

A photograph of two hands reaching towards each other against a clear blue sky. The hand on the left is lighter-skinned and is reaching upwards. The hand on the right is darker-skinned and is reaching downwards. The hands are positioned as if they are about to clasp or support each other, symbolizing help, support, and care.

Gravesham
Sanctuary
Helping the homeless in Gravesham

Annual Report
2021-2022



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities





Gravesham Sanctuary CIO
Annual Report
2021-2022

The report reviews the activities of Gravesham Sanctuary CIO during the period May 2021- April 2022, helping those facing homelessness in Gravesham.

*“... 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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1. About Sanctuary

Gravesham Sanctuary is a Christian-based, registered Charity (No.1181817 in England & Wales) whose objective is to support and befriend people facing homelessness in Gravesham. Currently, we do this by providing accommodation during the coldest months of the year as well as providing:

- A first point of contact for people facing homelessness
- Seasonal evening meals
- Day centre drop-in for appointments, advice, laundry, and showers for rough sleepers
- Help in getting paperwork, identification
- Signposting to and liaison with relevant agencies who can help with their individual situations.

We do this in partnership with Gravesham Council who provide us with our daytime venue, Churches Together in Gravesham, and the amazing support of our many volunteers.

We work closely with Gravesham Council's Housing and Rough Sleeping teams as well as various local agencies including North Kent MIND (mental health), Change, Grow, Live (West Kent drug and alcohol wellbeing Service), Gravesend Job Centre (employment opportunities), NHS Services (health) and The Home Office (documents and repatriation to a home country).

This document contains our review of the year from May 2021 until the end of April 2022.

2. Review of the Year

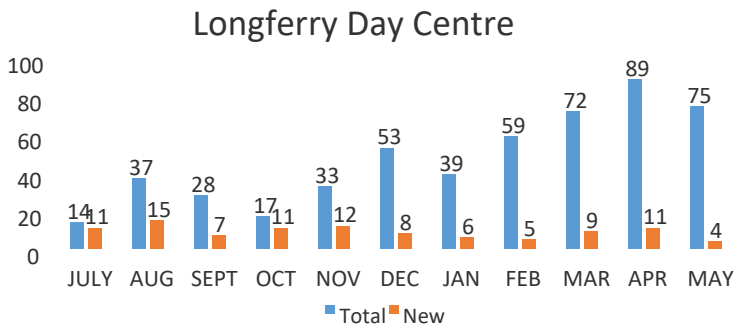
As late as October 2021, we were still unsure what accommodation we would be able to provide for the coming winter. Government guidelines meant communal sleeping was permissible if approved by the local health team but not recommended. The Sanctuary management team felt that going back to communal sleeping at Longferry Court was not the way to go and our decision was proved correct with the arrival of the Covid Omicron variant.

The uncertainty meant a delay in organising volunteers and training which would normally start in early September. As always, our volunteers have been exceptional, but it is fair to say the uncertainty made it difficult to find as many as in previous years.

Without a building to use, we decided, with government funding and support from the council, to place a limited number of rough sleepers into guesthouse accommodation from 1st November through to early April. We placed 14 guests into accommodation and, while that may not sound a lot, it did prevent 991 sleeps on the streets of our borough at a cost of around £37,000. Most of our guests have moved on to other temporary or permanent accommodation.

Longferry Court

This operates as our year-round administration office and principal office and, from July 2021, has been open as a daytime centre. We have had over 515 visits for various reasons: including support, community, food, tea/coffee, showers, advice and seasonal evening meals. Although starting later than intended, from January 10th, eight hundred and ten (810) evening meals were served



Partnership Working

We have continued our excellent working partnership with Gravesham Borough Council, and we work closely with the council's Rough Sleeping team. Through this team and beyond, we work with agencies such as CGL the drug/alcohol addiction service, Serveco, North Kent Mind, the daytime hub at Gravesend Methodist Church, police and probation and many others to achieve the same aim - to support and help those rough sleeping in the borough.

3. Statistics

Our data systems are well established and comply with GDPR; some of our data will come from our partnership working with Campaign Kent, who have some input into producing a detailed report for which we are very grateful.

Between 1st November and 31st March, we worked within a budget for 6 beds each night in guesthouse accommodation. However, there were times when we provided 7 rooms, given individuals' circumstances. We also placed three people in accommodation for short periods from August. These facts make it harder to give an accurate percentage of available beds used.

Given the monthly fluctuations, in total there was a 100% take up on the beds offered, preventing 991 rough sleeps on the streets of the borough (see graph below).

As shown below, compared to previous years, the number of sleeps prevented on the street shows an increase. This may seem surprising, considering in 2020/2021 we had a 9 to 10 bed house, compared to 6 to 7 rooms this year. This discrepancy is due to several "No Shows" in 2020/2021, where guests decided not to use their rooms. The sharp rise for the year 2019/2020 is due to the fact that we were sleeping between 12 and 15 guests over a five-night, later six-night period, in a communal sleeping area.

Since we started in September 2015, Sanctuary has helped 968 Individual guests and been able to help prevent 5,568 sleeps on the streets of our borough.

While this is a great achievement for Sanctuary and all those involved with our charity, it is none the less a sad set of statistics to have to report regarding the plight of the homeless.



