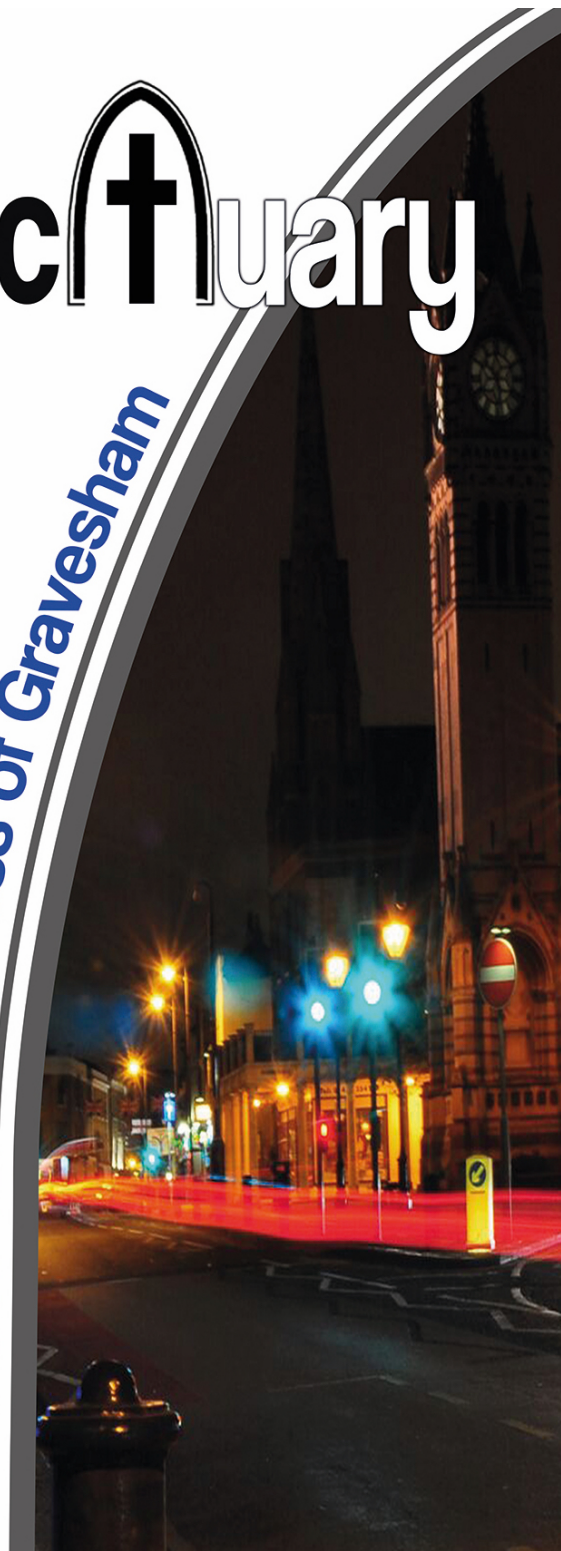


# Sanctuary

## Sanctuary Annual Report

2016/17

Helping the homeless of Gravesham







# Sanctuary Annual Report 2016-17

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The report reviews the activities of Sanctuary during the period July 2016 - June 2017, what we discovered about homelessness in Gravesham and recommendations for the future.

*July 2017*

***“... for I was hungry and you gave me food,  
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,  
I was a stranger and you welcomed me”***

*Matthew 25 (NIV)*

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## **Contents**

1.	ABOUT SANCTUARY .....	5
2.	REPORT PURPOSE .....	6
3.	SINGLE HOMELESSNESS IN GRAVESEND .....	7
4.	ISSUES FACING THE HOMELESS .....	10
5.	THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS.....	12
6.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	14
	APPENDIX I: SANCTUARY FINANCIAL RESULTS.....	18
	APPENDIX II: USEFUL RESOURCES .....	19

## 1. About Sanctuary

Sanctuary is a project of City Praise Centre (Registered Charity No. 1160677 – [www.citypraisecentre.com](http://www.citypraisecentre.com)), working in partnership with Gravesend Methodist Church and Churches Together in Gravesham. Our objective is to support and befriend the homeless community living in Gravesend.

Sanctuary is more than a winter shelter and offers services that include:

- **Winter Night Shelter** that provides showers, hot food and overnight sleeping arrangements. This operates 3 nights a week during December to March.
- **Drop-in Centre** that provides hot food and a place for guests to meet in the evening. This team operates Sunday and Thursday evenings during April – June, October – November.
- **Daytime Centre** that operates weekly throughout the year providing hot showers, clothing, laundry and access to a pastoral team that deal with individual guest issues and links them with appropriate agencies.

