveringly remained the same. During winter 2024 our aims were fulfilled as follows:

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.

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

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

Hospitality was offered at both our afternoon registration sessions and the evening meal sessions, both held in warm and comfortable church venues.

At our registration sessions, guests were offered hot drinks, sandwiches and snacks, plus the opportunity for a chat and additional support. They were also able to book a bed for the night in our church halls, if needed.

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

Following the evening meal, guests and volunteers shared together in board games or watching films together, before the volunteers left and our overnight guests started to settle down for the evening, still in the comfort of a warm and safe church hall. We had overnight guests every night over the 3-month period.

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

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

Our dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers (both secular and non-secular) worked together in friendly teams to extend a warm welcome to our guests, ensuring they were fed, comfortable and felt valued. Supportive relationships began to form as guests got to know each other and our volunteers, and they all found it a mutually rich and rewarding experience.

Projects like ours are known for their strong sense of community and the shelter is no exception. Friendships often continue beyond the period of the shelter, helping to reduce the pain of isolation so frequently felt by homeless and hungry people.

Loneliness is a significant affliction for many people who are homeless or struggling. Mother Teresa once said “Of all the diseases I have known, loneliness is the worst.”

Within carefully set boundaries, MCWS brought strong, stable volunteers into friendly contact with vulnerable guests and we are incredibly grateful for the time and commitment they each brought to their roles.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We also worked closely with Maidstone Day Centre, who provided weekday breakfasts and additional support for our guests, such as showering and laundry facilities, information on health and housing, applying for the right benefits etc.

*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and
judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.
Proverbs 31:8-9*



GUEST STORIES: CONSTANTIN

I've lived in the UK for the last five years, having emigrated from Spain where I lived for seven years. Prior to that I grew up in Romania.

I found the Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter because my ex-girlfriend, who I was living together with, left me in the streets. I had tried to help her with her mental health for a long time, but it reached a point where there was nothing more I could do.

Being at the shelter I've managed to save money to go to Spain to live there with my family, as I have a younger sister I have not seen in years, and to recover from surgery that I need.

In England I work at a factory doing picking, packing and cleaning, and have continued to work there while being homeless.

During my time at the shelter I have felt happier, as I have had a good experience over these two months. I want one day to have enough money to help the shelter in return, and visit everyone. I have found the best people here, people with sweet hearts who I feel towards the same as family, and I am so sad to leave them.

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

I am so happy that I found a place with lovely people, it was a beautiful surprise. The food is wonderful and it's exciting to see different venues each night to sleep in.



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

I did not need permanent accommodation, as I would be able to go to my family in Spain at the beginning of April, but when I first came to the shelter many people offered to help me. [However], I said thank you, but it's better to help someone else.

I'm sorry to leave this beautiful family, I'm leaving behind my dear friends and it won't be easy for me to say goodbye. I'm left with pleasant memories that I won't forget for the rest of my life! All the time I have lived here I have learned more from life: to cherish my dear family and friends who are what we need all the time. Material things, one day we will lose them. The world around us can change a lot. Along these lines I can hardly refrain from crying, but I have to say goodbye to everyone. One day I will come back [to the UK] and we will see each other again.

With love, esteem and respect. Costa.

GUEST STORIES: NICK

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

I was in a flat, but I became very ill and died on the operating table for 3 minutes. [Because of this] I got behind on rent. I told the landlord who said OK, but then he told me to leave.

I have worked for years in the village: Church warden, St John Ambulance, Youth clubs, Part-time Police officer. I was in the Scouts for 35 years and also in a church drama group doing plays around Kent.

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

Claire [Project Manager] helped find information on what I needed to do and gave me the help to do it. She is a really nice young lady, always helpful.



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

Yes, they did help and phoned people up to get my Universal Credit sorted out.

Nick also said:

All the staff here are very wonderful. They help with clothes and, whatever you need, they will do their very best to get it. I thank them all from the bottom of my heart. Very nice staff and understanding, made me feel very welcome. I do not know what I would have done without being able to be here. Words are not big enough to say. This is the best thing I have come to.

