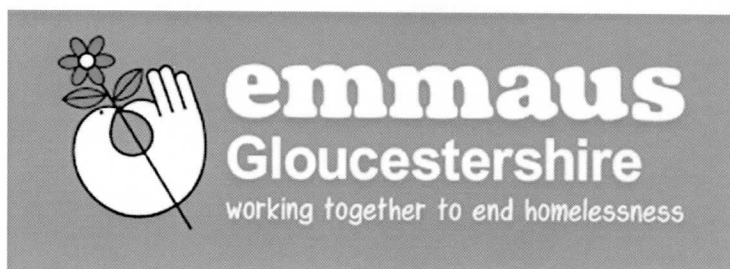


Gloucester
CITY MISSION
Serving Christ in the City



Report on the Winter Shelter
project 2018

Purpose of the Winter Shelter 2018:

The purpose of the Winter Shelter was to offer humanitarian respite during the coldest period of the year to those sleeping rough on the streets of Gloucester to prevent loss of life, and to signpost them to services which enable them to move on into accommodation. The service was not intended to become a chosen option for people vulnerably housed or homeless in Gloucester.

In providing the service, Emmaus Gloucestershire and Gloucester City Mission recognised that this service only provides an emergency humane service to ensure the safety of rough sleepers in the coldest months of the year. Both organisations are committed to holistic services that prevent homelessness and reduce the risk of people becoming entrenched in a negative cycle of short term accommodation.

Opening dates:

The Winter Shelter 2018 opened on January 5th 2018 and closed on April 2nd 2018. Originally permission had been granted until March 31st but this would have meant the last night would have been Easter Saturday with those still staying having to leave on Easter Sunday with nowhere to go. With the support of Gloucester City Council (GCC) and P3 (commissioned assertive street outreach provider for Gloucestershire), the decision was made to open for an extra 2 nights this year.

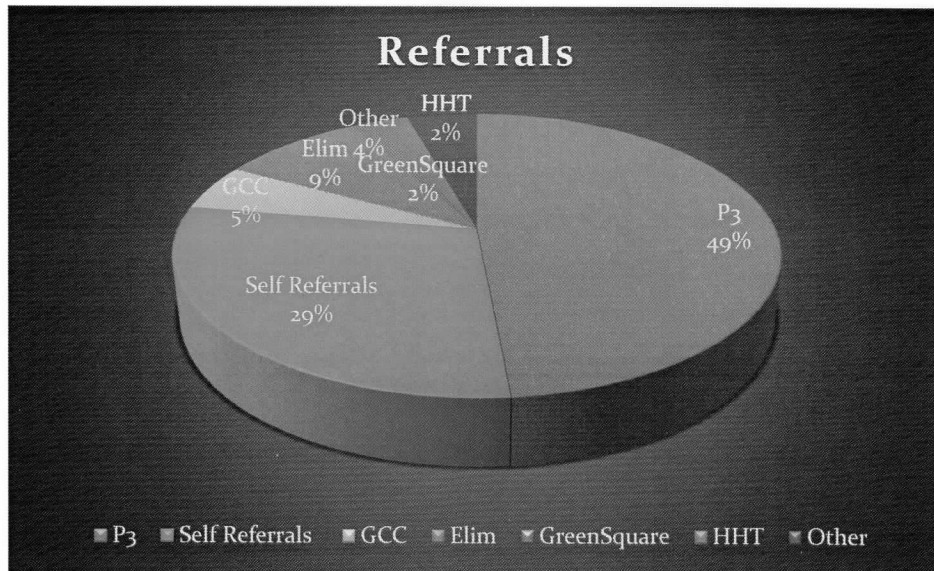
Overall the winter period of 2018 was exceptionally cold, with repeated spells of severe weather. The Winter Shelter was able to open during times when other services were forced to close, providing important respite to those who otherwise would have been on the streets.

Referrals:

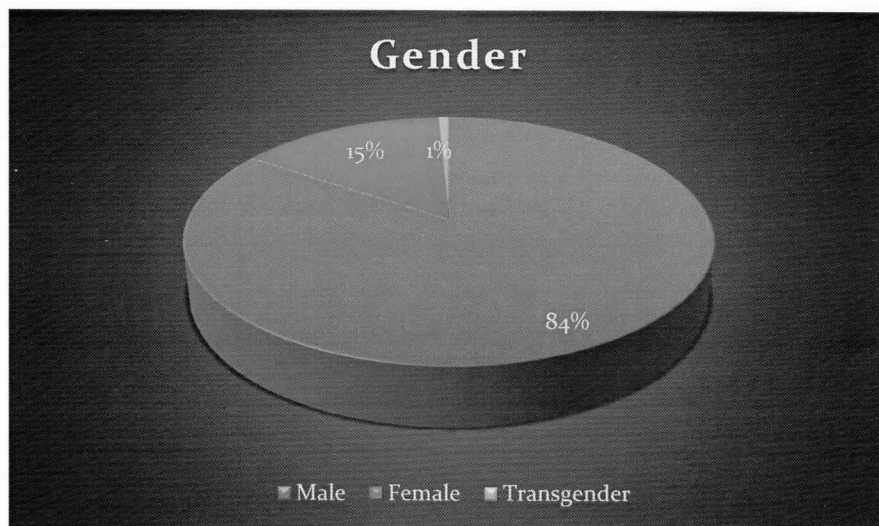
During the opening period, the Shelter received 134 referrals. Not all those referred to the Shelter took up their bed space. There were various reasons for this, including substance misuse, preference to sofa surf and mental health issues. Out of the 134 referrals 113 guests stayed for at least 1 night. This averaged 11.7 people staying each night, although clearly the Shelter was busier during the exceptionally cold weather. Over 3 months, the Shelter was able to provide a total of 1077 bed spaces to some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

