



MERTON WINTER NIGHT SHELTER

ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25





Introduction:

The Merton Winter Night Shelter was first established in late 2011 in response to the increasing homelessness issue and unmet need in the borough by providing vital shelter to those who are homeless over the coldest winter months. We are incredibly proud of our multi-faith project that offers a warm welcome, an evening meal, a safe and warm place to sleep and breakfast each morning before guests leave for the day.

As per the protocol for the past two seasons, Covid 19 was still in the back of our minds when planning for this season's Night Shelter to ensure the safety of both guests and volunteers. This year, we were able to relax the testing that we carried out each year, with guests only being tested on initial entry and over the Christmas week when guests and volunteers may be socialising more than usual. Thankfully, this year none of our guests tested positive to Covid 19 throughout the whole period.

Our communal rotating Night Shelter opened its doors to guests on the evening of Monday 2nd December 2024 with the wonderful volunteers from the Wimbledon and District Synagogue and ran until the morning of Monday 10th March where the equally wonderful volunteers at Trinity URC sadly closed their doors for the season.

Organisation

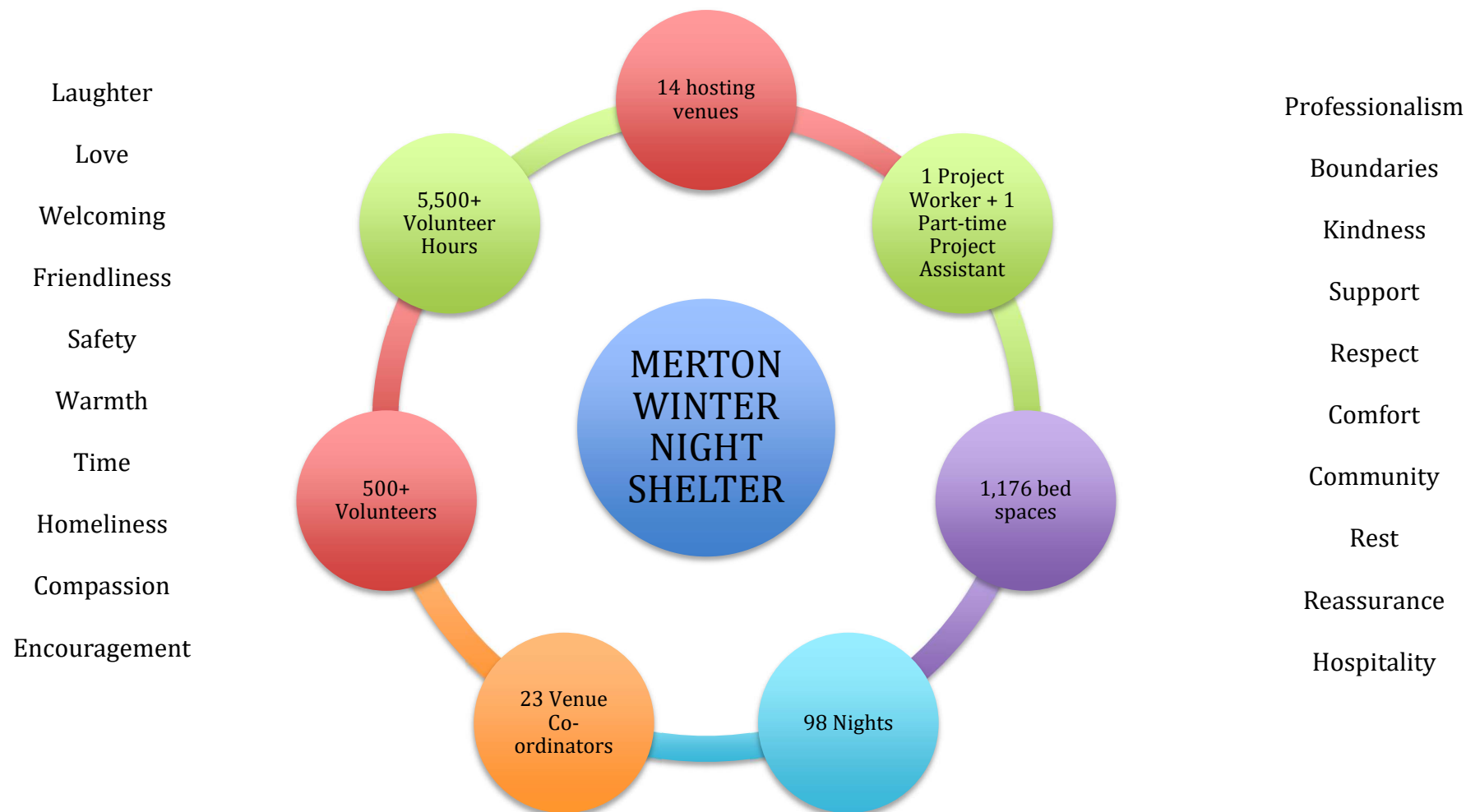
The project is facilitated and overseen by Faith in Action Merton Homelessness Project and our night shelter comprises of:

