

Wycombe Winter Night Shelter



Volunteers Handbook

2008

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We gratefully acknowledge the permission given by the Islington Churches to reuse much of the contents of their volunteer handbook, proven in use for several years.

GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” Galatians 3:28 (NIV)

Thank you for volunteering to work in one of the Wycombe Winter Night Shelters. Although several venues are involved on rotation, please regard them as being one shelter in one work. The shelter provides lots of opportunities to share God’s love and practical care with people who might otherwise have to sleep rough, and often challenges us in our gospel witness and preconceptions. Please take some time to read and digest these notes, and take part in the training sessions that Wycombe Winter Night Shelter (WWNS) coordinator sets up if you can. We hope that your experience of volunteering this winter will be rewarding and that all our shelters will be safe and welcoming for those who use them whether as clients, visitors or volunteers.

Background and Context

It is good to recognize that some of the guests who use the shelters have complex problems, which this scheme and its volunteers are not set up to deal with. Although we may want to, we cannot solve people’s problems. We are here to provide basic facilities and, on top of this, the most valuable thing we can do is simply to listen to people.

Where possible, clients will be helped to get in touch with the right agencies and organizations that can help them sort out their problems on a longer-term basis. So please do not try to take on too much. If you feel that you are getting into conversations that you cannot deal with, please let the Shift Leader/ Church or Project Coordinator know. Under no circumstances should you feel obligated to do anything asked of you by a guest nor should you put yourself in a situation where you are agreeing to keep secrets that you are not comfortable with. (See Respect and Confidentiality)

General

The Night Shelter scheme operates from January to March inclusive. Many churches are contributing to the scheme with resources, volunteers and venues on different nights of the week, providing food and a place to sleep for around 8 – 10 guests.

The Wycombe Winter Night Shelter is presently operated as a partnership between churches but there is a Management Board with representatives from a number of the participating churches.

There is a paid **Project Coordinator** who oversees the smooth running of the shelter, liaises with the seven Churches and works with the guests to find secure accommodation and self-stability.

Each Venue has a team of volunteers led by someone with appropriate experience and/or training.

The **Church/Venue Coordinator** will be responsible for:

- Ensuring the shelter runs smoothly and safely at their venue.
- Making sure there are enough volunteers to cover the sessions by drawing up a rota.
- Ensuring that provisions are available on site to prepare meal and clean up the venue.

There will also be a person responsible for each shift. This may be the coordinator or another volunteer appointed by the coordinator and will be known as Shift Leader.

The **Shift Leader** will be responsible for:

- Allotting tasks to volunteers.
- Taking key decisions when other volunteers are unsure of the best course of action. (Please back up decisions made by the Shift leader and do not contradict in front of other volunteers or guests.)
- Supporting volunteers where necessary in responding to clients.
- Arrange handover between shift leaders and WWNS Coordinator

Each Shift Leader has responsibility for the phone and Register/Log Book and should book guests in at the beginning of the evening. The Logbook is important, as it is the main tool of communication between volunteers in the venue teams taking part in the scheme. It should be used to note any incidents that take place, and to keep a record of attendance and monitoring statistics, which will be used for fund-raising next year.

What is required of Volunteers?

- Experience in working face to face with people.
- Some knowledge and sensitivity to issues relating to homelessness, including mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse. (Training provided)
- Familiarity and ability to work within Wycombe Winter Night Shelter policies and guidelines, especially regarding Health & Safety procedures.
- Ability to respond calmly but quickly in an emergency.
- Judgement of when to call for help.
- Basic knowledge of the building, especially the location of fire exits.
- Willingness to follow instructions from team leader, and work as part of a team.
- Knowledge of basic first aid would be useful.
- A heart for the vulnerable, poor and needy and a willingness to be challenged and changed.

General Guidelines

- Try to be on time.
- Make sure you know the church layout, especially the emergency exits, and any areas that are out of bounds to guests.
- Treat guests with respect.
- Be friendly and make guests feel welcome.
- Work as a team and support your Shift leader. Do not challenge their decisions in front of other volunteers or guests.
- Guests and volunteers should be known by first names.

