

King's Lynn Winter Night Shelter



Impact Report 2020-21

The Bishop of Norwich writes:

“I was asked recently in one of those quick question and answer style interviews what was the best thing that happens in East Anglia each year. I think they were expecting me to speak about a festival or celebration. I found myself spontaneously giving this reply: ‘The opening of the King’s Lynn Winter Night Shelter in October. It’s a symbol of hope to desperate people and one of the happiest evenings I’ve spent was being with them on their first night’.

The work of the Winter Night Shelter has had many joys and challenges this past year. The new building, a former vicarage owned by the Diocese of Norwich, will give much needed extra space and privacy, as well as continuing that loving atmosphere of attentiveness and care. The covid pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable people in our community and there were many fears for its impact on those who are homeless. The fact that the team leading the Night Shelter has navigated both dimensions with such foresight and stamina is testament to their hard work and dedication.

Long may they have our prayerful, practical and financial support, so that in turn they can bring Jesus’ healing touch to those most in need.”

The Rt Rev’d Graham Usher, Bishop of Norwich

(The Right Rev’d Jonathan Meyrick, Bishop of Lynn, served as our Co-Patron for the last three years and retired in January 2021. We are immensely grateful to him for his support – not least in blessing our lovely new building! – and wish him well for the years ahead).

The Mayor of Lynn, our Co-Patron, writes:

“I consider that the winter night shelter represents what is best about a local charity.

I continue to be impressed by what is achieved by the staff and volunteers, and have been very pleased to have been a patron of the charity.”

Cllr Geoff Hipperson, Mayor of Lynn and Co-Patron 2019-21

The Chair of Trustees writes:

“Many night shelters were not able to open this winter, but we are glad to have been able to open, albeit with a reduced capacity. However St John’s House has made a much better base, and we have risen to the challenge of all-day opening and provided a more comprehensive service to those who needed shelter.

The staff and volunteers have done sterling work in keeping the shelter safe and clean and protecting the guests and themselves from coronavirus throughout the season.

We are very grateful to all who have funded and supported us to enable us to run the Night Shelter.”

Canon Adrian Ling, Chair of Trustees

“It’s brought the local community together”: A volunteer, March 2021



A picture of hope in a hard year

The King's Lynn Winter Night Shelter was established as a Registered Charity in October 2017 by a group from Churches Together in King's Lynn. We have opened from the end of October until the end of March each winter since, with the aim of being here for anyone who needs us and to save lives on the streets in the coldest months of the year.

This Impact Report sets out an account of our most recent winter season, and reflects on how Covid has affected our approach to how we care for our homeless guests: as well as offering a first look at our future plans.

Photos are all of our new home at St John's House, Blackfriars Road: for everyone who would have liked to visit and hasn't yet been able to, we hope you will enjoy the "virtual tour"!

"I have been made very welcome" : Guest feedback, March 2021



Everyone in! ... the Covid crisis

At the end of March 2020 in response to the arrival of Covid-19 in the UK the Government issued the directive “Everyone In” which instructed local councils to accommodate rough sleepers in single-room facilities and for dormitory-style Night Shelters to close. Happily for the Night Shelter and our guests the instruction came on the weekend our winter season was already scheduled to end and so most them found themselves accommodated on the night of 30th March in hotel rooms, recommissioned hostel rooms and on camp beds in meeting rooms in a repurposed community centre: funded by emergency Government money to local authorities to make sure the homeless could be off the streets during lockdown. In some cases there was even better news as this unprecedented move saw offers of flats to people who might otherwise have waited years for the opportunity: and it was wonderful to be able to support them during the first weeks in a home of their own. We are grateful to the Borough Council of King’s Lynn and West Norfolk, the Purfleet Trust, Freebridge Community Housing and others who made the work of “Everyone In” possible: including the wonderful daily provision of food parcels to everyone from the Purfleet kitchen for a number of weeks until this emergency provision closed.

The Night Shelter had been considering a move from our old home at St Ann’s Fort and the arrival of Covid was a further reason to move: we needed a new home which was big enough for social distancing, with enough showers for everyone to keep clean, and with a good number of bedrooms so guests could have a single room of their own. Thanks to the generosity of the Diocese of Norwich in being willing to make one of Norfolk’s historic vicarages available to us, we were able to move to St John’s House in June 2020 and to begin preparing to open this new home.