Sanctuary works closely with other local agencies including Porchlight (housing charity), Mind (mental health), House of Mercy (temporary accommodation), CGL (drug and alcohol support), Job centre (employment opportunities), NHS services (health) and The Home Office (documents and repatriation to home country).

All this is only possible through the dedication of our volunteers who throughout the year gave over 15,500 hours to Sanctuary. Sanctuary receives no external funding and relies totally on supporter contributions.

We do not attempt to solve the social and political issues regarding homelessness – our focus is on supporting adult individuals where ever we can.

All data reported in this review comes from our own records or publically available sources.

## **2. Report Purpose**

Over the past year, our activities have been concerned with single homeless people. These are people who do not meet the priority need criteria in order to be housed by the local authority and are more likely to experience major health issues, both mentally and physically.

It is often presumed that single males are the most likely to end up in this category but our data this season has shown a significant increase in the number of females living on the street. It also shows that homelessness is now affecting older people, with a quarter of guests visiting sanctuary this year are aged 60 plus.

Many of the homeless we come across have significant support needs often as the result of physical and mental health issues. They may have previously lived in supported accommodation such as hostels and semi-independent housing projects but who, often through no fault of their own, now find themselves sleeping rough, 'sofa surfing' or living in squats. Situations that they are unable to change by themselves and who need the very help they are denied by the state.

In this our second report (Sanctuary was established in November 2015), we look at the numbers of single homeless people we have dealt with, the reasons for their homelessness, the impact this has on the town, and suggestions on what can be done.

Our aim is to provide relevant information to commissioners that will help them to address the impact of homelessness on local housing and health services. By taking notice of our conclusions they will also demonstrate progress towards achieving statutory duties on improved relationships between the local authority and local groups who care for the homeless in the borough of Gravesham.

### 3. Single Homelessness in Gravesend

#### How many homeless make use of Sanctuary?

There are single homeless people in every local authority and this past season (2016/2017) Sanctuary has seen a significant increase in the number of "Guests" who use our services, compared with last year:

	<u>2016/17</u>	<u>2015/16</u>	<u>Growth</u>
<b>Total No. accessing services:</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>52%</b>

When asked where these people slept, we found:

No. sleeping on street:	112
No. sleeping in a car:	13
No. 'sofa surfing':	31

Interestingly, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) who publishes annual figures on rough sleeping in England based on a snapshot street count or estimates from local authorities, suggest that Gravesham has only 6 homeless people sleeping rough.

Throughout the year we provide a range of additional services to the homeless that helps in restoring some form of dignity and hope to those considered by government as a low-priority:

	<u>2016/17</u>	<u>2015/16</u>	<u>Growth</u>
No. Winter shelter sleeps (Dec-Mar):	712	657	8%
No. Hot Meals served (Oct-Jun):	2533	1934	24%
No. of hot showers provided:	793		
No. of bags of laundry washed:	1154		
No. of items of clothes provided:	1042		

Although we dealt with over 200 individual homeless people during the past year, the figure is probably a lot higher as for some rough sleeper's the prospect of sharing bed space with 11-20 other guests is too stressful.

## Who are the homeless?

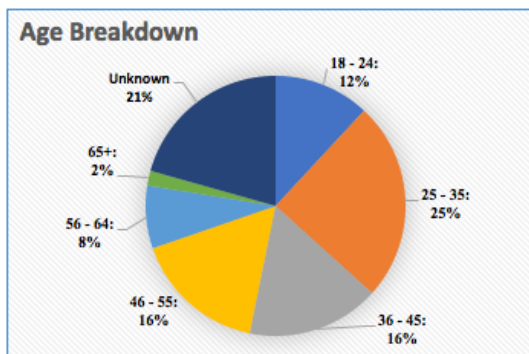
Homelessness is typically a transient problem, and so at any one time, the number and make up of our guests changes. In looking at the past year we found:

### Gender:

Male:	183
Female:	31
Unknown:	4

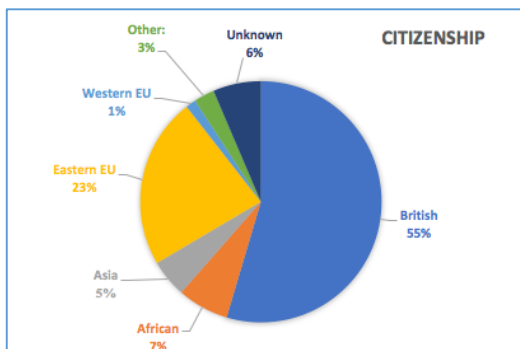
### Age breakdown:

