

BRISTOL
CHURCHES
WINTER
NIGHT
SHELTER



**“Truly I tell you, whatever
you did for one of the least
of these **brothers and sisters**
of mine, you did for me.”**

Matthew 25:40





Introduction

The Bristol Churches Winter Night Shelter was a four week pilot project which aimed to offer a safe space to sleep and a hearty meal for up to 12 homeless guests. As one volunteer said:

“I believe that the Christian community has the resources to make involuntary rough sleeping in Bristol a thing of the past.”

The churches in Bristol stepped up to this challenge by generously resourcing the project. Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, Pentecostal, Salvation Army and non-denominational churches worked together in a demonstration of unity.

The rough sleeping situation



Rough sleeping has more than **quadrupled** since 2012



Number of homeless families has **tripled** since 2012



Homelessness services are overstretched with **long waiting lists**



The fastest growing source of homelessness is **eviction** from private rented properties

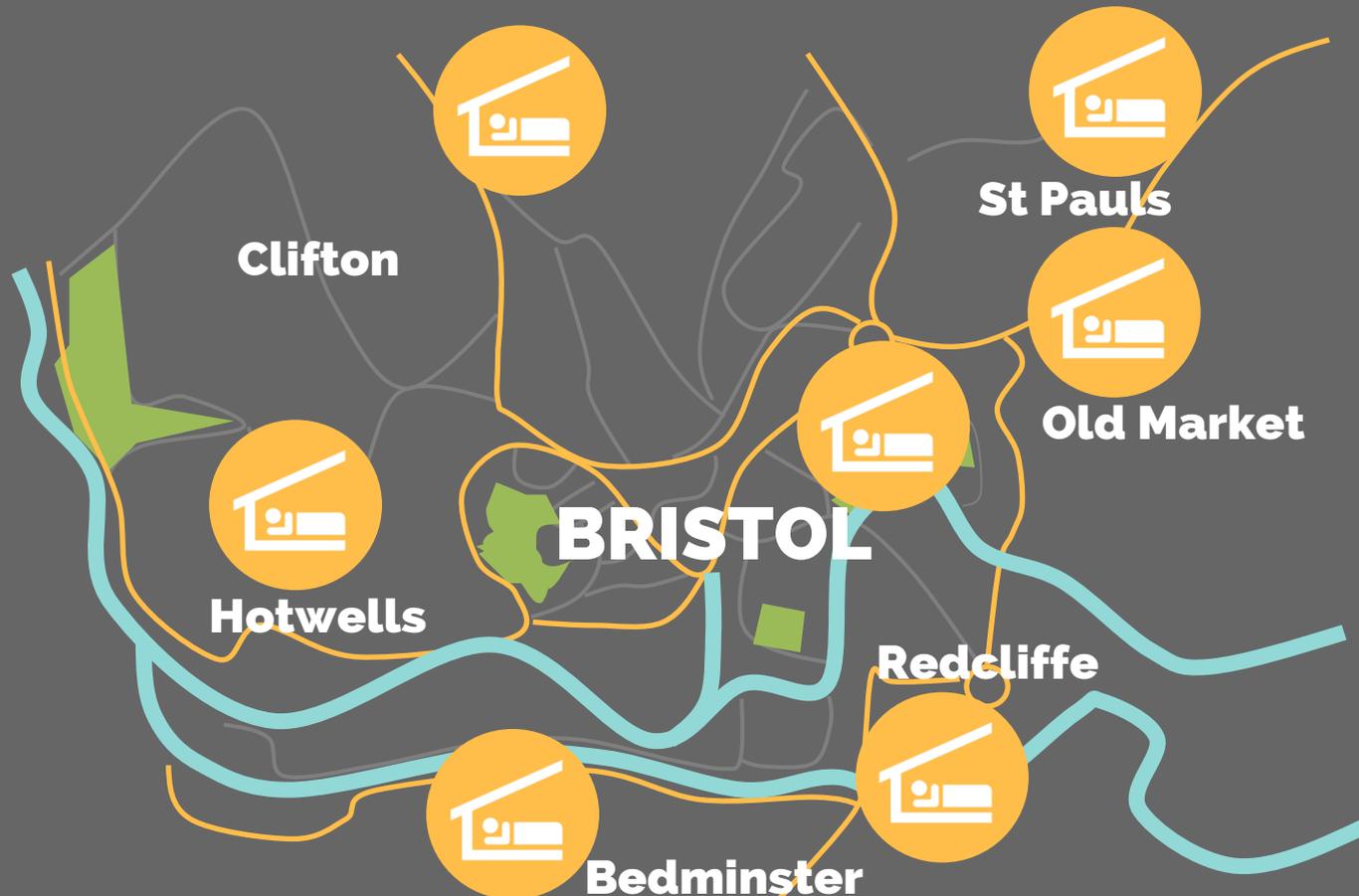


“I spend the night walking all around Bristol until the morning. If I’m lucky I sleep in the bus station, if the security guard doesn’t kick me out.”

Emile

The Church's response

Churches in Bristol came together to **volunteer**, financially support and offer up their buildings for the shelter.



Who else was involved?

St Mungo's

St Mungo's were the sole referring agency for the project, making sure that only vetted individuals took part. Their expertise provided vital, on-going support to the guests as well as assistance to the teams.

Housing Justice

