

King's Lynn Winter Night Shelter



Impact Report 2018-19



“I have been hugely impressed by the sheer number of volunteers helping over the winter of 2018/19, by the strong sense of compassion and commitment shown both by everyone involved, and by the stories and comments coming back from those who stayed. Jesus told us he was to be found in those who need our help and support - it is heartening to see how he was met, welcomed, housed and nourished in the 97 people who came to us this last year”.

The Right Rev'd Jonathan Meyrick, Bishop of Lynn and Patron of the Night Shelter

“It was both a privilege and important learning experience to work with the Winter Night Shelter in a fundraising capacity. To witness the volunteers at work and speak with a small number of guests caused me to appreciate just how essential this initiative is to King's Lynn. It undoubtably saves lives and brings a little cheer and human contact most of us can take for granted”.

Cllr Nick Daubney, Mayor of the Borough of King's Lynn and West Norfolk



Background and vision

The King's Lynn Winter Night Shelter was set up in 2017 by Churches Together in King's Lynn with the aim of establishing an overnight shelter during the winter months for anyone with nowhere else to stay. During our first winter we opened on Friday and Saturday nights in the building at 5 St Ann's Fort then occupied by the Purfleet Trust, and welcomed a total of 45 homeless guests.

This pilot season worked well though from our guest feedback it was clear more was needed: *"Somewhere to stay at Christmas [a Tuesday] would have been nice"* *"On Thursday I got in a wheelie bin and slept it was so cold"*. The winter of 2018-19 saw these hopes become reality.

In September 2018 the Purfleet Trust moved to new premises and following a summer of fundraising we were able to take on the lease of 5 St Ann's Fort for the winter. There followed an active 6 weeks of decorating and preparations for the first night of the new, 7-nights-a-week winter season: 1st November 2018.

To help prepare the Night Shelter we were joined by some wonderful teams of volunteers: the RAF, Mars Food, local clergy with unexpected skills ... together we transformed the building into a fresh, comfortable space to welcome our guests and let them see we think they are worth the best that we can do.



To run the Night Shelter seven nights a week, responsible for maintaining our own building, a number of substantial changes took place. Staffing increased to a total of six: a full-time Co-ordinator, who would continue to work for the Night Shelter after the winter was over; an Assistant Co-ordinator, full-time for six months; two members of staff to cover night shifts and another to work four morning or evening shifts each week. Plus a welcome six hours a week from our housekeeper cleaner! One member of staff would be present on every shift, supported by a team of volunteers.

Practical work on the building, in addition to the hours of decorating given by our volunteers, was substantial. A new boiler was installed, electrical wiring was given an overhaul, fire doors and safety features were added. The building needed to be registered for Food Hygiene (and was awarded a five-star rating when the time for inspection came). Furniture was donated or purchased and the huge task of collecting enough bedding for the winter was begun.

Finally we were ready and held our first AGM and Open House on 31st October 2018 when our supporters and all the organisations we expected to work with during the winter – the Council, the Police and more – were invited to join us. The Night Shelter was blessed and ready to open its doors.





Impact on guests

By 31st March 2019, the last night of the winter season, we had welcomed a total of 97 individuals as guests at the Night Shelter.

They came from a huge variety of backgrounds and circumstances: some had been homeless for months or years, others had lost their home only that day; some were in their 70s, one arrived on the night of his 18th birthday. Some were physically unwell, one was in a wheelchair; many others had complex mental health needs. Some were alcohol dependent or suffering from drug addictions, many had a history of self-harm; many were grieving from broken relationships, others were fleeing violence, some were suicidal. Many, as we found as we got to know them, had been abused as children. Some arrived as couples. Some came to us in desperation because so much had gone wrong in their lives that they could not be housed elsewhere. Others had come to the UK in search of work but struggled to find it or earn enough to keep them in a tenancy. Some were just out of prison, or hospital. One had been a teacher. Some could not read.

We welcomed them, listened to them, gave them a hot meal and a bed, and tried to show them they were people of value, and had friends who cared.

“It was all the best, I wanted to come every day ...”

“The time I spent there made me feel I had a purpose in life”

“It’s helped me a lot. Made me think more about what I want. If I wasn’t in the Night Shelter I’d probably be in jail”

“It’s actually a brilliant organisation, staff are very friendly and helpful, big thanks for them. I met new friends here, food was delicious all the time. Nice and warm bed.”

(Guests’ review and feedback, written on the last night of the season)

Over the 151 nights of the winter season we welcomed 81 men and 16 women, an average of 20 people per night (the most on any night was 24) and a total of 2897 beds. Some stayed only one night, others for some months: we asked everyone, every morning, if they’d like to come back in the evening. We had to turn a person away through lack of space - and with no referral possible elsewhere - on 18 occasions. 3 people were “banned” for the winter for safety reasons.

