



# The Snowflake Trust

## Night Shelter Report

for



## Winter 2016/17

Report issued on 27 June 2017

The Snowflake Trust is a charity registered number 1119743 and  
a company limited by guarantee number 059503950 registered in England  
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

This Annual Report for Winter 2016/17 has been prepared for the benefit of all interested parties and stakeholders so that everyone may be aware of the range and depth of services delivered, the immense amount of (mainly) voluntary work required to provide the night shelter on every night of the week during the coldest months of the year, and the important outcomes achieved.

This fifth year of operation of the night shelter has been characterised by a number of very significant developments, including:

- The night shelter being open for more nights than ever
  - 116 compared with 95 in 2015/16 and 94 in 2014/15
  - Following feedback from Guests and Volunteers last year, the night shelter remained open until the middle of March 2017
- Improved Guest outcomes
  - While it is becoming ever more difficult for Guests to move into their own accommodation due to the lack of local authority housing and increased rents by private landlords, nevertheless we are delighted that 16 of our Guests have been enabled to move on in their lives. (12 last winter). In particular, one of our Guests who has been with us since the beginning of the night shelter in 2012 now has a place at Merrick House, which provides a specialist housing support service and accommodation for homeless people aged 18 and over with housing support needs.
- Greater awareness of Snowflake amongst the local population of Hastings & St Leonards
  - A major poster & leaflet distribution project master-minded by our newest Trustee has resulted in much greater support for the night shelter, in both volunteering and donation terms
  - The website was considerably updated, and
  - The Facebook page has been further developed
- More grant-making Trusts supporting the night shelter
  - In addition to the continuing and generous support of the Sussex Community Foundation, The Police & Crime Commissioner and various other local trusts (see Appendix B), this year we have been delighted to receive funds in addition from The Silver Lady Trust, and another very significant contribution from a trust whose Trustees wish to remain anonymous
- More organisations fundraising for the night shelter
  - August 2016 saw a magnificent performance of Handel's *Messiah* at Hastings Castle in aid of the night shelter - many thanks to Katie Harrison and many friends for organising this

- Many other choirs and organisations arranged events throughout the year (see Appendix C)
- More individuals donating, and more contributing by monthly standing order
  - Greater awareness amongst the local population has led to many more individuals donating, with 12 now contributing on a monthly basis
  - In addition to the usual much-appreciated sponsored events, one of the trustees courageously engaged in a sponsored weight-loss followed by his inaugural sky dive
  - Sadly, we have received three 'in memoriam' donations, including in respect of Fr Seamus Stapleton, the much-loved Parish Priest of St Mary Star of the Sea in Hastings, Old Town, the venue of the Tuesday shelter. His personal support and commitment will be much missed
- More volunteers than ever before
  - 266 active volunteers were registered during the period. Whilst this has been a very welcome achievement, 25% up on last winter, nevertheless there were still difficulties in staffing the overnight and breakfast shifts on some occasions, with most volunteers understandably wishing to work the evening shifts
  - 75 volunteers were trained by St John Ambulance trainers in first aid/addiction this year
- More staff employed
  - This winter, the trust employed not only Rebecca Black as Project Manager, but also Will Stevens as Overnight Supervisor, without whom it would have been impossible to have had an adequate staffing level to operate the shelter
  - At the end of the night shelter, Rebecca Black resigned her post to take up full-time employment at The Seaview Project. Whilst Trustees are sad to see her leave Snowflake, nevertheless they are delighted that she has felt able to move on in her career - she will remain in close touch with both Guests and Snowflake by virtue of her new duties
  - The Trustees have taken the opportunity actively to consider the organisation of the night shelter for the future, and plans will be published in due course
- Achievement of the Housing Justice Quality Mark at the highest 'Excellent Practice' level
  - Trustees were delighted that the commitment and efforts of Volunteers, the organisation of Rebecca Black and the governance of the Snowflake trustees has resulted in this prestigious award having been made by the organisation providing the national voice in respect of housing issues
  - The Housing Justice Assessor in his report states: *'The common comradeship, courtesy and respect I experienced at the shelter venue, amongst everyone*