- 3 Volunteer organisers and trustees of Faith in Action: responsible for the overall running of and fundraising for the shelter.
- 1 Full time Project Co-ordinator: responsible for communication with all venues, supervision of day-to-day operations and individual casework for our guests.
- 1 Part-time Project Assistant: responsible for venue support twice weekly and continued casework for our guests.
- 14 Venues: who with their venue co-ordinators, organise both the available space and volunteers for the night shelter.
- A community of over 450 volunteers.
- Support and advice from Faith in Action's Trustees, Drop In Manager and Treasurer.
- The project operated in **2** consecutive blocks of **7** venues, opening their doors for the same night each week for **7** weeks, offering up to **12** bed spaces each night.



WHAT MAKES A NIGHT SHELTER?

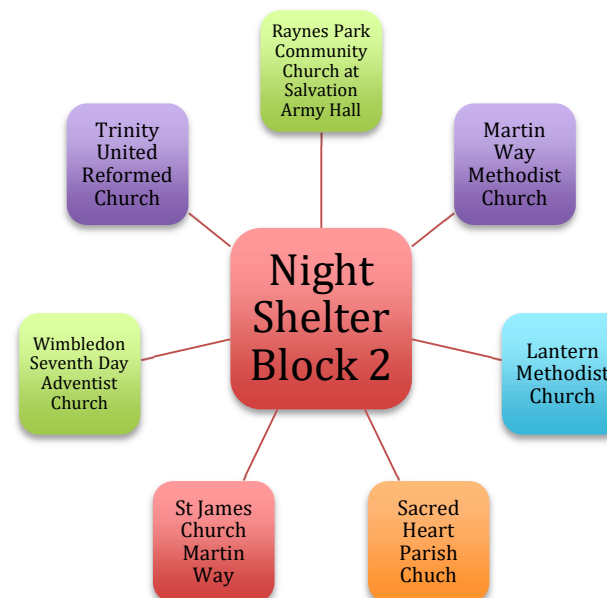
There are so many elements to a successful winter shelter, both tangible and intangible, but all are equally important for our guests.





OUR HOSTING VENUES AND COMMUNITIES

Our teams were also kindly supported by; Wimbledon, Korean, Morden, Sutton and Mitcham Salvation Army and volunteers from the Quaker community, the Shree Ganapathy Hindu Temple, Ahmadiyya Muslim Ladies, Christ the King, Oasis Church, Bishop Gilpin Community Choir, St Marks Church, Worcester Park Baptist Church and St Ann's Catholic Church in Banstead.



SERVICES ON OFFER

One to one caseworking

We work together with each guest to help achieve their best possible outcome.

Transportation of guest luggage

Shelter volunteers transport a rucksack and sleeping bag for each guest from venue to venue.

Translators

Many of our guests are from Eastern Europe so we try and have a Polish speaking volunteer available every evening to assist. We have also drawn on other volunteers with other language skills as needed.

Sunday afternoon opening

Sundays can be a very difficult day for guests, with most services closed, so we are thankful that in Block 2, Trinity URC open their doors early from 2.30pm for our guests.

Sewing and mending service

Guests can have their clothing and bags fixed and mended by our talented volunteers.

Chiropody

Foot problems can be common for people who have been homeless and our chiropodist picked up several issues which were quickly treated.