St John’s House, formerly St John’s Vicarage, was built in 1871-2 on a waste piece of ground belonging to the King’s Lynn Corporation and next to the railway station. The cost of £1,667 (including £7 for laying out the garden) was met by grants including Queen Anne’s Bounty and by donations from benefactors and local fundraising: including a (then) impressive sum of £75 from the Girls’ School. It is good to think that our new home was built from the kindness of others just as our bills are paid today! The garden originally included the bowling green in the Walks, and the house itself was occupied by the vicars of St John’s Church and their families (and their parish ... and the army, in WWII) from 1872-2019.

We moved house: but the question was, would a Night Shelter still be needed?

A new home and a new family

There were still people sleeping rough in King's Lynn during the spring 2020 lockdown: some had been evicted from their initial "Everyone In" accommodation, some were hard to place in the first instance (one guest who left us in March 2020 had a large dog), another – who eventually came back to stay with us in December 2020 – had originally come from another county and wasn't yet eligible for statutory help in Norfolk. We provided food parcels and support to a couple encamped in a "house" of wooden pallets on a riverbank: and as lockdown ended and the number of rough sleepers started to increase, showers for people who had nowhere to wash. The question was, had "Everyone In" and the new funding for homelessness meant that a Night Shelter would be largely empty this winter: or had Covid – with job losses, strain on couples and families, and a national crisis of mental health – meant that homelessness was as likely to increase?

Together with Public Health England and the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk – and following the government advice on night shelters which was eventually released in October – we planned a single room, Covid-secure, 24-hour shelter to be available in accordance with our charity's aims for anyone who needed us. The necessity of single rooms reduced the capacity of our new home to 6 guests: to be run in parallel to the alternative emergency accommodation set up by the Borough Council in "pods" (portacabins) on four sites around the town. We adapted our old vicarage as a Night Shelter fully compliant with fire regulations and with exterior lighting, new fencing, a secure courtyard area for smoking at night, and remote access CCTV. We also replaced the huge Victorian claw-foot bath tub with three shower rooms and basins ... no bubble baths this winter, sadly!

Meanwhile our staff team (full and part time) was expanded to 12 – Bob, Daren, Finlay, Florine, Jenny, Karine, Laura, Lucy, Matthew, Nick, Penny and Sarah – and Holly, who came to help with weekend cleaning – who were joined by nearly 100 volunteers, last year's plus new recruits from three information and training evenings held in October. It was wonderful to welcome two of last year's guests among this winter's volunteers: both contributing the hard work of weekly night shifts, and both also helping with the new volunteers' training.

"I went to the evening unsure about volunteering but came away inspired and keen to be involved" : A volunteer, end of season review, March 2021



A new way of working

From our opening night this season, the Night Shelter served a dual purpose: to provide shelter and support to the individuals who came to stay, and to give help “on the doorstep” to whoever else came to call. This second aspect of our work was significant and encountered a large number of individuals: in addition to the 23 guests who came to stay, a further 42 people (of whom 29 were estimated to be street homeless on the day they came to us) were helped often over a period of days or weeks with sleeping bags, access to a phone, advice, a listening ear and food parcels or hot takeaway meals – in particular for the many people housed by the Borough Council in the “pods” and in B&Bs. Everyone who came to us with nowhere to stay we referred to the Council for assessment and accommodation.

For our guests who came to stay, being open 24 hours provided us with an opportunity to offer more in-depth support than had been possible when we operated as a busy night time (only) shelter. In addition to safety, companionship, hot meals, laundry facilities and pastoral care, this year we were able to offer one-to-one support work for our guests: with diary management, GP appointments, benefits, housing applications, video calls with probation services, or for a guest to speak to her children. The gift to us of a tablet to share between them made a huge difference as for the first time we could provide guests with easy access online. The Night Shelter has always offered a certain amount of support to guests in activities beyond our building and once again this year it was good to accompany them to court, to housing assessments, to signing up for tenancies, to hospital. One guest who asked for our support in signing up for a tenancy – and did so successfully - had tried nine times on her own for other tenancies in the last year and each time had been too anxious to attend. We also offered support to former guests in their early days in a new home: arranged Christmas cards and Skype calls to former guests in prison: and continued to find time for a chat on the doorstep with others who had been with us and moved on.

