

# The Snowflake Trust

## Night Shelter Project

### Report

### for Winter 2014/15

**Report issued on 24 June 2015**

The Snowflake Trust is a Registered Charity no: 1119743 &  
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## ***1. Introduction***

2014/15 has been the third year of operation and the second successive year in which the Snowflake Emergency Winter Night Shelter Service has operated on all seven week-nights over the winter - 94 nights in all (103 nights in 2013/14, 58 nights in 2011/12). This Annual Report has been prepared to enable all interested parties and stakeholders fully to understand the range and depth of the service delivered, the work required to provide it, and the significant outcomes achieved. It also serves to satisfy the Trust's statutory reporting responsibilities in respect of its charitable and corporate status.

Without the enthusiastic support of our 157 Registered Volunteer helpers and the seven Churches whose halls were used without cost to Snowflake, the service to the 58 Guests who stayed overnight in our Shelters (64 Guests in 2013/14) would not have been possible. It is a particular pleasure to record that 26 Guests (45% of the total) were assisted to 'move on' over the winter (24 Guests (37%) in 2013/14). This is a welcome increase and explains to some degree why the number of Guests this year actually reduced in number - people helped last year had 'moved on' and were no longer in need of Snowflake's assistance.

The commitment and energy of our Volunteers has continued to be a real inspiration and, whilst Snowflake was started originally by Christian communities across Hastings & St Leonards, it is a real pleasure to record the number of Volunteers of other faiths and no faith who have willingly offered their time for those on the margins of society in our area - on behalf of the Trustees and Guests it is right to pay tribute to all.

A full induction and training scheme was operated, enabling 120 volunteers to be trained in such matters as First Aid, Food Hygiene and Dealing with Aggression (although it is pleasing to note that no serious incidents were recorded).

Snowflake continued to employ Rebecca Black as Project Manager for seven months to assist the planning & preparation and lead the practical implementation of the project. This year, for the first time, a Project Assistant was employed to manage the scheduling of Volunteers onto the various shifts and to manage the training programme. The Trustees are pleased to have been able to assist the employment of two young people from the area in this way. Rebecca has continued to develop effective relationships not only with the Homeless Community (as one Guest, speaking for all, succinctly put it: 'Rebecca is a lady with three sets of wings! She is a real anchor for us'), but also with statutory and other agencies, particularly with the Seaview Project (where the Snowflake office is based) and Hastings Borough Council Housing Department. The result is clearly shown in the 26 Guests who have been enabled to 'move on' to their own place this Winter.

Trustees have once again been delighted to receive valuable feedback from Guests and Volunteers alike in an endeavour to further improve the service in the future. The importance of reinforcing Guests' self-esteem and treating everyone with respect is now well embedded within the Snowflake operational ethos.

Of course, the Shelter service would not have been possible without the financial support from various grant-making trusts, local organisations (see appendix for their names) and many individuals (including the Guests themselves who undertook a sponsored walk) - the Guests and Trustees thank them all most warmly. The Trustees have been greatly heartened by the range of organisations and individuals who, on their own initiative, have provided funds or helped in other ways.

The Trustees have given due consideration to guidance from the Charity Commission concerning the 'Public Benefit' provided by Snowflake, and they are satisfied that Snowflake's activities comply in all respects with this guidance.

Richard Watson, a founder Trustee of Snowflake, retired from the Board during the year, and it is appropriate to record our thanks to him for his wise counsel. Mrs Sheila Young was subsequently appointed to the Board with a brief to maintain and improve relationships with Volunteers particularly over the Summer, and to develop the use of the Trust's media presence. The website has been re-written to enable full access by mobile devices and tablets, and plans are being considered for the use of Facebook and other modern media communication formats.

Sadly, Homelessness in Hastings & St Leonards does not look like it will be eliminated in the near future despite the efforts of statutory bodies. Accordingly, the Trustees - and, clearly, the kind hearted Volunteers from our local community - are determined to continue with the winter night shelter initiative for as long as it is needed.