The project used the tried and tested model that Housing Justice have developed over recent years. Their projects run across 70 boroughs in the U.K. Housing Justice provided excellent training and resources to ensure the success of the project.

Bristol City Council

Mayor Marvin Rees, said that, "No one who has the ability to take up help should have to spend the night on the street". The support of the Council's City Office helped ensure the success of the project. Marvin Rees showed his support by visiting the shelters during the project.

Other organisations

- Crisis Centre Ministries
- YWAM, Bristol
- Caring in Bristol
- Just Love
- St Thomas Ecclesiastical Charity
- The Julian Trust

A typical night at the shelter

6pm

Volunteers arrived and set up for the night. This often included a time of prayer and worship.



7.30pm

Doors opened and guests were registered.



8.30pm

Everyone enjoyed a hot meal and pudding prepared by volunteers.



9pm

Guests and volunteers played games and chatted.



11pm

Lights out and sleep for the guests, with overnight volunteers on duty.



7am

Lights went on...



...and guests had showers. Toothbrushes and towels were provided.



7.30am

Breakfast was served by the morning team.



8.30am

Guests went on their way, volunteers put away beds.



9am

Volunteers left.



Meet the volunteers

“The volunteers have literally been the best people I have met in my entire life..the best thing about the whole experience”

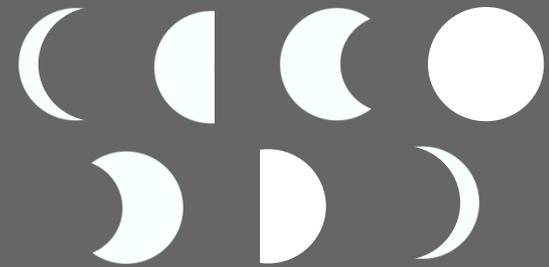
Guest at the shelter



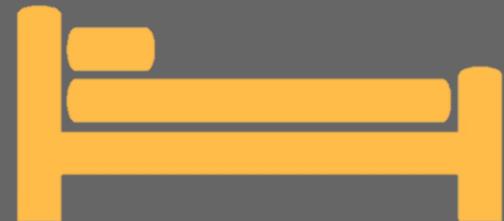
Over **200** volunteers gave their time to be trained and take part, supporting **84 shifts**.



Serving **233** hot meals and **233** breakfasts to guests...



They shared their love and hospitality with guests over **28** cold winter nights.



...and offering **233** nights of sleep in a bed.