Referrals were the preferred method of filling the bed spaces, however this was not always possible. For a short period of time P3 decided they would not refer people into the Winter Shelter unless all other possible options had been sourced first. This time frame correlated with an increase in the number of self-referrals to the Shelter.

The graph below shows that the majority of referrals came from P3, followed by self-referrals. Elim referrals mainly came from the Time to Heal project and GCC also made some referrals.



Who were the guests at the Shelter?



As can be seen by the pie chart above the majority of guests were male.

There were very different reasons for people needing to use the Winter Shelter. Here are some stories which highlight the reasons why guests needed to use the Shelter:

- One guest had lost his accommodation, and spent the night in police custody. He was released the following day without charge, but not allowed to return to his original accommodation, which would have meant he would be street homeless. Having been advised that he was intentionally homeless, Criminal Justice Liaison Team (CJLT) completed a referral to the winter shelter. The guest in question had some significant mental health issues and had been on prescribed medication for a number of years. He had never spent a night rough sleeping. The winter shelter allowed this individual to spend a night somewhere safe and warm, supporting his physical and mental health at a time when it could have deteriorated quickly.
- Another guest had lost his bed and breakfast accommodation, and needed to sleep in his car with all his belongings in it. At this point he was on dialysis 5 days a week for up to 6 hours a day. Following his case featuring on local television, he was helped to find accommodation through local authority. Whilst the winter shelter was not an ideal place for this individual, and was not set up to assist with his level of physical need, it was a more suitable emergency option than trying to sleep in his car.
- The longest stay over the winter months who stayed an average of two nights a week. This guest was seeking paid work where possible. This guest had no recourse to public funds, was polite, pleasant and had no identifiable substance misuse issues.

Reflections on referral data and potential implications

The findings of the shelter referral data are interesting but highlighted the limitations in the referral forms. The questions asked and the format used, made it hard to scrutinize the data in depth. This will be reviewed for future years. However, there may be some areas for reflection by local policy makers:

- The winter shelter received an average of 44 referrals a month. In 2017, the 6 District Councils of Gloucestershire estimated that there were 30 rough sleepers in the County. (information gathered from homeless link <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/homelessness-in-numbers/rough-sleeping/rough-sleeping-explore-data>). There is a discrepancy in these figures, and it is hoped that Councils may involve the Winter Shelter in providing future estimates of rough sleeping.
- There is no way to quantify whether there was any cost saving to the NHS. However, the Shelter offered somewhere to stay to people who may otherwise have tried to access A&E in the evening / through the night to have somewhere to stay.

Signposting to other services

The Shelter worked with other organizations to signpost guests to other services and into supported accommodation:

- P3 were on site most days to touch base with people and work with them to find more suitable longer term accommodation. Information collated suggests that around 80 guests were supported into accommodation after staying at the Winter Shelter. This included supported accommodation, B&B accommodation or private rented accommodation. 20 guests continued to be homeless – either sleeping rough or sofa surfing. It is unclear what happened to 13 guests.
- All guests who stayed one or more night Sunday – Thursday were given access to healthcare provision the next morning with the NHS Homeless Healthcare Team (HHT) co-located at the George Whitfield Centre. For those who stayed Friday and Saturday nights, signposting was given to the HHT. Guests were also registered with the HHT if they didn't have a GP or were unable to access their GP.

Learning for the future:

- It would be helpful to open for longer in the morning, after an overnight stay to enable P3 or other organisations working with guests to have longer timeframe to work with guests to identify their options, implement pathways and look for solutions in more practical productive way.
- Need to update the referral form to enable better scrutiny of data and sharing overview information with other agencies
- Staff training and recruitment is vital to the success of the provision. Having the right staff team on board makes the service run smoothly and effectively.
- More fundraising could be undertaken – such as 'Sponsor a bed', to enable supporters to direct their funds appropriately.

Conclusions:

The 2018 Winter Shelter project was a success, and lessons learned will be built upon to improve the service for guests in the future. Over 1000 bed spaces were offered to people in need, and food, clothing, safety and warmth was provided for over 100 individuals. The organisations involved are pleased to know that they have a positive assistance to those in a time of need, and hope that in the future, the need for the service will be reduced.

Those who contributed towards the opening of the service:

Thanks are extended to all those who contributed towards opening the service in 2018. This includes: Gloucester City Mission staff, trustees and volunteers; Emmaus Gloucestershire Companions, staff, trustees and volunteers; Gloucester Rugby Club; Gloucester Symphony Orchestra; Churches across Gloucester and the hundreds of individuals who donated money, clothing, food and time.

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