

The
LIVING
ROOM



END OF SEASON
REPORT
2019/20

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OVERVIEW

Introduction

The Living Room is a charity established in 2016 by Imagine Norfolk Together and a group of local church leaders. It uses church buildings to host a night shelter for homeless people in the Great Yarmouth area during the Winter months. Guests can stay for three nights each weekend and are provided with a warm bed, hot food, good company and support during the week, if required.

Vision

A town where nobody has to sleep rough on the streets.

Mission

To open church buildings during the Winter months to offer shelter hope and hospitality to people sleeping on the streets.

Culture and Ethos

The Living Room believes that every person, regardless of their circumstances, has great value and significance. Consequently, it seeks to foster a culture and atmosphere of mutual respect and warmth.

Aims

To enable people sleeping rough to have shelter warmth and hospitality for some nights every week during the Winter months. To improve outcomes for people sleeping rough who want to move on to permanent accommodation.

Location and Opening Times

Last Winter The Living Room was open from 29 November 2019 to 15 March 2020. We were forced to close two weeks early due to government guidelines concerning the Coronavirus pandemic.

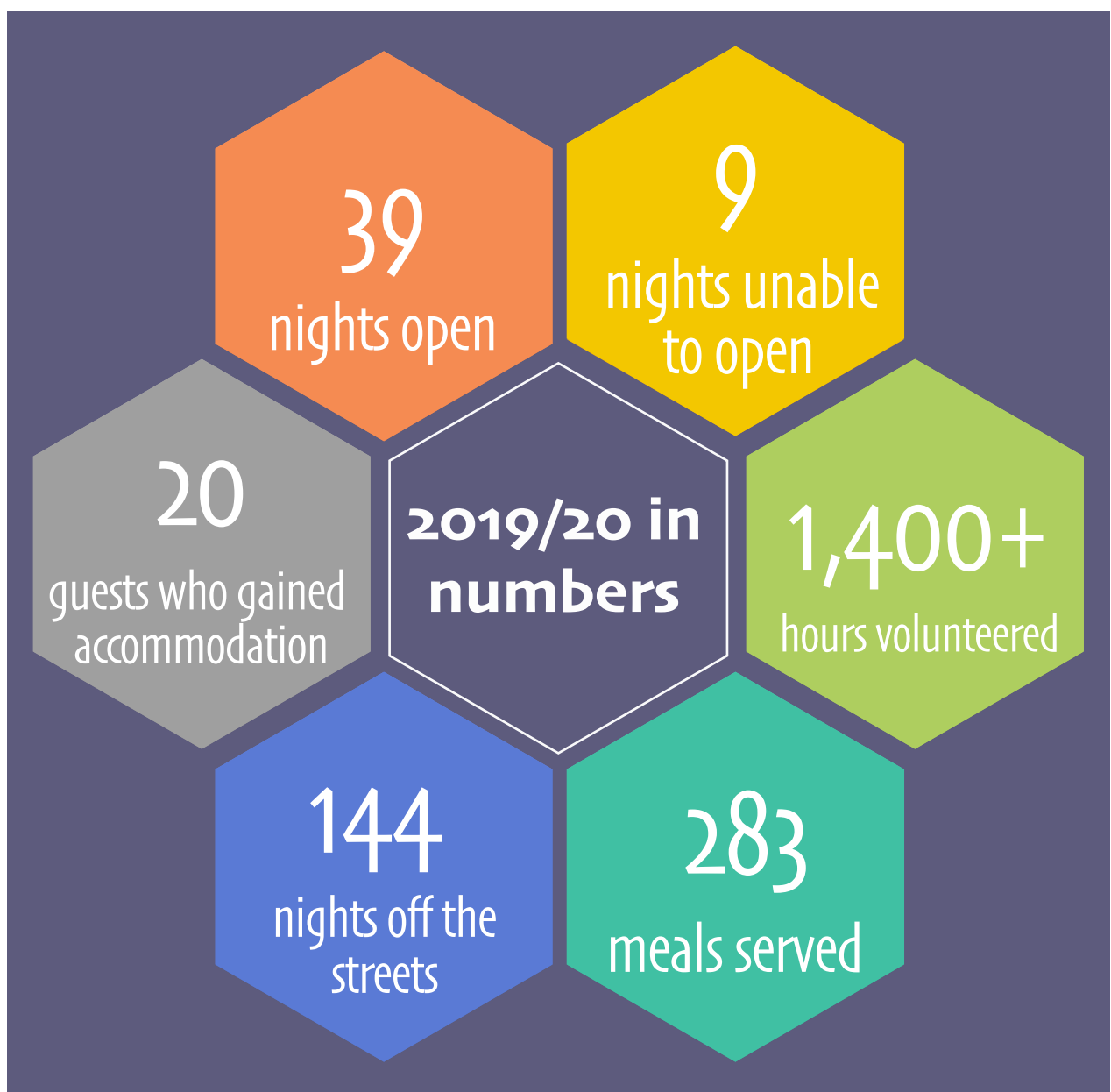
Our opening nights remained Friday, Saturday and Sunday at three local venues: Minster Mission (Pathway), Park Baptist Church and Kingsgate Community Church.