GUEST STORIES: ADAM

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

I was living in Tonbridge until 14/1/24. I had to seek shelter in my dad's allotment shed for about a week. I became homeless due to a disagreement with my previous flatmate. After a week of being stubborn and not asking for help, I contacted my probation officer. The next day he told me about MCWS. I contacted Claire and registered the same day and had a safe, clean and caring place to stay. Now, 2 ½ months on, I have my own place thanks to the support, advice and motivation from every member of staff/volunteer.

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

MCWS have helped me in so many ways. I have met some great people, made new friends and become part of the 2024 family. I've never received support and help the way the shelter has offered. I hope to volunteer myself next year, to help others and stay in contact with as many as possible from 2024.



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

Yes, there was continuous help with all aspects of my needs and requirements.

Adam also said:

I would like to take this chance to thank you all for everything you all have done for me. All have been amazing, even when I'm annoying. I honestly wouldn't be where I am now without you all. Thank you all for getting me through the tough days but putting up with me being on a wind up. Each and every one of you are amazing. Thank you for your time, help and friendship :)

GUEST FOLLOW UP: ALAN

Alan became one of our guests in winter 2023 after experiencing a personal tragedy, being made redundant, losing his home, then sofa surfing and sleeping rough for a few years

MY STORY – A YEAR ON

It all started with the death of my 13-year-old daughter Abbey that led to the breakdown of my marriage, sent me into a spiral and then to compound the problem I was made redundant from a job I had been doing for 10 years. Despite keep applying for jobs none were successful so I ended up running out of money and having my house repossessed. I ended up at first sleeping in a tent at different places and then a squat with other homeless like me, then to a disused garage.

My turning point was finding The Maidstone Winter Shelter in February last year, that helped by sign posting me to the MBC outreach team and the DWP so I could make a claim for Universal Credits, and also from them sending referrals to different agencies to help me find accommodation which happened just after the shelter closed. I was given temporary accommodation in a shared house with another man. Just after this I started volunteering at the Maidstone Day Centre making up food parcels and collecting from the donation points in the supermarkets and I saw this as giving back in a small way for the help I had received from them.



In July I was offered permanent accommodation with Cutbush & Corrall. On the 19th July I picked my keys up and moved in to my own flat, and in October I had the honour of meeting HRH Princess Anne with her looking around my flat and the new flats.

At the end of the year, I was told about a position for an overnight project worker with the Winter Shelter and applied straight away. I was overjoyed to be offered the job as again in a small way I was able to give back for all the help I had received from them, plus I could share my experience to help the people that used the shelter this year and also support them in any way I could. I enjoyed it a lot.

When the shelter finished this year, I was lucky enough to be offered a job I applied for at the day centre, as a support worker at Goodsell House which is their supported accommodation, and again I am enjoying the challenge.

So, as you can see, within a year and the help from a small but wonderful team of people I have come full circle.

IMPACT OVER THE YEARS

	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	2023 - 2024
	Overnight Support		
NUMBER OF BEDS USED / STREET SLEEPS AVOIDED	Dormitory in church halls: None Hotel rooms/beds: 169	Dormitory in church halls: None Hotel rooms/beds: 346	Dormitory in church halls: 609
NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL OVER-NIGHT GUESTS	7	30 23 Male, 7 Female	47 Male: 39, Female: 8
NUMBER OF PEOPLE ASSESSED FOR OVERNIGHT SUPPORT	10	31	49 Male: 41, Female 8
	Meals and additional support		
EAT-IN HOT MEALS	1193	1765	1401
TAKEAWAY MEALS	371	216	56*
MEALS DELIVERED TO TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION	39	NIL	NIL**
FOOD PARCELS	29	31	NIL***
INDIVIDUALS SEEN FOR MEALS AND SUPPORT	130	132	110
LENGTH OF SHELTER	12 ½ weeks	13 weeks	13 weeks
SHELTER DATES	Opened: 3rd January Closed: 31st March	Opened: 3rd January Closed: 3rd April	Opened: 2nd January Closed: 2nd April
NUMBER OF PAID STAFF	6	6	8

* guests were encouraged to come into the venues for meals, social interaction and support rather than just collecting takeaways, hence the reduction in numbers of takeaways.

