

Winter Night Shelter

1 June-31 August 2018

2018 Evaluation – Project Summary

The 2018 Winter Night Shelter offered a safe and supportive environment for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness in the Yarra Ranges. Stable One partnered with local churches and congregations, equipping and empowering them to work together, utilising their buildings as venues and engaging their members as volunteers. The Church has a mandate to care for people, spiritually and physically. As well as fulfilling this mandate, this project helped to fill a critical need for crisis accommodation, offering refreshment and rest to those in need. At the same time, it provided opportunities to develop community and to journey with individuals towards a more stable future.

Project Objectives

Project objectives remained the same as for the pilot project with four additional objectives added. All objectives were achieved. They were:

1. Provide overnight shelter for people experiencing homelessness and in need of crisis accommodation.
2. Offer a place of welcome, care, refreshment, and rest.
3. Build relationships with guests, developing community and journeying with those who want support and encouragement towards a more stable living situation.
4. Facilitate and support local congregations to offer a coordinated approach and to work together across denominations.
5. Increase awareness in the church and the community of the issues and challenges that people face when they don't have permanent and stable living situations.
6. Form a Winter Night Shelter Steering Committee to manage the project.
7. Encourage greater ownership of the Winter Night Shelter by partner churches and investigate shower options for guests.
8. Establish a daytime Support Centre/office space with a coordinator and investigate transport options for guests.
9. Review policies and procedures, risk management, communications including social media and website, and all supporting documents required for the project including training of volunteers.

Summary of Key Recommendations

1. Employ Project Coordinator on a full-time contract for six months of the year.
2. Continue to employ a Deputy Coordinator for 2 days per week for the duration of the Winter Night Shelter.
3. Produce a Guest Handbook.

Findings

Prayer

Prayer was foundational to the project and continued throughout with special gatherings, a prayer chain and 'prayer request' boxes at each venue which were used by guests.

Venues

- Eight churches partnered with Stable One to host the Winter Night Shelter. They were: Discovery (Mt Evelyn), Immanuel Lutheran (Lilydale), Lilydale Baptist, Mooroolbark Baptist, Mt Evelyn Christian Reformed, Mt Evelyn Presbyterian, St Patrick's Catholic (Lilydale) and Wandin Baptist.

- Churches offered safe and warm spaces for dining, socialising and sleeping. Two offered shower facilities.
- Mt Evelyn Presbyterian church hall was used as a Daytime Support Centre offering shower, lockers, storage shed, table tennis, kitchen and lounge. It also provided office space for the Project Coordinator and interview room for assessments.

Guests

- 26 different guests stayed at the Shelter (20 male, 6 female) filling 438 beds. The maximum on any given night was 9.
- 10 guests stayed up to a week, 6 up to 2 weeks and 10 between 3 and 11 weeks.
- Guests under the age of 25 were not accepted. Guests with mental illness were only accepted if it was managed well. Guests were not allowed to stay at the Shelter if they were substance affected.
- 12 guests moved into stable private rental/house share accommodation. One moved into transitional housing, three to suitable boarding houses and four to rehabilitation centres. Two were known to have chosen their cars over other options and four did not give details.

Staffing

- The WNS was managed this year by a volunteer Project Coordinator (5 days per week) and a paid (2 days per week) Deputy Coordinator. These staff assessed guests and worked with them through the daytime to offer support and help them connect to other services.
- 185 trained volunteers, ranging in age from 18-84, coordinated at venues, staffed shifts, cooked meals, drove the trailer and minibus.
- Venue Coordinators took responsibility for the Shelter when it was operating in their church. They attended monthly Steering Committee meetings from February-September and organised additional volunteers to bake items for supper and to do laundry.
- A Volunteer Coordinator helped with the initial recruitment and screening of volunteers and was also responsible for organising a Thank You party at the end of the project.
- There were additional roles of Prayer Coordinator and Secretary to the Steering Committee.

Transport and Nightly Timetable

- A minibus was provided at 6pm from the Daytime Support Centre to the nightly venue via Lilydale. This mostly eliminated issues with guests arriving too early. Guests made their own way via public transport in the mornings, leaving the church at 8.30 am.
- The Daytime Support Centre opened from 1-6pm Monday-Friday and 5-6pm on weekends.
- Dinner was at 7pm followed by games or other activities. Shift change was 10pm with lights out at 11pm. Guests would often go to bed very early. Doors were locked from 11pm-6am and guests coped well without going outside for a cigarette at night.

Challenges

- Guest behaviour was managed very well this year by Venue Coordinators and volunteers. Policies were enforced and had a positive impact on guests and the 'culture' of the Shelter.
- Staying connected to guests after the program finishes is a challenge. Guests are unlikely to go to church, but they highly valued the connection they found with volunteers and each other. The Presbyterian Church is looking into continuing to open as a drop-in facility once a week.

Finances

Expenses were close to \$19,500. This included almost \$9,000 in wages for the Deputy Coordinator (covered by a donation from Lilydale Uniting Church of \$11,000). Unsolicited donations were received amounting to \$11,000. Shower costs were covered by grants from Baptcare and St Andrews Foundation. There were also many donations of food, bedding, toiletries etc.