*Christopher Maxwell-Stewart*  
*Chair of Trustees*

## ***2. The Night Shelter***

### *a. What is the Night Shelter?*

The Snowflake Night Shelter is a temporary rolling night shelter based on the '*Shelter in a Pack*' model published jointly by Housing Justice and the Church Urban Fund. The Shelter project provides supervised overnight accommodation to homeless people who would otherwise be sleeping rough in Hastings and St Leonards during the extreme winter months. This includes:

- ✓ A warm bed
- ✓ Hospitality and engagement with willing Volunteers to facilitate wellbeing and positive self esteem
- ✓ Shelter from the winter weather
- ✓ Hot drinks and meals
- ✓ In liaison with specialist agencies, encouragement in accessing relevant longer term solutions to individual housing needs.

The Shelter was established in 2012 upon the original initiative of Fr John Cavanagh, a Franciscan priest working with other concerned citizens, when he was allocated by his Order to work in the Borough on Social Outreach. In this, its third year, the Shelter ran nightly from end-November 2014 to the end of February 2015, 94 days in all, with the following aims:

- To provide a night shelter for homeless people in Hastings & St Leonards using Church buildings through the coldest period of the winter
- With respect and without discrimination, to engage church members and local people generally with some of the most vulnerable people in Hastings & St Leonards in line with Christian principles
- To help homeless people move on to appropriate accommodation
- To establish the funding and administrative support necessary to enable the provision of such a shelter to continue in future years.

## *b. Governance*

The Trust employed a Project Manager from October 2014 to April 2015 with the primary task of managing the day to day operation of the Shelter, and a Project Assistant for four months. The Board of Trustees oversees the operation.

Plans are in place for oversight management to be extended in 2015/16 by the formation of a Steering Group formed of the Venue Coordinators.

## *c. Operational Arrangements*

Guests are registered by the Project Manager and a Trustee who meet the Guest in the temporary Snowflake office at The Seaview Centre, Hatherley Road, St Leonards. It is appropriate once again to pay tribute to all at the Seaview Centre, where the wise counsel and professionalism of the staff and Volunteers in dealing with marginalised members of our community is an example to us all. The Snowflake office is open daily when the Shelter is in operation. The normal daily operation of the Shelter is:

- 6pm Evening shift Volunteers arrive at the venue to meet with the Project Manager and Venue Coordinator and set up the accommodation, activity arrangements and commence food preparation
- 7pm Guests arrive
- 10.30pm Overnight shift Volunteers take over & 11.00pm 'Lights Out'
- 6.30am Morning shift Volunteers arrive and commence breakfast preparation
- By 08.30am, Shelter packed up and Guests and Volunteers leave.

The Trust operates its own van enabling a streamlined and efficient arrangement for the daily transfer of goods between venues. Stock not required on a daily basis is maintained in a rented container in Bulverhythe.

#### *d. Venues*

The Shelter relies on the goodwill of 7 local churches to provide the nightly venues, which are staffed by a bank of 157 Volunteers.

The venues vary hugely in space, design, amenities and age and it must be remembered that none of these buildings were designed to be slept in. Having said that, all the venues do their very best with what they have available and they do a magnificent job to make this accommodation warm and homely for the Guests. The Shelter is fortunate that amongst all their on-going church and community commitments, the various church leaders embrace the winter shelter project and generously allow The Snowflake Night Shelter to utilise their facilities for the good of community members that find themselves upon hard times. We also appreciate the hard work that is done behind the scenes for the venue, raising awareness, fundraising and the hidden cost borne by the venues, such as utilities and, in some cases, food. The actual venues were:

Sunday - St Matthews Church Centre, Silverhill

Monday - The Salvation Army Citadel, Hastings Town Centre

Tuesday - St Mary Star of the Sea, Hastings Old Town

Wednesday - St Thomas of Canterbury (Concordia Hall), St Leonards

Thursday - St Leonards Baptist Church, Chapel Park Community Centre

Friday - St John's Church, Upper St Leonards

Saturday - Christ Church, Blacklands, Hastings

### ***3. People Involved***

a. *Guests* - the majority of the Guests have been a joy to be around. Sad and happy moments have been shared in the Shelter in an atmosphere where Guests were not judged but listened to and heard. All who come to the Shelter, whether Guests or Volunteers, have been able to share each other's company in a peaceful environment that aids the removal of the preconceptions and stigma surrounding homelessness.

During the registration process at Snowflake's temporary office in the Seaview Centre, the reasons why (prospective) Guests were homeless were investigated. It soon became clear that the issues that lead to homelessness remain constant - Guests presented with issues of addiction, mental health problems (often combined), eviction, financial difficulties and, increasingly, family breakdowns (especially in the younger Guest group).