“I am so delighted we have done this – our whole church community has really got behind it and I think it has been an **eye-opening** and **unifying** exercise for us.”

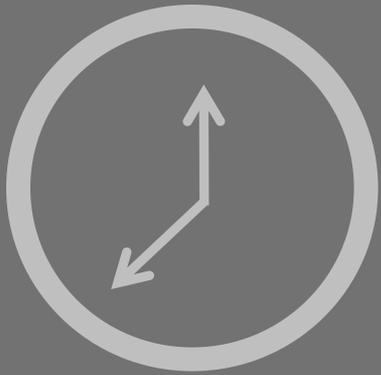
Volunteer



“We said “yes” to hosting the night shelter **in faith**, without really knowing how we would do it! One of our clergy had been involved in a similar project in a previous parish but the church hadn’t provided structured hospitality for homeless people like this before, only on a case-by-case basis. We were, in the end, overwhelmed by the support our congregation offered. The night shelter made it **easy and safe** for our members to do something practical to help homeless people – something **lots of them had wanted to do but didn't know how**. The relationships that formed between hosts and guests were a real gift. We can’t wait to do it again next winter.”

Hosting Church

Training



Multiple, **2 hour training sessions** were provided to prepare volunteers.

“The **training** was helpful, well worth doing, mainly that it pitched expectations in the right area – we knew what we were letting ourselves in for: took a lot of the nervousness out of the process.”

Volunteer

Meet the guests



15 guests were referred to the shelter, and overall occupancy was at roughly 75%.

27-74

Guests were aged between 27-74. Some of the guests were 'new homeless' and still working. Others had been homeless for many years.



Guests were from the UK and further afield

- 10 from the UK
- 3 from Europe
- 2 from west & central Africa.

Some guests presented with additional needs, including:

- mental health issues
- being in recovery from addictions
- learning difficulties
- PTSD
- language and communication

All guests were risk assessed before being given access to the shelter, to ensure the safety of other guests and volunteers.



Meet the guests

“In many cases, their stories were of misfortune that could have befallen any one of us”

One of the guests was a man in his thirties named **Jim***, who described himself as “**between a rock and a hard place.**” Jim had been working as a chef until a change in family circumstance meant that he was **left homeless.** His zero hours contract meant that he couldn’t find a new home, as these kinds of contracts are often not considered a steady income by landlords or agencies. Once homeless, he was unable to maintain his chef’s equipment and so **lost his job.** He didn’t qualify for council housing and had no funds to rent privately.

*Name has been changed to protect identity.

Outcomes

Guests were more than satisfied with the project:

6 guests gave their feedback during an in-depth interview at the end of the project.



10/10

Food and
sleeping
arrangements



9/10

Welcome
provided by
volunteers



9/10

Safety at the
shelters

Outcomes

A more stable future:

The assurance of food and accommodation over the period meant that guests were given **stability**. Rather than having to focus on finding a bed for the night, they could move their attention to **finding more safe and secure accommodation**.



The support from St Mungo's meant that **9 guests (including Jim!)** found accommodation over the period.

Hospitality as well as a place to stay:

"I knew if I wanted to speak to somebody I could. I was able to ask for prayer. "

"I really enjoyed card games, communal eating and the cross section of age groups among the volunteers."

"The best thing was the volunteers coming in, interacting and getting to know us."

What's next?



The future:

Following the **success** of the pilot, there is a strong desire to run the project next winter, taking account of lessons learnt.

We plan to:

- Open the shelter for between **2 and 3 months**.
- Consider **alternative beds** i.e. camp beds.
- Provide **additional training** for venue co-ordinators and shift leaders.
- Implement an **on-line sign up** system for volunteers.

Challenges to overcome:

- ? Could 50% of the volunteers be **male**?
- ? Could the host churches find ways to involve their **local community**?

How could you be involved?

Host-Volunteer –Co-ordinate-Give-Pray



Email: BristolChurchesWinterShelter@gmail.com