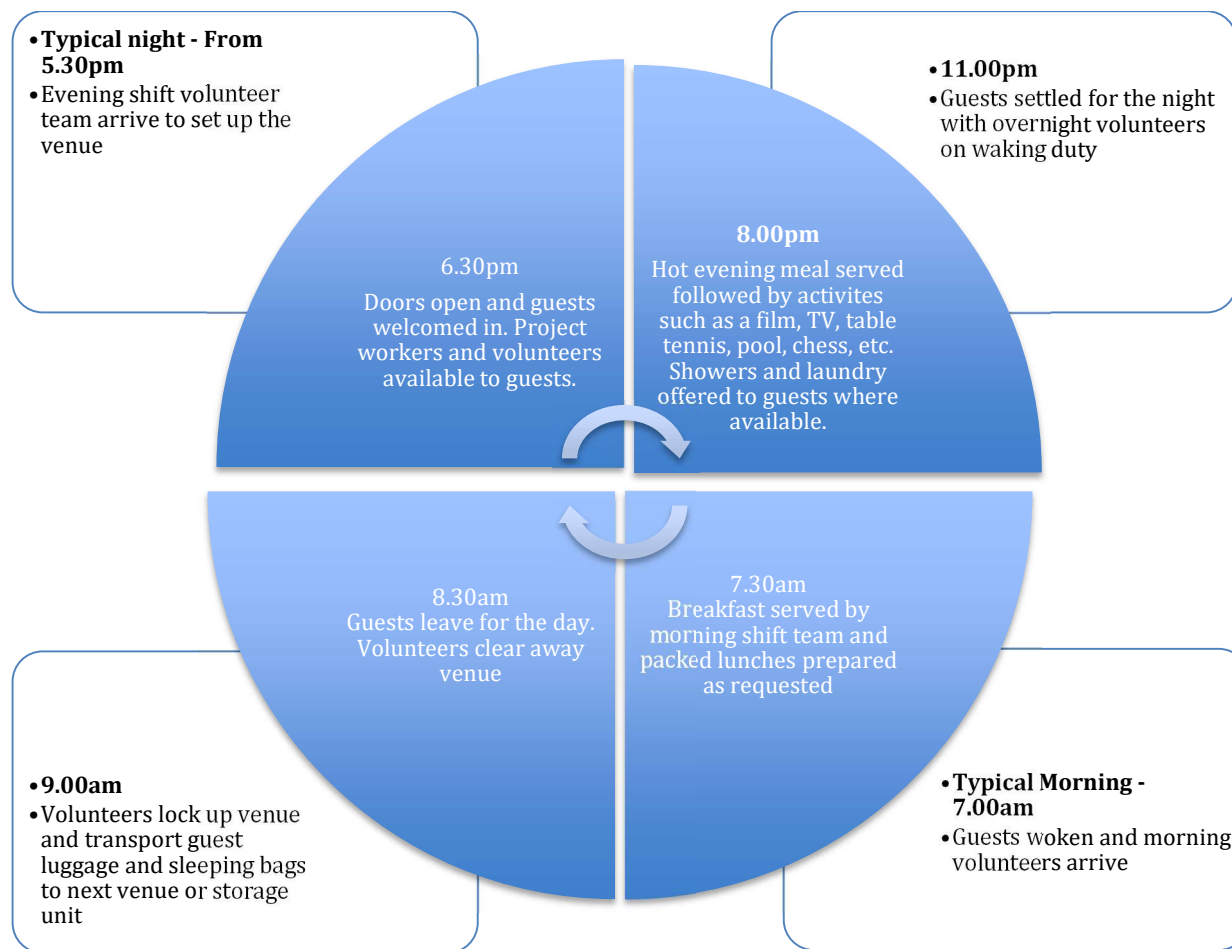
Laundry facilities

Where available, some venues are able to offer laundry services which were very much appreciated by all guests.

Showers

5 of our venues have shower facilities for our guests, with at least 1 additional venue having showers installed in time for next season.

A TYPICAL NIGHT AT THE SHELTER





THIS SEASON - GUESTS

Guest referrals mainly come via the Faith in Action Merton Homelessness Project where the Project Co-ordinator is based twice a week to meet with and assess potential new guests in need of the Night Shelter. We also accepted referrals from Merton Council, Via Drug and Alcohol team, YMCA Wimbledon and Probation services. Great care is taken in choosing guests because not every rough sleeper can cope with the rules necessary for safe communal living. Every decision we make is central to the guest's welfare and general outlook during their stay in the shelter. The moment a guest becomes part of the shelter, we immediately start working with them to find out what support they require and work with them to achieve their goals.

