

Bethany Overnight Welcome Centre – End of Season Report

As most of you know, Bethany Christian Trust provides overnight accommodation – the Overnight Welcome Centre - for rough sleepers. Our two parishes, along with Christian churches from all over Edinburgh provide a hot meal for the people using this overnight accommodation, with our Justice & Peace Group covering the cost of the food.

The Bethany Overnight Welcome Centre finally closed for the season on Sunday 2 May. The change of name is interesting – previously it was the Night Shelter but that didn't reflect the range of services provided such as doctors, social workers, community psychiatric nurses and other professionals able to provide support to homeless people using the Welcome Centre.

When Covid arrived last year, the converted church at Gorgie with its 75 beds crammed together was obviously not suitable so, in partnership with the City Council, Bethany moved the Centre to a hotel, enabling the guests to have individual rooms. This season, the Centre was housed in the Haymarket Hub Hotel. One of the other effects of the pandemic was that it concentrated the minds on finding accommodation for the homeless so that the numbers using the Welcome Centre were lower than they had been.

The Haymarket Hub Hotel kitchen was unsuitable for preparing meals so we had to use the kitchen at the Central Church, Tollcross and later Gorgie Dalry Church at Tynecastle.

Our parishes have been blessed by the number of volunteers to assist in this work but obviously, with many people having to shield because of age or illness, we lost a lot of pairs of hands. Three things came to the rescue:

- The eating area at the Welcome Centre was small and with only one guest per table to maintain social distancing, the number of volunteers required to serve the tables was reduced.
- We started buying meals from a company called Apetito (who generously donated the food on some occasions) which were easier to cook – saving all the hassle of buying and preparing food.
- Seton Steele from Apetito volunteered to do the cooking for us which, apart from a couple of nights when he had to be elsewhere, he did on every one one of our nights. This meant that we only had to find two volunteers to serve the tables. It is hard to underestimate how much simpler the whole process became because of Seton's wonderful contribution.

At the start of the season, we volunteered to do 10 nights (there was a slight nervousness about how the pandemic would affect us) then when Bethany issued an SOS because of teams dropping out earlier this year, we took on another 4 nights.

Over and above our volunteers who gave their time, a big thanks to all who have contributed financially to support the Welcome Centre – our two parishes contributed £1630 to Bethany for the work of the Centre as well as £610 to the J&P Group towards the cost of providing the food.

So, a big **THANK YOU** to all who have contributed, be it time and/or money, and watch this space for next season – October is not far away!