None of our guests would be housed now without the help of our partner agencies and we are grateful to them for their friendship and support for our guests throughout the winter and into the months ahead: among them the Borough Council of King’s Lynn and West Norfolk, Norfolk County Council Adult Social Services, Norfolk Police, Change Grow Live, Purfleet Trust, National Probation Service, NCHC Multi-Disciplinary Community Services, Sanctuary Housing Street Outreach, Freebridge Community Housing, Clarion Housing, Broadland Housing ... and more!

“The King’s Lynn Winter Night Shelter is an invaluable service in the community. It offers more than just shelter, it is a safe sanctuary to those in critical need. It is also a blessing to many; offering food parcels, hot meals and blankets to those that are not at the shelter but are in emergency pods or finding themselves on the street.

As a homeless outreach worker, I feel reassured that there is a facility that can promptly accommodate individuals with complex needs and challenging behaviours when in crises.”

Debbie Chapman, Street Outreach (Sanctuary Housing), end of season 2021

“I was able to visit my clients on a regular basis during the working week. The regular contact enabled a collaborative working relationship with the staff in the interest of my clients ... I feel that the Night Shelter provided a safe, caring and nurturing environment for the guests. The Co-ordinator and staff team provided support across all areas prevalent to this group of individuals ranging from support with housing appointments, liaising with probation and other community support agencies, GP appointments etc.

I would like to thank Lucy and her team for all the help and support they provided to my clients, and also to me as a professional. I will miss the team over the summer months.”

*Tara McKenna, Health Improvement Practitioner
NCHC Multi-Disciplinary Community Service (working with individuals who are regular
attenders at A&E)*

it’s a cold day for a staff photo ... Covid-secure, of course! We are deeply grateful that we had no cases of Covid among our guests, volunteers or staff this winter





For those who need us most ...

In previous years, guests have come to us by referral from any partner agency, or by self-referral: it was possible to simply come to the door and (risk assessment and space depending) be offered shelter for the night. Covid legislation made this winter more complicated, with all guests being referred at the final stage by the Borough Council, but despite this new restriction we continued to be here most especially for people who had no other options at all, including some with immensely challenging complex needs. Of our 23 guests, 9 came to us as evictions from alternative emergency accommodation provision: 14 were known to mental health services: 18 were involved in substance misuse: 19 were working with the criminal justice system: and we are pleased to have been able to accept every referral made to us where a suitable room was available.

Being here for the people who need us most can be immensely rewarding. A guest brought to the door by police who had found him in a graveyard sleeping among his own faeces: who stayed with us a month before being admitted to hospital under Section 2 of the Mental Health Act: how wonderful it was when he was discharged and came back to tell us he had a place in supported accommodation. It had been his fourth winter staying with us.

Of our 23 guests this winter, 17 were men and 6 women (including one transgender woman) and 5 were from overseas (with recent settled or pre-settled status or with no recourse to public funds): on the night they left us, 6 stayed with a friend or family, 6 were in other emergency accommodation such as a “pod” or B&B, 3 in custody, 2 in hospital, 2 in housing association tenancies, 2 in supported accommodation, one was renting privately and one to rough sleeping. Not everyone found a tenancy as a result of staying here: but these figures do reflect an ethos of providing a safe and supportive environment for people who have struggled to cope in other places: often over a period of months or years. For many, a therapeutic environment, with 24-hour support and an emphasis on a trauma-informed approach for each individual, was what began to make the future seem possible.

“Even the most challenging guests would surprise us with such kind things. One guest wanted to give a retirement card to a volunteer, so we organised it and he and others signed it. Another guest found an elderly gentleman asking for money in the park and persuaded him to come to the Night Shelter for a warm drink and some food to take away.”

A staff member, end of season 2021

So what should be the “new normal”?

Reviewing our work in the 2020-21 winter season, one fact has been very clear: that the move from evening queues at opening time to 24-hour accommodation, and from dormitories to a room of their own, has given our guests a dignity as human beings which has helped them and a way of working which we want to see here to stay.

With the uncertain Covid situation both nationally and globally we are also advised to plan for single-room accommodation as the preferred option for emergency provision for the homeless at least for another year.

We also have a beautiful new home – and a garden which our 2020-21 guests have begun to help us work on! – at the start of a 15-year lease, and which itself asks the question of what needs to happen for the Night Shelter to be open all year round.

From October 2021 we are therefore hoping to open for a ten-month season working towards year-round opening in the years ahead. We hope also to adapt St John’s House by dividing some of the larger bedrooms to allow us to welcome more guests: and to invest in our staff with further training to help us give our guests the best possible support.