We completed approximately 40 face to face referrals who were either offered a shelter place or added to the waiting list if appropriate. There were a number of referrals that we signposted on to other shelters, services or were able to assist directly into accommodation. 22 different guests were offered a place in the shelter over the 14 week shelter run. Once a guest is given a place in the shelter they can stay as long as they need, provided they respect the shelter rules.

Our guests come from a wide range of working backgrounds and professions including; builders, carpenters, brick layers, plumbers, and those working in hospitality.

The dynamics throughout the duration of the shelter can change on a day to day, week to week and month to month basis depending on our guest group at any given time. We work hard to maintain a shelter culture based on respect, kindness and safety for all who need us. We had all male guests this season - 2 female guests were offered places but did not take it up as fortunately, we signposted them to different options which worked better for them.





NATIONALITIES

British: 4
Eastern European: 12
Rest of World: 6

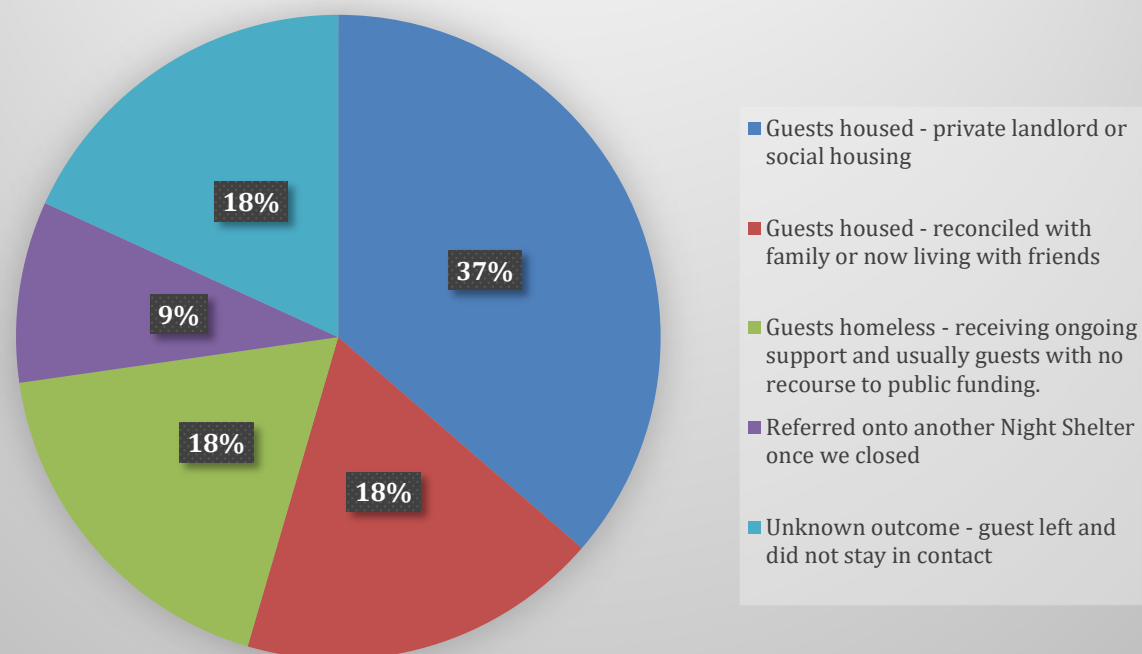
LENGTH OF STAY:

1-7 Days: 4
8-14 Days: 2
15 - 28 Days: 3
28+ Days: 13

AGE RANGES

26-35: 3
36-45: 9
46-55: 6
56-65: 3
65+: 1

Outcomes - We understand that the shelter structure does not work for everyone. For some, the shelter just offers respite over the coldest winter months whilst for others it brings opportunities that can be life changing.





Some of the ways we helped...

- ✓ GP registrations
- ✓ Accompanied visits to the GP and hospitals
- ✓ Dental registration and support to book appointments
 - ✓ Book optician appointments
- ✓ Referrals to the drug & alcohol team
- ✓ Support to access appropriate mental health services
- ✓ Homeless application to local council
- ✓ Housing referrals to private landlords
 - ✓ Moving guests into accommodation
 - ✓ Benefit applications
 - ✓ CV writing
 - ✓ Accessing courses and subsequent work experience

