

The Starfish Winter Night Shelter

Introduction:

The churches of Tamworth, under the banner of Tamworth Covenanting Churches (TCC), have spoken about the problems of homelessness, especially those who sleep rough, for some years. However, in 2016 there was a fresh and growing desire to somehow meet the need of the homeless ourselves, rather than merely persuade local housing charities or statutory bodies into action. The churches of the town interact regularly, through their many community projects, with people who are vulnerable and on the margins of society, and felt that they had a sufficient understanding of the need, if not necessarily the expertise to run the project themselves without any external guidance and support.

For this reason, and at an early stage of discussions, church leaders met with Emma Neill from Housing Justice, a Christian organisation with a background of enabling faith groups to set up and run successful winter night shelters for rough sleepers. Housing Justice has considerable experience and expertise in this area having been involved in the setting up and running of over 70 such centres.

Following this, the clergy of TCC suggested that this project might sit within the Starfish Project charity, which has been running in Tamworth for 11 years, during which time it has extended its reach from one centre to five centres throughout Tamworth. The Starfish Project was set up initially as an outreach project of TCC, reaching those affected by drug use— though its focus has extended to working with the disenfranchised and marginalised, not just individuals and families affected by drug use. The memorandum and articles of association of the Starfish Project states that six of its trustees are to be clergy from TCC demonstrating a very close association between the two bodies.

The suggestion was put to the trustees of Starfish and it received unanimous backing to run a pilot scheme for one month in February 2017. The trustees were aware of the significant challenge in running this scheme when this decision was made in late October 2016 with only a three month lead-in time. However, if possible, it was felt that it would be better to run this pilot scheme in February as the alternative was to wait until the winter months of 2017/18 which would then push back the actual project another year.

Preparation:

The Starfish trustees appointed a steering team to oversee and guide the pilot scheme. The four members of the steering team were:

- Rev Dr Steve Jonathan: Senior Minister of the Elim Church, Chair of Trustees of the Manna House charity hosting a number of community projects, and Chair of Trustees of the Starfish Project.
- Rev Michael White: Parish Priest of St John's and Sacred Heart RC churches. Michael is also a trustee and founder member of Heart of Tamworth Community project, and has experience in running a number of community projects.

- Mr Jack Brierley: Jack has worked as a Company Secretary in his working life and is an active church member of St Andrew's Methodist Church, Leyfields, and a trustee and Company Secretary for the Starfish Project.
- Mr John Larkin: John has worked for Birmingham City Mission for many years before taking on the role of Starfish Project manager in 2005. John also kindly agreed to act as coordinator for the pilot scheme.

The steering team worked hard to communicate and inspire people from across the town, mainly through the TCC network of churches. During the next couple of months, the following was achieved:

- Further consultation with Housing Justice.
- Seven churches offered their premises to be used for the winter night shelter. All premises were then assessed by our coordinator of the pilot scheme according to the guidelines of Housing Justice. The seven churches all possessed the relevant Food Hygiene certificates for their kitchens.
 - ~ Sunday – St Barbabas's, Mile Oak
 - ~ Monday – Manna House/Elim Church
 - ~ Tuesday – St Peter's
 - ~ Wednesday - Holy Trinity
 - ~ Thursday – St Andrew's
 - ~ Friday – St John's
 - ~ Saturday – Tamworth Baptist
- Camp beds were kindly offered to the project by the army (4th Battalion of the Mercian Regiment) through Rev Tim Flowers (local Methodist minister and Army Chaplain).
- Bedding was supplied by the Holiday Inn as they refurbished and upgraded their stock.
- Co-ordinators were selected and trained for each of the seven venues.
- Suitable publicity for the pilot scheme was disseminated to all churches in the town.
- Volunteer forms were created and were distributed to around 180 people through the TCC network. Forms and accompanying references were scrutinised by the venue coordinators.
- A training night for all volunteers was hosted with Housing Justice. Further training was rolled out for those unable to attend.
- All venues were required to have holders of Food Hygiene Certificates.
- It was agreed that the night shelter should run from 8.00pm to 8.00am with three shifts, in all centres.
- Transport of beds from venue to venue was agreed.
- All policies were adapted from the Housing Justice set policies. See Volunteer Handbook attachment.
- Tamworth Borough Council Housing Department representatives were informed of the details and developments of the pilot scheme.
- Additional public liability and property insurances were arranged for all seven venues.
- Referral processes, including forms and procedures, were designed, based on the Housing Justice model (see attachment).

The Pilot Scheme

Number of guests: On average, six guests were provided hospitality and accommodation each night.

Feedback from Venue Co-ordinators:

- ~ Growing friendship, comradery and support between the venues
- ~ Pilot scheme ran smoothly
- ~ Excellent administration
- ~ Greater understanding of plight of homeless, especially rough sleepers
- ~ Support from Housing Justice was valuable
- ~ Community spirit experienced between volunteers and guests sharing meals together
- ~ Communication channels didn't always work well
- ~ Overnight session was more difficult to cover with volunteers in some venues
- ~ Moving beds was significant commitment for one couple who took on this role for the duration of project
- ~ Occasional challenging behaviour from guests
- ~ Not enough time to meet with guests before they wanted to bed down
- ~ Significant concern for guests who will return to the streets at the end of the project
- ~ Negligible support from Tamworth Borough Council was a concern by some

Comments from Guests

- ~ Gratitude for the provision
- ~ Some meals were preferred to others
- ~ Some venues were preferred to others
- ~ Occasionally, a guest felt patronised

Areas of concern / change:

- ~ A question of whether two or three months was the right move for Winter 2017/18
- ~ More training for volunteers on dealing with challenging behaviour
- ~ Open venues at 7.00pm with meal at 7.30pm (instead of 8.00pm and 8.30pm)
- ~ Each venue to arrange for the transportation of beds to next venue
- ~ Many who offered to volunteer were not used in the pilot scheme, especially those from churches not offering a venue. This was largely due to the short lead-in time to the pilot scheme. It is hoped that all suitable volunteers will be given opportunity to serve next winter.
- ~ Need to work in partnership with Tamworth Borough Council and other agencies.
- ~ Need for improvement of referral process with other agencies.
- ~ Need a part-time salaried co-ordinator. This role is **vital** for the success of the project.

Future plans

- Winter 2017/2018: it is our aim to run the winter shelter for the months of December 2017 to February 2018 (inclusive).
- We aim to employ a part-time co-ordinator at 20 hours / week for the duration of the project, and 10 hours/week for two months prior to the commencement of the winter shelter. The cost of this post will be in the region of £6000. This would require a start date at the beginning of October, thereby requiring interviews before the end of July.
- We will seek external funding Tamworth Borough Council who will be invited to act as partners for the winter shelter. Failure to secure funding will jeopardise the future of the project.
- Based on December 2017 — February 2017 (inclusive) where there was 28 recorded days at zero degrees and below (Birmingham), the saving to the council for just six people not requiring SWEP help would be $28 \times 6 \times £40 = £6720$ (£40 is an estimate cost. Tamworth Borough Council will be able to confirm the actual cost per head). Since the winter night shelter will be offering 10 places, the saving to the council would amount to £11,200 (based on £40 per night). This calculation is for illustrative purposes only.

Attachment:

- Volunteer hand Book

SJ/April2017