18 - 24:	26
25 - 35:	54
36 - 45:	36
46 - 55:	36
56 - 64:	17
65+:	4
Unknown:	45



### Citizenship:

British:	119
African:	15
Asian:	11
East Europe:	50
West Europe:	3
Other:	6
Unknown:	14





## What are the reasons for their homelessness?

In talking with our guests, the following reasons were given as to why they became homeless:

- Losing job and hence income to pay rent
- Unable to afford an increased rent
- Evicted by landlord
- Landlord 'selling up' and no longer offering accommodation
- Domestic troubles
- Just been released from prison

## The impact of Sanctuary

Through the efforts of Sanctuary, Gravesham has a partial response to the homeless living in the town, and at no cost to the public purse.

Without this, it is possible that local services would have been overwhelmed by the needs of the homeless and that some would have died through cold and neglect.

In terms of health, when Sanctuary is open during the winter months, the health of guests is improved due to regular meals, toilet facilities and having a warm, safe place to sleep. In terms of social inclusion, they also become part of a friendly community that builds on social interaction with the many volunteers who work at Sanctuary, and who are able to point them to agencies who can help with housing and jobs.

As well as providing practical assistance to the homeless, working with other agencies has led to a number of positive outcomes including:

No. of people housed: 33

No. of health issues resolved: 5

No. of people sectioned: 3

No. of people voluntary repatriated: 6

No of jobs found through the Job Centre: 3

## 4. Issues Facing the Homeless

### *The Housing Crisis*

The Homelessness reduction bill will bring in to place legislation that will entitle more people to meaningful help and support when facing homelessness. The 'Homelessness Monitor England' published by Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Crisis last year, suggested positive initiatives which appear to be on the verge of reality. However, what has not changed is the acute shortage of homes that people can afford.

All 326 English councils were surveyed to get an accurate feel on the level of affordable accommodation. Of those, 162 responded, with:

- 64% are struggling to find social tenancies for homeless people.
- 50% said it was "very difficult" to assist applicants into privately rented accommodation.
- 85% said it was difficult assisting single people aged 25-34 into accommodation
- 88% find it difficult to house large families.

The chronic shortage of affordable housing is a major cause concern both nationally and locally in Gravesham.

### *The cost of housing in Gravesham*

Because Gravesham is close to the high-speed rail link and major roads to London, rents are much higher compared to other parts of North West Kent. This, combined with the freeze on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) – the amount of benefit available for support with housing costs – is causing serious problems in both housing the homeless and in preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place.

In our view, the LHA is out of step with the actual cost of market rents in Gravesham. For example, the average rental property in Gravesham for a one- bedroom flat is between £682 -£695 per month with a three - bedroom house from £1,092- £1,300. ([www.home.co.uk](http://www.home.co.uk)). Even the

homeless that have jobs are struggling to afford this level of accommodation. And as rents are predicted to continue to rise, even those who are currently renting will be forced out 'on to the street', as we have seen in several guest situations this year.

Similarly, there is increasing reluctance of landlords and letting agents to accept people on benefits and to offer property for longer than 6 months under an AST (Assured Short Hold Tenancy). This means that it is practically impossible to place homeless people into the private sector market.

### ***Reduction in funding for rough sleepers***

Sanctuary, in line with homeless winter shelters across the county, has seen a significant increase in the numbers of Rough Sleepers which according to our records, has doubled since last year (2015/2016).

Although there are agencies we work with to reduce this number (e.g. Porchlight outreach service/Helpline, The House of Mercy, Langley House Trust, and Gravesham Borough Council), this source of help will be restricted in the future by the overall reduction in funding for homelessness services across the county.

Homeless Link report that nationally, 47% of homeless accommodation services are facing reductions in their funding and access to affordable housing is blocking the ability for people to move on. We have seen this locally as the only registered Hostel in Gravesham is the House of Mercy which has limited accommodation for a 6-month period.

### ***Restricted access to health services***

During the past year we have helped a number of guests get treatment for various health issues including severe epilepsy, tuberculosis, hepatitis C, and HIV. However, while GP's are the primary point of access to health services, many homeless are unable to register with a GP service often due to the lack of a permanent address or any documentation required to register.

