

*The*  
**LIVING  
ROOM**



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**REPORT**

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**December 2017 -  
April 2018**

written by Anna Heydon, 'Imagine Norfolk Together'



## Introduction

The Living Room project grew out of a growing feeling amongst local church leaders that there was a need for a safe overnight space where rough sleepers could escape from the cold and wet, and that this might be a way in which the churches could use their resources to show God's love to some of the most vulnerable in our society. In February 2016 Anna Heydon from 'Imagine Norfolk Together' was tasked by the Great Yarmouth church leaders' ecumenical group to investigate and pursue the possibility of working together with local agencies to make this happen, as partnership working was felt to be extremely important. It emerged that the need for a shelter for rough sleepers was a need recognised by professionals from other voluntary agencies in the town too. Out of this a steering group developed and plans took shape, with The Living Room eventually opening its doors on the first weekend in January 2017.



In the last year we have achieved charitable status with trustees who have enthusiastically committed to taking The Living Room forwards. We have now completed our second winter and continue to believe that this is a project for which there is a great need.

## Aims and Vision

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

**Mission:** To open Church halls during the winter months, offering shelter, hospitality, and hope to people sleeping rough.

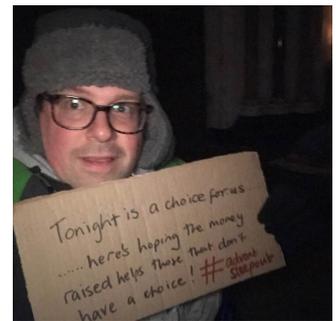
**Culture and Ethos:** The Living Room believes that every person, regardless of their circumstances, has great value and significance. Consequently The Living Room seeks to foster a culture and atmosphere of welcome and mutual respect and warmth.

**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.

The name 'The Living Room' arose out of our desire to create a place which is not associated with the traditional 'winter night shelter' stereotype, but instead is a place of warmth and welcome. We also hoped that the name would communicate our desire to help our visitors move on and that for some at least, their stay with us would represent the beginning of a new and better life.

## Funding

A total of £18,600 was raised for the second season of The Living Room, through grant funding (Dreams and Visions, Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia), events (Advent Sleepout, Cliff Park Community Church Carol Service), and gifts from individuals and churches. On top of this numerous gifts in kind, including bedding, food, clothes and toiletries were received from local people, charities and businesses. Our greatest cost was employing a Project Co-ordinator for 30 hours a week.



## Location and days

The Living Room was able to expand its provision this year from one night a week to three nights, each night hosted at a different church location. Our locations were: Park Baptist Church, the King's Centre and the Minster Mission. One added bonus of being able to use the King's Centre was that it meant our visitors could have access to showers – which was one of our hopes for development last year. We chose to open over the weekend since fewer services are available and it can be harder to connect people in crisis with accommodation.



## Staffing and Volunteers

We employed a new Project Co-ordinator for this winter. She started with 25 hours a week which was then increased to 30 once The Living Room was in full swing. The role of the Project Co-ordinator was to receive referrals during the week, find out further information about the referred people if possible, and to carry out a risk assessment. On the evening of

The Living Room the Project Co-ordinator was present for the first couple of hours to assist the volunteers, talk through risk assessments and any other issues with volunteers and oversee the arrival of the visitors. The Project Co-ordinator also arranged meetings with our visitors during the week in order to support them one-to-one with making progress towards permanent accommodation where appropriate. We continue to employ our Project Co-ordinator at present beyond the end of The Living Room season in order to maintain and build on the relationships and support for the visitors which began over the winter and to run our weekly drop-in meal.

As well as the Project Co-ordinator, The Living Room was also fortunate to have 44 volunteers fulfilling a number of different roles, including cooking, transporting bedding and equipment, setting up, welcoming visitors, serving meals, eating and interacting with visitors, washing up, supervising overnight, preparing breakfast, clearing up and washing and drying bedding. In total this came to approximately 1634 hours of volunteer time. We usually had 3 volunteers present for the early evening shift and then 2 volunteers for the overnight and morning shifts. Volunteers came from 6 different churches in the borough, alongside others from the community who wanted to get involved.

From the feedback forms received from our volunteers and the feedback sessions they attended it seems in general to have been a very positive experience for them. Comments included the following:

*“I loved the night when one visitor sat at the table and said “this is like being in a real family.”*

*“I loved speaking to the visitors, learning about their lives. Despite difficult circumstances they are kind and friendly to me.”*

*“I enjoyed sharing a meal with our visitors and learning about their lives.”*

*“I enjoyed sharing conversation, and laughter and fellowship with the guests and other volunteers.”*

*“I enjoyed seeing how strong and caring the people we help are. It would be so easy for them to give up but they don't. I find it inspiring.”*

*“The training, the atmosphere, the willingness to progress [are good]. We are briefed well and well looked after. The atmosphere created by the Project Co-ordinator is excellent.”*



*“I like the community feel and mutual respect for each other. It’s great to be able to do something practical to help. It always seem well organised with all the equipment needed being there”*



Suggestions were also offered (and gratefully received) for improvement many of which were immediately adopted and some of which will be considered for the next season. The most significant of these are addressed later in the report.