- Please do not give or lend money to guests, the team leader has addresses of Day Centres and other agencies that are able to provide appropriate help to homeless people in genuine need.
- Do not give personal information especially address, telephone number or e-mail address. You may think there will be no problems but people have been pestered long after the shelter closes with requests which are hard to refuse.
- Arrangements should not be made to meet with guests outside the Shelter unless it is an activity arranged by WWNS.
- Make sure you are not left alone with a guest or leave a colleague alone. This is not only for your own safety but so that if anyone alleges an impropriety against you, there is a witness.
- When speaking to guests it is best not to make promises; people can feel very let down by a promise not kept. Our organisation needs to build trust in order to be effective in finding appropriate help for guests. Broken promises can undermine this work.
- Do not take guests to your home.
- For your own safety do not wear or bring valuables to the Shelter. Often there is nowhere to store valuables safely.
- There should be at least two volunteers in the Shelter at all times.

Confidentiality

When talking to guests it is important not to push for information. Please acknowledge that some guests may feel hurt or let down by some experiences and may not wish to talk about them. Others will like nothing better than to tell you their story. Please respect guest's confidentiality and don't allow your conversation to become common gossip especially with other guests.

Confidentiality is important for building trust; however it is not about keeping secrets and this should be made clear to guests. You may keep any conversation in confidence so long as you do not feel burdened or uncomfortable about what has been shared. If things feel as though they are getting too demanding tell the guest that you may have to tell your coordinator what is being said in order to get appropriate help. It is then up to the guest as to whether they want to continue.

If you feel there is a threat to another person or to the safety of the Shelter you should tell your coordinator/shift leader immediately.

Gifts

From time to time guests may wish to give gifts to staff or volunteers. Small gifts may be accepted particularly if they can be shared. The general rule is that all gifts should be shared with the team and the guest should be told that this is the policy. In any case all gifts should be reported to the Coordinator and recorded in the log book. Any gift deemed to be too expensive or in some way inappropriate should be gently returned to the guest. You should not encourage guests to give gifts.

Rules for guests

We keep the rules to a minimum, but for everyone's comfort and safety please note the following:

- No alcohol or drugs to be consumed in or around the premises.
- No violent, threatening, racist or other anti-social behaviour/language
- No offensive weapons
- In accordance with the new law, there is no smoking inside the building. Provision will be made outside close to the premises but this may be on the basis of periodic controlled sessions.
- No pets
- Place is forfeited if not personally reserved each night by 8.00pm
- The Shelter is for those aged 21 years and above.

EXAMPLE TIME TABLE

6.00-10.00pm Evening Shift (short overlap time for briefing between shifts)

- Open up;
- Prepare and cook a hot meal.
- Set up tables & chairs and make beds.
- Check toilets for cleanliness, soap & towels.
- Check the security of premises regarding doors to be locked or opened.
- **7.15pm** The whole team should get together for briefing. A good time to introduce new volunteers. Check that they have read the volunteers handbook and check that everyone knows the fire drill. Coordinator to pass on any concerns from the previous night. Jobs to be allotted to volunteers. Where appropriate finish with prayer.
- **7.30pm** Doors open book clients in for the night and for the following night.
- Show new guests around;
- Serve tea & coffee over the course of the evening.
- **8pm** begin to serve the meal
- Wash and tidy up after the meal.
- Organise social activities for the guests e.g. games of draughts, jigsaws, dominoes, TV, Quiz Night. Etc
- Record any incidents in the log book.

9.45pm- 7.00am Night Shift (overlap times)

- Secure the building
- Make sure everyone is comfortable and settled in for the night;
- **11pm** Lights out. All guests should adhere to lights out and quiet.
- There should be two volunteers awake, in case of need.

- Record any incidents in the log book.

6.45- 9.00am Morning Shift Previous shift originally down to finish at 6 which would leave 45 mins with no volunteers!

- Put on urn & Cook breakfast
- Waking up guests.
- Serve breakfast
- Clearing beds and bedding away; Guests can be encouraged to clear up their own bedding. (It is advised that you wear gloves when handling used bedding)
- Ensure guests leave premises by 8.30
- Washing up and tidying up.
- Ensure log book has been completed and phone is handed over to Project Coordinator or representative of the church running the next night.
- Clean Church premises and toilets.
- Take bedding away for laundering. Please wash at 60 degrees (other volunteers may be involved in laundering but may need bags of sheets transporting to them)
- Secure the building.