We were also able to pay for B&B accommodation for the three guests who would have otherwise been on the streets on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Website

www.thelivingroomgy.co.uk

2019/20 AT A GLANCE



STAFF

Support Advocate - Jo Morrison

Jo is in her third year with The Living Room and remains a central cog in the success of our work so far. Her role primarily revolves around supporting our visitors. This begins with helping them register to stay with us but extends to supporting them with benefit applications and accessing other services and, where possible, with looking beyond rough sleeping to finding permanent accommodation and financial stability.

Jo hosts a regular drop-in at Great Yarmouth Library, where rough sleepers can self-refer to sign-up with us. She attends regular meetings with local agencies including the council and the police and has helped The Living Room become a respected and integral part of the support offered to rough sleepers in the borough. When the shelter is open Jo attends the first shift to touch base with the visitors and encourage volunteers and coordinate the provision of any supplies, such as sleeping bags, clothing and toiletries to the visitors as needed.

Project Co-ordinator - Barrie Thornton

Barrie worked with us for a short period in the latter part of 2019 and early 2020 to develop our volunteer base and promote The Living Room within the community. This involved hosting several 'pop-up' stalls in local supermarkets, the Job Centre and by giving presentations to local organisations who expressed an interest in supporting the work of the charity. He also worked closely with the trustees to coordinate the shift rota and train new volunteers.

TRUSTEES

There are currently five trustees who offer oversight and practical support to The Living Room. They are:

Rev. Peter Timothy	Chair of Trustees
Rev. Katy Dunn	Vice Chair of Trustees
Jo Howes	Treasurer
Mark Attwood	
Polly Tyson	

They have been joined in a wider management group for monthly meetings by staff members and two co-opted members: **Anna Heydon** (Imagine Norfolk Together) and **Barbara Rowe** (Pathways Cafe). We look forward to also welcoming **Glen Hagger** to the team for the 2020/21 season, but are sad to say goodbye to Mark and Barbara as they move on.

VOLUNTEERS

Every night we open requires seven volunteers; three on the first shift, two on the second (the night shift) and two on the third.

We were blessed by 38 volunteers during the 2019/2020 season, from a range of backgrounds. Approximately two thirds came from local churches and the other third were from the local community. All wanted to get involved in helping our homeless guests.

Each volunteer is required to undertake bespoke training on safeguarding, professional boundaries, and personal safety, along with a DBS check. We were pleased that some of our volunteers from the 2019/2020 season took up further training opportunities offered in drug and alcohol training, fire safety and first aid.

Volunteers undertake a number of jobs, such as setting up the venue, welcoming guests upon arrival, preparing, cooking and serving the meals, eating with and interacting with the guests, washing up, overseeing the night shift, clearing down and cleaning the venues after each session, transporting equipment and bedding between venues and laundry, to name but a few. We are thankful for all their hard work in making The Living Room possible.

Feedback

Each year we ask for feedback from our volunteers at the end of the season. Here are some of the observations offered this year:

It gives hope to those less fortunate than ourselves

"Many (visitors) have found themselves asking questions about faith as a result of the actions of Christian volunteers and staff. It has been great that The Living Room management and staff have responded to this by providing a safe place to explore faith on a Monday morning for those that want to know more."

"It has been exciting to see so many visitors moving forward with their lives, finding accommodation and breaking addictions."

"Volunteering for The Living Room has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life, doing life with such a wide variety of characters and seeing lives changed."

"It's a privilege to be part of this charity."

"For some of our guests this is the only safe place they can sleep, talk and meet other people."

"A safe haven for those in need of shelter, food and companionship."

VISITORS

In spite of receiving 53 referrals and requests to attend the shelter, we were generally much quieter this year, with a total of 31 guests staying with us throughout the winter season. As with previous years we have found that some visitors will complete the referral and then not actually arrive at the shelter on the night. This may be due to finding a sofa with friends to stay on, choosing to stay on the streets, being unable to sleep in a dormitory system, or other reasons known only to themselves.



Our guests were all pleased to be with us though and gave the following feedback:

"More friendships, helped me build and improve my life."

Good family environment and a good home cooked meal."

"Made me realise that there is support out there for everyone."

*The Living Room
saved my life ...*

"It helped me to stay positive and look forward to getting off the streets. I am now off the streets and continuing to make progress that The Living Room helped me start."

"The Living Room saved my life and made street life disappear when it came to the weekend. I knew I had a home to stay at on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday".

