

## Bethany Care Shelters

*'Bethany Christian Trust provide, among their other services for the homeless, night care shelters during winter months for people who would otherwise be sleeping rough. Various church halls and other premises around the city open their doors and Bethany provide, as well as sleeping mats and blankets, a place of warmth and security. In addition, teams of volunteers from churches across the city - including St John's, Portobello and St Mary Magdalene's - prepare and serve a hot meal for the people using the care shelter. Our two parishes are providing the meal on eight evenings this winter (funded by the St John's Autumn Fayre and Albert Cabellero's sponsored bike ride). At the moment, the care shelters are taking up to 50 people per night but this will rise to 65 per night during the colder months of winter.'*

Hello,

I just wanted to get in touch to let you know how the shelter has been going so far. It opened four weeks ago with 23 people staying over on the first night. Two people who we got to know well last season came back to say hello and tell us that they are now in accommodation and doing well. Praise the Lord! We've written up one of these individual's story which I hope will encourage you as much as it has encouraged the staff team.

*On the opening night of the Care Shelter this winter the first of the staff team turned up at the church to be greeted by a familiar face; Sally. Sally had used the shelter for the previous three winters and was well known to the staff. Emotions were mixed; on one hand the staff member was pleased to see her but on the other, there was disappointment that she was back at the shelter again. But something was different about Sally. She looked good. And she was smiling! After greetings were exchanged Sally explained that she had come along tonight to say hello and to tell the staff how she was getting on – she didn't need to stay for the night. Wonderful! She thanked the staff for all their help and said the shelter and its staff were amazing.*

*Very few people stay at the shelter for more than half the nights of the winter season but last year Sally had stayed every night except one. On the last morning, as the shelter closed for the summer, Sally had hugged the staff team goodbye, in tears because she didn't know where she was going to stay that night and she was scared. The staff had tried their best to reassure her, themselves unsure where she would end up that night and they resolved to pray that she'd be safe.*

*The Care Shelter was the only place Sally felt safe. She didn't engage with other services, even those that visited the shelter on a weekly basis. Crisis Skylight had known who Sally was for some time but she had never been willing to engage with them. Last winter Sally started to tentatively engage, having attended one of their classes. Soon afterwards they were able to help her apply for benefits and accompanied her to the job centre and to the council to apply for temporary accommodation. She got a bank account and started volunteering through a placement arranged by the job centre to build her CV.*

*Sally was so pleased to tell the Care Shelter staff that she is now in a B&B and not having to stay at the Care Shelter. She had a big smile on her face as she announced that her PVG clearance had just come back and she would start work in a care home the next day. The staff were delighted for her and were hugely encouraged by this remarkable transformation. What a great way to start off the 2017/18 winter season!*

Numbers of people staying at the shelter have grown a lot since the first week and we've had to turn people away on a number of occasions unfortunately. In the last week we've seen an average of 50 people present each night.

Thanks to those of you who have cooked or provided a venue for the shelter in the past and to all of you who are involved this winter. You're such an important part of the shelter – not just because the service wouldn't exist as it is without you all but also in the way that you interact with those who come along to stay. The conversations you have each night mean so much to people and do have an impact.

From Ruth, Care Shelter, on behalf of the Bethany Christian Trust,  
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