



**GWNS VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**  
**2019 - 2020**

Thank you for volunteering to be part of Greenwich Winter Night Shelter (GWNS).

We aim to provide a safe and welcome refuge to homeless people over some of the coldest months of the year. Shelters thrive on the work of volunteers; from those who sign people in, to those who serve meals, to others who share in conversation, skills and experience. For homeless people, a shelter can be as little as a place to sleep out of the rain or as much as a step forward to self-sufficiency.

We hope that your experience of being a GWNS volunteer will be rewarding. The following document sets out more information about the shelter, guidelines for volunteers and operational procedures. Please take some time to read this carefully and raise any questions you may have with the Project Manager or one of the Trustees (contact details are set out at the end of this booklet).

## **Shelter description**

GWNS provides food, overnight accommodation, friendship and support to homeless guests. The shelter is located at a different venue each night of the week to provide a visible and accessible presence.

One of our key values at GWNS is hospitality. God has shown us great hospitality in welcoming us into his family in Christ, and we extend hospitality to our guests through our welcome to them at the shelter. We are grateful to volunteers of any or no faith, provided that every volunteer agrees to the core values of compassion, empathy and kindness to our fellow human beings.

We can accommodate a maximum of 15 guests per night; however, over the course of the shelter the total number of people supported will be far more as individuals move on and others take their place.

## **Structure**

GWNS is an inter-church charity which adopts a proven shelter provision model and operates in accordance with the Housing Justice Quality Mark. The responsibility and day to day work of GWNS is undertaken by:

- The Trustees - a small ecumenical team with overall responsibility for the running of the shelter

- The Project Management Team - responsible for project co-ordination and administration including liaison with the referral agencies. The Project Management Team reports to the Trustees.
- The Case Manager – works with the referral agencies and the guests to create a personalised action plan or ‘move on pathway’ (i.e. preparation for a new residence) for the guest to carry out throughout their stay at the shelter. The Case Manager is part of the Project Management Team.
- Each host venue has a Venue Coordinator(s) and Shift Leader(s) (shift leaders are appointed by the Venue Co-ordinators with the Trustees). The Venue Coordinator is responsible for ensuring the overall operational effectiveness of the shelter, compiling the rota to provide the full complement of volunteers on each session, ensuring provisions are available at the shelter to prepare the necessary meals and the cleaning up of the venue.
- The Shift Leaders are responsible for allocating tasks to volunteers, taking key decisions when other volunteers are unsure of the best course of action, supporting volunteers where necessary in responding to guests and briefing the new Shift Leader at handover. The shift leaders feed back to the Venue Coordinators.

## **Referral Process**

The night shelter is not open access; we accept referrals from several agencies who conduct risk assessments on our behalf for each guest in order to ensure the health and safety of guests and volunteers. The referral agencies continue to work with the guests and have an ongoing relationship with them.

The Project Manager compiles a list of referred people who meet the shelter criteria and sends this to the relevant Venue Co-ordinator on a daily basis.

## **Guidelines for volunteers**

The purpose of GWNS is to provide a safe place to sleep, good food and Christian hospitality to welcome our guests. It is not a support agency: advice, on-going support or advocacy cannot be offered by volunteers to any guest, however much they might want to. Guests in need of advice should be directed to their referral adviser or the GWNS Case Manager who is trained to provide tailored advice and support.

Volunteers must provide the name and contact details of two referees who can vouch for their suitability to work with vulnerable adults. In the case of church-goers, one referee should be their Vicar or church leader. For others, a professional or work place reference is

preferred. The second referee should be a personal or character referee who is not a close personal friend or family member.

GWNS volunteers must be over 18 years of age. At the discretion of the Venue Coordinator, young people aged between 16 and 18 may be allowed to help at the shelter, subject to a full risk assessment being carried out. Children under 16 are not allowed into the shelter between 6.00pm and 9.00am the following morning under any circumstances.

## **What is required of Volunteers?**

- Compassion and a willingness to be challenged.
- Commitment to undertake all prescribed volunteer training.
- Desire to treat guests with respect and make them feel welcome.
- Reliable and good time keeping.
- Maintain boundaries (first name terms only).
- Dress appropriate to the circumstances.
- Ability to follow the Venue Coordinator or shift leader's instructions, and work as part of a team (volunteers should not challenge the decision of the venue coordinator in front of other volunteers or guests).
- Good sense of judgement e.g. knowing when to call for help or further advice, responding calmly but quickly in an emergency.
- Knowledge of GWNS guidelines.
- Sensitivity to issues relating to homelessness including mental health issues and addiction.
- Knowledge of the building layout, especially the location of fire exits and a first aid box (information provided by Venue Leaders).
- If the centre has a shower facility, try to ensure that these are used fairly (i.e. that one individual does not use it excessively). You may be asked to inspect the shower and toilet facilities from time to time to ensure that they are in good order, and clean them if necessary.
- If the breakfast venue is at a different location from the sleeping area, and guests' personal effects are left in the sleeping area, a volunteer should either lock the room or stay there until guests have returned.