*present (volunteers, staff, guests and visitors), is of great credit to Snowflake as a whole. The breaking down of 'us and them' barriers and emphasis on integration as opposed to segregation was evident and a joy to experience.'*

- Involvement with the Hastings Borough Council "Rough Sleeper and Street Community Working Group"
  - This follows a concerted effort by the Snowflake trustees and others to seek to coordinate services for local homeless people to ensure the best possible support and outcomes for them throughout the year
- Financial Security
  - Whilst fundraising for the future will be necessary, the Trust is in its best financial position in its short history
- Developing the Board of Trustees
  - At the end of the period the Trustees sought applications from supporters with particular talents to join the Board to complete the range of skills required for best practice governance and to enable key succession planning to come into effect.
  - Initial interviews have been held, and Trustees will advise supporters of developments in due course.

There is much information about The Snowflake Trust on the website at [www.snowflake-nightshelter.org.uk](http://www.snowflake-nightshelter.org.uk), and further enquiries are welcome via the 'Contact Us' tab or by post to the registered office.

(Original signed)

Andrew Charles 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*.

Now in its fifth year, the Shelter ran from, 25 November 2016 to 20 March 2017, 116 days, with the following aims:

- To provide a night shelter for genuinely homeless people who would otherwise be sleeping rough in Hastings and St Leonards during the extreme winter months
- With respect and without discrimination, to engage church members and local people generally with some of the most vulnerable people in the Town in line with Christian principles
- To provide a warm bed, non-judgemental hospitality and engagement with willing Volunteers to facilitate wellbeing and positive self-esteem
- Hot drinks, an evening meal and breakfast
- In liaison with specialist agencies, encouragement in accessing relevant longer term solutions to individual housing and employment needs

The Shelter was originally established in 2012 upon the original initiative of Fr John Cavanagh OFM Cap, a Franciscan priest working with other concerned citizens, when he was allocated by his Order to work in the Borough on Social Outreach among marginalised persons. Fr John remains in touch with the Trust and is its 'Official Visitor'.

### b. *Governance*

The Trust employed Rebecca Black as Project Manager throughout 2016 to enable continued liaison and knowledge of Guests and their needs prior to the Shelter opening in November. The Trust also employed Will Stevens as Overnight Supervisor whilst the Shelter was open, without whom appropriate levels of overnight staffing would not have been possible as Volunteers for this shift were in relatively short supply.

Venue Coordinators met regularly as a group to share experience and best practice.

The Board of Trustees provided general oversight of the project.

### c. *Operational Arrangements*

During the time the Shelter was open, the Project Manager was based in an office at The Seaview Project, Hatherley Road, St Leonards, where she and a Trustee interviewed

potential Guests on a daily basis. Once again, it is appropriate to pay tribute to Rebecca and the staff and Volunteers at The Seaview Project for their commitment to marginalised folk and the wise counsel and professionalism which has characterised all their dealings.

The normal operation of the Shelter was:

- 6pm Evening Shift Volunteers arrive at the venue to meet the Project Manager and Venue Coordinator, set up the accommodation, arrange activities and begin food preparation
- 7pm Guests arrive
- 10.30pm Overnight Supervisor and Volunteers take over, 'Lights Out' at 11pm
- 6.30am Morning shift Volunteers arrive and commence breakfast preparation
- 8.30am Shelter packed up, hall and facilities cleaned, and Guests and Volunteers leave.

The Trust operates its own van enabling an effective 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, none of which were designed to be slept in - we are immensely grateful for the efforts made by the various communities to ensure that the accommodation is made as warm and homely as possible for the Guests. Everyone is most appreciative of the support of the various Church communities raising awareness, fundraising and covering the hidden costs of heating, lighting and, in some cases, food.

