



**Report on Extended Winter Provision
December 2022 – February 2023**



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Introduction

This report collates data and learning from Catching Lives' extended winter provision – the first time we have offered an open drop-in throughout the evening.

Between 19 December 2022 and 28 February 2023 we extended our day centre opening hours to 9am-9pm (except Wednesday afternoons when we remained closed for team meeting 1.30-4pm as usual).

Goals

Our goals for winter provision were to provide:

- A safe place to spend time in the evenings, with the option to join activities.
- Hot drinks and evening meal for people sleeping rough and people struggling due to the cost of living crisis.
- Support to people who are homeless or vulnerably housed to stay warm, safe and well during the colder months.
- Joint working with Canterbury City Council to help people access severe weather emergency provision (SWEP) and other housing offers.
- Internet access and charging for mobile phones/devices for people sleeping rough.

Service delivery

Staffing and support offer

We began with two members of staff on duty and two volunteers in the kitchen. After a very quiet start in the run-up to Christmas with maybe 7 people an evening, more people began accessing in late December and early January (approx 20), and we had concerns that people were more often under the influence of substances in the evening. As a result, we increased cover to three staff. This ensured a safe environment and enabled staff to have more in-depth conversations and manage the space safely.

We were clear that the evening support offer would be limited because other agencies were closed. We encouraged people to access the daytime drop-in between 9am-2pm where additional support would be available e.g. confidential 1-1 meetings, seeing the mental health specialists, contacting other agencies.

The evening team received requests for support with a range of issues such as housing, benefits and mental health. In some cases, such as accessing SWEP, direct support was provided at the time. More often, the evening team provided light touch support by listening and using our client recording system to ensure the team had the right information to offer support when the person returned in the day.

Client group

- 125 individuals were seen during evening provision, with an average attendance of 9.7 evenings. The majority were already known to us and also accessed during the daytime at some point over winter.
- 13 people attended only on evenings and, of these people, only 6 were not previously known to us. These 13 people only accessed once or twice, often for a specific reason such as to access the needle exchange.

One third of people accessing evening provision were sleeping rough seven nights a week, with the rest being in various forms of emergency or settled accommodation. As Canterbury Council's SWEP was open for three periods between September and February (and some people sleeping rough were offered continuing accommodation once SWEP ended), some people who would have otherwise been sleeping rough and accessing the centre were instead placed out of area in Council provision.

We also ensured that anyone sleeping rough was offered adequate kit/clothing etc to stay warm. We tried to meet individual needs in other flexible ways with the funding we had available. This included paying for B&B/hotel rooms on a couple of occasions for vulnerable clients who could not access other emergency housing and did not have the funds to pay for this themselves.

Partnership working

A range of agencies held evening drop-ins, including The Hep C Trust who offered testing with immediate results. This was effective as clients saw others being tested and decided to do so themselves created a snowball effect.

The British Red Cross delivered a First Aid course targeted towards the types of injuries or situations that rough sleeping clients might experience, such as falls and seizures. Feedback from clients attending was positive.

Canterbury Council's RSI team were also able to meet clients during evenings, widening the opportunities for mutual clients to receive support.

An IDVA from Rising Sun domestic abuse charity also attended regularly to offer support to clients.

If the extended provision had been planned further in advance, we might have secured additional external partner involvement. As it was, opening so close to Christmas meant that some agencies didn't have the staffing capacity to attend evening drop-in.

Activities

A Film Club as introduced in January for 10 sessions. This proved popular with clients who helped choose the films. Clients also made use of other self-service activities in the centre including table tennis and board games.

Volunteers

We recruited volunteers to prepare and serve a hot evening meal. We would like to thank everyone who gave up their time, especially during the cold periods of weather, for their support.

Client welfare costs

There were fewer welfare expenses specifically for evening provision than anticipated (cold weather clothing, sleeping bags etc), possibly because a number of people were in council accommodation who would otherwise been sleeping rough.

Housing outcomes

Assisted to move into accommodation 1 December 2022 – 31 March 2023:

15 SWEP (council offered SWEP but client declined: 10)
11 Emergency housing
9 Supported Accommodation
4 Private rented
2 Housing Association
41 Total

Learning

The evening provision was well received and played an important role in keeping people occupied and warm during the cold dark evenings.

We can't estimate how many people who were sleeping rough and using the service would have used the night shelter if we'd been able to open it for this winter – the fact SWEP as open means we don't have a clear picture of potential demand. There were at least 2-3 people sleeping rough over the winter who weren't eligible for SWEP but probably wouldn't have been eligible for the night shelter either, for example due to substance use.

Our key learning was the need for 3 staff to manage the space, even when offering a reduced service. One person who is in crisis or under the influence can occupy a lot of staff time. It was sometimes hard for the team to assess risk when someone arrived for the first time during the evening and, while they could have refused access pending a daytime assessment, the team found it hard to turn anyone away.

