



King's Lynn Night Shelter Impact Report 2023-24

The Rt Rev'd Jane Steen, Bishop of Lynn, our Patron, writes:

It is always a joy to write this short introduction to the King's Lynn Night Shelter's annual report, and this year is no exception. Homelessness is a scourge on any society, whose treatment of its most vulnerable is a good measure by which to assess it.

So thank you to all of you reading this who have supported the Night Shelter: with volunteering, with giving, with your church and with your prayers. I cannot overstate the importance of your contributions. Funding challenges have remained this year and without your support, the Night Shelter would not have opened as it has been able to.

Last year, I wrote shortly after the Prince and Princess of Wales had launched the Homewards Partnership, with its aim of making homelessness rare, brief and unrepeated. It is something of a sadness that none of the Partnership's six flagship locations are in Norfolk, but we watch their work with interest and in the hope of learning about ending homelessness everywhere. I especially hope that the Partnership will continue to emphasise the importance of enabling people to have a roof over their heads as the first stage in addressing so many of the complex life issues which burden them.

In the meantime, for the sake of anyone who is homeless now, or who might become homeless this year, thank you for all that you do to support the Night Shelter and to end homelessness.

The Rev'd Canon James Nash, Chair of Trustees, writes:

One way or another, I have been involved with the King's Lynn Night Shelter since it was founded. I remember being part of the Saturday morning breakfast shift when the Shelter was based at St. Ann's Fort and only open for two nights of a weekend. Staff and volunteers alike found it utterly heart rending having to ask guests to leave on Sunday morning knowing that they would have to fend for themselves day and night until the following Friday evening – very often during periods of atrocious weather. As you read Lucy's introduction and the remainder of this Impact Report you will see just how much has changed in seven short years. As guests are invited to stay St John's House they are welcomed into a properly decorated and well-furnished home where they find comfort, support and security around the clock.

For all the progress made, no-one involved in running the Night Shelter is resting on their laurels. Observing the beginnings of long-planned for extension is such an encouragement. Knowing that we will remain open all year round fills me with joy. May I offer my own thanks to everyone who works at the Shelter, whether as an employee or volunteer. I am so grateful to those who give financial support, and to those who pray for the work of the Shelter and for the guests who stay with us.

From the Director

This seventh year of the Night Shelter's work has ended with the very good news that from 1st October 2024, **the Night Shelter will be open to our guests year-round**. It is immensely encouraging to have reached this point and to reflect on how we have grown since our first beginnings gathered on camp beds, two nights a week during the winter of 2017-18 – our staff and volunteers who worked to care for our guests during the snows of that year have seen a lot of change and re-imagining as we've considered how best to support vulnerable people in post-Covid Britain, how to work with other organisations to achieve the best outcomes for our guests, and how to keep it all funded. We've come a long way, and we look forward to continuing the adventure!

2024 is a time of new beginnings – a new Government, and in West Norfolk a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which sets out the aims and plans of the Local Authority for the next four years. The Night Shelter's own Strategy is designed to run alongside this, looking at how we can be most effective in partnership working, and how the resources of the Night Shelter can best be used for people not eligible for statutory help, in need of more support, or prevented in any way from accessing other accommodation.

Between November 2023 and June 2024 the Night Shelter accommodated 32 guests, out of 109 people who were referred or self-referred to us. This stark contrast between the need, and our capacity to help, continues to push us forward in our plans for development work – and we're very pleased that work on the first phase of this project has already begun.

The cover of this Report shows the “chain of stars” made by our guests and staff for the Night Shelter's Christmas tree this year. Each star has the name of a former guest no longer with us – at the time of writing, we've lost 13 people within the last year. The average age of death for people experiencing homelessness in the UK is just 42 for women, and 44 for men. Time can run out.

We are especially grateful to our friends and benefactors who continue to make our work possible, as well as to our volunteers, staff team, trustees and the many organisations who work with us through the year. Thank you for your invaluable help.

Lucy McKitterick, July 2024

*Did you feel welcome and valued here? **Yes definitely, one hundred thousand percent.** Did your stay at the Night Shelter make a difference to how you felt about yourself, or your future? **Yes a big difference. It put things into perspective about where I want to be and where I am now. This is crucial to Lynn, this place.***

A guest

Responding to the need ...