- ✓ Sourcing and signposting job opportunities
- ✓ Providing clothing and footwear where needed
- ✓ Storage for additional guest luggage
- ✓ Deposits & rent in advance payments
- ✓ Covering prescription costs for guests with NRPF
- ✓ Offering a secure postal address
 - ✓ Debt support
 - ✓ Passport applications
 - ✓ Arranging and attending appointments with immigration lawyers
 - ✓ Arranging and attending appointments with housing lawyers

- ✓ Support with opening bank accounts
 - ✓ Liaising with probation
- ✓ Translation services for external appointments
- ✓ 60+ Oyster card applications and replacements
- ✓ Covering cost of travel to appointments and work
- ✓ Providing basic mobile phones
 - ✓ Mobile phone top-ups
 - ✓ Arranging furniture and household items for guests moving into accommodation
- ✓ Assisting with job applications
- ✓ Assisting with EEA settled status and pre-settled applications
 - ✓ Monetary grant applications
 - ✓ Provide care of postal address



CHRISTMAS AT MWNS

As you may be aware, unfortunately, due to high demand, Crisis at Christmas no longer provide a service that allows all London night shelters to decant their guests over the Christmas period. We therefore need to rally up our dedicated volunteers and organise our own arrangements for the Christmas period. The reality is that without doing this, the Night Shelter simply would not have been able to open our doors until 2nd January because otherwise our guests would have had to return to the streets for this difficult period of time.

St Mary's Church offered us their beautiful venue to host our guests over the Christmas period and a huge team of wonderful volunteers from all different venues provided constant cover and meals for our guests until the morning of 27th December, where Faith in Action took over for the usual twice weekly Drop In session. Trinity URC Church then kindly offered their premises for New Year's Eve and New Year's Day so our guests could stay inside for the whole couple of days, when other services they usually access during the day such as the library would be shut for the bank holiday.

Over this period, guests enjoyed beautiful homecooked food, board games and DVDs, friendly conversations with our volunteers and lovely Christmas gifts which were so gratefully appreciated, with one guest commenting he cannot remember the last time he received a Christmas gift.

Volunteers donated, prepared and served a beautiful traditional Christmas lunch on Christmas Day for all of our guests which was thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated by all.

Most importantly for our guests, they were able to stay in one place for 48 hours, meaning they could lie in for as late as they wished, stay in a dry and warm environment instead of wandering the streets and feel safe and part of something over Christmas which can be a very lonely and sad time for many of our guests.

A huge thank you to every single volunteer who was involved in the Christmas period. If you are interested in volunteering for this coming Christmas period, please do reach out to the Project Co-ordinator or your venue Co-ordinator for more details.





A guest's journey with the Night Shelter *(Names have been changed for privacy reasons)*

Dawid

Dawid was a guest with us last season and unfortunately, due to his immigration status still being unresolved, he found himself rough sleeping and sleeping on the buses since we closed. We welcomed Dawid back with open arms and volunteers were delighted to see him again, although sad that his situation hadn't improved too much. Within the first few weeks of the Night Shelter, Dawid received the news that he had been eagerly waiting, and he now had full status with recourse to public funding. We immediately made necessary applications to councils and benefit offices to get everything in place and he was offered his own accommodation just before Christmas. We stayed in touch with Dawid, and although so pleased to be off the street, he did miss the communal element of the Night Shelter, so he graciously accepted our invitation to join us for Christmas Day and the other guests were so pleased to see him again.



Wayne

Following a relationship breakdown, Wayne ended up living back with his mother which was a very strained situation. This too broke down and unfortunately Wayne ended up sleeping rough for the first time in his life. He was very scared and did not know where to turn. Wimbledon Guild pointed him in our direction and when he came to us, he was tearful, ashamed and frightened. Our project co-ordinator spent time with Wayne, assessing him and explaining what the Night Shelter was all about. When he turned up that evening, he was very apprehensive but the other guests and volunteers made him so welcome and he quickly settled in. He was very proactive, working with our new opportunities worker at Faith in Action to get his CV in order. Wayne attended several private and social landlord viewings and fortunately found a suitable property which he could afford and move in to.





Our Volunteers

This season we not only enjoyed the return of so many of our wonderful and experienced volunteers, but also welcomed lots of new folk who joined our network following a social media call out to the local community and the two new venues. It was clear from the feedback collected that volunteers old and new very much enjoyed being involved with the project and feel that they get as much out of the experience as they give.