There have been a few occasions of misbehaviour and occasional conflict between Guests. Such incidents have led to Guests being challenged and warned about their behaviour.

Shelter rules concerning the admission of over-intoxicated Guests have been enforced rigorously. The safety of our Guests and Volunteers is paramount. Each Guest was made aware of the rules and regulations during the registration process before admission to the shelter. After checking that they were understood, each Guest was asked to sign a copy of the rules to that effect. All Guests who presented at the Shelter were assessed each night by the Venue Coordinator at the door. Guests were not allowed to keep or store alcohol or non-prescription drugs in the venue. The Shelter must be a safe haven for Guests and Volunteers alike and if clearly over-intoxicated Guests were to be admitted, there would be no incentive for them and others to change their lives around.

b. *Venue Coordinators* - each venue had a Venue Coordinator, normally (but not exclusively) a member of the community whose hall was being used.

Each night of the week the Shelter ran at a different venue. The Venue Coordinator's responsibility was to make sure the venue was ready to receive the Guests and to confirm their *bona fides* on entry to the shelter. Details of Volunteers allocated to each night of the Shelter and each shift were available to all Volunteers via the Trust's website about four weeks in advance. The Venue Coordinator would allocate duties each evening on arrival, including cooking, setting up etc. A Deputy Coordinator would normally attend

the morning shift to supervise breakfast and the packing up of the Shelter (although the Guests became adept at that!).

All of our Venue Coordinators have done a thoroughly professional job, ensuring that their venues ran smoothly. They ensured that the Guests and, in most cases Volunteers, were fed, they disseminated important information such as fire and Health and Safety information to Volunteers & Guests throughout the Shelter, and they kept in contact with the Project Manager where necessary. Venue Coordinators were also instrumental in getting together teams of Christians of various denominations, non-Christians and those of no faith, to work for the good of disadvantaged people in the local area. So, a huge 'thank you' to our 2014/15 coordinators: Rebecca Black, Simon Bailey, Chris Emery, Christopher Maxwell-Stewart (Coordinator at two venues), Roy McGaughey & Alan Privett.

*c. Volunteers* - in all, 157 Volunteers came forward to cover the three shifts per night, sadly considerably less than the 200 we had planned for. This resulted in strain on those relatively few volunteers able to be present for the overnight shift, and is an issue which the Trustees will address for the future. Normally there were six Volunteers on the evening shift, four overnight and four in the morning - a total of 74 hours of Volunteer work each night! As in previous years, a large proportion of Volunteers came to us through the host churches, but there were also many Volunteers from other local churches and the community as a whole.

Each Volunteer was asked to complete a Volunteer application form (including details of a referee) whereupon their contact details, availability, experience and skills etc was held on a central database, and references noted. Venue Coordinators were subject to a background check via the Disclosure & Barring Service.

Prior to the Shelter starting, several 'stand-alone' training sessions were held for Volunteers, and we would like to thank Roger Nuttall of the St John's Ambulance Homeless Service for his help in running three First Aid Courses for a total of 35 Volunteers. Three courses were also held to equip

45 Volunteers with a Food Hygiene Certificate, and thanks go to Richard Venables for running these. One evening seminar was held on the subject of 'Dealing with Aggression' at which 40 Volunteers attended.

The generous heart of the Hastings & St Leonards community and their willingness to volunteer should not be underestimated in the overall success of the Shelter. Many Volunteers returned for a third year. The Volunteers have each brought different skills and life experiences to the project. All our Volunteers have made each Shelter venue a warm and welcoming place for our Guests during a difficult time in their lives. It is a very important part of the Guests' experience to be treated with the respect and kindness that everyone deserves and our Volunteers have been fantastic at this. As one Guest in his 'feedback' put it: "Words can't describe how much I think about them - they are all 100%".

*d. Staff* - that the Shelter has been an undoubted success continues to be due in large part to the commitment and professionalism of Rebecca Black, our Project Manager. She has brought to the Shelter an example of courtesy, care and consideration which has been recognised and welcomed by Guests and Volunteers alike. Similarly, she has been instrumental in making and maintaining contact with other agencies so as to enable Guests to engage with those authorities necessary for the Guests to move on, many to their own accommodation or to other charities (eg Emmaus Hastings & Rother).