4. Volunteers

Volunteers are the real backbone of what makes Sanctuary work - selfless and compassionate people who give their time to serve those less fortunate than themselves. We applaud them and thank them. Even with the late start, our amazing cooks have served up over 750 meals and our volunteers have given nearly 1000 hours since January, interacting with guests during daytime sessions and evening meals, cleaning, doing laundry and providing support and community. The difference they have made to these people's lives is incalculable.

5. Funding: how do we manage the budget?

We are supported by Gravesham Churches together and we are very thankful for financial gifts received from local churches and their members. We also have a number of individual supporters; their donations, along with gift aid, are vital to sustain the charity's work. We received substantial government funding from the Homelessness Winter Transformation Fund through homeless charities Homeless Link and Housing Justice. This was used for guesthouse accommodation, salaries for some staff and towards work and furnishings at 56 Windmill Street. We also received money for accommodation costs from the Housing Support Fund via Gravesham Council and towards staff salaries for the coming year from the Philip and Connie Phillips Foundation. This funding has made it possible for us to provide effective help and support for our guests to move out of homelessness and rebuild their lives.

6. The Future: A new and exciting adventure.

Gravesham Sanctuary are now the owners of our new property at 56 Windmill Street in Gravesend, which we plan to open for the next winter season and beyond. This has been made possible by a most generous loan offered to Sanctuary with favourable interest-free payment terms. The house needs work to maximise its capacity, linking the basement with the rest of the house and dividing a large bedroom. We have appointed an architect to draw up plans and apply for change of use and listed building consent.

Our hope is that we will be able to accommodate 7 guests on a 24/7 basis, not just through the winter season but all year round.

This will mean employing new daytime support and overnight staff as well as building our volunteer base. We aim to open to guests towards the end of 2022.

There are financial challenges but also wonderful opportunities. The house will provide a short-term home where people can experience stability and community and learn resilience and skills to rebuild their lives. It will provide opportunities for our volunteers to use their own skills and interests for the benefit of our guests. We hope many will join us on this new adventure.

Focus on how we support our guests.

As with all projects working with homeless people, Gravesham Sanctuary needs to identify who is homeless and why. We have seen an increase as new homeless guests report and register for our services at our day centre, where we now operate Monday to Friday. As a Gravesham Borough Council officer from the Rough Sleeping Team said,

“It seems incredibly busy everywhere and more so to yourselves as you are continually on the front line. We know we can rely on you always to respond to enquiries, because we know you care so much about the service and its clients.”

We welcome genuine rough sleepers who need our help, engaging with them to see what support they require so that we can signpost them to the appropriate agency whilst caring for them in a non-judgmental way. Many rough sleepers lack a phone and internet access, often essential for accessing relevant services.

We can provide this as well as being an advocate or intermediary to obtain support from the relevant services. Our volunteers at the Day Centre are able to sit with any guest who may be feeling apprehensive about doing this.

Providing guest house accommodation offered guests stability and security alongside personalised support at our day centre; getting to know the guests well helped build good relationships. Other services have commented that we continue to care for and support our guests long after other agencies have closed their case down.

Why do we operate this way? We believe there is a need for the consistency that Gravesham Sanctuary can offer with our volunteers as a listening ear. We continue engagement, always seeking a new way of thinking around how to help and support them. As a Christian charity, we believe that second chances should be available for guests who wish to move on and are serious about changing their lives.

Our partnership with other agencies is effective in supporting guests in their steady climb out of homelessness. We work closely with the housing authority to determine who has a 'Duty of Care' for each individual. We work alongside colleagues at drug and alcohol addiction services, where guests are offered opportunities to attend sessions for therapy, counselling, and support.

Mental health and well-being are a huge factor in the journey out of homelessness.

Our links to North Kent Mind and the Community Mental Health Team have enabled referrals, ongoing support, and counselling

sessions to be arranged, making a huge difference to our many guests who experience mental health issues, whether separation, bereavement, loneliness, depression, anxiety or other diagnosis.

Offering the guest community and a friendly, safe place to relax and engage with others can provide a haven, a single point of access, a safe place to call home even for a few hours.

Art Therapy, board games and gym membership gave guests an opportunity to enhance their wellbeing and to be engaged during daytime hours. The Alpha Course gave those who wished to do so an opportunity to explore the Christian faith.

We will continue to support through the summer months with the emphasis on finding suitable accommodation for those guests ready to move on. We will also plan for the coming winter's accommodation and continue to register any rough sleeper, advocating for them and helping them navigate the many pathways of housing dilemmas.

7. Supporting Sanctuary

Sanctuary is predominantly a volunteer organisation, where a large number of people give their time to the project for no charge. Where we do have costs, it is in the provision of resources to help the homeless and in paying key staff to ensure the project is managed and continues to run well.

We are fortunate that we also receive many gifts such as food and clothing which greatly reduce the items we need to purchase, but even with these, the cash requirements of running Sanctuary are large.

We are looking for individuals, churches, and local businesses to support us financially on a regular basis. They can do this directly or by setting up a regular standing order using the following details:

Account name: Gravesham Sanctuary CIO

Account no: 00032523

Sort Code: 40-52-40

We also have options for giving online or via mobile quick-pay. These can be found on our website:

www.graveshamsanctuary.uk

We also receive cheques made payable to 'Gravesham Sanctuary CIO' which can be sent to our registered postal address shown on the cover of this report.

For individuals who are tax payers, please let us know so we can claim Gift Aid on your behalf.

We are always on the lookout for volunteers who can help us, for both daytime and overnight roles. For more details and applications, please visit our website.

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