The actual venues for this winter were:

Sunday	St Matthews Church Centre, Silverhill
Monday	The Salvation Army Citadel, St Andrews Square, Hastings
Tuesday	St Mary Star of the Sea, Hastings Old Town
Wednesday	All Saints, Hastings Old Town
Thursday	St Leonards Baptist Church, Chapel Park Community Centre, St Leonards
Friday	St John's Church, Brittany Road, St Leonards
Saturday	Parish of the Good Shepherd, Concordia Hall, St Leonards

### 3. People Involved

#### a. *Guests*

A very different group of *Guests* when compared with previous years was welcomed, and many happy moments have been shared in an atmosphere where *Guests* were not judged but listened to and heard. Whilst unfortunately 3 *Guests* had to be banned for inappropriate behaviour this year, everyone visiting the Shelter contributed to a generally peaceful atmosphere, enjoying each other's company and removing any remaining preconceptions and/or stigma surrounding homelessness.

This year, during the registration process, it became clear that whilst there was an increase in prospective *Guests*, the younger ones sometimes appeared not to be willing to accept the rules of the night shelter as explained at the interview. The main reasons for homelessness remained fairly constant, namely relationship breakdown, addiction, mental health, eviction from private rented accommodation and financial difficulties.

#### b. *Venue Coordinators*

Each venue had a *Venue Coordinator*, usually from the community whose hall was being used. Rebecca Black took on the responsibility for the Monday shelter in the absence of a suitable *Volunteer* coming forward.

The *Venue Coordinator's* responsibilities are principally the organisation of the cadre of *volunteers* to set up and run the Shelter that evening, the allocation of their duties, explanation of appropriate health & safety issues (including fire and emergency evacuation arrangements) and to ensure the *bona fides* of *Guests* arriving. In the week before, *Venue Coordinators* contacted the allocated *Volunteers* to introduce themselves and discuss the duties expected - *Volunteers* were able to check their allocation via the website in the two/three weeks previously. A *Shift Leader* would normally organise the morning session for breakfast and for the packing up of the Shelter and the cleaning of the hall and its facilities.

*Venue Coordinators* were also instrumental in bringing *Volunteers* from different communities, different faith communities and those of no faith, together into effective teams for the benefit of the *Guests*. It is very appropriate to thank personally the *Venue Coordinators*, namely Andrea Randall-Smith & Fay Thomas (Sundays), Chris Emery (Tuesdays), Kevin Swaffer (Wednesdays), Roy McGaughey (Thursdays), Lesley Crighton (Fridays) and Mick Hillier (Saturdays).

### *c. Volunteers*

266 active volunteers were available this year - much higher than the hoped for 200, and compares favourably with the 187 in 2015/16. Significantly, younger volunteers came forward having been motivated by the Facebook page, a marvellous testimony to the care and willingness of good-hearted local people wishing to contribute to those less fortunate than themselves. That said, and perhaps understandably, availability of volunteers was heavily directed towards the more attractive evening shifts rather than overnight and mornings.

This year, Volunteers were asked to be more specific about their availability, and some offered to review the vacancies identified on the website and to offer to cover those gaps - most of the time this worked well, and there were only two occasions when emergency arrangements had to be made to ensure appropriate levels of supervision. New volunteers this year were required to provide a reference, with DBS certificates required from Venue Coordinators.

Training facilities were provided in rooms at Sussex Coast College with no cost to the Trust, and 75 volunteers were trained by St John Ambulance trainers in respect of first aid and addiction, almost twice as many as in the previous year. On-line training in food safety (level 2) was offered, and two sessions on 'dealing with difficult situations' were held.

Volunteers bring their own skills, life experiences and interests to their contribution to the Shelter, and all have ensured a warm and welcoming environment for the Guests (and each other). Feedback from the Guests has been unfailingly positive and appreciative.