Our traditional health service is conventionally designed to treat one condition at a time but the homeless display multiple health problems. This makes access to several services difficult to navigate, particularly if they are leading chaotic lifestyles and managing issues relating to mental health and substance misuse.

Some of the homeless we deal with have complex needs. They often find it difficult to manage their emotions and can exhibit challenging behaviours as well as poor compliance with appointments and treatment. Missed appointments can lead to the homeless being excluded from the benefits system, and other main services.

The resulting negative interaction and exclusions from support services can act as traumatic experiences meaning engagement can be distressing.

Sanctuary has, where possible, encouraged other agencies to work alongside the project enabling our "Guests" to have full access to services. However, we have found that many mental health services exclude those who are currently using drugs or alcohol.

## **5. The Social Impact of Homelessness**

### *Premature mortality*

Homelessness is a significant social determinant to health and is often associated with premature mortality. Over the past year we have known of two deaths caused by premature mortality. The faculty for homeless and inclusion health notes (2013) records "When homeless people die because of exposure or other direct effects of homelessness, they die of treatable medical problems, HIV, Liver and other Gastro-intestinal disease".

Research published by the Salvation Army found that 53% of homeless women and 34% of homeless men have attempted suicide at least once.

## Increased alcohol and drug abuse

While on the streets the homeless are prone to alcohol abuse, drug and substance misuse, physical and mental health conditions. For many homeless, particularly women, mental health issues are often rooted in experiences of neglect and abuse in childhood. This is often compounded throughout their adult life and by the experience of homelessness itself.

Drug and alcohol use often develop to cope with the difficulties of the homeless lifestyle and past trauma. One of our guests made the comment that his focus is just to get through the next two hours, while others have said they just want to numb the pain of being cold. Both conditions are satisfied through alcohol and drugs, although this doesn't prevent the onset of hyperthermia.

The effect of repeated drug use and alcohol has a strong and devastating effect on the physical health of the homeless. Homeless people with alcohol dependency are 28 times more likely to have an emergency admission to hospital than the public putting a strain on local health services within the Gravelly Hill area.

## Social isolation

Single homeless people are more transient than other populations. There is an inherent distrust in government backed services who are seen as either not wanting (or able) to help, or wanting to get rid of them by moving them on out of the area. This low level of trust can make engagement challenging and impedes access to medical services.

Similarly, low levels of literacy also deter people from seeking help as does the language barrier - 31% of Sanctuary guests lack basic English skills needed for everyday life. This can prove challenging when guests are required to observe prescribed instructions, compliance and understanding.

These issues combine to prevent the homeless from being integrated or feel part of the local community. This engenders suspicion on all sides and animosity between the "haves" and "have not's". Much of our

pastoral time is spent in breaking down these barriers and helping the homeless access services such as housing, benefits and health.

## **6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### *Formal recognition of homeless shelters*

Since the first Winter shelter for the homeless opened in Folkestone in the winter of 2009, there is now a network of 10 Winter Shelters running across Kent spanning Gravesham to Dover. Sanctuary is concerned with the homeless in Gravesend and is part of the Kent Winter shelter network that meets regularly to share ideas, knowledge and statistics.

Without this network, the support of our volunteers and the financial donations received (the cost of running Sanctuary last year was around £15,000), then the plight of the homeless in Gravesham would be far worse and could easily overwhelm local government based services.

At the current time, Sanctuary has an informal relationship with some of the departments within the council. This has enabled us to:

- Provide data on the extent of homelessness in Gravesham
- Work with the Community Safety Unit and the local police in resolving individual guest issues
- Use the data we hold regarding health needs of specific guests to contribute to local needs assessments and strategies.
- Help in writing the SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) to ensure that this winter there is a clear policy in place for those who are homeless during the worst of the weather.

## **Formal partnership with the local council and homeless agencies**

Carrying on from the last point, we would like to develop a formal relationship where we can work with the council and other agencies in advising on a long-term response to homeless issues. This would also result in a better understanding of what each agency does, better sharing of data on homeless issues, and an insight of homeless issues that are not being addressed.

We believe that this would further improve the rehabilitation and possibly into work for our guests.

## **Better access to health services and benefits**

As mentioned in section 4, our health service is not geared to treat more than one condition at a time and they required people to be registered. This is way out of line with the homeless who are typically transient and display multiple health problems.

At the moment, the only solution is to call an ambulance when someone falls ill – there is no mechanism to prevent or solve health issues before they become major.