*e. Trustees* - Snowflake Trustees overseeing the operation of the night shelter were: Christopher Maxwell-Stewart (Chair of Trustees), John Troughton (Deputy Chair), Peter Bournier, Andrew Crighton, George Hornsby, John Reid (Treasurer & Company Secretary) & Sheila Young (appointed during the year). Richard Watson left the Board in the Autumn of 2014, before the night shelter began operation.

#### **4. Financial Review**

It is important that the way the Snowflake Night Shelter spends its generously donated money is clearly explained. We have again been successful this year in receiving substantial grants from a number of different grant-making trusts, other organisations, churches (see the Appendix for details) and many individuals connected with Hastings & St Leonards. We are particularly grateful to those supporters who give regularly each month by bank standing order or via LocalGiving.com and those who raised funds in many different ways (including, for this year, a 'sleepover' at St Richard's Catholic College, a 'wheelchair push' by Michael Hayward & Mike Richardson, sponsored walks by the Guests themselves and by Trustees, a Burning Bush Theatre Group concert, the Old Town Carnival, and Daniel & Christian Ryan who were sponsored to complete the Hastings Half Marathon!).

Our financial year ended on 31 May 2015 on which date the full year's financial accounts were completed. The accounts have been examined by an independent, retired chartered accountant and published on the website. In summary, income and expenditure for the year (rounded for ease of presentation) is given below for information purposes:

##### *a. Income*

From Grant-Making Trusts	£ 12,500
From Other Organisations	£ 7,086
From Gift Aid	£ 1,155
From Individuals etc	£ 5,044
From LocalGiving.Com	£ 1,487
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£27,272</b>

##### *b. Expenditure*

Salaries & on costs	£ 20,676
Office Supplies & Volunteers' Handbook	£ 1,068

Website	£ 540
Office Rent to Seaview Centre	£ 875
Laundry, Bedding etc	£ 3,334
Food	£ 2,151
Insurances	£ 859
Van depreciation	£ 3,300
Other	£ 3,687
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£ 36,490</b>

With costs outstripping income by almost £9,218 this year, the funding shortfall has been met from the charity's reserves. It is clear that more needs to be done to raise sufficient funds if the future of the night shelter is to be assured, a matter which the Trustees will be taking forward in a vigorous manner in 2015/16.

### *c. Hidden Costs*

Churches provide their halls free of charge, paying the utility costs and any extra insurance which might be required. Some churches and individuals provided food and refreshments at their venues throughout the period, an impressive commitment to the project. Volunteers provide their services free of charge - were they to be paid at the rate of the current National Minimum Wage then the extra cost to Snowflake would have approached £50,000.

Many communities donated toiletries, socks, gloves, hats, scarfs and other items in support of the Shelter which were incredibly useful for Guests who arrived in great need.

## **5. Feedback**

### *a. From Guests*

Guests were invited to complete a questionnaire to provide their views on how the Shelter operated, its effectiveness and its usefulness. These are representative of the views expressed:

- I felt very safe
- Venues were good
- Food very good and soups very filling
- Camp beds were comfy and linen good & clean
- We were made very welcome
- Volunteers - Words can't describe how much I think about them, they are all 100%
- Christopher & Rebecca are two of the best people I have ever met
- Maybe open for longer (into March)
- Loved everything about it
- Thanks and God bless you
- Thank you to volunteers
- Rebecca is a lady with three sets of wings! She is a real anchor for us
- I'd like to be a volunteer next time

### *b. From Volunteers*

Volunteers were encouraged to attend a feedback meeting on 5 May 2015. 40 Volunteers attended, and their views, together with the views of Volunteers who communicated via email, all of which will be seriously considered by the Trustees are summarised as follows:

- Training generally good, although Food Hygiene sessions were plagued by technical problems: a number of suggestions to widen the topics covered were mentioned for Trustees' consideration, and consideration to be given to enabling volunteers coming on board after the shelter opened to be given training opportunities in future
- More notice should be given with a synopsis of what each session would contain might enable more volunteers to attend
- Scheduling arrangements required further attention to give Volunteers as much notice as possible, and to give Coordinators the authority to reduce the number of volunteers on duty as they saw fit
- The possibility of screening off female Guest areas to be considered
- More variety in the food provided to be explored
- Camp beds were a success, although the provision of more hot water bottles should be considered
- The activity items were 'tired' and in need of replacement; possibility of expanding activities to permit listening to music of football commentaries on the radio to be considered
- Arrangements for the introduction of Volunteers to each other and the allocation of duties should be reviewed to ensure all are welcomed and jobs fairly distributed
- Arrangements for leaving the shelter to have a smoke to be reviewed so that a consistent policy can be followed at all venues.