### **Volunteers should not:**

- Bring alcohol or drugs into a venue or arrive to volunteer under the influence of alcohol.
- Make promises to guests. GWNS needs to build trust in order to be effective in finding appropriate help for guests; broken promises can undermine this work.

- Allow themselves to be alone with a guest.
- Arrange to meet with guests outside the shelter unless it is an activity arranged with GWNS.
- Wear or bring valuables to the shelter.
- Be drawn into critical observations about other venues, for example opinions about which venues are better or worse.

**Golden Rules for the smooth operation of the shelter are:**

- Check identities and know who people are.
- Do not provide personal information (especially address, telephone number or e-mail)
- Do not lend your mobile phone to any of the guests.
- Do not take guests to your home.
- Avoid unnecessary physical contact and do not be alone with a guest.
- Do not give or lend money to guests.
- No alcohol or non-prescribed drugs allowed.
- Do not intervene physically in any fight.
- Do not give any medication to guests, not even paracetamol.

## **Respect and Confidentiality**

It is important not to push for personal information from guests. Please acknowledge that some people may feel hurt or let down by their experience and may not wish to talk about it. Others will be more open and able to tell you their story.

Respect confidentiality and do not allow your conversation with a guest to become common gossip especially with other guests or volunteers. Confidentiality is important for building trust, but it is not about keeping secrets and this should be made clear to guests. If at any time you feel that the individual you are speaking to poses a threat to themselves or another person, or to the safety of the shelter, you should advise the individual that you will need to let your Venue Coordinator/shift leader know immediately. Likewise, if you feel that a conversation is too demanding, tell the guest that you may have to tell your Venue Coordinator what is being said in order to get appropriate help. The decision whether to proceed with the conversation then rests with the guest.

## **Gifts**

Guests should not be encouraged to give gifts. Financial gifts should not be accepted. However, from time to time guests may wish to show their gratitude by giving a gift to the

volunteers. In such cases, where possible, they should be directed towards a gift that can be shared with the team e.g. box of chocolates. All gifts should be reported to the Venue Coordinator/Shift Leader and recorded in the Logbook. Any gift deemed to be too expensive or in some way inappropriate should be gently returned to the guest.

## **Decision Making**

There is a lead person on every shift who is responsible for making key decisions. Please do not question any decision in front of other volunteers or guests. If you feel there is an issue with a decision taken, please talk to the Venue Coordinator/Shift Leader in private. If you still feel that your views are not being considered fairly then you may make a complaint to either the Project Manager or one of the Trustees, who will advise you on next steps. Contact details for these people are listed at the end of this document.

## **Guest agreement**

All guests have discussed and signed the Guest Agreement with their referrer prior to being referred to the shelter. The terms of the agreement are re-iterated by the Venue Coordinator/Shift Leader when individuals arrive for their first night at the shelter as follows:

- No alcohol or controlled drugs are allowed in or around the premises.
- Guests on prescription medication will be made known to the venue coordinator through the referral process.
- No violent, threatening, racist or other anti-social behaviour and no weapons.
- In accordance with the law, there is no smoking inside the building.
- Guests should be accompanied for cigarette breaks due to safeguarding issues (e.g. other venue users).
- Guests should arrive between 7.00-8.00pm so they are in time for dinner. There is no guarantee of dinner for guests who arrive after 8pm.
- Guests who arrive late i.e. after 8.00pm, without prior agreement, may be denied access to the shelter. The decision on whether to permit access to any latecomer will be at the discretion of the VC/Shift Leader based on full consideration of the circumstances presented.
- Guests should remain in the shelter between the hours of 10pm-7am. This includes not leaving the venue for any cigarette breaks.
- Guests must not view pornographic or other inappropriate material and must respect the 'close time' for screen viewing at 11pm.
- No pets allowed.

- Guests who skip two nights can no longer be offered a place at the shelter and will be re-referred to their referral agency.

## **Timetable of shifts**

The guide to shifts is as follows (please check details with your Venue Coordinator as there may be slight variations in individual shelters):

### **Evening Shift - (6.00pm – 10.00pm)**

6.00pm: Open up, prepare and cook a hot meal, set up tables and chairs, make beds, check toilets for cleanliness, put out soap and towels (remove bleach and bathroom cleaners), check the security of premises regarding doors to be locked or opened.

6.45pm: Team briefing.

7.00pm: Doors open. Venue Coordinator/shift leader will book guests in for the night and show new guests round. Volunteers welcome and serve tea and coffee and chat to guests.

8.00pm: Serve the meal. Guests who arrive after this time are no longer able to access the service (unless there has been prior agreement). Volunteers eat with the guests.