### *d. Staff*

The success of the Shelter, and the award of the Housing Justice Quality Mark, is due testimony to the commitment and skill of Rebecca Black as Project Manager. Her contacts with the various agencies has been vital in enabling Guests to move on in their lives - her relationship with the Guests has been particularly appropriate, professional and supportive, and many have benefited from her wise advice and encouragement.

The appointment of an Overnight Supervisor was an undoubted success in that fewer Volunteers were required to provide appropriate levels of overnight supervision.

### *e. Trustees*

The Trustees overseeing the operation of the Shelter were: Andrew Crighton (Chair of Trustees), John Troughton (Deputy Chair of Trustees), Joseph Cornford-Hutchings,

Peter Bourner, George Hornsby & John Reid (Secretary/Treasurer).

#### 4. Financial Review

It is important that the way Snowflake spends its generously donated income is clearly and transparently explained.

This year, the Trust has been fortunate in obtaining very substantial income from grant-making institutions (see Appendix B - £24,000 compared with £18,122 in 2015/16), from church and other community groups and organisations (see Appendix C - £21,2 compared with £13,947 in 2015/16), and £16,324 from private donations and fundraising (£14,923 in 2015/16), including contributions made via *Logaliving.com*. The continuing and very generous monthly contributions from a number of supporters is particularly helpful, and the many and various fundraising initiatives this year have been particularly inspiring, especially the annual 'wheelchair push' by Michael Hayward and Mike Richardson, Joe Cornford-Hutchings's sky dive, and our younger supporters from their sponsored 'sleep outs' in their back gardens! Many, many thanks to everyone concerned.

The trust's financial year ended on 31 May 2017. The annual accounts, having been examined by an independent retired chartered accountant free of charge, have been made available on the website. In summary, income and expenditure for the year is given below:

a. Income

From Grant-Making Trusts	£24,000
From Church Communities	£4,179
From Other Organisations	£17,101
From Personal Donations & Localgiving.com	£16,324
From Gift Aid & Bank Interest	£516
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>£62,120</b>

b. Expenditure

Salaries, National Insurance & Pension Costs	£26,235
Office Supplies, Leaflets, Volunteers' Handbooks, Fees etc	£2,489
Website & IT	£1,230
Office Rent to Seaview	£1,063
Laundry, Bedding, Transport, Storage etc	£4,469
Food	£5,303
Insurance	£999
Training	£1,512
Other	£4,174
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>£47,474</b>

'Office' costs included the one-off £750 fee relating to the Housing Justice Quality Mark assessment. 'Food' costs were considerably more than previous years as the range of food available was extended in line with Housing Justice recommendations. This will be reviewed with Guests next winter as wastage was greater than we would otherwise wish to see, and further analysis will be made as to the appropriateness of food supplied. 'Other' costs includes the purchase of movable screens to separate male/female sleeping areas and other items required to satisfy the recommendations of the Housing Justice Quality Mark assessment.

Overall, income exceeded expenditure by £14,646, leaving capital resources at £40,789. This enables the Trustees to move forward with their planning for 2017/18 in the certain knowledge that operational funds will be available. This being so, the Trustees have designated £10,000 of their reserves for when the van requires replacement, and a further £20,000 prudently set aside to a general reserve in line with Charity Commission recommendations in respect of operational reserves for charities. Regardless of the above, it is clear that to ensure the future of the Shelter, further fundraising will be required for the foreseeable future. All that said, the Trust is now better placed financially than at any time in its short history.

### *c. Hidden Costs*

Churches provide their halls free of charge, also covering the utility and any extra insurance costs which might be levied. Some churches and individuals provided food and refreshments at their venues throughout the period, and one local restaurateur provided bacon for Saturday mornings - truly impressive contributions to the project.

Volunteers provided their services free of charge. Were they to be paid the living wage, then costs would increase by about £50,000 - this is a similar amount to what the trust would have to pay to hire the various Church halls were they not donated free of charge.