Catering costs were higher than expected – we anticipated evening meals being simple and hot (soup and bread, beans on toast etc) but volunteers often prepared full meals, similar to lunch provision. This caused a few issues with food getting used up in the evening that was planned for use the next day.

There were no issues at 9pm, as people tended to make their own way out before closing.

There was a knock-on effect on daytime activities, as people were allowed to stay throughout the day. This disrupted some workshops as there were people on-site who weren't engaging in the activity.

Staffing costs in the day team need to be planned for in the budget and on the rota, to cover recruitment, induction and support of evening staff as well as on-call support.

Evening staff would need additional training if delivering more 1-1 support.

Clients expressed anxiety as the end of winter provision approached. This was perhaps made worse by the very cold weather continuing into March.

Recommendations (if delivering evening provision again)

1. Minimum three evening staff, with a manager on-site for some of evening shift in the initial weeks to monitor how people present and support the evening team to exclude people as necessary.
2. Additional training for evening team on refusing access/asking people to leave where under the influence.
3. Advance planning so that partner agencies can commit resources and be on-site.
4. Incorporate activities like the Film Club and table tennis which help to promote a focused environment.
5. Make a decision on whether to close the drop-in during the afternoon in order to preserve focused activity times and identify other services open 2-4pm where people might go instead – or use centre space differently to avoid disrupting activities.
6. Include day staff hours in budgeting.
7. More detailed planning and instructions around what type of food is served, and budget/order for additional meals accordingly.
8. Recruit activity volunteers to play table tennis, board games etc. Look at creating ongoing projects where clients can take things away to work on.
9. Consider extending provision (funds allowing) through to clocks changing in March.

Annex A: Data

Individuals using evening provision: 125

	Instances	Individuals
Accessed the centre	1217	125
Use of centre phone e.g. to call council for emergency housing	45	25
Computer use	163	41
Charged phone at centre	98	42
Clothing provided	74	43
Meals served (hot dinners)	822	100
Sleeping bags provided	50	33

Housing situation

Rough sleeping (7 nights a week)	41
Supported accommodation	16
Council tenancy	10
Emergency Housing (Interim Accommodation)	10
Sofa surfing with family/friends	7
Car	7
Rough sleeping/ Sofa surfing with family/friends	6
Private rented	5
Temporary accommodation	5
Family home	2
Housing association	2
B&B/hotel (self-funded)	2
Not recorded	12

Gender

Male	103
Female	21
Gender fluid	1

Benefits situation

Universal Credit	38
Universal Credit and PIP	11
PIP and ESA	3
PIP	2
PIP and JSA	1
ESA	2
Pension credit	1
No benefits in place	11
Not recorded	56

Nationality

British	80
British/ Israeli	1
Scottish	1
Northern Irish	1
Irish	4
Egyptian	3
Polish	3
Bulgarian	1
Albanian	1
Romanian	1
Turkish	1
Not recorded	28

Annex B: Feedback – clients

Lightly edited for spelling and clarity

What, if anything, did you like about the extended openings?

- The movie nights were good. The company was good.
- Good for homeless people spent time here warm and safe.
- Provided a place to meet others time out of the dark and cold weather. Nice food and helps keep away depression.
- The dinners, socialising more, more support, somewhere to stay warm.
- It kept me stable, safe and out of the way.
- somewhere to keep warm for a few hours and eat a hot meal, instead of feeling isolated and in the streets, or vulnerable and in danger elsewhere. A chance to break habits.
- Dinners, more socialising and warm place to be.
- I liked the way that it was more time out of the cold and wet. And more time to do activities, also it didn't make you feel that everything was rushed.
- The films, the activities and small talks.

What else would you have liked to see in place or done differently?

- Nothing
- My opinion openings time 7am to 7pm better for rough sleepers early open.
- Perfect.
- Nothing
- Go back to staying open at 9pm.
- The volunteers were wonderful, but more authorised security would be and feel a little bit more safe.
- I wouldn't change anything, much I think the staff are all doing a fantastic, service here they are all very professional and involved.
- More stuff for homeless people, if there are courses inside because of activities (paper, etc) so is all full okay.

If we can extend our services again next winter what are the main things that we could do that would help you personally?

- Nothing
- Generally everything ok.
- A place to meet and talk to others, a warm environment away from the 4 walls of my room. Nice food.
- Keep the dinners going, keep support where possible.
- More control in the place.
- Nothing
- As I thank you all for the effort you all put in and kindness.
- More games, more changing clothes, stuff for outside (sleeping bags, tents but it's out the donations), more help for couples to come together in a shared accommodation.

Any other thoughts/comments?

- It should be able to stay open till 9pm all year round as this would help with people's mental health
- Support and help. Many thanks.
- Have extended opening hours in summer.
- No.
- Great services and lovely people.
- Grateful for all the volunteers who do a very good job.
- No
- Well done, to you all
- The help in catching lives because of 3 times homeless is very, very annoying.