On 1st April our 97 guests were accommodated as follows:

Private rental	10	Prison/police custody	6
Hostel/supported housing	24	Deported/left the country	2
Staying with family/friends	12	Rough sleeping	11
Hospital/secure unit	3	Unknown	29



Impact of volunteers

“I think this is the perfect opportunity to help my community”

“You never know when life may hand you a rough deal”

“I hate seeing people on the streets”

(October 2018, applications for becoming a Night Shelter volunteer)

The Night Shelter this year was supported – and made possible – by the help of 130 volunteers, an extraordinary response and a huge increase on the 43 people the previous winter.

They came from all possible walks of life: among our teams each night we had teachers, nurses, clergy; a GP, a paramedic, a fireman; parents, grandparents, students, local councillors, the Mayor; local business people, people between jobs, care home workers, the retired. Some had family members suffering from addiction, or homeless in other towns, and felt that if they could not help their loved ones they could help us. Others had experience of addiction or homelessness themselves. Some had lost children. Some had been in prison and wanted to share the hope they had found outside. Others came with their work colleagues, “we all decided we wanted to do something to help”.

With the support of the Diocese of Norwich Safeguarding team we reviewed the process of recruiting and training volunteers, based on the understanding that we would be caring for a group of vulnerable adults and needed to do the best we could for both them and our volunteers. All volunteers – old and new – came to one of eight information and training evenings, to talk through the practicalities of safeguarding, best practice and boundaries in volunteering, as well as how we would run the Shelter this winter and what we were trying to achieve. References were sought, and all new volunteers were interviewed and shown around before joining us for their first shift.

In recruiting our volunteers we were keen to seek help as widely as we could: we would need it! So our information evenings were held in 6 different locations – thanks to the hospitality of local churches – across the town and surrounding area, from South Lynn to North Wootton; and we also hoped to find volunteers who could speak the mother tongue of some of our guests – many thanks to Access (the local support centre for migrants), and to all the shops who helped support our Lithuanian poster campaign!



“I found it heart warming and at times heart breaking, sometimes challenging but always incredibly worthwhile”.

“I was really impressed with all the extra help given to the guests”.

“I am grateful for all the people I have met ... I’ve learned so much in the last months”.

“I found it a fantastic experience and enjoyed the company of the guests I was privileged to spend time with”.

(March 2019, Feedback from volunteers on the winter season)

As in the previous winter, volunteers served on a flexible rota based on what worked for them. Three shifts covered each night: three or four volunteers were present on each shift. 151 hot evening meals were cooked, 46 cooked breakfasts (a weekend treat!), and an amazing 6,500+ hours of volunteers’ time given to the work.

At the end of the season, we asked them how they had found the experience. For some it had been a challenge: unfamiliar situations and needs, and the hard work and reality of making sure every shift, every night, was covered so that the Night Shelter could remain open. A “Mayor’s Thank You Party” at the Town Hall with our Patron the Bishop of Lynn was a lovely opportunity to thank them all publicly for giving so much: and also to share with them the huge appreciation passed on to them in the comments from our guests!

100% of volunteers who responded said they would recommend volunteering to a friend. All but one (who wasn’t sure yet!) said they’d like to help again next year.



Photo reproduced courtesy of the Lynn News

Impact on the community

“My personal reflection is what an amazing thing you have done, the people of King’s Lynn have done, I can’t say how pleased and proud I am to have been involved. What an effort and achievement, what a fantastic result and difference made”.

Duncan Hall, Housing Services Manager, Borough Council of King’s Lynn and West Norfolk

“This year has seen a much more enhanced service offered to vulnerable people in and around Lynn and from the perspective of the Police, the Night Shelter have been very helpful assisting us in situations where other agencies cannot help ... their interaction with us has been very positive which we feel can only get better as we move forward to next year. Thank you”.

Chief Area Inspector Rob Button, Norfolk Police

“We very much appreciate all you and your team have done in supporting homeless and vulnerable people within the town. [Its closure for the summer] is a great loss and we are hoping that the project will reopen again soon”.

David Nash, Probation Officer, Norfolk & Suffolk CRC Ltd

“The Night Shelter has been a lifeline for many this year and your commitment to supporting vulnerable homeless people has been inspiring. Thank you on behalf of my team for helping raise the profile of homelessness”.