** Our meals were offered to people with no home or no cooking facilities this winter, so no meals were delivered to temporary accommodation.

** 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.

GUEST COMMENTS

Each winter we find our guests are very grateful for someone who will just listen to them and to whom they can tell their individual concerns. Talking about problems often makes the issues seem less significant and also means that appropriate help and support can be found. One of our guests shared this comment on our social media page:

I just want to say what an amazing bunch of people you are. I am so grateful I got to spend time in all of your company, you are some of the most wonderful people I have ever had the pleasure to know.

Darren

Also, one of our other guests, Constantin, very kindly bought an orchid for the project staff at the shelter, as a thank you for all their support. Whilst this was unnecessary, it was truly appreciated and brought a tear to a few eyes. Thank you, Costa!



SHELTER ACTIVITIES

After our evening meals, guests and volunteers shared together in some social time. Here are some of the activities:

BOARD GAMES

A selection of board games were enjoyed between guests, volunteers and staff each evening. Much fun was had by all!



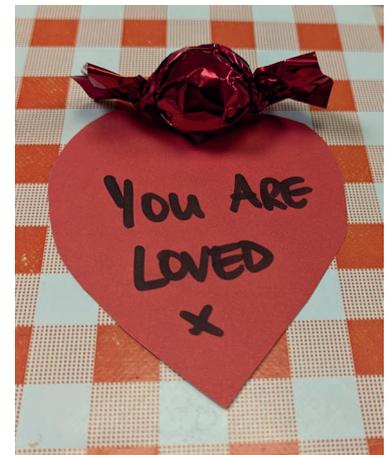
FOOTBALL – MAIDSTONE UNITED FA CUP 6TH ROUND

When Maidstone United football team played Coventry town in the FA cup (6th round), a screen was set up in the church venue as some of our guests were keen to watch the game. Although our local team lost, it was a fun and emotional evening.



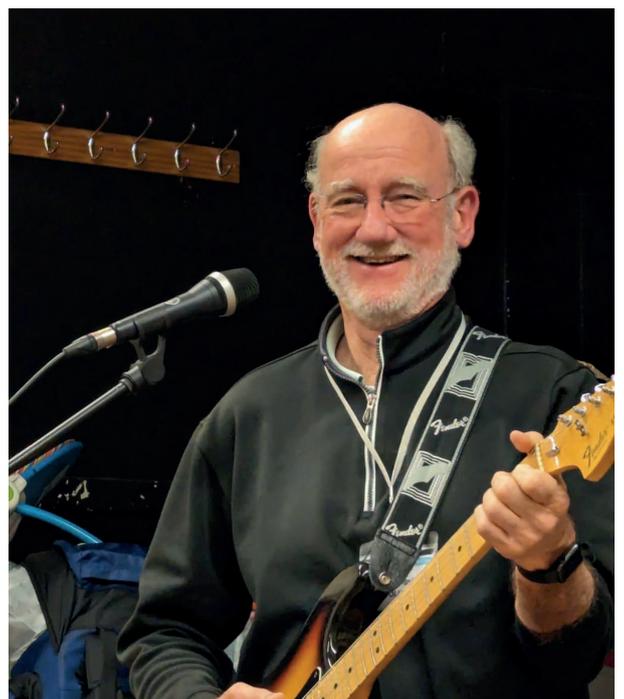
VALENTINES DAY

On Valentine's Day our Project Manager, Claire, bought chocolates and made heart-shaped labels for each guest's place at the dinner table. The heart messages were written in various languages, depending on the nationality of the guest.



SING ALONG WITH NIGEL

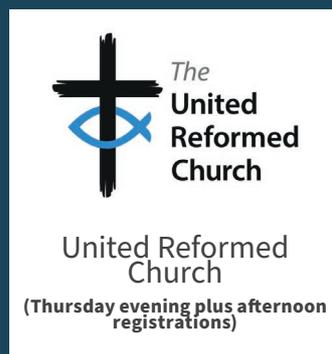
One of our volunteers, Nigel, played music and organised a sing-along for our guests, volunteers and staff. Everyone enjoyed being a part of this special musical session.