Activities

As with previous years, optional activities were available to guests. On Friday nights there was table tennis, Saturdays was pool and Sundays there were board games (which always prove popular). Newspapers are usually available to read and music is sometimes played the radio. We also held film nights on Saturdays and watched old black and white movies or singalongs such as Grease. Both genres proved popular.

In the Community

In addition to our guests, a number of homeless individuals in Great Yarmouth either chose not to stay or were unable to stay with us. The Support Advocate was still able to work with them, spending time helping them to register with GP surgeries and gain appointments, look for housing, supplying food, water and other essentials, and sometimes just providing an ear to listen. We were also able to help furnish a flat for one of the men who found accommodation during the spring.

CASE STUDY

Chloe and Oliver (*names changed*)

Chloe and Oliver arrived in Great Yarmouth having been promised jobs and accommodation with a company owned by one of Oliver's friends. By the time they arrived in Great Yarmouth the company had gone bust, leaving them with no jobs and nowhere to live. They found out about the shelter and came to stay with us. Both were very proactive and determined to change their circumstances. However, homelessness is rather like being stuck on a downward spiral and is very hard to break free. Despite Chloe's best efforts in handing out her CV all across town, no one was willing to take her on without a residential address. Oliver had no CV as such, so we were able to put him in touch with Sean Marsden, a local Community Connector who helped him to write one. This enabled him to have an interview, but he was ultimately also unsuccessful in gaining employment.

During the rest of the season they were living in a tent locally and were soon joined by several of our other guests. Chloe oversaw that the campsite was always kept clean and tidy and even took to feeding the local birds with a packet of cheap seed when she could afford it. She loved the wildlife but was still determined that they would not spend another season in a tent and using the shelter, even though they were both grateful to be able to come to us each weekend.

Then came a night where we were unable to open, due to staffing issues. We put many of our guests in overnight accommodation through a charity called Great Yarmouth B&B and Chloe and Oliver were placed in a guesthouse near the seafront that weekend. The owner agreed to take Chloe on as a cleaner and she started work. Unfortunately, this did not last long as they found out Chloe was homeless, and she was asked to leave. She did not want to fight the dismissal.

After this Chloe had found someone who would take them on for a tenancy but was then unsuccessful in gaining it, as she missed a deadline on her U/C claim and had to start again. The landlord was not willing to wait another four weeks for the rent. Both Chloe and Oliver were very disappointed but determined to keep trying. By this time, the shelter had finished but Chloe and Oliver continued to keep in touch and come to the meal on Sunday nights.

During the week Chloe and Oliver began attending one of the local churches, along with some of our other guests, to do their washing in the community laundry room. Oliver was asked if he would like to volunteer in the new kitchen garden that was being set up there and he threw himself into building planters, painting fences, and growing fruit and veg. He seemed to really enjoy having something to do. There were days when it was very obvious that he was struggling to even get motivated to get out of bed, but he seemed to be in a better place when he was out in the garden.

Chloe rang our Support Advocate late one night to ask if The Living Room would help them with some money as they had found a landlord willing to take them on. This is not something The Living Room would usually do, but we managed to find a grant that could be used specifically in situations such as these. They were due to move into the house a few weeks later but chose not to do so as they had heard there might be better accommodation becoming vacant in the town very shortly. They had their deposit back so would have some cash to put the deposit on the new place when it became available.

At this point Oliver stopped coming to the Sunday night meal as he and Chloe had been threatened by somebody they knew. That person had said they would burn their tent down with them in it. He did not feel he could leave all their things in case he went back to the tent and they were gone. We packed food for Chloe to take back to him. Chloe was very concerned for Oliver's mental health and worried that he might spiral into drink and drugs. Neither of them felt that they wanted to involve the police in what was happening, so it went unreported. Eventually things died down and Oliver felt safe to leave the tent and come back to the Sunday meals again.

Around this time a new Premier Inn opened in the town and we were able to take our guests for a meal whilst the new restaurant staff learned their jobs. Chloe and Oliver came along and really enjoyed it. Chloe remarked that it was nice to feel normal again. She was still talking about it the following week. We were also able to go to the circus, on generously given free tickets, and Chloe and Oliver really enjoyed themselves watching the show.

During this time Oliver was still volunteering fairly regularly in the kitchen garden at church, and there was talk of Chloe starting to volunteer in the kitchen there too. She was still worried about the amount he was drinking and the effect not working or having accommodation was having on his mental health. Sometimes she would be very upset as she felt that they were not making any progress.

Chloe made an appointment with local support agency DIAL to discuss housing. She was optimistic about a room which was available but sadly the room was then given to someone else. The landlady had promised them the next room that came up, but they were both finding it extremely hard to deal with all the let downs. Finally, after four months Chloe managed to secure a room in the town. Her benefits were sorted out and she began working for the church as a cleaner. The Living room was able to assist them both with getting some furniture and cutlery, crockery, curtains etc. We were even donated a lovely big TV which they were able to have in their room.

