

## CONTENTS

Shelter Description.....	1
Guidelines for Volunteers.....	2
Rules for Guests .....	5
Timetable of Shifts .....	5
Guidelines for Venue Coordinators .....	6
Policies and Procedures .....	8

Thank you for volunteering to be part of Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter. There are many different ways in which you can help. Please take some time to read this handbook carefully. We hope that your experience of volunteering this winter will be rewarding and we aim to ensure that all our shelters will be safe and welcoming for those who use them whether as guests, visitors or volunteers.

## SHELTER DESCRIPTION

Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter began in January 2011 and runs during the winter. ECWNS provides food, overnight accommodation, friendship and support for homeless guests. The scheme is a rolling shelter – one that is located at a different venue each night of the week. One of our key values at ECWNS is hospitality. As human beings, God has shown us great hospitality in welcoming us into his family in Christ, and we extend hospitality to our homeless guests through our welcome to them at the night shelter.

We can accommodate 14 people per night, but over the course of the shelter the total number of people will be far more than that as people move on, hopefully to permanent housing, and new guests take their place.

### Structure

ECWNS is a registered charity, number 1152768. The day to day work of ECWNS is undertaken by:

**The Project Coordinator** who liaises with the referral agencies and accepts referrals to the shelter. The Project Coordinator works with the referral agencies to help the guests to be housed, and with each church's Venue Coordinator to ensure the smooth daily running of the shelter. The Project Coordinator is responsible to the Steering Group.

**The Steering Group** which is a small ecumenical group with overall responsibility for the running of the shelter. The members are Trustees of the charity.

Each host church's **Venue Coordinator** who is responsible for:

- Ensuring the shelter runs smoothly and safely at their venue.
- Making sure there are enough volunteers to cover the sessions by drawing up a rota.
- Ensuring that provisions are available on site to prepare the necessary meals and clean up the venue.

**Shift Leaders:** the responsible people on site for each shift. At any particular time, this may be the Venue Coordinator, or another volunteer appointed by the Venue Coordinator.

Shift Leaders are responsible for:

- Allotting tasks to volunteers.
- Taking key decisions when other volunteers are unsure of the best course of action.
- Supporting volunteers where necessary in responding to guests.
- Briefing the new Shift Leader at handover.
- Filling in the Logbook.

**Contracted staff** are taken on for special roles such as Caseworker and Welcomer. This allows us to give more help to the guests, and provide more consistency across venues.

### **Referral Process**

The Night Shelter is **not** an open access shelter. We operate a referral process liaising mainly with Acton Homeless Concern, Ealing Soup Kitchen, and St Mungo's Broadway. Risk assessments are carried out for each guest for the health and safety of all our guests and volunteers. Referrals are made through the Project Coordinator, and Venue Coordinators are subsequently informed of new guests.

## **GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS**

The heart of Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter is hospitality and welcome, and this shows itself through the friendliness of our volunteers, and the way we enjoy our time together.

However, it is good to recognise at the outset that some of the guests who use the shelters have complex problems, which this scheme and its volunteers are not set up to deal with. Although we may want to, we cannot solve people's problems. We are here to provide basic facilities and, on top of this, the most valuable thing we can do is simply to listen to people.

Where possible, guests will be helped to get in touch with the relevant support agencies and organisations that can help them sort out their lives on a longer-term basis, so please do not try to take on too much. If you feel that you are getting into conversations that you cannot deal with, let the Shift Leader / Venue Coordinator or the Project Co-ordinator know. Under no circumstances should you feel obligated to do anything asked of you by a guest, nor should you put yourself in a situation where you are agreeing to keep secrets that you are not comfortable with. (See 'Respect and Confidentiality')

### **What is required of Volunteers?**

- A heart for the marginalised, poor and needy and a willingness to be challenged and changed.
- Willingness to follow instructions from the shift leader, and work as part of a team.
- Ability to respond calmly but quickly in an emergency.
- Judgment of when to call for help.
- Familiarity and ability to work within Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter policies and guidelines, especially regarding Health & Safety procedures.
- Sensitivity to issues relating to homelessness, including mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse
- Basic knowledge of the building, especially the location of fire exits. (Information provided by Venue coordinators)