In a difficult and anxious winter we have seen so much good: we look forward to the future in hope and in gratitude for all that has been possible so far.

“The Winter Night Shelter has provided warm, welcoming and safe 24-hour accommodation for some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Helping people to avoid the very dangerous nature of rough sleeping particularly through the cold winter months is a challenging area of work which has only been intensified during the pandemic of Covid 19. We look forward to continuing to work with you and all partners to build upon the success of Everyone In and continuing to take steps to end rough sleeping for good.”

Nikki Patton, Housing Strategy, Borough Council of King’s Lynn and West Norfolk

“What did you like about the Night Shelter?” – “Everything!”

“What could we do to improve the Night Shelter next year?” – “Build another one next to this one.”

(responses to the guests’ feedback survey, March 2021)



With warmest thanks to ...

All Saints High Kelling * All Saints South Lynn * A Dickerson Builders Ltd * BCKLWN * Caritas Alive in Faith Project Grants * Catenian Association * Churchill Park Academy * Co-op Community Fund * Cornerstone Church Barroway Drove * Dersingham Methodist Church * Farthing Trust * Fritcham Ladies Group * Freebridge Community Housing Fund * Gaywood Wives Group * Howden Joinery Company * Hunstanton Bridge Club * Hunstanton Community Choir * Hunstanton Golf Club * Hunstanton Methodist Church * Julia and Hans Rausing Trust * K Brown Auto Repairs * King's Lynn Church of the Nazarene * King's Lynn Evangelical Church * King's Lynn Minster * King's Lynn Players * King's Lynn Power Station * King's Lynn Quakers * King's Lynn Rotary * King's Lynn Soroptimists * King's Lynn Town Band * Kyril Charitable Trust * London Road Methodist Church * Marham Methodist Church * Martin Folkes Lodge * MCF Covid Community Fund * MHCLG/Homeless Link Winter Transformation Fund * NCF Covid-19 Local Resilience Fund * NCF Flux Family Fund * Norfolk Masonic Charities Committee * Norfolk Winter Resilience Fund * Priory Rotary * Purple Events * Queen Elizabeth Hospital Social Work Team * Schroder Charity Trust * Souter Charitable Trust * St Andrew Congham * St Andrew Holt * St James Castle Acre * St Leonard Mundford * St Mary East Rudham * St Mary Heacham * St Mary Holme next the Sea * St Mary Little Walsingham * St Mary the Virgin Sedgeford * St Mary West Winch * St Peter West Lynn * Stanhoe Methodist Church * The Bishop of Lynn's staff team * The Chelsea Square 1994 Trust * The Church in the Woottons * The Mariners Old Hunstanton * The Mercers' Company * The Reel Fling * Travis Perkins * Trundley Design Services * Union Church Hunstanton * Waitrose Community Matters * West Norfolk Lodge * Wolferton Club * Your Local Paper Winter Appeal ... and to many generous individual benefactors and friends.

We are grateful also to the Diocese of Norwich for the lease of St John's House, and to the many volunteers who prepared it for opening;

to the Bishop of Norwich, for hosting an Open Garden in August 2020 which raised £1487 for the Night Shelter and provided a joyful opportunity for a fundraising event in a summer of Covid-cancelled plans;

to our volunteers for their gift of time and care; to our staff for their compassion and commitment; and to our Trustees for their vision, service and prayers.

... & how you can be part of our work

In 2020-21 the Night Shelter received £30,000 of public funding from our local council and won £40,000 of additional Government funding: the balance, in a budget of around £200,000 (including the works needed to prepare St John's House for use as a Night Shelter) came from grants, charitable gifts and donations.

As we plan for year-round opening, in a Britain recovering from the Covid pandemic and all it has brought, we will need more than ever the support of our benefactors and friends. The Friends of the Night Shelter is our regular giving scheme designed to make it possible for everyone to become an essential part of our work: the Friends contribute an amount (any amount: there's no minimum) each month and in turn receive a regular newsletter, updates and invitations to be part of special events.

Details, including how to donate online, are here:

<https://www.klwns.org.uk/friends-of-the-night-shelter>

We'll be announcing further fundraising events this summer, and information about joining our volunteers, very soon: so stay in touch for lots more details and news!





King's Lynn Winter Night Shelter

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