9.00pm: Wash and tidy up after the meal, organise social activities for the guests.

Refrigerate, wrap or dispose of any left-over food as appropriate.

### **Night Shift - (9.45pm – 7.00am)**

9.45pm: Handover to overnight volunteers. Secure the building, ensure everyone is comfortable and settled in for the night.

11.00pm: Lights out. All guests should adhere to lights out and quiet time. Overnight shift leader to conduct a risk assessment and determine whether it is necessary for one volunteer to be awake during the night. If any inflatable mattresses deflate, provide a new one for the guest.

### **Morning Shift – (6.45am – 9.00am)**

6.45am: Hand over to the morning shift and make them aware of any issues/concerns.

Switch on the urn and make breakfast.

7.00am-7.30am: Wake up guests.

7.30am -8:30am: Serve breakfast, clear beds and bedding away. Guests should be encouraged to clear up their own bedding. You may wear gloves when handling used bedding and shake bedding carefully. Ensure guests leave premises by 8.30am.

8:30am-9.00am: Final wash and tidy up. Clean premises (including the toilets). Take bedding away for laundering (or pass on to laundry volunteers). Please wash at 60 degrees (mattress covers at 40 degrees). Secure the building and leave it ready for use by other groups. Return any keys, log book and venue mobile phone to the designated location. Ensure that bags of waste for recycling or disposal are dealt with according to the

procedures of the venue. Any lost property should be labelled 'Left behind at GWNS on [day/date]' and left at an appropriate location such as the venue's office or vestry.

Note: there is quarter of an hour overlap between shifts for handover and briefing.

## **Health and Safety policy**

A copy of the GWNS Health and Safety policy is available at each venue.

## **Food hygiene and kitchen safety**

Individuals involved in the preparation of food are required to have level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate.

## **Procedure for the prevention of violence**

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 as intimidating and can undermine the operational effectiveness of the shelter. 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 guests must be 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 any 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 the Venue Coordinator/shift leader at the first sign of aggression and to act cooperatively to diffuse the situation. The Venue Coordinator/shift leader with one other volunteer 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 16 to 18 year olds are removed from the area and, if possible, potential weapons such as plates, cutlery should be removed. 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 routes" should it be necessary to get out of the way fast.

One worker should be in a position to telephone the police for 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.

## **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 useful actions to assist the shelter include:

- Promote first aid where necessary
- Provide reassurance and help everyone to calm down.
- The Venue Coordinator/shift leader should write up the incident as soon as possible. If another person has witnessed the incident, they should also write their version of events.
- Arrange for any volunteer who has been scared or hurt to leave the shift.
- Arrange longer term support where necessary.
- Discuss the incident and try and draw out constructive lessons to avoid a similar incident in the future.

- Consider providing other guests with brief details of what happened and how it was dealt with in order to prevent rumours and provide reassurance that incidents are dealt with effectively.

## **GWNS Complaints & Grievance Procedure**

This procedure is intended for any person involved in the GWNS whether they are a guest, or a volunteer. The procedure set out below should be adopted in the event of a grievance or formal complaint arising during the course of the normal operation of the night shelter, which does not fall into the categories of infringement of the shelter rules by a guest, or other policies on harassment, but may relate to how these disciplines are implemented or exercised, or a grievance reported.

The complaint form must be completed and logged by the Venue Coordinator/Shift Lead, and passed on to the GWNS Trustee responsible for complaints, Margaret Cave (Chair of Trustees) and recorded in the Log Book. If it is inappropriate to write the complaint in the Log Book the complainant should make their complaint in writing and pass this directly to the Chair of Trustees or via the GWNS Project Manager as appropriate.

If a guest makes a complaint about GWNS to their referrer, and this is passed on to the Project Manager, it is the Project Manager's responsibility to inform the Chair of Trustees to progress. The Chair will seek to resolve the matter informally with those concerned as soon as possible. Where this is not possible, the complaint must be fully investigated with those concerned within two weeks. The complainant should then be notified of the outcome in writing. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response they may take their grievance to the GWNS Trustees. The decision of the Trustees shall be final.

## **Disclosure of a Safeguarding Issue**

GWNS welcomes single homeless guests with low support needs. Risks are assessed as part of our referral process and guests with needs which may cause them to be vulnerable adults will generally not be appropriate for GWNS. GNWS recognises however, that a safeguarding issue may arise during the course of the shelter operation. If a guest discloses information which causes concern for their safety or the safety of others or relates to a criminal offence, this should be documented and the Trustee responsible for Safeguarding should be immediately informed via the contact number in the Shelter Log Book. The Safeguarding Officer will take appropriate action and also inform the Trustees as appropriate and necessary. The guest's referrer will also be notified of any such disclosure.

Where there is an immediate danger during the operation of the shelter, emergency service should be contacted by dialling 999.

# GWNS

## **Trustees:**

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