## ***6. 2014/15 Objectives achieved?***

Last year, the Trustees indicated that they were determined to continue the winter night shelter into the future as needs dictate. To this end, the intention was:

- a. To reflect on all of the feedback received with a view to improving the quality of the service the Trust provides in future - *achieved*

- b. To continue to liaise and work well with other relevant agencies, and to develop relationships with them further - *achieved*
- c. To make Snowflake's services even better known - *achieved, but still more to be done*
- d. To consider the dates on which the night shelter will operate in light of experience of the Snowflake and other night shelters on the south coast and changing weather patterns - *achieved*
- e. To confirm the availability of suitable venues and Venue Coordinators - *achieved*
- f. To employ a project manager and assistant before, during and shortly after the shelter is open to ensure a well-managed and effective operation geared to the needs of local homeless people and in line with the availability of suitably skilled Volunteers - *achieved*
- g. To extend the availability and appropriateness of suitable training for staff and Volunteers alike - *achieved*
- h. To revise the Volunteers' Handbook in line with experience gained and current best practice - *achieved*
- i. To review our recruitment arrangements with a view to obtaining more Volunteers and their availability for the more unpopular shifts - *unsuccessful, and new initiatives are being developed*
- j. To maintain an appropriate level of financial reserves as will ensure continuance of the shelter into future years by developing its contacts among grant-making institutions, local organisations and individual supporters - *achieved, but more work to be done*
- k. To build up the skills available to the Trustee Board by the appointment of more members, and to ensure key succession arrangements are in place - *partially achieved, but more recruitment to be completed.*

## *7. Looking ahead to 2015/16 & Beyond*

**In addition** to developing further the objectives set for 2014/15, in 2015/16 the Trustees wish to:

- ✓ Obtain the *Housing Justice Shelter Quality Mark*
- ✓ Improve continuing communication and liaison with volunteers, especially over the Summer
- ✓ Extend recruitment of Volunteers further into the wider community including the Hastings Campus of Brighton University

## Appendix A - Guest Statistics

	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Number of Days Shelter Open	94	103	58
Number of potential Guests registered	72	91	70
Number of Guests welcomed to the shelter	54	64	58
<b>Number of Guests assisted/enabled to 'move on' to suitable accommodation</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>5</b>
Average occupancy per night	13	13	9.8
Average length of stay	23	21	9.5
Maximum occupancy on any one night	18	19	15
Number of Male Guests	44	52	44
Number of Female Guests	10	12	14
<b>Guests' Age Analysis</b>			
Under 30	12	18	14
31 - 40	16	19	17
41 - 50	12	19	19
51 - 60	12	7	7
61+	2	1	1

## **Appendix B - Grant-making Trusts supporting Snowflake in 2014/15**

The Sussex Community Foundation

The Isabel Blackman Charitable Trust

The Magdalan & Lasher Trust

The Frances & Eric Ford Trust

## **Appendix C - Other organisations supporting Snowflake in 2014/15**

Burning Bush Theatre Group

Catholic Women's League, Bexhill on Sea

Emmanuel Church, Hastings

Fludes Carpets staff

Hastings Lions

Hastings Old Town Carnival Committee

Hastings Runners

Hollington Methodist Church

Parish of St Matthews, Silverhill

Parish of St John's, Hollington

Parish of St Helen's, Hastings

Parish of Ss Peter & Paul, Hastings

Parish of St Leonard & St Ethelburga, Hastings

RC Diocese of Arundel & Brighton

RC Parish of St Mary, Star of the Sea

RC Parish of The Good Shepherd, St Leonards & Hollington

Salvation Army

Senlac Rotary Club

St Richard's Catholic College, Bexhill on Sea

Staff at the Department of Transport, Hastings