Many individuals, communities and organisations (including Battle Foodbank) donated much-needed toiletries, socks, scarves, hats and gloves which were very useful and well received by the Guests.

## **5. Feedback**

### *a. From Guests*

All Guests felt well cared for, some in particular made the point that they felt both 'safe' and also 'valued - we were not talked down to'. All were appreciative of Rebecca, as in previous years.

## *b. From Volunteers*

Feedback was received from about one quarter of Volunteers. Generally, Volunteers were unsure of what they had expected. However, in almost all responses, the following was clear:

- Volunteers felt the whole project was rewarding and enlightening, in some cases expressed as 'a privilege', certainly a better experience than had been anticipated
- Guests were found to be 'nice people' who just hadn't had the breaks or the support they needed - an immense groundswell of appreciation & thanks towards all Volunteers was evident from the Guests
- Preconceptions about homeless people were shattered - 'It certainly made me see things differently'
- Volunteers generally worked well together under Rebecca Black's & Coordinators' leadership, and felt well supported

So far as the Volunteers' opinions as to whether their impact on Guests had been beneficial to the Guests, the general opinion was that they 'hoped so'. It was noted with pleasure that 16 Guests had been assisted to move into their own accommodation, including several of those Guests who had been welcomed into the Shelter for a number of years.

## **6. The Housing Justice Quality Mark.**

The acquisition of the Quality Mark, especially at 'Excellent Practice' level, is deemed by the Trustees to be of significant importance in providing all stakeholders with the confidence evidenced by an informed, external assessment that the funds donated to Snowflake are being managed and used well, and in line with the Trust's formal Objects. Extracts from the Accreditation Report follow:

### *Excellent Practice Standards*

- Governance is of a high standard: trustees are hands-on actively involved applying their impressive array of skills and life experience to this work
- There is good evidence that guest and volunteer feedback is actively sought, captured and conveyed in the annual report and used to shape and influence the work going forward

### *Safe Practice Standards*

- The project has both an explicitly and implicitly apparent culture of robust, warm hospitality in its practice which is a pleasure to experience
- Good attention to best practice around Health & Safety particularly regarding Food Hygiene with Snowflake being registered with the Food Standards Agency
- There is clear evidence of implementation of project policies which are available on the projects dedicated website

- The project is very well organised and managed and appears to be well established and respected in the community
- Volunteer recruitment, induction, training and overall management is handled centrally by the project and in a professional manner
- The Project Manager has good experience working in the homeless sector and is well-connected and skilled in this area and has been, more recently, employed year-round
- Snowflake employ an Overnight Supervisor working in conjunction with overnight volunteers
- Admission/Referral procedures are robust, clear and considerate to all parties

#### *Paper Work/Project Evidence Review*

- The Snowflake shelter team clearly work well together with a spirit of cooperation and job satisfaction. It is apparent that everyone is dedicated and committed to this work. There is no doubt that Snowflake is making a significant contribution, in an impressive and well-networked way, to alleviate poverty, destitution, social injustice and anti-social behaviour. This goes a long way in building and maintaining stronger, safer communities - perhaps more than many projects (and their Local Authority's) realise. Capturing and evidencing this impact, therefore, has been identified by Housing Justice as a key leverage point in advancing the work of shelter projects.
- Shelters can play an important part in breaking the cycle of homelessness for 'returners' in particular and it appears that a large percentage of your guests fall into this category along with the more entrenched folks deemed as 'living on the street'.
- There is evidence of good, trusted, cross-agency working relationships at Snowflake. The working partnership of George (trustee) and Rebecca (coordinator) is a particular asset to the project - operationally, of course, but also in terms of the support George provides Rebecca in her challenging role.
- **The common comradery, courtesy and respect I experienced at the shelter venue, amongst everyone present (volunteers, staff, guests and visitors), is of great credit to Snowflake as a whole. The breaking down of 'us and them' barriers and emphasis on integration as opposed to segregation was evident and a joy to experience.**

