**WINTER SHELTERS**

**Information for Local Councils**

Stable One is a registered charity whose mission is to help the Church find ways to support people experiencing homelessness with accommodation. We recognise that homelessness is not just a lack of shelter and that the Church is well positioned to also provide care, connection and support.

After extensive research into overseas programs, Stable One developed and piloted a model for running a Winter Shelter in 2017 with churches in the Yarra Valley, Victoria. Since then we have supported the replication of the program in Maroondah, Bendigo, Sunbury, Wangaratta, Shepparton, Whitehorse, Glen Eira, Frankston and Toowoomba, QLD. A Winter Shelter Network now brings together coordinators from these autonomous organisations in a community of practice.

**The Model:**

* Churches work together to use their buildings as venues to provide hospitality - an evening meal, dormitory style sleeping and breakfast - to those who otherwise would have nowhere safe and warm to sleep through winter.
* Volunteers from churches and the community are recruited, vetted and trained to staff the shelter filling evening, overnight and morning shifts.
* Guests are assessed for eligibility before being invited to stay - men and women aged 25+ years, managed mental health and able to abstain from drug and alcohol use whilst at the shelter. They may be referred by a range of welfare organisations.

Most municipalities have little ability and resources to respond to rough sleepers in their communities. Winter Shelters provide **more than a place to stay**. They are not a long-term solution to the national housing crisis, however they do provide the opportunity for people to come in from the cold for a time and connect to a community that cares about them. As relationships are fostered, so are opportunities to refer guests to other services that they may need to move forward in their lives. There have been many positive outcomes for guests of winter shelters – employment, mental health supports, improved physical health, reduced AOD dependency, renewed sense of hope, friendships and even long-term accommodation.

**How can a local council support a Winter Shelter?**

* Building Permits - The Municipal Building Surveyor can issue temporary occupancy permits to churches and may seek approval to waive associated costs. (In Victoria, Stable One advocated for the Victorian Building Authority to assist and a Practice Note was issued to cover this use. See [EA-01: Temporary Accommodation - Existing Buildings](https://www.vba.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/136586/Building-Practice-Note-EA-01-Temporary-Accommodation-Existing-Buildings-Final-Approved.pdf)). Planning permits should not be required as churches may only be open for one or two nights per week for the three months of winter. The shelter is considered ‘an ancillary activity of the church’ (see [letter from Yarra Ranges Council](https://stableone.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/305-Swansea-Road-Lilydale-Accommodation-associated-with-a-place-of-worship.rtf)).
* Council may award community grants or access other funding to support the upgrade of fire safety measures in church buildings or to buy equipment.

For further information, go to [stableone.org/winter-shelters](https://stableone.org/winter-shelters/) to watch a video or read more information. Alternatively, contact Jenny Willetts, Managing Director at jenny@stableone.org or call 0466 565866.