GUIDELINES FOR CHURCH/VENUE COORDINATORS

Church/Venue Coordinators have the responsibility for managing the human and physical resources of the shelter. You will be called upon to make decisions as to the most appropriate course of action, and you may wish to make these in consultation with the paid co-ordinator who will be more familiar with the clients. However, no list of policies and procedures can possibly cover every situation, and sometimes you will have to think on your feet.

Building

You must be familiar with the building. Importantly you must:

- Know where the fire exits and fire extinguishers are
- Know where the First Aid box, telephone and list of emergency numbers are, and tell your volunteers where they are.
- Make sure that fire exits are unlocked and not blocked
- Know the evacuation procedures in the event of a fire
- Make sure that any areas where you do not want residents to go are secure.
- Tell volunteers where residents can and cannot go.
- Identify a safe area where volunteers can leave their belongings.

Volunteers

- Introduce volunteers to one another and ensure that everybody knows who is a volunteer and their names (badges?)
- “Buddy up” new volunteers with a more experienced volunteer.
- Allocate people jobs for the evening: e.g. serving tea, serving meals, putting out tables and beds, showing clients round the shelter etc.

The Log Book

The Log Book is extremely important as it is:

- The means of communication between the seven locations, passing on details of who arrived, who didn't and to record any incidents.
- The method used to book clients in for the following night.
- The way we collect statistics, used to write a report at the end of the scheme that is then used for fundraising.

Please look after it and make it up faithfully. It is our evidence of the Shelter being regularly properly run in case of any individual incident.

Before you open

- You should have received the phone and Logbook from WWNS Co-ordinator
- Go through the logbook and discuss incidents with the co-ordinator, if possible, and inform the volunteers of any incidents, problems or concerns.
- If you anticipate a problem, discuss it and agree what you will do; everybody should know how you will deal with it before you open.
- If you do not have enough volunteers and do not feel it is safe to open, delay your opening time – it is a good idea to go outside and talk to the people who are waiting and explain what is happening.

Opening Up

- Welcome each guest as they arrive.
- The age limit is 21 and above. This will be declared by clients by signing the entry sheet that refers to the client rules.
- If it's their first night in the shelter scheme you will need to sit down with them and go through the Shelter Rules (Welcome to...) Remember that some clients may not be able to read. You will also need to ask them for all the information for the Logbook. This only needs to be filled in fully on the first night.
- Offer new residents a copy of the map of the night shelter venues.
- When you answer the door, always ask clients to give you their names (i.e. don't ask "Are you Dave?")
- Sometimes people turn up at the door who are not booked in. This is an area for discretion. The Shelter will probably be fully booked, but there may be a free bed because someone has failed to arrive by 8.30pm. You might decide to let an extra person stay because you have plenty of room – but it's important not to guarantee a bed for the next night as some venues only have room for the limit of 12. Don't forget to write up this sort of thing in the logbook.
- Once things have settled down you will be keeping an eye on things but you should have plenty of opportunity to chat to guests and volunteers.

Handover

If you are working in shifts with different leaders, make sure you talk to the person taking over about any incidents or problems.

HEALTH & SAFETY STATEMENT

Our policy is to provide and maintain, as far as is reasonably practicable, safe and healthy working conditions, equipment and systems of work for both volunteers taking part in and clients using the Winter Night Shelter scheme, and to provide such information, training and supervision as is needed for this purpose.

OBJECTIVES

The Wycombe Winter Night Shelter management committee undertakes:

- To provide a working environment that is healthy and safe with satisfactory amenities.
- To ensure that health & safety legislation, regulations and codes of practice are observed.
- To provide and maintain safe premises and equipment including appropriate protective clothing.
- To ensure that the use, handling, storage and transportation of food, articles and substances are safe.
- To ensure that the systems of work are safe and to provide or locate appropriate training and advice for volunteers in these matters.
- To promote effective communication between the Shelter steering committee, Church/Venue Coordinators, volunteers and guests on safety matters in each church
- To ensure that all volunteers and guests using the premises are safe and without risk to their health
- To review and revise this policy annually or as new legislation requires

DRUGS & ALCOHOL POLICY

The following general guidelines are adapted from those used by the Crisis at Christmas winter shelters

Use of drugs and alcohol

Drugs or Alcohol must not be consumed/used on the premises by any guest or volunteer.