In September 2022 the UK Government published a new Rough Sleeping Strategy “Ending rough sleeping for good” with a defined aim to prevent rough sleeping where possible, and to ensure that where it does occur it should be rare, brief and non-recurrent. In West Norfolk our own Borough Council has continued these aims and the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2024 picks up the themes of prevention, intervention, accommodation and recovery to set a map for how statutory services, working in partnership with other local organisations, will seek to support some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

The Night Shelter is unique in West Norfolk in providing emergency accommodation at the point of need with 24/7 staffing and integrated in-house support. The accommodation “model”, of a safe place in need but also a warm welcome and a sense of “family”, is aimed at encouraging those who have may have struggled to sustain other accommodation in the past – and also to enable us to welcome safely guests with more complex needs, for whom round-the-clock support is the right help at this time. Of the 32 guests we welcomed this year, all but one shared with us that they needed help with mental health, alcohol or drug use. Around a third included all three.

The Night Shelter’s work with our guests begins at the point of referral, either from other professionals working with them, or a self-referral by the guest themselves. The Charity has been committed since its outset to accepting guests by both routes without compromising on safety, and we’re especially grateful to colleagues from Norfolk Police, the Probation Service, the Purfleet Trust, Change Grow Live, Home Group, Adult Social Care, NIHCSS and the Borough Council whose support in sharing information meant we could accommodate a remarkable 28 self-referrals out of 32 guests this year. Since 2018 the Night Shelter has met weekly with our partners every season to consider how best we can support our guests. Partnership working is key to any homelessness strategy – our guests need their professionals to talk!

Working in partnership with the Night Shelter staff gave us and our clients a safe place to meet for our appointments.

With the partnership we were able to get all the paperwork required, and help for our clients to attend their appointments, not only with us but with other appointments out in the community. It was good to have a clear plan of who was doing what with regards to housing so not only staff but the clients also knew what was expected of them.

Julie Bowyer, Norfolk Integrated Housing and Community Support Service

... the St John's House Project

Since November 2021 the Night Shelter has been hoping to develop the site at St John's House, in response to the death of a veteran of (then) Her Majesty's Armed Forces while sleeping rough in the church garden next door to the Night Shelter on a night when we had no available room. We're delighted that in the summer of 2024 the first phase of this work (adaptations to our existing building) has been possible, with the second phase (an extension) due to begin as soon as fundraising permits.

The St John's House Project, once complete, will **increase the Night Shelter's capacity by 50%** so that year-round we can make a greater contribution to local homelessness provision. The Project has the additional advantage that the extended building will not have a substantial impact on running costs (as staffing numbers will remain the same) – and that the additional rooms will in turn increase our income, as a greater number of guests eligible for Housing Benefit can be accommodated. The Project will enable us to help more people – and will also help the Charity towards financial sustainability as dependency on one-off grant funding is reduced.

It's also a great design, in keeping with our 1870s house “of historic interest” ... to find out more, or if you're able to help with this exciting work, please do get in touch!



Focus on ... working with trauma

The Night Shelter is a member of both Housing Justice and Homeless Link, two national charities dedicated to supporting best practice in work with people experiencing homelessness in the UK. Through these links the Night Shelter has undergone a comprehensive review of how we work with our guests, to consolidate our work as both “person-centred” and “trauma informed” – and to understand, as a team, why it matters so much. We’re also grateful to Homeless Link for their funding for the first of our staff to complete the new NVQ in Providing Homelessness Services with the Chartered Institute of Housing this year – we hope there will be many more!

Anna (not her real name) was well known to a number of our partner agencies: the partner of a former guest, the mother of another, she was in her early 40s and already a grandmother. She had a reputation for being difficult to engage with, and had an open multi-agency case with Police as a victim of extensive domestic abuse. She was also alcohol dependent, and with a very recent history of criminal activity including shoplifting and assault.

Anna referred herself to stay at the Night Shelter. She presented as very timid, anxious in this new environment. Over the coming weeks we worked to help her feel safe and to give her space to begin building understanding and trust – and to reevaluate where things needed to be done differently, such as completing the address history on a form for social housing, where the process itself was a reminder of the abuse she had suffered. We listened as she felt able to share with us something of what her childhood had been like. One of our staff accompanied her to court, and was permitted to sit with her in the dock. She had cut herself with a razor blade that morning. We’d cleaned it up, and reassured her it was ok to talk.

Something must have felt right for her at the Night Shelter: she stayed with us for several months, and we had no incidents or causes for concern. We were able to give her a good reference, and to support her at an interview for move-on longer-term accommodation – and to help her move in, when she was accepted.

There is no miracle cure for the harm caused by trauma or abuse. But there is understanding, and learning to understand more. And always, there is hope.

The Night Shelter is a fantastic resource. I believe we have a good working relationship with staff and good levels of communication. Knowledge pertinent to risk and need is shared well and the weekly meetings are well organised, giving a good insight into the discussed individual ... I believe staff have a good understanding of the probation role and assist supporting us with our overall goals, which are shared goals and values. I look forward to working with you next time around.