To date Chloe continues to work for the church and Oliver tends to his allotment. They remain in permanent accommodation.

FINANCE

Total Income for 2019/20: £28,621

Our primary sources of income are via successful grant applications (see *Thank You page*) and this year from Great Yarmouth Borough Council. We also received a generous £1,000 gift from an individual and some smaller gifts from churches and individuals.

Total Expenditure for 2019/20: £26,754

Our primary areas of expenditure are: Staffing costs, training, room hire, advertising, insurance, storage and volunteer expenses.

FUNDING

Like most small charities, we rely on fundraising and the goodwill of individuals who want to see an end to homelessness and support the work we are doing. We have benefitted greatly from both physical and monetary gifts.

Practical gifts have included things like toiletries, knitwear, food, Christmas gifts, clothes, rucksacks and footwear, as well as kitchenware, tv's, curtains and furniture to help support our guests as they go into accommodation.

A number of individuals support us financially, as have some larger organisations and funders, notably The Mercer's Trust and Great Yarmouth Borough Council.

On behalf of our guests, we are truly grateful to everyone who has contributed in some way during the 2019/20 season.



LOOKING AHEAD

Covid-19

As the current Coronavirus pandemic plays out it is a little difficult to envision what The Living Room might look like during the next season, but we fully intend to be here in Great Yarmouth, supporting the homeless community.

Without funds the work cannot continue and so, of course, fundraising will still be needed. We have a fundraiser who has offered to write a grant application for us, and are actively looking for others with experience in this area who might be willing to help.

As the summer progresses we hope to be able to reopen for our summer Sunday meals which may initially take the form of a takeaway, until we are given the all clear by the government to go ahead and eat together indoors again. We hope that by the end of November the government will have offered further guidance and we will be able to safely reopen.

Expansion of Nights

There have been requests from both visitors and volunteers to open for additional nights. Discussions have taken place with churches in the area and we have two new venues that are able to host The Living Room next year, subject to funding and staffing.

There have also been requests, again from both visitors and volunteers, for showering facilities at more of the venues, and this too is being thought about when discussing new venues. One of the new venues already has showering facilities in place.

The major obstacle to extra nights is the lack of volunteers. We have appointed a Shift Coordinator to oversee volunteers, shifts, training and recruitment, beginning in September, and are exploring different possibilities to staffing the shifts.

Current volunteers have expressed a wish for online training, and this will be explored in tandem with our new Shift Coordinator. The hope is to enable volunteers to undertake training at their own pace, rather than attending a fixed training day.

Synchronising Support Services

The growing relationships among service providers in the town offers the opportunity to better synchronise the support being offered to rough sleepers and ensure a holistic approach where different agencies complement each other and avoid unnecessary overlap. We are keen to explore how these relationships can be better fostered, particularly to increase the number of homeless persons who are able to not just find permanent accommodation but are able to adjust to the huge changes required with this way of living.

THANK YOU

We are so grateful to each and every person, organisation and agency that has given us their valued support over the last year.

Churches

Bradwell Methodist Church, Christchurch, Gorleston Baptist Church and The Well, Kingsgate Community Church, Light of Life Baptist Church, Minster Mission, Park Baptist Church, The Salvation Army, St. Mary Magdalene Church and The Bridge.

Grant Providers

The Mercer's Trust, Paul Bassham Charitable Trust, Beatrice Laing Trust, Soroptimist International Great Yarmouth.

Medical Support

Lighthouse Surgery (part of East Norfolk Medical Practice), especially Katrina, Ailsa and Doug

Local Agencies & Organisations

Change Grow Live, Citizens Advice Bureau, ComeUnity (especially Sean Marsden), Dial, DWP, EEH, Genesis Housing, Great Yarmouth Borough Council and those within Housing Options, Great Yarmouth Library, Great Yarmouth Police Force and all in the OPT, GYBee&Bee, Herring House Trust, Make it Happen, The Mariner's Compass, Mesh, Tribal Trust.

Volunteer Training

Claire Hamilton-Deane, Lydia Chilvers and Caroline Hill

Supermarkets

Asda Great Yarmouth and Morrisons in Gorleston

Lady Agnew, High Sheriff of Norfolk Who helped raise the profile of The Living Room after visiting and volunteering.

Ava Beecham who chose and brought Christmas presents for all our visitors, then wrapped them, assisted by younger sister Iris and younger brother Henry.

All who were praying for us throughout the season and to everyone who has knitted for our guests, donated items or money, sent us gifts from our Amazon wish list or given us their support in any way. We are truly grateful to you all.

Thank you!