

Wycombe Homeless Connection

Winter Night Shelter



Volunteers' Handbook



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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 venues. 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 we offer. We hope that your experience of volunteering this winter will be rewarding and that all our venues will be safe and welcoming for those who use them whether as guests, volunteers or visitors.

Background and Context

It is good to recognise that some of the guests who use the venues 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, guests will be helped to get in touch with the right agencies and organisations 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 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 10 guests.

The Night Shelter is not a drop in where anyone can just turn up. We operate a referral process liaising with Wycombe District Council, the Old Tea Warehouse, the Probation Service and other local agencies. This is for the health and safety of all of our guests and volunteers.

The Wycombe Homeless Connection 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** and 2 assistant coordinators who oversee the smooth running of the shelter, liaise with the seven Churches and work with the guests to find secure accommodation and a more stable lifestyle.

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 meals 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 guests.
- Arrange handover between shift leaders and WHC 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 shelter. It should be used to note any incidents that take place, 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 Homeless Connection 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 the shift 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 only.
- Please do not give or lend money to guests.
- Do not give out 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 WHC.
- 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 or volunteers.

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 18 years and above.

TIME TABLE OF SHIFTS

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 guests in for the night.
- Show new guests around;
- Serve tea & coffee over the course of the evening.
- **8pm** No guests to come in from now unless with prior agreement.
- 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

- 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 and shake bedding carefully)
- Ensure guests leave premises by 8.30a.m.
- Washing up and tidying up.
- Ensure log book has been completed and a record made of any incidents.
- Hand phone over to Project Coordinator.
- 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 or assistant who will be more familiar with the guests. 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 guests 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 way we collect statistics, used to write a report at the end of the shelter that is then used for fundraising.

The log book is our evidence of the Shelter being properly run, please look after it.

See the front of the log book for a sample page on how to lay it out. Entries must be signed legibly so that any queries regarding incidents can be followed up.

Before you open

- You should have received the phone and Logbook from the WHC Project Worker
- Go through the logbook and discuss incidents with WHC Staff, 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

- **DO NOT** let any of the guests into the shelter unless a staff member of the Project Team from WHC has arrived, unless given specific authorisation to do so.
- Welcome each guest as they arrive.
- The age limit is 18 and above. This will be declared by guests by signing the entry sheet that refers to the guest's rules.
- If it's their first night in the Night Shelter you will need to sit down with them and go through the Shelter Rules. Remember that some guests may not be able to read.
- Offer new guests a copy of the map of the night shelter venues.
- When you answer the door, always ask guests 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. Do not let them into the shelter as you will not know their background and will be putting other guests and your volunteers at risk. Advise them to go to the council offices the following day to register.
- 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.

Use the handover sheet provided.

HEALTH & SAFETY STATEMENT

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

OBJECTIVES

The Wycombe Homeless Connection management board 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 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

Communication

- Guests will be advised of this policy on entering the shelter. It will be contained in their contract as explained by the WHC 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 HYGIENE & KITCHEN SAFETY

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

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 and Kitchen Safety Guide which is available on request.

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

Volunteers need to be aware of the fire instructions for the venue/s they will be at. They must familiarise themselves with the procedure in case of fire.

All venues must have fire instructions clearly displayed on the wall.

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 recognise that actual or potential violence **may** be a problem in working with this vulnerable guest 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 recognised 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 guests 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 guests 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 guests 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 guest, or invite a guest into your home.
- Avoid being alone with a guest, 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 one of the Night Shelter Coordinators.
- 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.

DRUG & ALCOHOL INFORMATION/PROCEDURES

The following general guidelines are adapted from those used by the Crisis at Christmas winter shelters. A copy of the drugs and alcohol policy is available on request.

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

CHURCH VENUES

SUNDAYS – West End Hall, Kings Church

Entrance on West End Road off Desborough Road

MONDAYS – Trinity United Reformed Church

Opposite the Rye on the London Road near the pedestrian crossing

TUESDAYS – Oakley Hall, All Saints Church

Castle Street Coffee Shop entrance

WEDNESDAYS – Oakridge Baptist Church Hall

Corner of Oakridge Road and Jubilee Rd.

THURSDAYS – Union Baptist, The HUB

Easton Street, one way system

FRIDAYS – Wesley Methodist Church

Priory Road opposite side entrance of Primark near Railway arch

SATURDAYS – St Marys and St Georges Church

Top steps off Dashwood Avenue or Rutland Corner

CONTACT US

Please do get in touch if you have any questions.

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