Richard Johnson, King’s Lynn Probation Service



Merry
Christmas



Focus on ... lived experience

From the outset the Night Shelter has relied on “lived experience” – that is, the experience of people who have been homeless, or who have experienced other concerns in common with our guests – to inform our practice and help us understand what a “good” Night Shelter should look like. This year saw the staff team engage in a focussed exercise to ask how lived experience can form part of service planning and delivery at every stage – including not just how we support our guests, but also how we enable and listen to our volunteers and staff who have experienced homelessness (including any who have previously stayed at the Night Shelter), and how the challenges and needs of this work can be addressed.

Clare (not her real name) came to us early in the season. She had been sleeping rough with her partner for some weeks having left privately rented accommodation after a dispute over rental debts. She was in her mid-50s and was pretty fed up; she and her partner had found homelessness a strain on their relationship, and both of them were using alcohol to cope.

Clare talked a lot about her life on the streets, and before. She and her partner were able to participate in two sessions with the local council’s housing strategy team looking at lived experience as part of planning the new 2024 Homelessness Strategy, and she was a great help to us in looking at how we shape our intensive support work to help our guests find a sense of self-worth and achieve their own goals. She also helped us better understand the impact of homelessness on relationships, and it was good to be able to welcome her partner to stay, shortly before she was accepted for longer-term move-on accommodation.

Lived experience in homelessness provision generally focuses on housing need. But it’s important also to recognise that homelessness isn’t something people experience in isolation – just as relevant can be people’s experiences of alcohol or drug use, of struggles with mental health, of the criminal justice system, of domestic abuse. We must listen to all of these voices – and we’re grateful when people have the courage to come forward and talk. Clare would like to volunteer with us in future. We hope she will, when the time is right for her.

We asked her: Did you feel welcome and valued here? Yes I did, very. It felt like my HOME which I’ve not had for a long time. They gave me back my sense of being again. What did you think about the staff and volunteers? I loved them all. They are the best. They have done so much to help me and feel like a person again. Did anything surprise you? Yes. Everything – I knew they would help me, but it was more than that. I had my dog with me and they made me and him feel good. Did your stay at the Night Shelter make a difference to how you felt about yourself, or your future? Yes, most definitely. I now feel like I actually matter and yes I now have a future.

From our volunteers

The Night Shelter has around 60 volunteers, who between them provide invaluable support to the staff team in welcoming and caring for our guests. Our volunteers are aged 18-80+ and come to us with all kinds of backgrounds and skills ... the only qualification needed is an interest in homelessness and some time to give to discovering more! All volunteers complete a simple application form, with details of two referees, and attend an initial information evening (held on advertised dates throughout the year) which includes basic safeguarding training.

Over the last year our volunteers have given their time to cover an amazing 3,465 hours of shifts: in the morning on the breakfast shift, in the evenings preparing a hot meal for our guests, and (crucially for a Night Shelter!) overnight. We encourage volunteers to chat with guests and to be a “listening ear” (as well as enjoy the occasional board game) – they make St John’s House a home.

We asked this year’s volunteers about their experiences:

***Why did you decide to volunteer at the Night Shelter?** I decided I had an evening a week to volunteer somewhere and wanted to be able to work with and listen to people. The Night Shelter was perfect and after attending a new volunteer evening, I wanted to be part of this work. * I thought I could give something back to members of the community who need help to try and find safety and security.*

***What have you most appreciated?** The opportunity to help in a practical way, showing people they are valued and loved. * Meeting new people, staff, volunteers and guests, and building up meaningful relationships.*

***What is the most important thing you have learned from our guests?** They are just like us, but their lives have, sometimes through no fault of their own, been difficult, abusive, violent and insecure. * How mental health and physical health impacts them. How hard it is for homeless people to deliver self-care and to be safe. How addictions can impact their lives and how difficult it can be to overcome these, also how complex post-traumatic stress disorder can severely impact their lives. * How hard it is to access safe, affordable and secure housing, and the barriers homeless people face and how stressful being homeless is. How important it is for the Night Shelter to continue their invaluable work and how important it is for King’s Lynn to have this safe space and support for homeless people. * That small acts of kindness really do matter and can make a difference.*

Could this be you? see our website www.knightshelter.org.uk/volunteer or contact us for dates of our next planned information evenings.

In remembrance ...

The loss of 13 of our former guests in one year – thankfully none of them while staying with us – is shocking. We try to attend funerals if we can, if the family would like this. When there is no family able to help, the Night Shelter will as often as possible work with local funeral directors to arrange a service, and we're very grateful to the clergy and others who give their time freely for this work.