Our wonderful volunteers assist us in so many ways including preparing and serving delicious meals, which are so thoroughly enjoyed by our guests, transporting the ever growing mountain of luggage from venue to venue which in itself is a mammoth task, staying overnight to ensure the safety of all of our guests and turning up week after week to chat with our guests who they truly begin to bond with, playing games with them and generally take excellent care of them, making them feel welcome and part of our Night Shelter family.



Quote from one of our volunteers: 'A truly moving positive experience'

Quote from one of our volunteers: 'the night shelter was well organised and it was a pleasure to be able to help.'



MWNS 2024-25 Accounts:

INCOME to 31st March 2025

	Totals
Faith Groups	£8,238
Trusts and Foundations	£25,000
One off grants	£2,000
Companies and Charities	£5,000
Individuals	£3,380
Bank interest	£59
	<u>£43,677</u>

EXPENDITURE to 31st March 2025

	Totals
Salaries, training, computer software and audit	£39,441
Housing Justice membership	£395
Big Yellow – central/luggage storage	£293
Covid tests + Christmas isolation accommodation	£756
Mobile phones/rucksacks/sleeping bags	£670
Phone top-ups/clothing/storage boxes/travel	£829
passes/oyster card top ups	£448
Accommodation post-closing	£60
Bank charges	

£42,892

WMNS 2024/25 MAIN BALANCE **£785**

MWNS RESERVE: Brought forward from 2023/2024 **£35,715**

OVERALL BALANCE TO CARRY FORWARD INTO 2025/26 **£36,500**



LOOKING FORWARD

Our Project Coordinator will continue to support our Night Shelter guests at the twice weekly Drop In Sessions run by Faith in Action, and this will continue all year round.

Our focus on partnership working will continue to be a priority for the 2025/26 Night Shelter season, to give our guests the best chance to progress with their goals and maximise their time at the shelter. We will continue to explore how best to help those guests who come into the night shelter and explore further training opportunities for our volunteers. If you do feel you have any special skills that can help our Night Shelter community, please do make the Project Coordinator aware of this.

We worked hard this season on increasing the amount of Polish speaking volunteers, due to the high number of Polish guests we see through our door. However, we could always do with more and we really need more Tamil translators available to our guests as frequently as possible. If you know anyone who may be interested in volunteering with us next season, please do contact the project co-ordinator at ashling@mertonfaithinaction.org.

COLLECTIONS AND DONATIONS

There are some items that instantly help to make our guests feel welcome and other items that are incredibly useful. If you are able to start collecting for next winter, it really does make a difference to our guests.

- **Oyster Cards:** for guests to travel to and from medical appointments, work, support group attendance, etc.
- **Slippers:** The guests have really appreciated being able to slip out of shoes and into slippers. One guest advised us how looking after your feet is essential if you are homeless as there can be so much walking.
- **Mobile Phones and Chargers:** These are critical for our guests to enable us and third parties to be able to easily contact them.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANK YOU'S

We are very fortunate to have such amazing support from so many brilliant volunteers, faith group communities, services, partners and funders in our community who all helped towards the success of this year's Winter Night Shelter. We are extremely grateful to the Faith in Action staff team for assisting with advice and ongoing casework, translation and follow up support during the season. We would also like to thank Karen Hayhurst (Housing and Support manager) and her team, together with the Reception team from the Wimbledon YMCA, St Pauls Group for their support and practical help throughout the season.

FUNDERS AND SUPPORTERS

Our hosting Faith Group Communities

The Rowlett Trust

Wimbledon Offices Ltd.

Abundance Wimbledon

Acorn Environmental

Barre Wimbledon

The Salvation Army South Wimbledon

Bespoke Change

The Wimbledon Foundation

D & S Tailoring, Wimbledon Park

Housing Justice

London Borough of Merton

Wimbledon YMCA St Paul's Group

The Wimbledon Guild

Via Merton

CDARS

AND all the hundreds of individuals who have so generously donated their time and money to the Winter Night Shelter, along with the other faith groups, community groups, schools and colleges who contributed in so many different ways. Your support is invaluable and greatly appreciated. Without your generous donations and assistance, the Winter Night Shelter quite simply could not operate and for this, we are so grateful.

With many, many thanks,

Ashling Flannery (Night Shelter Project Co-ordinator)

Nicki Zisman (Night Shelter Assistant Project Co-ordinator)

Jane Bush, Robin Goodchild, Talat Malik, (Merton Winter Night Shelter management team and Trustees, Faith in Action Merton Homelessness Project)