



SNOWFLAKE
Night Shelter

The Snowflake Trust

Night Shelter Report

for

Winter 2015/16

Report issued on 28 June 2016

The Snowflake Trust is a charity registered in England No 1119743 & a company limited by guarantee registered in England & Wales No 5950395, registered office: 25 Boscobel Road North, St Leonards on Sea, East Sussex TN38 0NY

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1. Introduction from the Chair of Trustees

2015/16 has been the fourth year of operation and the third successive year in which the Snowflake Emergency Winter Night Shelter Service has operated on all seven week-nights over the winter - 95 nights in all (94 in 2014/15). 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 contributes to compliance in respect of the Trust's statutory reporting responsibilities in light of its charitable and corporate status.

Without the enthusiastic support of our 187 Registered Volunteer helpers (30 more than in 2014/15) and the seven Churches whose halls were used without cost to Snowflake - including, for the first time, St Mary Magdalene Greek Orthodox Church in St Leonards - the service to the 52 Guests who stayed overnight in our Shelters (54 Guests in 2014/15) would not have been possible. It is a particular pleasure to record that 12 Guests were assisted to 'move on' over the winter (26 Guests in 2014/15). In one sense, this reduction in the number of Guests 'moving on' is welcome and explains to some degree why the number of Guests this year actually reduced in number for the second year running - people helped last year had already '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 recruitment, induction and training scheme was operated, enabling many Volunteers to be trained in such matters as First Aid/Overdose Aid & Food Safety.

Snowflake continued to employ Rebecca Black as Project Manager to assist the planning & preparation and lead the practical implementation of the project. An Assistant was employed to assist with the morning arrangements, although, as it transpired, the Guests themselves helped enormously to clear away and pack items into the Snowflake van. The Trustees are pleased to have been able to assist local employment 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 on his feedback form: 'Rebecca is a rock 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 developing local awareness of the importance of the night shelter and its contribution to the environment of the area, and the way in which Guests have been assisted in a respectful manner and in a variety of ways.

Trustees have once again been delighted to receive valuable feedback from Guests and Volunteers alike in an endeavour to further improve the night shelter in the future. Almost half the Volunteer body contributed to a questionnaire review or by attending our annual feedback meeting, a synopsis of findings being published on our website. Grateful thanks are due to Sussex Coast College for hosting this important feedback meeting, as well as training events throughout the winter. The importance of reinforcing Guests' self-esteem and treating everyone with respect is now well embedded within the Snowflake operational ethos.

The Shelter service would not have been possible without the financial support from various grant-making trusts, local organisations, and many individuals (including some enterprising fundraising initiatives from Trustees and volunteers alike) - 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 (see the Appendix C for further details).

There have been three changes to the Board of Trustees during the year. Firstly, Christopher Maxwell-Stewart, one of Snowflake's founder Trustees, stood down at the end of the year, and it is only right to record the enormous contribution his energy, knowledge and leadership has contributed to the Trust. Secondly, Trustees have been pleased to welcome Joseph Cornford-Hutchings, a current Volunteer, to the Board. Joe has reduced the average age of the Trustee body to a remarkable degree, and brings with him enthusiasm and wide knowledge of local affairs, and is to take the lead in liaising with our Volunteers in future. Sheila Young left the Board in the Summer, having been instrumental in arranging the Snowflake Summer Party, for which many thanks to her and to Alan and Jenny Privett for the use of their garden for the event.

The website has been well used by Volunteers now that it is fully accessible by mobile devices and tablets, and further enhancements are planned. A Facebook page has been developed and has been well received. Both are to be developed further in 2016/17.

Sadly, Homelessness in Hastings & St Leonards does not look like it will be eliminated in the near future despite the efforts of statutory and non-governmental 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.

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.

(Original signed)

Andrew Crighton

Chair of Trustees

2. The Night Shelter

a. The Night Shelter explained

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 fourth year, the Shelter ran nightly from end-November 2015 to the end of February 2016, 95 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 full-time Project Manager from October 2015 with the primary task of managing the day to day operation of the Shelter and maintaining contact with the street community in the area, and a Project Assistant for four months. The Board of Trustees provided oversight to the operation.

During the year, a Steering Group was formed, consisting of the Venue Coordinators, the Project Manager and a nominated Trustee, principally to ensure consistency of operation across all venues.

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 8.30am, 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 rented storage facilities.

d. Venues

The Shelter relies on the goodwill of 7 local churches to provide the nightly venues, which, this year, were staffed by a bank of 187 active 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 Mary Magdalene, Church Road, Hastings
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 any remaining preconceptions and/or 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. Some Guests were banned from the shelter as a result.