**Volunteers should**

- Be reliable, attend all the shifts they have agreed to and arrive on time
- Know the church layout, especially the emergency exits, and any areas that are out of bounds to guests.
- Treat guests with respect.
- Be friendly and make guests feel welcome
- Work as a team and support the Shift Leader, not challenging their decisions in front of other volunteers or guests.
- Address guests and other volunteers by their first names.
- Arrangements should not be made to meet with guests outside the Shelter unless it is an activity arranged with Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter.
- Wear appropriate and sensible clothing

**GOLDEN RULES**

- Check identities – know who people are
- Never give out your telephone number or address, Or invite a guest into your home
- Make sure you are never alone with a guest.
- Do not give money to guests
- Use physical contact only sensitively and appropriately
- No alcohol allowed
- Do not intervene physically in any fight
- Do not give any medication to guests, not even aspirin, paracetamol etc.

**Respect and Confidentiality**

When talking to guests it is important not to push for information. Please acknowledge that some guests may feel hurt or let down by some experiences and may not wish to talk about them. Others will like nothing better than to tell you their story. Respect guests' confidentiality and don't allow your conversation to become common gossip especially with other guests or volunteers.

Although confidentiality is important for building trust, it is not about keeping secrets and this should be made clear to guests. If at any time you feel that the person poses a threat to themselves or another person or to the safety of the Shelter you should advise the guest that you will need to let your coordinator/ shift leader know immediately. Likewise, if you feel as though a conversation is getting too demanding, tell the guest that you may have to tell your coordinator what is being said in order to get appropriate help. It is then up to the guest as to whether they want to continue.

**Trust**

When speaking to guests it is best not to make promises; people can feel very let down by a promise not kept. ECWNS needs to build trust in order to be effective in finding appropriate help for guests. Broken promises can undermine this work. ('I will try...' not 'I will...')

For your own safety do not wear or bring valuables to the shelter in case there is nowhere to store valuables safely.

**Gifts**

From time to time guests may wish to give gifts to staff or volunteers. Small gifts may be accepted particularly if they can be shared. The general rule is that all gifts should be shared with the team, and the guest should be told that this is the policy. In any case all gifts should be

reported to the Venue Coordinator/ Shift Leader and recorded in the Logbook. Any gift deemed to be too expensive or in some way inappropriate should be gently returned to the guest. Guests should not be encouraged to give gifts.

### **Managing violence and aggression**

Aggressive behaviour includes threats and verbal abuse as well as physical violence. It is natural to be frightened of violence, and this needs to be taken into account in the expectations of oneself or others when dealing with actual or potential violence or threatening behaviour. As always, one's own safety and that of colleagues and guests must be put first. Guidelines can never cover everything - volunteers must also draw on their experience, skills and common sense when faced with aggressive situations.

It is the responsibility of all volunteers to alert colleagues, especially the Shift Leader and shelter staff if present, at the first sign of aggression. One or two volunteers should talk to the individual(s) concerned, remaining calm, but firm, and trying to create opportunities for them to back down without feeling humiliated. Where possible, the guest(s) should be taken aside. Other volunteers should remain at a reasonable distance but pay attention in case the situation escalates. Volunteers who are not directly involved with the main protagonists should attempt to keep other guests calm, and prevent them from becoming involved unless they are friends who can assist positively. Any vulnerable people should be guided away from the area and if possible, potential weapons such as plates, cutlery, etc should be removed. Space should be created to ensure that people are not crowded into a confined area. All those present should be mindful of their own and others "escape routes" should it be necessary to get out of the way fast.

If an incident escalates and the guest(s) cannot be calmed, then volunteers should be prepared to vacate the area. Personal safety must be put before the protection of property. The Shift Leader should call the police immediately. In exceptional circumstances, if retreat is not possible, volunteers should take appropriate measures to defend themselves. In the unlikely event of an attack, only force sufficient to stop the attacker and prevent injury to self, colleagues or other guests should be used, and reasonable restraint is acceptable.