OUR VENUES

Our church venues vary in building size and facilities, but all adapt well to the Shelter's needs. We are always incredibly grateful for the support offered in this manner and for the trust that church leaders place in us to use their buildings effectively and safely. We are also grateful to the trustees of Maidstone Day Centre for allowing us the use of their venue for one evening per week.

During winter 2024 we used 4 of our local church venues, plus Maidstone Day Centre, as follows:



From these venues we offered hot meals which were prepared and served by our volunteers. Staff and volunteers ate their meals alongside our guests, in a similar manner to a family meal. This gave our guests the opportunity for some 'normal' conversation and a chance to talk about any concerns they might have, leading to the offer of additional support if needed.

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

Each year we are incredibly grateful for the support from our local churches and we would like to extend a huge thank you to each of the above venues for their willingness to open their doors and support the shelter for yet another year.

Thank you all!

OUR VOLUNTEERS

The Trustees of MCWS would like to offer their sincere thanks to each of our volunteers for their contribution and commitment over the winter period.

Volunteering has always been a core value at Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter and words cannot begin to express how grateful we are for the dedication, care and kind-heartedness of our volunteers. Our successes each year would not be possible without their support. We recognise that our volunteers are at the heart of our work and we truly appreciate the fact that they freely donate their time to show love and kindness to people in need in our town. Many of our volunteers return year after year, bringing experience and support for some of our newer team members.

Last winter, 131 volunteers registered to help in our venues over the 3 months that the shelter was open, and they all made a huge difference to the lives of our guests. We want to say a big thank you to every single one of them. We could not successfully undertake our work without the support of our volunteers and they each bring their own uniqueness and energy for the benefit and success of the Shelter.

Our volunteers once again worked together in teams to ensure that the shelter ran smoothly. The tasks covered included serving drinks and snacks at our afternoon sessions, cooking hot evening meals, setting up both the dining and sleeping areas in our church venues, welcoming guests and serving/sharing meals with them, listening to and chatting with our guests, providing overnight cover and support alongside our overnight project workers, preparing weekend breakfasts – and clearing up each of the venues before we left each day. All of these jobs were essential to the smooth running of the shelter and could not have been achieved without the support, communication skills and teamwork of our volunteers.

We also had a few volunteers who offered their time to provide additional support, such as hairdressing, sewing/mending & manicures/pedicures. Many of our guests truly appreciated these services.

VOLUNTEERS 'END OF SHELTER TEA'

At the end of each shelter season, our volunteers are invited to an afternoon tea as a thank you for their support over the winter. These events are usually well attended and are a great opportunity for all volunteers, staff and trustees to meet together.

Volunteers from all our venues are invited to attend, giving them the opportunity to socialise with the team members they have worked with but also to meet volunteers from other venues, often for the very first time.



VOLUNTEER COMMENTS

I absolutely loved working at the shelter. The visitors were all polite and welcoming. It gave me a lesson in empathy and changed my outlook as I was unsure what to expect at first. I would like to do it again next year.

AMANDA

My third year of volunteering and once again a great experience. Met some wonderful guests and really appreciate the effort that goes in to put this together. Thank you for the opportunity to help out.

STUART

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank MCWS for allowing me the privilege to volunteer once again. Although the experience can be very humbling at times it can also be a barrel of fun and laughter! I have never classed this as work, although that's how my friends refer to it; for me it's just spending time with incredible individuals that I have developed some endearing relationships with. If I can just put a smile on one person's face then my job for the day is done. I hope that the shelter will continue to provide this invaluable service for as long as the need exists and that I will be able to carry on to play my small part.

NICKY

I really enjoy my volunteering shifts.

If I were prime minister I would get EVERYONE to do a night in a homeless shelter. You learn so much - even at my age.

MARGARET

I have thoroughly enjoyed helping on Wednesday afternoons, making tea, coffee, sandwiches and Pot Noodles (so many Pot Noodles in particular!) for the guests, who have really appreciated being in a relaxed, comfortable environment.