- Drinking alcohol whilst on shift is not allowed.
- Volunteers should not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs when coming onto their shift.

Action to be taken if policy is breached

- If guests are found drinking on the premises they will be asked to leave the scheme. This can be done that evening by the Church/Venue Coordinator or with the Project Coordinator the following morning. This is up to the Church/Venue Coordinators discretion. It may be more disruptive to remove the person from the premises that night, depending on what kind of state they are in at that time.
- If guests are found taking drugs on the premises they will be asked to leave the scheme.

- Anyone found dealing drugs will be asked to leave the scheme.
- Volunteers who suspect that someone is violating these policies must make a note of this on the reverse side of the log sheet. This way volunteers the following night can be aware. Volunteers should not police a night shelter but should not be negligent.

Communication

- Guests will be advised of this policy on entering the shelter. It will be contained in their contract as explained by the WWNS Project Coordinator
- Volunteers should be informed of the policy at briefing meetings and details of the policy should be included in information given to volunteers.
- If anyone is excluded from the shelter as a result of breaching the policy all Church/Venue Coordinators should be informed. In particular the church responsible for the following night must be informed.

FOOD PREPARATION AND REHEATING GUIDELINES

These are general points for all volunteers to be aware of. Cooks and those storing, preparing and handling (including serving) any food should refer to the comprehensive Food Hygiene Appendix.

Preparation

Food should be thoroughly cooked to a core temperature of at least 70°C and kept at that temperature for at least 2mins. (if you are cooking a casserole the core temperature should be taken from the centre of a piece of meat)

Cooling

Cool food rapidly before putting in the refrigerator. Food should not stand around for more than 90mins at which time deterioration will begin. Food can be cooled quickly by standing in cold or iced water.

Reheating

The practice of reheating should be avoided. However, if this is unavoidable, the food should be heated until it has reached a core temperature of at least 70°C and held at that temperature for at least two minutes.

Microwaves

If food is being cooked or heated in a microwave oven be especially careful to ensure that every part of the food is thoroughly heated. Microwaves often heat food unevenly, so you may need to stir and move the food around to ensure temperature consistency.

Serving

Hot food must be served at a temperature of at least 63°C

(Information from 'The Food Safety Handbook' by Graham Aston)

FIRE INSTRUCTIONS (example placed in the UBC Night Shelter)



FIRE RELATED INSTRUCTIONS

Those responsible for meetings must read these instructions. You are responsible for ensuring that those attending are aware of them

You are in the LOWER LOUNGE

Before using this lounge the **EXTERNAL GATE MUST BE UNLOCKED**

There are **two emergency exits** from this lounge. One eventually leads to a gate at the front of the premises that must be unlocked to allow access to Easton Street.

The **white door** leads directly outside and is the main exit route to be used

The **second exit door leads to an internal** corridor and to a second internal door **straight ahead** into a stone corridor to the right and an exit into a sideway.

Those with **walking difficulties** should **use the second exit to avoid the steps**

Once out of the building by either route **please assemble on Easton Street**

FIRE ALARM SIGNAL

When an alarm sounds please be alert, observe for signs of fire and prepare to leave when instructed

Evacuate if the alarm sound continuously for more than 30 seconds

If there is a fire dial 999 (the alarm is not connected to the fire brigade)

If the **alarms have been set off accidentally** by your meeting/group advise a HUB Administrator as soon as possible during daytime.

Appendix 1. FOOD HYGIENE & KITCHEN SAFETY

Detailed guideline procedures are contained in a separate document for catering staff. This is available to all volunteers on request.

Appendix 2. PROCEDURES FOR PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE

We are grateful to the Churches in Islington whose advice in this area has been invaluable. Over the years that the Islington Churches have operated a Cold Weather Shelter Scheme the shelter environment has generally been calm and welcoming and thankfully there have been no violent incidents. With that in mind however, it is important to recognize that actual or potential violence **may** be a problem in working with this vulnerable client group.

The following guidelines were issued by the London Rough Sleepers Unit, are used by Shelter and Crisis and are intended to offer direction on the most effective ways of preventing violent behaviour and protection from its consequences.