All volunteers and staff should co-operate in taking a consistent approach to confronting guests about unacceptable behaviour and in banning or excluding clients from the building. One person should not be identified as the instigator of a ban – these should be presented as team decisions, and everyone must actively support the decision even if they have a different opinion. If an incident does occur, it is likely to be very unsettling for everyone involved in the project whether volunteer or guest. Some things that can be done include:

- Providing reassurance and helping everyone to calm down.
- Recording details of the incident as quickly as possible in the Logbook. If another person has witnessed the incident, get them to write down their version of events as well.
- Arranging for any volunteer that has been scared or hurt to leave the shift.
- Arranging longer term support where necessary.
- Discussing the incident and trying to draw out constructive lessons for avoiding a similar incident in the future.
- Possibly providing other guests with brief details of what happened and how it was dealt with; this is to prevent rumours and provide reassurance that incidents are dealt with effectively.

## RULES FOR GUESTS

- Come every night and arrive on time
- If you leave the shelter, you may not come back in
- No admission if you are drunk or high
- No alcohol or drugs
- No violence or bad language
- No weapons
- No smoking inside
- No animals
- Do not ask for money
- You must work with the Action Plan made to help you move on

## TIMETABLE OF SHIFTS

These are Guidelines only: check detailed timing with Venue Coordinator

**Equipment arrival** – between 9:00 and 17:00 by arrangement with previous venue

- Help unload beds, duvets, pillows, wash bags and log book and store ready for evening.

### 6.00-10.00pm Evening Shift

- Open up
- Prepare and cook a hot meal
- Set up tables and chairs, put up and make beds
- Check toilets for cleanliness, soap and towels. (Remove bleach and bathroom cleaners)
- Check the security of premises regarding doors to be locked or opened
- 7.15pm The whole team should get together for a briefing. This is a good time to introduce new volunteers. Check they have read the volunteers' guidelines and that everyone knows the fire drill. Project Coordinator/ Venue Coordinator will pass on any concerns from the previous night and any necessary information about new guests. Jobs to be allotted to volunteers. Pray for the evening.
- 7.30pm Doors open. Project Coordinator/ Venue Coordinator will book guests in for the night.
- Show new guests round
- Serve tea and coffee over the course of the evening
- 8.00pm No guests to come in from now unless with prior agreement.
- Serve the meal. Grace should be said before anyone eats. Volunteers eat with the guests.
- Wash and tidy up after the meal
- Organise social activities for the guests –e.g. draughts, jigsaws, dominoes, TV, Quiz Night etc
- Record any incidents in the Logbook
- 9.45pm Volunteers meet again for debrief, prayer, and handover to overnight volunteers

### 9.45pm – 7.00am Night Shift

- Secure the building
- Make sure everyone is comfortable and settled in for the night.
- 11pm Lights out. All guests should adhere to lights out and quiet.
- There should be two volunteers awake, in case of need.
- Record any incidents in the log book.
- 6.45am Hand over to Morning shift and make them aware of any concerns.

**6.45-9.00am** Morning shift

- Put on urn/kettle and make breakfast
- Wake up guests
- Serve breakfast
- Clear beds and bedding away. Guests can be encouraged to clear up their own bedding. (It is advised that you wear gloves when handling used bedding and shake bedding carefully.)
- Ensure guests leave premises by 8.30am
- Wash and tidy up.
- Ensure the Logbook has been completed and a record made of any incidents.
- Clean church premises (inc toilets).
- Take bedding away for laundering (or pass on to laundry volunteers). Please wash at 60° (mattress covers at 40°)
- Secure the building.

**Transport** - between 9:00 and 17:00 by arrangement with next venue

- Load beds, duvets, pillows, washbags and log book into transport.
- Transfer to next venue and assist in unloading

Note quarter of an hour overlap between shifts for handover and briefing.

**GUIDELINES FOR VENUE COORDINATORS**

Venue Coordinators have the responsibility for managing the human and physical resources of the shelter. You will be called upon to make decisions as to the most appropriate course of action, and you may wish to make these in consultation with the Project Coordinator who will be more familiar with the guests. However, no list of policies and procedures can possibly cover every situation, and sometimes you will have to think on your feet.

The Venue Coordinator is ultimately responsible to the governing body and leader of their church for the use of the premises to run the shelter.