Typically, the guests have been really gracious to the volunteers, and very grateful for our efforts. It's been a pleasure to spend time with them. When a guest gets some good news - of being housed for instance - it is a joy to share in their excitement.

LAUREL

I am so grateful to have been given the opportunity to volunteer with the Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter this year. I was welcomed into a unique community - where volunteers and guests join together under one roof. It has been a real pleasure to get to know staff, guests and volunteers- to be able to take the time to listen to their stories and make them feel seen and listened to. This has been a hard winter for so many people in so many ways and knowing that every person in Maidstone has the option of a safe, warm place to spend the night has made me able to rest easier. Thank you MCWS!

LAURA

I would say to anyone who is thinking of volunteering to 'go for it!' I was a little nervous on my first session as I kept thinking or saying 'what happens next? What do we do now?' But the staff and other volunteers are so friendly and helpful that I soon got stuck in! The clients are so appreciative of our services and I soon got to know them and chatted. I know that it made me more aware of how lucky I am in life and that I take things for granted i.e. roof over my head, warmth, clothes and food on the table. I really enjoy my volunteering sessions.

ROS

Firstly, I would like to say how much I have enjoyed this year, 6-9pm shift.

Playing games and seeing the guests laugh has been the best. Chatting and getting to know them, listening to them and generally just giving them some time.

Some guests were very shy at the start and seeing them come out of themselves and join in with the games has been great. Each week we've had more and more join the games table! Corks (game) is definitely a big hit amongst guests and volunteers.

Also watching the [Maidstone United] match on the big screen was brilliant, couldn't have been possible without the guests bringing their equipment and setting it up for everyone!

Looking forward to next year!
REBECCA

This is the first year I have volunteered for the evening session rather than the overnight session and I have absolutely loved the interaction with the guests (and Peter the volunteer). I have sat and talked to people feeling sad, lost and troubled, I have seen those same people watch the football and laugh, or just enjoyed some friendly banter over dinner and seen them smile after walking in at rock bottom. For me the highlights have been how a simple game of dobble, or even more popular "corks" has managed to integrate people and get so many laughs. Guests who sat on the edge not brave enough to speak at first now join in with games, make jokes and most rewarding leave with a smile on their face. And the jokes I have received over the awful coffee I make on a weekly basis are priceless. If I could sum it up in a few words it would be "rewarding, humbling and fun" and I am going to miss it until next year.

HANNAH

Volunteering at the Maidstone Churches Winter Shelter is always a rewarding and eye-opening experience. Being an ear to listen to those facing challenging circumstances, reminds me of the importance of compassion in today's society. Grateful for the opportunity to contribute to something that truly does make a difference.

JODIE

This is my second year of volunteering at the shelter and it has been just as rewarding. I really enjoy my time chatting to our guests and sharing a meal with them, hearing how their week has been and having a general catch up. I also enjoy working with the other volunteers and MCWS team of project workers. If you are thinking of volunteering, this a local, worthwhile and rewarding way to spend your free time.

SALLY

This is my fourth year of volunteering and each year gets better. The care and devotion of everyone involved in the winter shelters shines, the team leaders are always there for support and kindness for every single guest.

My Wednesdays are full of laughter, conversation and meeting interesting people, guests and volunteers alike.

It gives me the opportunity to give my time to benefit others, to help them deal with their situations, to listen to them and to make sure they have a good warm healthy meal. Everyone is so grateful for the safe warm space.

I will miss my Wednesday evenings. It fills me with joy to be with our guests and volunteers at the Day Centre [venue]. One of the nicest evenings of my week.

Thank you to MCWS for giving me the opportunity to help and support people who may be experiencing tough, difficult and challenging times. Never stop doing what you're doing.

CLARE

Now I have come to the end of my first time volunteering I am able to reflect on my experience and compare it to my expectations when I first decided I wanted to offer my time and support.

What a pleasure it has been to be a very small part of a network of paid and volunteer workers for the past three months.

Our guests have been consistent and I know very grateful for the chance to come in from the cold, eat a hot meal and spend time in the company of other guests.

