

Winter Night Shelter

2017 Evaluation - Project Summary

Stable One's mission is to support the Church as it works together to share the love of God by providing accommodation to those in need. To journey with each person towards stability, offering spiritual and physical care. The Winter Night Shelter pilot project opened its doors on 4 June 2017 for three months. 7 churches in Lilydale, Mount Evelyn, Wandin and Yarra Glen hosted as venues. 165 volunteers from more than 30 churches and the local community worked together to provide 26 men and 4 women experiencing homelessness with crisis accommodation which was 'more than a place to stay'.

Project Objectives

All the project objectives were realised. These 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.

Findings

Guests

- 30 different guests stayed at the Shelter filling 482 beds. The maximum on any given night was 9.
- 14 guests stayed less than a week however, 4 guests stayed between 6 and 13 weeks.
- 3 guests were under 25 yrs. Immaturity and vulnerability meant that the Shelter was less than ideal for them, particularly the female guest.
- Relationship breakdown, drug and alcohol dependency, unsuitable accommodation, eviction and release from prison were the main reasons for homelessness with mental illness indicated only once. More than half of the guests, however, had a history of mental illness.
- 5 guests moved into stable rental accommodation. Others went to rehab, family or friends. 6 were known to have returned to the street or to sleeping in their cars.

Challenges

- Guests needed a place to be during the daytime where they could relax, make a drink, access the internet etc.
- Policies were at times difficult to enforce due to the desire to show grace and compassion to guests. This was particularly an issue in regard to alcohol consumption.
- Guest behaviour at times increased the risk to the safety of volunteers and other guests. The smoking of synthetic cannabis, a mind altering 'legal high', was an issue.

Project Value Adds

- The collaboration of Wandin and Lilydale football and netball clubs, along with The Mustard Tree Op Shop and Café meant that guests could access showers three days a week, as well as with clothing vouchers and 'suspended coffees'.
- Two churches were recipients of working bees organised by guests and volunteers.

Prayer

Prayer was foundational to the project and continued throughout.

Finances

Expenses were just under \$20,000, including start-up costs for Stable One as a NFP and purchase of a trailer. One grant for \$10,000 was received, with other donations amounting to \$37,332. No salaries were paid and around 8,000 volunteer hours were contributed. In addition, many items of bedding and toiletries were donated as well as gifts 'in kind'.

Media and Communication

A substantial amount of time was given to communicating. Facebook, website, speaking engagements, newsletters, weekly email updates to volunteers, contact business cards, networking, newspaper and radio interviews were all utilised.

Venues

- Church Partnerships were established with Discovery (Mt Evelyn), Lilydale Baptist, Mt Evelyn Christian Reformed, Mt Evelyn Presbyterian, St Patrick's Catholic, Wandin Baptist and Yarra Glen Uniting.
- Churches offered safe and warm spaces for dining, socialising and sleeping.

Staffing

- 165 trained volunteers, ranging in age from 18-84, coordinated at venues, staffed shifts, cooked meals, washed laundry, baked, drove the trailer and supervised showers.
- 2 volunteers were Project Facilitators who assessed guests and offered support during the daytime to connect to services, work and accommodation.

Transport and Nightly Timetable

- Guests found getting to venues on public transport daunting, particularly on their first night. A minibus was used on a Sunday to Yarra Glen.
- Guests often arrived too early at a venue, causing challenges for staff working there or cooks entering the venue early.
- The original start time of 7pm was too late as guests were cold and waiting. It was moved to 5.30 pm, though this was not ideal for volunteers coming from work.

Summary of Key Recommendations

1. Form a Winter Night Shelter Steering Committee.
2. Identify partner churches and Venue Coordinators before February 2018. Encourage greater ownership of the Winter Night Shelter by each church and investigate the feasibility of installing shower facilities.
3. Identify a permanent daytime office/drop-in space in Lilydale for 2018.
4. The maximum number of guests per night at the Shelter to be capped at ten. Review Admissions Policy in regard to under 25s.
5. Provide daily minibus transport to each venue from Lilydale.