

Winter Night Shelter

1 June-31 August 2019

2019 Evaluation – Project Summary

Project Summary

The 2019 Stable One Winter Shelter built on the experiences of the previous two years operation and continued to develop and provide a safe and supportive environment for those in the community experiencing homelessness. Once again, the Winter Shelter (WS) partnered with local churches and the community to provide food and temporary shelter during the winter months utilising church venues and a contingent of around 200 volunteers. Responding to the clear Gospel injunction of caring for others in need, the Shelter has a target group of people 25 years and over with a connection to the Yarra Valley. In this endeavour the WS has helped to fill a critical gap for those in housing crisis whilst at the same time offering connection, inclusion, support and advocacy for those on the margins of the community.

Project Objectives

The project objectives did not vary from previous years. These are:

1. Provide overnight shelter for people experiencing homelessness.
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.

These objectives were achieved. Ongoing assessment and evaluation provides opportunities for continual development.

Summary of Key Recommendations

1. Local churches to assume leadership of and responsibility for the Winter Shelter as an affiliate of the Stable One Winter Shelter Network.
2. Rename the program to reflect its location and distinguish itself from other shelters operating around the state eg. 'Yarra Valley Winter Shelter' (Stable One Winter Shelter Network affiliate).
3. Review distribution of duties of key roles – eg. Project Coordinator, Deputy Coordinator, Volunteer Coordinator.

Findings

Prayer

Prayer continues to be the undergirding strength of WS with a prayer chain and monthly ecumenical gatherings.

Venues

Due to issues with building permits two churches withdrew their properties but continued to take responsibility for the Shelter on their allocated night, operating from another church venue. With the directive from Council to close in the final two weeks of operation, Oasis camp in Mt Evelyn, and the Linley Estate in Montrose heroically stepped in, offering the use of their facilities to WS for four consecutive nights each. Logistically this created an enormous amount of flexibility and extra work, however it meant that the WS was able to stay open, closing just one day earlier than planned.

Mt Evelyn Presbyterian church once more graciously opened their church hall each weekday afternoon and for an hour on weekends for the Daytime Support Centre. This provided guests with a kitchen, shower, washing machine, personal lockers, storage shed, lounge area, Coordinators office, interview room, clothes racks and storage, and lunch larder.

Guests

WS assessed and registered 42 guests. Of this number 34 guests stayed at the WS (21 male, 13 female) filling 427 beds. Three dogs were also accommodated at different times throughout the winter.

Staffing

A key recommendation from last year was to employ the Project Coordinator in order to work towards a sustainable model. This was implemented as a six-month full-time contract. A Deputy Coordinator was employed for on a casual contract for 2 days per week through Winter. Venue Coordinators joined the Project and Deputy Coordinators, Prayer and Volunteer Coordinators and a Secretary to form a Steering Committee. Around 200 volunteers supported the WS this year, ranging from 19 to 85.

Transport and Nightly Timetable

The minibus from the Mt Evelyn Reformed Church was used again this year to transport guests each evening to venues. It was also used some mornings. The Shelter opened at 6.00 pm with doors locked at 10:00pm and re-opened at 7:00pm when morning shift arrived. Guests left by 8.30 am and pack-up completed by 9 am.

Challenges

The ongoing management of such a large volunteer base and issues faced by our guests naturally bring certain challenges. However apart from two incidents that occurred (and were admirably dealt with by the Venue Coordinator and volunteers), the major challenges faced this year had more to do with bureaucracy rather than guests. Communication is always a challenge, but solutions have been suggested which will alleviate most issues. For the first time this year we had damage to property. This was from a guest whose behaviour had resulted in termination of their time with WS. They broke into a venue by smashing the glass door and made themselves at home (at a time when the shelter was not operating at that property). They were taken into custody by the Police and although property was damaged, no-one was hurt or threatened. Additional donations covered repairs.

Finance

Total cost of the WS for 2019 was \$50,529. The majority of these expenses are to cover staffing costs as churches cover their own costs for food and heating. Funding came from fundraising efforts, grants and donations. 'In-kind' contributions are substantial (volunteer hours, food, heating and lighting provided by churches) and are valued at approx. \$196,000.