The Health and Safety Statement included in this pack acknowledges the responsibility of the committee and various churches to provide direction and support to volunteers; in addition, all volunteers have an individual responsibility never to put themselves, their colleagues, guests or members of the public at unnecessary risk. These procedures should be viewed within the context of that shared responsibility.

Defining violence and aggression

Although these guidelines focus on the extreme end of violent behaviour, this does not mean to imply that only physical assault is of concern. Threats and verbal abuse, for example, are also recognized for their intimidating and undermining impact and, where appropriate, these guidelines should apply to all forms of aggressive behaviour.

General guidelines for managing violence and aggression

It is natural to be frightened of violence, and this needs to be taken into account in the expectations of oneself or others when dealing with actual or potential violence or threatening behaviour.

In responding to violence or potential violence, one's own safety and that of colleagues and the client group must be seen as the first consideration.

Guidelines can never cover every eventuality. Volunteers must also draw on their experience, skills and common sense when faced with aggressive situations.

All volunteers should co-operate in taking a consistent approach to confronting guests about unacceptable behaviour and in banning or excluding clients from the building. As far as possible, one volunteer should not be identified as the instigator of a ban – these should be presented as team decisions, and all volunteers must actively support the decision even if they have a different opinion

Managing a violent incident

It is the responsibility of all volunteers to alert colleagues at the first sign of aggression and to act co-operatively to diffuse the situation.

One or two volunteers should talk to the individual/s concerned, remaining calm, but firm, and trying to create opportunities for the guest/s to back down without feeling humiliated. Where possible, the guest/s should be taken aside.

Other volunteers should remain at a reasonable distance but pay attention in case the situation escalates. Volunteers who are not directly involved with the main protagonists should attempt to keep other clients calm, and prevent them from becoming involved unless they are friends who can assist positively.

In particular, one volunteer should ensure that any vulnerable people are removed from the area and if possible, potential weapons such as plates, cutlery, etc should be removed from the area.

Space should be created to ensure that people are not crowded into a confined area. All those present should be mindful of their own and others "escape route" should it be necessary to get out of the way fast.

One worker should be in a position to 'phone for police assistance should this become necessary. It may be useful to identify in advance which volunteer on your shift would have this responsibility should a situation arise.

If an incident escalates and the guest/s cannot be calmed, then volunteers should be prepared to vacate the area. Personal safety must be put before the protection of property. The police should be summoned immediately.

In exceptional circumstances, if retreat is not possible, volunteers should take appropriate measures to defend themselves. In the unlikely event of an attack, only force sufficient to stop the attacker and prevent injury to self, colleagues or other guests should be used, reasonable restraint is acceptable.

After an incident has occurred

If an incident does occur, it is likely to be very unsettling for everyone involved in the project, whether volunteer or guest. Some things that can be done include:

- Promote first aid where necessary
- Providing reassurance and helping everyone to calm down
- Recording details of the incident as quickly as possible in the log book
- Arranging for any volunteer that has been scared or hurt to leave the shift
- Arranging longer term support where necessary
- Discuss the incident and try and draw out constructive lessons for avoiding a similar incident in the future
- Consider providing other guests with brief details of what happened and how it was dealt with; this is to prevent rumours and provide reassurance that incidents are dealt with effectively.

****** PERSONAL SAFETY ******

In order to promote safety in the Night Shelter sessions, always observe these rules:

- Check the identity of each guest arriving at the door by asking for their name
- Do not let any guest into the building whose name is not already in the log book

- Never give your home 'phone number or home address to a client, or invite a client into your home.
- Avoid being alone with a client, especially one of the opposite sex.
- Leave your valuables in the safe keeping of the Church/Venue Coordinator, or if possible leave them at home
- Do not give money to guests – if you are concerned about their situation, refer them to the Night Shelter Coordinator
- Do not touch any guest, even to wake them up.
- Wear gloves when handling used bedding.
- When dealing with lost property, never put your hand into a bag or pocket. Tip contents onto a flat surface so you can see what you are handling.

Volunteers should act safely and not put themselves or other volunteers or guests in any danger. If you feel intimidated at any time during the shift, inform the Church/Venue Coordinator. Please take directions at all times from them, especially with regard to matters of personal safety.

Appendix 3. DRUG & ALCOHOL INFORMATION/PROCEDURES

Detailed guideline procedures are contained in a separate document for church co-ordinators and shift leaders.

This is available to all volunteers on request.