The guests are respectful of their peers and sympathetic to each other. They all know each other and my overarching memories will be how heart warming it was to see them interacting and looking out for each other.

Some of the guest's stories are heart wrenching, caught in a cycle of knowing no different path to follow, but some equally happy with their lot. How lovely to hear laughter when we played games and the joy of them choosing some new outfits from the donations of clothes and toiletries.

Some were more confident, others quietly accepting and some grateful for a clean bed indoors.

Listening to a lot of guest's health needs was something I had not really thought of. The difficulty in accessing a dentist for instance. I also know they are very grateful for the day centre.

Many of my fellow volunteers had come back year after year and I can see why now. Not to just feel good but to really see what a difference the shelters have to those most vulnerable in our communities. The staff who cover both the day centre and the shelters have an amazing knowledge of each person that attends, the right level of empathy and are also respected by the guests.

Thank you for the opportunity and I look forward to signing up again next year.

TRACEY

OUR COOKS

We are always incredibly grateful for the care and thought that goes into providing healthy and filling meals for our guests and winter 2023-24 was no exception, with all our kitchen teams achieving a 5-star rating with Environmental Health.

A huge thank you goes to our volunteer cooks who provided meals throughout the winter. Our evening meals were mainly cooked on site by our volunteers, although a couple of other volunteers prepared puddings at home and delivered them ready to be served. Our guests were incredibly appreciative of their hot meals every night. Thank you!



“ “ I have loved my Thursday evenings. It is such a great team to work with.
Thanks for having me.
CHARLOTTE ” ”

“ “ Another brilliant year at the winter shelter. We have been lucky enough to have a great bunch of guests this year with both new and old faces. The atmosphere has been light and the volunteers have had easy conversations with the guests. It's great to see the food choices going down well with all and catering for dietary needs has not been a challenge. Receiving our 5 star award for food hygiene was very rewarding and to know we are doing it right is a boost. Coming to the end now it will be sad to say farewell to some of our guests but we look forward to seeing them out and about or even next year.
JO ” ”

“ “ I absolutely love volunteering on a Monday night in the kitchen, planning and cooking the food for our guests.
Seeing the clients enjoying a good homecooked dinner and 'stodgy' pudding always brings a smile to my face.
KAREN ” ”

OVERNIGHT VOLUNTEERS

Although we had 2 overnight project workers last winter, we still needed the support of at least one overnight volunteer each night, for safeguarding and support. Finding willing overnight volunteers is a huge challenge for many reasons, but we are always very grateful to those volunteers who are able to support the shelter in this way. One of our overnight volunteers has shared the following thoughts:

“ “ One of the joys of retirement has meant I don't have to be up early for work and this has meant I could help at the shelter by being an overnight volunteer. The task is not onerous and you get to sleep at least half a night.

The night hours can bring many things and, for the homeless that have had to live on their wits, means they sleep lightly so the need to talk to someone doesn't mean the needs stop as the evening volunteers go home. Also, you get to go home in the early morning knowing you have something good albeit sad the guests don't have that privilege.

CHRIS

THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY'S VISIT

This year, we were delighted to welcome a distinguished guest for Holy Week when we hosted Justin Welby and his guests for dinner. They visited us at the Baptist Church one Tuesday night, following a civic reception at the Archbishop's Palace.

Joining him along with his chaplain the Rev Richard Braddy and Heather from St Luke's Church were some of the members of the community of Saint Anselm, a monastic order for young people aged 20 to 35, set up by the Archbishop to allow them to experience a year of prayer, service and community.

We met Sydney, Duncan, Sanchitha and Bhanuka from the community, who spent several hours chatting to all the guests, swapping stories and experiences with them and finding out more about each other's lives, whilst enjoying a fabulous Roast Chicken dinner, superbly prepared for a mere 40 people by Jo and the Tuesday Team.

The Archbishop spent his visit chatting to the guests, volunteers and staff. Guest Bob in particular had a really in-depth conversation with him over dinner where the hot topic of conversation was "Did he get nervous when he was on the TV or doing a service that involved the Royal family?" – or words to that effect, as well as discussing the coronation.