What is needed is a health clinic that is aimed at the homeless. This may run on a few days each week but must allow for people to 'turn up' who have many issues. That clinic must also be able to prescribe treatments 'on-site' and be able to deal with multiple languages. To support these clinics, suitable volunteers can be provided by the homeless agencies who often know the individuals and may be able to better communicate between guest and clinician.

With this clinic and the partnership already recommended, we believe that vulnerable individuals who currently fall between services will be caught. It will also help address the health inequalities faced by homeless people and provide a coordinated response such as identification of early intervention, saving time and resources.

## **Better communication with the public concerning the homeless**

The homeless are often demonised as being responsible for their situation. While this may be true in some individuals, our experience shows this is false for the majority of people we deal with. It needs to be recognised that the solution to homelessness involves society as a whole and not just local authorities.

There needs to be an acknowledgement of the problems around homelessness and an appeal for everyone to get involved. As an example, Churches are often a large source of volunteers who have a real heart for the local community. This is evidenced by initiatives such as Street Pastors, School Pastors, Food Bank and Sanctuary. That's not to say that other faiths or societies are not involved – we are very grateful of the work and support by the Sikh community who do a great job in providing hot meals.

What is required is for the plight of the homeless to be communicated accurately and groups like churches, encouraged to get involved. This communication could come from the formal homeless partnership group without blame or bias.

## **Long-term, joined up, housing plan**

The Housing First legislation going through parliament is a government commitment to preventing and tackling the rising levels of homelessness. According to the Centre for Social Justice *“Additional funding has been provided to local authorities to simulate innovative measures to address this problem, and the Government has given its backing to new homelessness legislation, which would see a radical transformation in the way that homelessness is dealt with.”*

A long-term strategy to build more affordable homes of all types is badly needed. This should cover single homeless people without a job through to those who have started work and are seeking to rebuild their lives.



It should also cover the role of homeless shelters and temporary accommodation.

### **Short term fixes**

The Housing First initiative will take time to take effect. In the meantime, we have a growing population of homeless people in the town. Our next shelter does not start until December and then it will only probably be 3 days a week.

At the current time there is no solution to rough sleepers who are often made to 'move on' from makeshift campsites. But 'move on' to where?

We believe that an interim solution is needed where rough sleepers can 'sleep' safe in the knowledge that they won't be moved on and there are people who will work with them to provide more permanent accommodation.

This could re-purposing an empty building and providing a camp site with toilet facilities.

## APPENDIX I: Sanctuary Financial Results

	<u>FY 2017</u>	<u>FY 2016</u>
Donations:	£35,827	£11,864
Expenditure:		
Administration (Telephone, printing, etc)	£2,071	£1, 048
Promotion (leaflets, banners, etc)	£309	£1,166
Supplies (sleeping bags, sheets, etc)	£2,758	£5,425
Catering	£3,280	£2,776
Premises related (additional heat, light, etc)	£3,630	£ -
Volunteer expenses (petrol, etc)	£1,065	£245
Other	£537	£357
Total Expenditure:	<u>£13,650</u>	<u>£11,017</u>

For accounting purposes, Sanctuary runs from July to June the following year. Hence FY2017 covers July 2016 to June 2017. Because Sanctuary started in late 2015, the FY2016 period covers October 2015 to June 2016.

Only financial gifts are included. We had a large number of donations of clothing, food and goods that were used but not recorded here.

At the current time Sanctuary has a bank balance of £19,314 which is planned to be used on a number of capital projects to improve the services on offer to guests at Gravesend Methodist Church.

## APPENDIX II: Useful Resources

HM Government (2010) *Inclusion Health commissioning inclusive services: Improving the way we meet the primary Healthcare needs of socially excluded people*

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/346571/inclusion-health.pdf>

Inclusion Health ((2013) *Commissioning inclusive services: Practical steps towards inclusive JSNAs, JHWSs and commissioning for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, homeless people, sex workers and vulnerable migrants*

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/287787/JSNA\\_and\\_JHWS\\_guide\\_final.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/287787/JSNA_and_JHWS_guide_final.pdf)

Shelter(2016) *Green Book, 50 years on. The Reality of Homelessness for families today.*

[http://www.shelter.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/1307361/Greenbook\\_a\\_report\\_on\\_homelessness.pdf](http://www.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1307361/Greenbook_a_report_on_homelessness.pdf)(accessed June 2017)

Homeless (2016) *Support for single homeless people. Annual Review 2016*

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/sites-attachemnts/summary%20%20support%20forsingle%20%20people%202016.pdf> (accessed June 2016)

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