

**PRESS RELEASE**

20 Sep 2019

**Gravesham Sanctuary for the homeless people opens for winter 2019**

Gravesham Sanctuary, a local charity providing a night shelter for homeless people in the borough, has launched the Friends of Gravesham Sanctuary (FOGS) for individuals, business and churches as the shelter prepares to open for the winter.

Gravesham Sanctuary was established in 2015 as a response to the needs of homeless people living in the borough. It was initially started by two local churches, City Praise Centre and Gravesend Methodist Church, and became an independent charity earlier this year.

On Friday (September 20) the Mayor of Gravesham Cllr Gurdip Bungar officially opened the Gravesham Sanctuary building, which has been refurbished with the help of a number of local businesses ahead of the coming winter.

Michael Coveney of Gravesham Sanctuary said: "Our mission remains the same - to be the first point of contact for homeless people and providing for their immediate needs; the provision of a night shelter during the winter months; and signposting homeless people to the appropriate agencies who can help their situation."

Gravesham Sanctuary works in conjunction with Gravesham Borough Council, Gravesend Methodist Church which runs a daytime community hub, and with Churches Together in Gravesham which provides many of the volunteers.

The aim is to provide a night shelter seven nights a week for six months from October 21, which will require a great deal more support than is available at present, hence the Friends of Gravesham Sanctuary programme.

A friend is an individual, church or local organisation that is committed to supporting the mission of Gravesham Sanctuary. This can be done in a number of ways, including:

- Making a regular financial contribution
- Raising funds through events
- Taking responsibility for supplying specific items, such as food or capital equipment as requested by Gravesham Sanctuary Project Manager
- Committing to volunteer on a regular basis to the running of the night shelter and its associated activities
- Being a vocal ambassador in promoting what we do and in recruiting more supporters
- Being part of the Sanctuary Prayer Team

Michael Coveney said: "You do not have to be a friend to do any of these, it's just that a friend becomes a recognised supporter of what we do."

Since 2015, Gravesham Sanctuary, along with Gravesend Methodist Church, has supported more than 800 individual guests, with the night shelter operating between December and the end of March each year. It is now planned to make the night shelter available for six months, provided enough volunteers can be found.

A big step forward in making this a reality was the building provided by Gravesham Borough Council for this purpose.

A project of City Praise Centre registered as Gravesham Sanctuary CIO in England and Wales, No. 1181817

Office: 01474 356773 email: sanctuary@citypraisecentre.com website: www.GraveshamSanctuary.uk

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Cllr John Burden, Leader of Gravesham Borough Council, said: “We are only too pleased to support Gravesham Sanctuary.

“Working to tackle the issue of rough sleeping and homelessness in the borough was a key part of our manifesto at the last elections and has received cross-party support, highlighting a unity of purpose from the council to put in place practical measures of support such as Gravesham Sanctuary.”

As well as knowing that without their support Gravesham Sanctuary could not operate, friends also receive:

- The use of a certified Friends of Gravesham Sanctuary logo
- Regular updates as to what is going on in the project
- Optional listing of their name on the Gravesham Sanctuary website and where appropriate this can include links to their own website.
- Information and fund-raising packs

An early friend is local builder Grafton which has installed a new kitchen ready for the winter.

Others who have helped prepare Gravesham Sanctuary for the winter ahead include Howdens Joinery, Gravesend, who supplied the kitchen; Breyer Group supplied two electricians for two days to assist with the electrical upgrade works; PA Group completed specialist works in relation to asbestos; Chalk Plumbing who supplied two shower trays; and Triton who supplied electric showers.

Gravesham Borough Council’s Building Management Team provided the resources to install the kitchen, showers and to decorate three rooms.

Other local friends include Northfleet and Ebbsfleet Lions, Gravesham Rotary club, as well as national organisations including Tesco, Lidl and the John Lewis Partnership.

Cllr Jenny Wallace, Gravesham Borough Council Cabinet Member for Housing Services said: “It’s great to see how the local community has come together to help homeless people when they are at their lowest point.

“With the council having provided the venue and agreeing to pay for the utilities, it is so encouraging that so many local businesses have joined us to get Gravesham Sanctuary to a position where we can support homeless people throughout the borough this winter.”

Gravesham Sanctuary is funded through local contributions and has strong links to the Churches In Gravesham where most of the 150 volunteers come from. The budget for this year is more than £50,000, which doesn’t include the many generous gifts of food received each week.

To find out more or to become a friend, visit <http://graveshamsanctuary.uk/FOGS>

Ends

**FOGS**  
Friends of Gravesham Sanctuary