This year we had the privilege of arranging an Orthodox funeral for a former guest – a first for the Night Shelter, but a very familiar service to the crowd of friends who came. The text below is from that service, but it's shared to honour all of our guests – and to show something of the value of each of them, and the gift they are to us.

* * *

We first met Rita at the Night Shelter in 2018. Like most of our guests she arrived cold, tired and in need, we did our best, that winter and when she came back to stay later on. Like most of our guests she came to us because she needed what we could give her. And like most of our guests we remember her for what she gave to us.

Rita was an artist, a skilled portrait artist, until her eyesight and illness and the difficulties of street life made drawing no longer possible. The first time we met her she showed us her portfolio, saved in the photos on her phone; it was so important to her that the Night Shelter knew her as a person, among the 98 people who came to stay with us that winter. And she was also an artist at finding fun in things, and teasing people she liked.

And she had a great gift for friendship. During the last month we have had so many calls and visits at the Night Shelter from people wanting to remember her, friends who knew her long before we ever did, and others she met here, sometimes the most unlikely friendships, but people who loved her for her kindness and humour and extraordinary generosity – the normal thing is for visitors to take patients little gifts in hospital, but with Rita it was the other way around, and she would have a gift for her visitors.

Rita suffered terribly in the last year of her life. The loss of her sister to suicide last winter was a great grief to her, and she struggled fiercely against her illness through her last months with us, any mention of an ambulance, or hospital, being met with a determined “No!”. But last summer as she lay week by week in a little room on the top floor of Addenbrookes, with the beauty of the summer countryside outside the window which she couldn't clearly see, she seemed to find some peace; she came back to Lynn, tenderly cared for on Oxborough ward, and just before Christmas was able to move into a little flat, no longer homeless, and she was so proud.

It was a privilege to have known Rita, and we are glad we did. May she rest in peace.

Asking the question ... are we gender-biased?

For the last few years, much of the national anxiety about homelessness has been about rough sleepers. Across the country the annual rough sleeper “snapshot” carried out by local authorities each year continues to be a measure of need and response, and individuals seeking temporary accommodation have needed to demonstrate that they are sleeping rough before becoming eligible for help. And yet, not all people experiencing homelessness sleep rough.

At the Night Shelter we’ve followed with interest new research reports from Homeless Link into the “gender bias” of homelessness provision – which essentially looks at how men’s and women’s experiences can differ, and how women may struggle in consequence to access help. We’ve listened to the stories of our own guests, and seen at first hand how domestic violence, sex work, the drugs industry, and sofa surfing in multiple locations can be at least as dangerous and traumatic as sleeping rough – and how for women, this may be what their experience of homelessness looks like.

Nearly a third of our guests this year were women, the highest proportion we’ve yet seen. For this year’s Impact Report we’ve focussed on their stories, to mark our commitment to understanding homelessness and what it’s really like in Norfolk today.



Out in the community

The Night Shelter takes seriously the need to engage with our community in understanding homelessness, to share news of our work, and to engage in conversations both locally and nationally about how we respond to the need around us. Over the last year this work has included:

- Two visits to a school for young people excluded from mainstream education;
- A visit to a local primary school, and a cub pack;
- Two students from the College of West Anglia on extended placements as part of their studies for the NVQ in Health and Social Care, and one student on placement as part of formation for ministry in the Roman Catholic Church;
- Talks at three fundraising concerts, two film nights, a book group event, a women's fellowship group, and the Churches Together in Lynn AGM;
- Visits to engage with guests and staff from the Dean of Norwich Cathedral, the Leader of the Borough Council, four local councillors, the CEO of the Norfolk Community Law Service, and the CEO of the Church Urban Fund.
- Visits to engage with staff at Pilgrim's, one of Lynn's biggest employers in the food industry; to Sandringham Flower Show; a day of engagement and encounter with Hopestead in Norwich; and the Housing Justice annual conference in London.
- A regular appearance in the Lynn News "Thought for the Week" column!

Thursday, 14th December 2023

14.12.23

Question for the homeless.

- How many people visit the night shelter each day.
- How many tea bags do you use a week?