Paula Hall, Chief Executive, The Purfleet Trust

“It has made people more aware of homelessness and the need of so many in our community”

“The generosity of King’s Lynn and surrounding areas has been outstanding”

(Volunteers’ comments from the final Review)

In 2018-19, 100% of the bedding we used, 100% of the toiletries and towels we supplied, and almost all of the food we needed, came from donations. A huge Christmas campaign supported by the local press helped raise our profile in the community: as did the extraordinary response to a new Facebook page (1,500 new followers before we were half way through the season). The donations highlighted also for us that awareness of homelessness and a sense of connection with Lynn goes far beyond the town: we had blankets from Attleborough, sheets from Walsingham, a fortnightly veg box from Swaffham and potato sacks from Sutton Bridge!



In November 2016, the annual rough sleeper count for King's Lynn was 42: the highest increase that year of any town in the UK. People were sleeping in tents, pillar boxes, holes in the ground lined in plastic sheeting: a pregnant teenager had been among them. In the cold winter lives were at risk and clearly a change was needed.

At the end of the railway line from London and Cambridge, and in an area where seasonal workers in agriculture and industry are in demand, Lynn sees a relatively high number of people coming from elsewhere: among the 97 guests at the Night Shelter this winter, 26 had come from overseas and others from elsewhere in the UK, sometimes fleeing violence or situations to which they could not return. In addition, parts of King's Lynn are in the top 2% of the Index of Multiple Deprivation for Norfolk, in the top 3% for the UK and higher than any area in the region except Great Yarmouth*: the "crumbling edge" of housing, and the struggles of poverty, including social problems, all contribute to the numbers of people finding themselves homeless.

In this context the Night Shelter considers its work in partnership with other organisations in the town essential to our work with our guests. Weekly meetings were established from November 2018 at which the Borough Council's Housing team, the Police, Probation services, the Purfleet Trust, Change Grow Live (help with substance misuse) and Genesis Housing were invited to join us in looking at each name on our guest list and asking how we could all best help them. The list was shared among our partners – with our guests' agreement – each day, both to alert others to any of their clients staying with us and to enable them to share any information relevant to us. We joined the monthly Single Homelessness Working Group set up by the Housing team, attended multi-agency meetings, and accompanied our guests to their GP, to social services, to court, if they asked it. We accept guests on referral from any of our partners: and, recognising the need to be there for those people who have contacts nowhere else, from guests who simply come to our door. In 2017, the November rough sleeper count was 9, and in 2018, 5.

*See data by area on the Norfolk County Council's page link www.norfolkinsight.org.uk, and nationally at www.gov.uk/government/statistics



What makes the Night Shelter special?

“I fled domestic abuse and ended up in King’s Lynn. I was suicidal and went to the hospital for help ... when they discharged me, I was signposted to the Night Shelter. At first, I didn’t feel comfortable telling my whole story. After a fortnight of staying there, I felt sufficiently confident to tell everything. I was supported by one of the independent living coaches at the Purfleet Trust and by the end of the week she had a place for me in one of their houses. I registered for Universal Credit ... Now I want to get back to work. Eventually I want to train to become a nurse”.

(a male guest, 30s, recorded interview)

“The Night Shelter has helped me in every single way I can think of. It got me off amphetamines ... The regular food, shelter and care made all the difference. People listened and even helped me with my medical needs ... Now I’m in another hostel for a month and after that I will get support towards a place of my own, which will be adapted for my needs ... If it wasn’t for the Night Shelter I wouldn’t be where I am now. I would probably be on the street dead. I feel fantastic now – I sincerely mean it”.

(a female guest with mobility needs, 40s, recorded interview).

“We were staying at the Night Shelter continuously through the winter ... it’s been a long, hard struggle but we’ve finally got somewhere. We had to search the internet daily to try and find a landlord who would accept people on housing benefit, we received so many rejections, we were quite dispirited. To be honest having nowhere begins to wear you down, it affects your health.

Finally we found somewhere ... it’s a place where we can begin to sort things out, use to make a new start. We’ll have our own address to help us find work ... it’s the first time in two years we’ve been able to rent a property, we’re excited and nervous. It’s a big step”.

(two guests, 40s, recorded interview)



On the last Saturday of the winter season, just as the last of our guests were preparing to leave us, we took all those from the winter who wanted to come for a Day Out on the North Norfolk coast at Walsingham and Wells-next-the-Sea. It was a glorious spring day and a rare chance for some of them to escape the hard realities of life on the streets: for some it was the first time they had been out of Lynn in two or three years.

We were made welcome for coffee with the Sisters at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, in their garden; we lit candles in the church; we had a fish-and- chip lunch on the Wells harbour front and finished the day with a boat trip – for the bravest! – out to sea. It was a hugely enjoyable day of fellowship and good times together; it was also a beautiful reminder that the homeless who come to stay with us are people like ourselves.