It was a really enjoyable visit that I'm sure many people will remember for a long time.



OUR PARTNERS

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

Pivotal to the success of the Shelter is the work of our Project Team in building trust with our guests and encouraging them to access the support they need.

Over the years we have developed partnerships with other organisations that are so vital to the success of the shelter and the benefit of our guests. During winter 2023-24 we worked closely with the following organisations:

**maidstone
homeless
care**

for weekday breakfasts, showers,
laundry facilities, food parcels and
general advice/support


Porchlight
Changing attitudes • Changing lives

for help with accommodation issues


MAIDSTONE
Borough Council

Street Homeless Outreach Team,
for housing support and advice

**LOCAL FOOD
BANKS &
SOUP RUNS**

**Street
Link**

MADM
Making A Difference
Maidstone

We also worked with Kent Police, Maidstone Probation Service, Community Mental Health Workers & Lily Smith House – Temporary supported accommodation.

WORKING TOGETHER WITH THE SUNDAY SOUP RUN / DON DOEL FOUNDATION

Once again, the Don Doel Foundation have really appreciated coming together with the MCWS on a Sunday afternoon. Working together as a joint team has been super. It has also been wonderful to enjoy a dry, warm space. Thank you for inviting us in!

Mary, Sunday Soup Run Co-Ordinator

Last winter was the fourth year that the Sunday soup run team came into our registration session each Sunday afternoon, as part of our working together initiative.

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

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

Each year we see many examples of people's compassion and desire to help those in need in our community, and we are incredibly grateful for their support. There is an outstanding spirit of generosity within the Maidstone community which is clearly reflected in the donations we receive.

Thank you so much to everyone who has donated to the Winter Shelter, both financially and otherwise. Your donations enable the shelter to keep running each winter and they are all truly appreciated.

ANNUAL FUNDRAISING MEAL

Thank you to everyone who supported our fundraising dinner at Frédéric Bistro on 17th October 2023 and special thanks to Frédéric's themselves for generously donating £10 per head to the Shelter. We raised £1270 at this event, including the proceeds from the raffle.

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



HELP OUT TO EAT OUT!

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

Thank you to everyone who continues to support our work in this way.



LAWTECH

The team at Lawtech kindly donated 2 food hampers, a large pack of pillows plus lots of food & hygiene items for the benefit of our guests. These thoughtful donations were gratefully received by our guests over the winter. Many thanks!



CHARITIES AID FOUNDATION

Each year, the staff at Charities Aid Foundation generously donate food items to support our guests at the winter shelter. Thank you very much for these generous donations.



THE BODY SHOP

The Body Shop in Maidstone set up a 'Giving Tree' in their store throughout Nov/Dec 2023, and our charity was the fortunate beneficiary of the donations for our guests.



JANINE LOLLIT

Janine organised these fantastic donations of sleeping bags, scarves, hats, gloves and coats for the benefit of our guests this winter. These thoughtful donations are really appreciated. Thank you!



KA2 STAFF

The staff team at KA2 very kindly collected and donated food items, including some treats for our guests. Thank you so much! These items were really appreciated over the winter months.

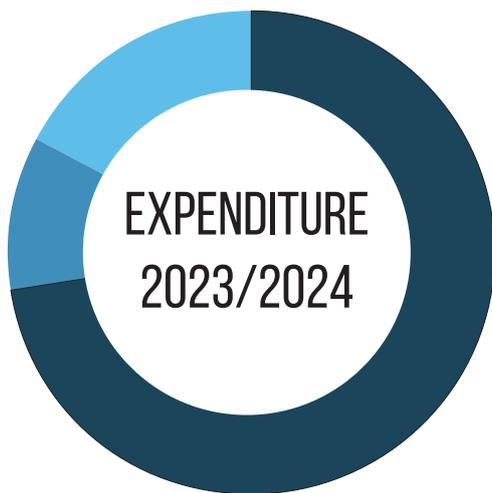
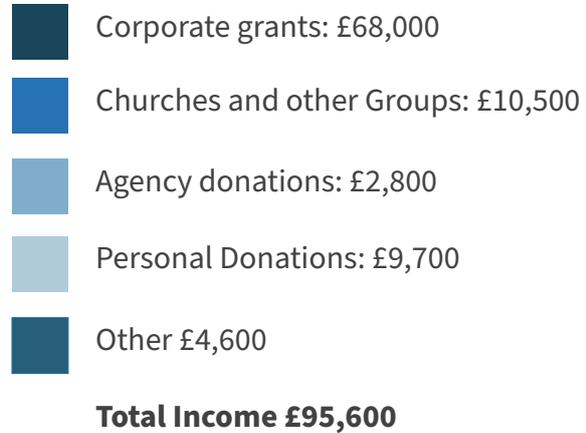