A team effort ... a year of fundraising

Fundraising events, and donations from groups and individuals, are the Night Shelter's biggest source of income each year. Our fundraising team work throughout the year to engage support and once again we've had an exciting and varied programme! Here are some of the highlights:

In July we ran a charity stall at Sandringham Flower Show with hand-tied bouquets created by our volunteers from stock donated by a local flower farm; ● In September we opened to the public as part of King's Lynn's Heritage Open Day, and welcomed over 100 visitors for the only day of the year we're open for tours; ● In December we were delighted to be supported by King's Lynn Community Cinema Club at a screening of Ken Loach's *The Old Oak*, and by King's Lynn Community Choir at a sell-out winter concert; ● Also in December we joined up with Churches Together in King's Lynn for *Carols on the Streets* – a day of music making on the High Street which raised £791 in just four hours on the coldest day of the year; ● In April one of our longstanding supporters was the first to run the London Marathon in aid of the Night Shelter – and raised an amazing £4,000!

We would not be here without this help. Thank you so much to everyone involved!



Becoming part of our work

The Night Shelter currently receives **no national or local Government funding**.

Around 21% of our budgeted income for 2024-25 is Housing Benefit. The rest of our income has to be sourced from grant funding, fundraising and donations - West Norfolk has a Night Shelter only because a great many people make it all possible!

Could you be a Friend? The **Friends of the Night Shelter** give a regular amount (any amount!) each month. You'll receive two newsletters a year, and an invitation to our annual "Thank You Party" as a mark of our appreciation and a chance to meet with staff, volunteers and guests. Follow the link on this page to sign up – or contact us for a standing order form: www.knightshelter.org.uk/donate

Are you part of **a community group, a church, a school**? We can come to you – let us know if you'd like us to come and talk about homelessness and what we do, maybe as part of a fundraiser or special collection. We like questions!

Could your workplace be a **Community Partner**? You might like to help by donating services or products to help with the running or maintenance of the Night Shelter, or by organising a fundraiser or event ... we're always happy to chat about ideas!



With warmest thanks to ...

Access Migrant Support * All Saints Briston * All Saints Fring * All Saints High Kelling * All Saints Hilgay * All Saints Narborough * All Saints South Lynn * Authors, Books and Cake * Aviva Community Fund * Barratt Family Charitable Trust * Brancaster Golf Club * Catenian Association * Chelsea Square 1994 Trust * The Church in the Woottons * College of West Anglia * Cornerstone Baptist Church * Dersingham Methodist Church * Ely Railway Station * Farthing Trust * The Fent Shop * Foresters Friendly Society * Fountain of Life Church Ashill * The Francis Friends * Freebridge Community Housing * Friends of King's Lynn Citizens' Advice * Fruit & Veg 4U * Geoffrey Dicker Lodge of Freemasons * The Geoffrey Watling Charity * Great Massingham Film Club * Great Northern Train Drivers * Guy Raymond Engineering Ltd * Highgate Methodist Church * Hopestead * Hunstanton Bridge Club * Hunstanton Catholic Parish * Hunstanton Round Table * The King's Arms Shouldham * King's Lynn Church of the Nazarene * King's Lynn Community Choir * King's Lynn Community Cinema Club * King's Lynn Cub Scouts * King's Lynn Evangelical Church * King's Lynn Golf Club * Krusty Loaf * The Lady Hind Trust * Lovells House * The Mariners Bar * The Mercers Company * National Lottery Community Cost of Living Fund * Nisa Local * Norfolk Community Foundation Love Norfolk Fund * Norfolk Farmers Masonic Lodge * North Wootton Methodist Church * North Wootton Women's Institute * Pilgrims Pride Ltd * Pippa's Pantry * Pott Row Methodist Church * RKB Carpentry and Locksmiths * Rosebery School * Sainsbury's Helping Everyone Eat Better * Shouldham Ladybirds * Singers Inspired Choir * Smith & Williamson * Snettisham Spiritualist Church * Society of St Margaret * Society of St Vincent de Paul * South Creak Memorial Pavilion * South Wootton Methodist Church * Southgates Medical Centre * Springwood High School * St Andrew Congham * St Andrew Holt * St Anthony of Padua RC Church Fakenham * St Dominic's Catholic Church Downham Market * St Faith Gaywood * St John the Baptist Timberhill Norwich * St Mary Heacham * St Mary and All Saints Little Walsingham * St Mary the Virgin Amner * St Mary the Virgin Holme next the Sea * St Mary the Virgin Sedgeford * St Mary West Winch * St Michael Didlington * St Nicholas Dersingham * St Nicholas Friendship Group Dersingham * St Peter and St Paul Swaffham * St Peter West Lynn * St Stephen Gloucester Road, London * Swaffham Baptist Church * Ward Gethin Archer * West Norfolk Circuit Methodist Church * Whitefriars School * Your Local Paper ... and many individual benefactors and friends.

You're awesome, thank you all for everything. I couldn't have done this without you giving me a room.

A guest



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