



The award winning Folkestone Churches Winter Shelter (FCWS) operated from 7<sup>th</sup> December 2009 - 28<sup>th</sup> February 2010. Recognition for its Services for Vulnerable People achieved an "Excellence Award" from the Kent Housing Group - an incredible achievement for a first time operation.

For 84 nights the FCWS gave shelter, advocacy, companionship and value to the **47 different guests** who came to stay. A total of **729 bed spaces** were used during the shelter operation. The project became a hub from which our guests could access services and support. **Over 250 volunteers** provided a service for some of the most vulnerable people in our society by creating a non-judgmental and welcoming atmosphere where people felt affirmed, encouraged and enabled to move forwards in some way.

The vulnerability of our guests was evident, with some fleeing domestic violence, some suffering with mental health issues (60%) and/or substance misuse problems (45%) and many also had an offending history (60%). Our guests were predominantly men but we did have 7 women come to stay with us. Our youngest guest was 18 and the oldest 64.

The project worked extensively with partner agencies, (notably Citizens Advice, Porchlight, KCA, Shepway District Council Housing options) and was highly regarded by them. Expert advice was obtained from police, substance misuse agencies, mental health services, Kent Fire and Rescue Services, Shepway District Council Environmental Health and the Housing Options team prior to set up and during operation. Referrals were received from 16 agencies across East Kent, but were predominantly from the Shepway area, with **67% of the bed spaces being taken up by local homeless people.**

The people of Folkestone, mainly through the churches, provided a minimum of **1440 volunteer slots of differing times of between ½ hour and 12 hours** resulting in a **minimum of 5232 hours**. This time was given directly by people cleaning, providing food, friendship (and foot massages!), talking, playing chess, accompanying to official interviews and medical appointments, shopping, laundry and setting up/checking supplies etc. (NB only night time hours quoted in figures above - the reality was much higher but these were not recorded).

Excellent feedback was received from many agencies including police, CAB, East Kent Mental Health Services Commissioner and also East Kent Adult Social Services Commissioner. Successful advocacy also led to local and national policy on service provision to homeless people being changed by MIND, the mental

health charity. We also received favourable media coverage from the local press, radio, Canterbury Diocese and BBC South East.

What was evident was the difference the Winter Shelter made to people's lives. People fed back how they felt valued and were treated with dignity and respect. The interventions and consistent support from all involved within and beyond the project made a difference to vulnerable people where and when it mattered. People involved (from all agencies) were able to place 16 guests into accommodation by the end of the shelter operation.

By whichever criteria we would wish to judge Folkestone Churches Winter Shelter, our assessment is that it was a success!

What we feel is important now, is to build upon the incredible success of the first year operation and develop the service for the coming winter.

Here are some comments by guests who stayed with us:

- ✓ "I don't want to think about what would have happened without the night shelter - I don't think I'd be alive"
- ✓ "You've all been so lovely"
- ✓ "Why do you give your time to do this?"
- ✓ "Can we come back and help next year?"

Next are some comments from services, churches and volunteers:

*I sent 2 clients to the Shelter and they were both very complimentary of the administration, and especially the food. They had no concerns and felt safe and well looked after. **Porchlight Canterbury***

*It has been particularly valuable for the churches to work together, and indeed to enable one another to serve and to do together what we could not have done alone. I think this experience will be transformative for Churches Together, as it has built a base of common experience and growing relationships.*

**Hilary Nabarro Folkestone URC**

*It seemed like a good project to me, I am not aware of any complaints or problems and would be happy to see it run again.*

**Chief Inspector Martin Bradley, Folkestone Police**

*Before we got involved we felt very frightened, now looking back it is hard to see what we were frightened of. **URC Volunteer***

**Thank you for all your help and support - Richard Fitzgerald FCWS Project Manager, on behalf of the steering group.**