Shelter rules concerning the admission of over-intoxicated Guests have been enforced. 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 overintoxicated 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 gelling 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 2015/16 coordinators: Andrea Randall-Smith & Fay Thomas (Sundays), Simon Bailey (Mondays), Chris Emery (Tuesdays), Kevin Swaffer (Wednesdays), Roy McGaughey (Thursdays), Lesley Harston (Fridays), & Charmaine Hill (Saturdays).

- b. **Volunteers** - in all, 187 Volunteers came forward to cover the three shifts per night, 30 more than in 2014/15, but sadly considerably less than the 200 we had planned for. This resulted in considerable strain on those relatively few volunteers able to be present for the overnight shift and, on some occasions, the shelter ran on less volunteers than we would otherwise have wished. For next winter, it is the Trustees' intention to employ a member of staff to manage the overnight shift. 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, and during operation, several 'stand-alone' training sessions were held for Volunteers, and we would like to thank the St John's Ambulance for their help in running 4 'Overdose Aid' courses, including one on a Saturday morning at Sussex Coast College. 40 Volunteers attended these courses for the first time and received appropriate accreditation. Volunteers were also encouraged to acquire a Level 2 Certificate in Food Safety by an on-line provider, at Snowflake's expense. It is unclear how many Volunteers obtained this certificate, as not many claimed back their course fee! 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 fourth year, and it was pleasing to welcome new, often younger, Volunteers.

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: Andrew Crighton (Chair of Trustees), John Troughton (Deputy Chair), Peter Bourner, George Hornsby, Christopher Maxwell-Stewart, John Reid (Treasurer & Company Secretary) & Joseph Cornford-Hutchings, appointed to the Trustee Board in April 2016. Sheila Young resigned from the Board at the beginning of the year, before the 2015/16 shelter began operations.

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 Appendices B and C for details of how many different communities and churches have been supportive) 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, this year, what has become an annual 'wheelchair push' by Michael Hayward & Mike Richardson, a 'Swimathon' by pupils at Battle Abbey Preparatory School, sponsored walks (including by a trustee and a volunteer's 'firewalk'), various events including performances by *Christian Voices*, *SoundWaves Community Choir* and *Choral Explosions*, the Old Town Carnival, a sponsored 'world's longest, highest and fastest' zip wire challenge, and Simon Thurston and Catherine Wellington competing in the Hastings Half Marathon. Quite a list - and thanks to everyone!

Our financial year ended on 31 May 2016 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	£ 18,122
From Other Organisations	£ 13,947
From Gift Aid	£ 790
From Individuals etc	£ 4,132
Via LocalGiving.Com	£ 10,791
TOTAL	£ 47,782

b. Expenditure

Salaries & on costs	£ 18,616
Office Supplies, Leaflets & Volunteers' Handbook, Fees	£ 1,068
Website	£ 1,713
Office Rent to Seaview Centre	£ 813
Laundry, Bedding etc	£ 2,603
Food	£ 3,445
Insurances	£ 859
Training	£ 1,032
Van Depreciation	£ 3,300
Other	£ 1,716
TOTAL	£ 35,165

With income £12,617 more than expenses this year, the Trust has achieved a level of reserves well in line with Charity Commission recommendations, with year-end reserves standing at £26,143. Whilst it is clear that continued fundraising efforts

will be needed to ensure the night shelter continues as demand requires in the foreseeable future, nevertheless the Trust is now on a much firmer financial footing than at any time in its short history.

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 Living Wage then the extra cost to Snowflake would have been higher than £50,000. Had Snowflake to pay for the hire of the halls, another £50,000 would have been needed!

Many communities, including Battle Foodbank, donated much-needed toiletries, and also 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:

- Awesome and everything was great
- Would have been nice to have stayed in bed longer - say once a week
- I would like to thank Rebecca and all the volunteers for their tireless attitude and warm welcome towards all the guests
- Thank you - I appreciate you very much
- Big love and respect - I wish it could continue longer
- Food good and more than adequate
- All the volunteers were OK to get on with
- I couldn't have coped without you
- All the halls were very nice but some of the toilets were very cold
- Very helpful with all my problems

b.From Volunteers

Volunteers were encouraged to complete a questionnaire and to attend a feedback meeting on 30 April 2016. A full synopsis of the results is available from the website, and many comments and recommendations have been well received by Trustees and have informed their objectives for 2016/17. It was pleasing to note that everyone who contributed to the feedback offered to volunteer again. Some representative comments follow:

- We need better cover for night shifts
- Allocating shifts as far ahead as possible would help
- I did a range of shifts at all but two venues - they each had their good and bad points, but an average score would be 7 or 8 out of 10
- More training on 'homelessness awareness' please
- The Guests appreciated us knowing that we Volunteers cared about their welfare
- My experience with the Guests was better than I expected - more like friends
- I felt the Guests appreciated people taking the time out to talk and get to know them
- March should be included
- Conversations with Guests friendly and relaxed - I think I helped them feel welcome and respected
- Had a good laugh and banter with the Guests

6. Objectives - 2015/16 (reviewed) & Beyond

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 to maintain and develop previous Objectives, and to

- Obtain the Housing Justice Quality Mark
 - This process was started, but temporarily suspended as one particular venue did not meet relevant standards.
 - This matter is being followed up over Summer 2016 and will be resolved by the Autumn when a full HJQM application will be made.

- Improve continuing communication and liaison with volunteers, especially over the Summer.
 - Partially achieved, with further plans laid for Summer 2016

- Extend recruitment of Volunteers further into the wider community including the Hastings Campus of Brighton University.
 - Partially achieved as evidenced by the new Volunteers. No progress has been made re the Hastings Campus of Brighton University which is being closed; however, much progress has been made with Sussex Coast College, with whom a recruitment campaign directed at mature students and staff is being planned

Former Objectives which also continue to receive Trustees' attention include:

- 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; it is intended to continue the shelter into mid-March 2017**
- 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. The Project Manager is now employed all-year-round; over the summer months this will ensure continued knowledge of the likely Guest numbers and personalities, enable continuous liaison with partners, and ensure that the shelter is well prepared on its opening date**
- g. To extend the availability and appropriateness of suitable training for staff and Volunteers alike - **achieved; further training has been**

identified following this year's feedback and will be implemented by the Trustees

- 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 - **only partially successful, and new initiatives are being developed, including the employment of staff overnight, specific training for overnight volunteers, and training for all in dealing with 'difficult situations'**
- 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.**

Appendix A - Guest Statistics

	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Number of Days Shelter Open	95	94	103	58
Number of potential Guests registered	57	72	91	70
Number of Guests welcomed to the shelter	52	54	64	58
Number of Guests assisted/enabled to 'move on' to suitable accommodation	12	26	24	5
Average occupancy per night	14	13	13	9.8
Average length of stay	25	23	21	9.5
Maximum occupancy on any one night	18	18	19	15
Number of Male Guests	43	44	52	44
Number of Female Guests	9	10	12	14
Guests' Age Analysis				
Under 30	15	12	18	14
31 - 40	11	16	19	17
41 - 50	14	12	19	19
51 - 60	10	12	7	7
61+	2	2	1	1

Appendix B - Grant-making Trusts supporting Snowflake in 2015/16

The Sussex Community Foundation
The East Sussex County Council Chairman's Fund
The Isabel Blackman Foundation
The Jean Alison Carr Charitable Trust
The Magdelan & Lasher Trust
The Frances & Eric Ford Trust
The Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner's Proceeds of Crime Fund

Appendix C - Other organisations supporting Snowflake in 2015/16

Arcool Ltd
Battle Abbey Preparatory School (Swimathon)
Beulah Church, Bexhill
The Blacklands Community
Catholic Women's League, Bexhill on Sea
Chatterbox
Choral Explosions Choir
Christian Voices
Leather Interiors Limited
East Sussex Youth Offending Team
Emmanuel Church, Hastings
Staff at Fludes Carpets
5Fostering Limited
Halton Baptist Church Friday Group
Hastings Academy (SEN Department)
Hastings Lions
Hastings Old Town Carnival Committee
Hastings Old Town Gardeners' Association
Hastings Runners
Hollington Methodist Church
The Marina Fountain Public House
Parish of St Matthews, Silverhill
Battle Methodist Church
Parish of St John's, Hollington

Parish of St Helen's, Hastings
Parish of Ss Peter & Paul, Hastings
Parish of St Peter, Bexhill
Parish of St Leonard & St Ethelburga, Hastings
The Plough Public House
RC Diocese of Arundel & Brighton
RC Parish of St Mary, Star of the Sea
RC Parish of The Good Shepherd, St Leonards & Hollington
Real Wizard
Sackville Road Methodist Church
Salvation Army
Senlac Rotary Club
Smarties Toddlers, St Matthews, Silverhill
Sound Waves Community Choir
Staff at the Department of Transport, Hastings
Sussex Coast College (SEN Department, Sale of students' work)
University of Brighton Students' Union - Hastings RAG Week
Wellington Square Thursday Group
Women's Institute in Rye
Women's Institute in Ore
Women's Institute in Bexhill