

Annual Assembly of Churches Together in Coulsdon

Saturday 19 January 2019

Floating Shelter Review 2018

The shelter in Coulsdon ran for eight Thursdays between 1 November and 20 December. As always overnight accommodation in a safe and caring environment was available for a maximum of 14 guests who also received a three-course evening meal, an evening of socialising with volunteers, a cooked breakfast the following morning and a hearty packed lunch to take away with them, so they were fully provided for until they arrived at the next night's shelter on the Croydon Churches' Floating Shelter (CCFS) circuit. All guests are referred to us by Croydon Reach, which is a part of Thames Reach – a government-funded organisation helping homeless people in London to get hostel accommodation, benefits, healthcare, training and employment.

Guests

This year we welcomed 36 guests (31 men, 5 women) over the season, compared with 29 the previous year. This represented 91 guest nights which was almost the same as last year. The first night is always sparsely populated and this year was no different: we opened with just five guests. We closed with a similar number, the week before Christmas. Most nights we actually had a full, or nearly full, guest list (maximum 14) but across the season we had a great many no-shows: 24 people failed to turn up which included one we had to exclude.

This made for a very different feel to this year's shelter as we were constantly seeing new faces who stayed only a short time with us. In fact only two guests stayed all eight weeks with us and we got to know them very well, whereas 17 spent just one week with us. There are various reasons for this: a few moved on quickly into more stable accommodation (shared flats or hostel rooms); one or two went into hospital and we lost track of them; many had more complex needs and were unable to cope for long with the basic rules of the shelter and others were quite entrenched rough sleepers and getting them to engage at all with the shelter with a view to moving forward in their lives was possibly a good thing even if they did not stick with it this time.

Broadly speaking for those who stayed with us the evenings were spent companionably; all ate heartily and the atmosphere was good with notable examples of guests supporting one another at difficult times.

Volunteers

We had 109 active volunteers this year including six new ones (five of them from St Andrew's) and several returning after time off. This figure remains broadly constant over the years and I'm confident we'll always attract new interest to this project. We do certainly need all the volunteers we have – it's often difficult to find replacements in the inevitable cases of illness – and, in particular, there is a need for newcomers in the overnighting team. In the coming year we will lose Rev. Sue Shortman, who has given dedicated service to this job and will be greatly missed.



Once again our hairdresser, Julie Millett, spent two evenings with us and was kept busy throughout those evenings. This is a welcome service to be able to offer our guests.



A contingent of St Aidan's music group came to sing carols on our last evening supported by Rev. Paul Roberts on the accordion which made for a pleasant close to our season and led into the distribution of Christmas gifts.

Sincere thanks go to all the volunteers whether they are in direct contact with guests (48 volunteers) in the evening, overnight or early morning or in one of the very many backroom jobs (61 volunteers) which keep the machinery of the shelter so well oiled such as laundry, cooking, cleaning, setting up, collecting donated food and maintaining our database. In particular huge thanks go to Judy Earl who has organised all the provision and cleaning of laundry with supreme efficiency since the start of the shelter in Coulsdon in 2011 and was involved in setting up our shelter from 2010. She has now reluctantly retired from that role. It'll be hard to find someone to fill that job.

Administration

In response to the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) the shelter database manager, Jim Clower, conducted a thorough review of the data we hold on volunteers and its storage to ensure our compliance with the law. Our privacy policy and consent form was sent to all 155 volunteers on the database in the early summer and most have responded. Permission has been given for all photos we use in our advertising. Sincere thanks to Jim for efficiently researching the requirements and completing this laborious task.

We continue to instigate safeguarding checks for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates on volunteers in direct contact with guests as requested by the CTC at the Annual Assembly in 2016. Where possible these are processed by the various churches' own authorities.

A general volunteers' training course is offered in October every year by CCFS and this year all co-ordinators were encouraged to attend to meet the new manager of Croydon Reach and be updated on new practices to be introduced to improve the overall functioning of the shelter. Mary Blamires and I attended together with two of our new volunteers. Early promises of improved management have sadly not been realised and relations between the shelter and the agency have gradually declined. Recent reports from the post-Christmas circuit suggest that this trend is continuing to the extent that it is causing serious concern.



Donations

We went into this season with a healthy bank balance as a result of unusually generous donations and fundraising last year. This year we have received far less in monetary donations: a total of £50 which came from two private donors which was much appreciated.

However, we continue to receive plentiful supplies of donated goods: St Aidan's Primary School once again made us the beneficiary of their harvest food collection; 1st Coulsdon Cubs decorated and made up 25 shoe boxes packed with small gifts and learnt something about homelessness in the process which contributed to their World Community badge; 2nd Coulsdon Rainbows once again left a surprise package for us on our last evening of beautifully decorated cakes which were ideal for the guests' lunch packs; Coughlans continued to provide bread, sandwiches and pastries weekly from their Thornton Heath depot; Bashford & Co in Sanderstead continued to provide bacon, eggs and sausages for breakfast – next year they are threatening to come and have breakfast with us! Surplus supplies of goods at the end of the season were passed on to the Manna Centre, the Refugee Centre, Purley Food Hub and Crisis.

Finally, the annual CCFS carol singing in Croydon's Whitgift Centre, in which we participated, raised just over £1,000 and the Coulsdon Waitrose green token collection raised a splendid £550 for central CCFS funds.



Expenditure

With plentiful funds in hand we were in a strong position to invest in first aid and defibrillator training before the start of our season to ensure we had first aiders with up-to-date skills amongst the various teams on duty throughout the evenings, nights and early mornings for a few years to come. Thanks go to Monica Jefford for arranging two courses in the early autumn which were attended by 12 shelter volunteers and to St Andrew's Church for allowing free use of their premises.

We have not needed to buy any major equipment this year but our running costs inevitably gradually increase if we want to run a healthy, comfortable shelter catering for the various peripheral needs of our guests. Whilst we receive generous supplies of preserved food we do buy plenty of fresh food too, and occasional treats that are much appreciated.

We decided once again this year that we could afford to give a significant Christmas gift to guests on the last night: a £20 Primark gift card. Many of our guests have families and it was good to offer a choice to keep this for themselves or to treat their loved ones to a gift if they wished.

Prayer

Carol Russell continues to play a central role in co-ordinating the prayer life of the shelter. This year she adopted a new approach at the start of the season and used the Prayer for Coulsdon session before our first night to focus on the work of the shelter and the volunteers. She found this very successful. Weekly during the season she gathers the chatters for a short period of reflection before we open our doors and follows up each evening with prayer notes based on the

evening's outcomes and conversations. These notes are circulated to all who wish to receive them and are much appreciated as a means of keeping everyone's needs in mind during the ensuing week.

Finally...

In addition to those already mentioned I would like to thank:

- all who play a part in this collaborative project which would not function smoothly without so many people willing to take proper responsibility for their patch;
- St Aidan's for allowing free use of the premises;
- Fr Peter for providing off-season storage for all our equipment;
- the church contacts for maintaining good channels of communication with all our volunteers;
- Mary Blamires for sharing the weekly responsibility for the shelter and continuing to fill the role of CCFS Trustee for us.

Leonie Wilding

CCFS Co-Ordinator