**Building**

You must be familiar with building. In particular you must:

- Know where the fire exits and fire extinguishers are
- Know where the First aid box, telephone and list of emergency numbers are, and tell your volunteers where they are.
- Make sure that fire exits are unlocked and not blocked.
- Make volunteers and guests aware of the venue's Fire Instructions
- Know the evacuation procedures in the event of a fire
- Make sure that any areas where you do not want guests to go are secure.
- Tell volunteers where guests can and cannot go.
- Identify a safe area where volunteers can leave their belongings.

**Volunteers**

- Introduce volunteers to one another and ensure that everybody knows who is a volunteer and who is in charge (Shift Leader). Ensure everyone has a name badge.
- "Buddy up" new volunteers with a more experienced volunteer.
- Allocate jobs for the evening: e.g. serving tea, serving meals, putting out tables and beds, showing guests round the shelter etc.
- If possible, there should be at least four volunteers in the Shelter at all times.

## The Logbook

The Logbook is extremely important as it is:

- The means of communication between the different venues, and also the Project Coordinator, passing on details of who arrived, who didn't, and a record of any incidents.
- A way to collect statistics which will be used to write a report at the end of the shelter that is then used for fundraising.

The Logbook is our evidence of the shelter being properly run, please look after it. Entries must be signed legibly so that any queries regarding any incidents can be followed up.

- Before you open
- You should have received the Logbook, and the list of guests for the evening.
- Go through the Logbook and discuss incidents with the Project Coordinator, if possible, and inform the volunteers of any incidents, problems or concerns.
- If you anticipate a problem, discuss it and agree what you will do; everybody should know how you will deal with it before you open.
- If you do not have enough volunteers and do not feel it is safe to open, delay your opening time – it is a good idea to go outside and talk to the people who are waiting and explain what is happening.

## Opening Up

- Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter asks that venues do NOT serve tea or coffee to the guests when they are outside waiting to come in, as this encourages early arrival, and others who are not part of the shelter.
- Welcome each guest as they arrive.
- The age limit is 18 and above.
- If it's a guest's first night you will need to sit down with them and go through the Shelter rules in the 'Guest Agreement'. Please ask them to sign this. Remember that some guests may not be able to read, or may have poor English.
- Offer guests a copy of the map of the following night's venue.
- When you answer the door always ask guests to give you their names. Do not ask "Are you ..name?"
- Some people turn up on the door who are not booked in. Do not let them into the shelter as you will not know their background and will be putting other guests and your volunteers at risk. Advise them to go to one of the Referral Agencies the following day to complete a referral form. This is one of the hardest parts of volunteering at the night shelter, especially when we know that the likelihood is that the person will have to sleep on the streets when we turn them away. However, it is important that we keep to the agreed system so that everyone knows how things work.
- Once things have settled down you will be keeping an eye on things but you should have plenty of opportunity to chat to guests and volunteers.

## Handover

If you are working in shifts with different leaders, make sure you talk to the person taking over about any incidents or problems.

## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

As well as this handbook, the following ECWNS policies and procedures are in force, and all volunteers and staff should be familiar with them. They are [available on line](#) and printed copies are in the Venue Handbook distributed to each church hosting the Shelter.

- Alcohol and Controlled Drugs Policy
- Complaints Procedure
- Confidentiality and Data Use Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Kitchen safety guidelines

### **Health & Safety Statement**

Our policy is to provide and maintain, as far as is reasonably practicable, safe and healthy working conditions, equipment and systems of work for both volunteers taking part in and guests using the Winter Night Shelter, and to provide such information, training and supervision as is needed for this purpose.

ECWNS acknowledges the responsibility to provide direction and support to volunteers; in addition, all volunteers have an individual responsibility never to put themselves, their colleagues, guests or members of the public at unnecessary risk. These procedures should be viewed within the context of that shared responsibility.

### **Fire Instructions**

Volunteers need to be aware of the fire instructions for the venues they will be at. They must familiarize themselves with the procedure in case of fire. All venues must have fire instructions clearly displayed on the wall.

*We are grateful to Wycombe Homeless Connection whose advice and support helped in the original compilation of this Handbook and procedures.*

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