PETER SPRAGG

Peter donated many pot noodles, as our guests are often very hungry when they arrive each day and they are always grateful for one of these 'quick fix' snacks to give them a bit more energy and keep them going until dinner. Thank you so much, Peter.

FINANCES

SCHEDULE OF FINANCIAL INFORMATION (ESTIMATED) FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST MAY 2024



Surplus of income over expenditure: £13,100

The cost of the operation has risen this year, partly because of the national problem called “Inflation” which has affected all our costs (and our Policy is to increase our salaries in line with inflation) but also because we have been serving more guests, which is a sign of what is going on in the country. Set against this, our many Corporate Sponsors have been more than generous in their gifts and grants to us, and we are finishing the year, to our surprise, with a probable Surplus of about £13,000. Our finances are in good shape for 2025.

John Tapper – Treasurer



THANK YOU'S

Our Trustees would like to offer their sincere thanks for the support from our host Venues (Churches), Volunteers & Staff. Thank you so much for all you have done to provide food, warmth, shelter and support to our guests. We are extremely grateful for the invaluable kindness and commitment of all who support the shelter in so many different ways.

Huge thanks also goes to our funders and donors, without whom the winter shelter would not be possible. Thank you!

OUR STAFF

Our staff team this year consisted of:

Claire Kehily (Project Manager)

Mike Louth (Assistant Project Manager)

Hollie Neal, Jan Croucher & Priya Jethwa (Project Workers)

Darren Ellis & Alan Tompsett (Overnight Project Workers)

Mandy Fuller (Administrator and Volunteer Co-Ordinator)

These staff all worked well together as a team, both with each other and with our different groups of volunteers, to provide a positive and supportive experience for our guests.

Extra special thanks goes to Claire & Mike, who worked tirelessly to ensure the shelter ran smoothly and successfully each day. Claire also worked hard liaising with other organisations to support our guests with their 'moving forward' requirements.

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

OUR TRUSTEES

To our Trustees, thank you for your commitment and leadership.

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

OUR GUESTS

We also wish to thank our guests, the people who have touched the lives of so many of us. They have such varied, colourful stories and life experiences and they have enriched others by walking through the doors of our various venues. Thank you for allowing us to work alongside you, to obtain the support needed and to alleviate homelessness and poverty in our town.

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... and for many individuals who have given online and in other ways.

Those Who Supported In Other Ways

A huge thank you goes to:

- The Friars, Aylesford, Hannah Davies and Monarch Laundry - for their amazing support in laundering many of our sleeping bags throughout the winter.

- Mariama Bah & Claire Knight – for their physical and mental health support, provided through the NHS.

- Cara Garton – for her ongoing support with our website and design of the Annual Report.

Bequests

Donations received in memory of the late Mr Jeffery Beeney

The unknown donors:

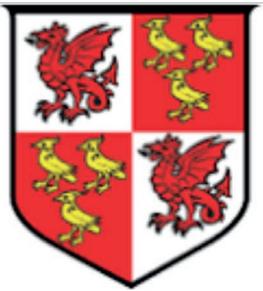
A HUGE thank you to you all!

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

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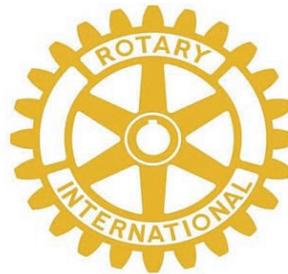
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