

## **World Homelessness Day 2021 – Press Release – Plymouth Soup Run**

Plymouth Soup Run is a volunteer-led service that operates 365 days a year. For over 20 years, a team of volunteers from a church, business or social group has mobilised donations, prepared food and gone out, whatever the weather. Homeless men and women, and other people in need know that they will be able to get help from the Soup Run which, other than emergency services, is the latest presence on the streets at night time. This is a no-questions-asked service; no one is turned away and everyone is welcome to receive support.

Providing food is at the heart of what we do. Since World Homelessness Day 2020, we have provided over 24,000 meals. But we offer so much more, reflecting the complexity of life circumstances for our clients. Signposting to professional help through welcoming specialist colleagues to Soup Run sessions or through referral to daytime services enables us to get help for people as quickly as possible. The Plymouth Soup Run is seen increasingly as a conduit, with health services, councils and the police enlisting our support to locate and connect people at risk.

Our volunteers include medical professionals and teams are trained in first aid, basic life support and administration of naloxone (heroin antidote). Every Sunday, a staff member from Plymouth Access to Housing (Path) joins the Soup Kitchen at Shekinah and advises clients on their housing options. Despite everyone's best efforts to follow up referrals and encourage rough sleepers to engage with services, sadly, people may remain on the streets for some time before they can be housed. We do our best to support rough sleepers by connecting them with housing services (typically seeing 20 rough sleepers per week and referring seven per week to the Rough Sleepers Team), and offering practical support: clean clothing, toiletries, and sleeping bags. In the first eight months of 2021, we gave out 380 sleeping bags – more than 10 per week.

People who are currently sleeping rough or in temporary accommodation are especially targeted for support. But the impacts of homelessness linger and reach deep into the sense of wellbeing and security of those who have ever experienced it. Hence, we take a trauma-informed approach to engender trust – a cornerstone of our service that facilitates connection of clients to the support that they need. We frequently refer clients to GP and nurse outreach services, and for blood-borne virus testing through partnership with the Hepatitis C Trust. Client 'J' who had been difficult to contact to supply with antiviral medication was located via the Soup Run and will be followed up regularly to support her treatment programme.

The service continued working in a Covid-safe way throughout successive lockdowns, and was a key partner in Plymouth's NHS efforts to offer vaccination to vulnerable patients. That push continues by encouraging vaccine take-up, and we support individuals who are Covid-positive and isolating by welfare checking them and providing food when needed.

While we shall always continue to offer support where needed, our aspiration, especially for our clients is that we shall no longer be needed. So, it is welcome news to reconnect with people who have managed to maintain their accommodation, take up education and training opportunities, and gain employment. Just one example is a former client 'M' who called in at the Soup Run a few weeks ago and left a generous donation. He wanted to share his good fortune now that he was working, and to recognise the vital help that the Soup Run had given him at a low point in his life.

From 'B', a rough sleeper: "[The Soup Run] people feed me, give me warmth, give me clothing and make me a human being again."