Those we took with us were alcoholics, addicts, those with mental and physical health needs; ex-offenders, people with a history of violence, people from overseas now homeless in the UK while they looked for work. They were not unusual as a group needing a Night Shelter: the fact that we were all together on a Day Out was extraordinary.



Being homeless, and particularly being homeless on the streets of a town where people know you, is humiliating. There are no pictures of our guests in this Report, because it is up to them to tell their story: we share their identity only with partner organisations in homelessness who are working with us to help them. The experience of having to ask for everything you need – from Universal Credit to a toothbrush – can feel a painful loss of dignity; the waiting and uncertainty which is the reality of being one of a huge number (one in 200 of us) of homeless people in the UK in 2019 is often frustrating, discouraging and a constant struggle for the next day, the next hour. The hidden pain that people carry can be enormous: it is always a shock in a Night Shelter to discover as guests begin to share their stories just how many were abused as children.

At the Night Shelter we try to see the whole person, the suffering, wounded person, as someone for whom the current lack of a home is not something they have chosen and which in no way detracts from their dignity as a human being. Mother Teresa in Calcutta in the 1960s declared “the biggest disease today is the feeling of being unwanted”: for our homeless guests, the visible and tangible proof that we were interested in them was what made the difference, what they commented on and thanked us for when they left.

Jon Kuhrt, Rough Sleeping Adviser to the Government and specialising in the response of faith and community groups, writes on the question of “grace” versus “truth”: compassion and acceptance on the one hand, and challenge and responsibility on the other. At the Night Shelter we have seen that these approaches do not have to be in conflict at all: unconditional care for the dignity and welfare of those who come to stay is the best thing we can possibly give them to help them – with the right support – find strength and hope for themselves.



“It was all of you caring about me that did it. It made me start to care about myself”. A guest

So what about 2019-20?

“Well done, keep going! Thank you!!”

“Stay here and be here! Keep it open please”

“Thank you! Keep it open all year round!”

“I hope for people in my position that this shelter is here next year”

Our guests' comments on the last night of the 2018-19 season are both a reward and a challenge: 1st April was the end of the season for us, a chance to rest and reflect, but it was just one day in a long struggle for many of our friends. It is clear that a Night Shelter will continue to be needed for some time to come, and the Trustees and Steering Group of the KLVNS are planning accordingly.

We will open for a new winter season on 31st October 2019, again for five months.



Our Co-ordinator continues in post but we will recruit or renew contracts for five further staff – including two members of staff on the busy evening shift.

We will look at how we train our staff and volunteers, so that they have the best possible preparation for their work.

We will recruit again for volunteers from the local community, with a special effort to seek volunteers who can speak Lithuanian, Latvian or Russian.

We will continue to talk with the Borough Council and others about how we can best support people into making connections and finding housing.

We will look at the mental health needs of our guests and consider what we can do to understand and support them better.

Above all: we will continue to seek to support the people in this town most desperately in need, and to save lives again next winter.

Supporting us

It will cost £90K to keep the Night Shelter open for the 2019-20 winter season, including rent, staffing costs, equipment and essential building works.

While substantially more expensive than running a Night Shelter for example on the model of rotating between different church floors (as in Cambridge, Norwich and Yarmouth), the benefits of having a “home of our own” are huge: not only is it far easier to run a shelter which doesn’t have to be packed up and moved on every day, but we are also able to provide a much greater level of the stability and sense of safety and “family” which our guests have responded to so warmly this year. We provide a consistent welcome which has become known in the town as a place to go for help. And our guests can find us: at the same time, same place, every evening, every night of the winter.

We welcome all donations and grants towards our work, great and small.

£15 will provide a homeless person with a bed for one night.

£450 keeps a full house of 24 guests in clean bed linen daily for a week.

£12,515 pays for one of our overnight staff for the winter.

The winter of 2018-19 was made possible by the generosity of:

*King’s Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council * Dreams and Visions * Geoffrey Watling Charity * Mrs HR Greene Trust * Farthing Trust * Norfolk Community Foundation: Dulverton Trust & Surviving Winter Fund * Murphy Group Charity * Fitzmaurice Trust * Tesco Bags of Help * Lady Hind Trust * King’s Lynn Mayor’s Charity of the Year Appeal ... and many local churches, schools, groups and individual donors.*

A big Thank You to them all!

King’s Lynn Winter Night Shelter
5 St Ann’s Fort
King’s Lynn
PE30 1QS



01553 776109 www.klwns.org.uk
nightshelter.steering@gmail.com
or on Facebook @klwns



King's Lynn Winter Night Shelter

5 St Ann's Fort, King's Lynn PE30 1QS 01553 776109

www.klwns.org.uk

Registered Charity no. 1175645 Find us on Facebook @klwns