## 7. Objectives

Including unresolved Objectives from earlier years:

- To obtain the Housing Justice Quality Mark - **achieved**
- Improve continuing communication with Volunteers, especially over the Summer - **in hand**
- Extend recruitment of Volunteers further into the wider community including the Hastings Campus of Brighton University - uncertainty over the future of the campus frustrated this objective, but in terms of reaching the wider community this objective has certainly been **achieved**

- d. To reflect on feedback received with a view to improving the quality of the service the Trust provides in future - achieved insofar as Volunteers' & Guests' feedback is concerned. 2017/18 will see achievement of the few recommendations made by the Housing Justice assessor
- e. To continue to liaise and work well with other relevant agencies and to develop relationships with them further - achieved and to be continued
- f. To make Snowflake's services even better known - achieved
- g. To consider the dates on which the Night Shelter will operate in light of experience of Snowflake and the other night shelters on the south coast and changing weather patterns - achieved
- h. To confirm the availability of venues and Venue Coordinators for winter 2017/18 - in hand
- i. To review our recruitment arrangements with a view to obtaining more Volunteers and their availability for the more unpopular shifts - partially achieved
- j. To maintain an appropriate level of financial reserves - 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

## Appendix A - Guest Statistics

	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Number of days Shelter open	116	95	94	103	58
Number of potential Guests registered	59	57	72	91	70
Number of Guests welcomed to the Shelter	56	52	54	64	58
Number of Guests assisted/ enabled to 'move on' to suitable accommodation	16	12	26	24	5
Average occupancy per night	16	14	13	13	10
Average length of stay	31	25	23	21	10
Maximum occupancy on any one night	20	18	18	19	15
Number of male Guests	47	43	44	52	44
Number of female Guests	9	9	10	12	14
Guests' Age Analysis					
Under 30	8	15	12	18	14
31 - 40	20	11	16	19	17
41 - 50	14	14	12	19	19
51 - 60	11	10	12	7	7
61+	3	2	2	1	1

## Appendix B - Grants from Trusts

Hope Kitchen

Isabel Blackman Foundation

Magdalen & Lasher

Sussex Community Foundation

The Silver Lady Fund

The Police & Crime Commissioner's *Safer in Sussex* Fund

Anonymous

## **Appendix C - Donations from Organisations:**

Ashburnham Church PCC  
Battle Muffins  
Beulah Church, Bexhill on Sea  
Bexhill Methodist Church  
Caterpillar Parents & Toddlers Group  
Christchurch Singers  
Claverham Community College  
Conveyancing Direct staff  
Crowhurst Community Arts Fund  
Derwent Masonic Lodge  
East Sussex Youth Offending Team  
4<sup>th</sup> Hastings Scouts  
5 Fostering Limited  
Free Spirit Foundation  
Friends Unlimited Choir  
Green Insurance  
Harmony One Choir  
Hastings Community Choir  
Hastings Inter-Faith Group  
Hastings Old Town Carnival  
In memoriam (three)  
King's Church - Boot Fair, Link Luncheon Club  
Knights of St Columba Council 630  
McMath Accountancy Services  
Mount Pleasant Bible Study Group  
Mount Pleasant Coffee Morning Group  
RC Parish of the Good Shepherd  
RC Diocese of Arundel & Brighton  
Rotary Club of Hastings  
Sackville Road Methodist Women's Own  
Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School  
Salvation Army  
Society of St Vincent de Paul  
Sonrise Church  
St Barnabas, Bexhill on Sea  
St John's, Hollington  
St Leonards Baptist Church  
St Leonard & St Ethelburga's Church  
St Mark's, Little Common, Bexhill on Sea  
St Martha's RC Church, Little Common, Bexhill on Sea  
St Mary Star of the Sea choir, club & Parish, St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School  
St Matthews Choir & Friendlies Group (over 50's)  
St Richards Catholic College, The Class Choir, Vinehall School & Wheatsheaf pub in Little Common