## **Training**

We aim that all volunteers should have attended mandatory training run by Anna Heydon (Imagine Norfolk Together), Tim Inger (Training Connector for Neighbourhoods that Work) and Sue Bryant (Bishop’s Advisor for Safeguarding, Diocese of Norwich). This training includes an overview of the project including its vision and aims, personal safety training, professional boundaries, and safeguarding.

In addition 3 meetings were also offered to volunteers during the running of The Living Room in order to get together, experience peer support and deal with any issues arising.

## **Referrals and Visitors**

In total The Living Room received 42 referrals during it’s opening time. In total 31 different visitors stayed with us at The Living Room during the time we were open. This is a significant rise since last winter (11 referrals, 8 visitors), which may be partly due to an increase in the numbers needing emergency accommodation, but is also likely to be a result of the increased awareness of what The Living Room offers amongst rough sleepers and agencies. The difference between the number of referrals received and number of men who stayed was due to a number of reasons, including visitors not turning up, Project Co-ordinator feeling that the referred visitors were not suitable for the services we could offer and accommodation being found prior to needing to use The Living Room. The Living Room provided a total of 229 nights off the street for rough sleepers in Great Yarmouth and 458 meals. We were unable to open for 11 nights during the time due to visitors not turning up, lack of volunteers and Project Co-ordinator illness.



## Activities

Once again this year, volunteers and visitors sat down together for dinner, and this was an important time for getting to know each other on equal terms.



The 'free' time at The Living Room evolved rather differently to last year. Quite a few of our visitors wanted to go to bed as soon as dinner was finished. Others wanted to sit and do their own activities or chat among themselves. Many still enjoyed chatting to our volunteers or playing board or card games together.

However the same opportunities for more organized activities did not present themselves or seem appropriate this year. This may in part be linked to the much larger number of visitors we had with us on any one night.



We are gradually developing this during our drop-in 'summer' sessions. The 'Cloth of Kindness' project (<https://www.clothofkindness.co.uk/>) has already held a pilot session with our visitors with the potential for more regular visits next winter.

Due to training received locally by members of the Living Room management team, we have also had a session with our visitors around the risks of Modern Slavery particularly those who are made vulnerable by homelessness.

## Learning and Development

We have an ongoing desire to improve and develop what we are offering to our visitors and volunteers. Outlined below are the key issues arising during the project as suggested by the management group, Project Co-ordinator, visitors and volunteers, along with the agreed resolutions, some of which have already been implemented, others of which will be implemented next winter.

**Problem:** No-one to take responsibility and lead for the shifts once the Project Co-ordinator has left for the night

**Solution:** Team leaders to be identified for shift 1 each night of opening. The team leaders will receive extra training.

**Problem:** Shift 1 is very intensive and tiring, and changeover between shift 1 and 2 is disruptive

for visitors who are sleeping.

Solution: Trial shortening shift 1 by an hour



Problem: Airbeds going down during the night

Solution: Better quality airbeds to be bought for next winter. Spare airbed to be taken each night.

## Impact and Outcomes

The basic outputs of the project in terms of referrals and visitors have been detailed above. However we believe that The Living Room has and will continue to have an impact and outcomes which surpasses these outputs. During the running of The Living Room our Project Co-ordinator has been able to work individually with many of the visitors, meeting up with them during the week, in order to support them to define and achieve their goals. Our Project Co-ordinator has worked closely with other agencies, and as a result of these partnership efforts, 8 of the visitors have had successful applications for benefits, 11 of the visitors now have places to stay and 1 is in residential rehab.



We also believe that The Living Room has also had a positive impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of the visitors. Our written feedback from visitors includes the following:

*“fantastic charity that will put people up who are on the streets”*

*“a friendly atmosphere, a decent night’s kip, good food”*

*“nice people, very helpful”*

*“it gives the homeless somewhere to sleep, eat, shower.”*

*“just the fact of giving a person in need a roof and hot meals is very important, and also like in my case help you back to active life.”*

*“helps the homeless. Got a job and somewhere to live.”*

*“everything. Nice environment and good people.”*

*“Gave me a sense of not everyone’s bad or selfish”*

*“Helped me keep sane”*

*“It’s got me off the streets in snow and cold. Been able to shower and meeting people in the same situations homeless.”*

*“I came in sick and The Living Room helped me to stand up again. I don’t have words to describe how grateful I am.”*

100% of visitors who completed evaluation forms (total of 9 visitors) said that they were 'quite' or 'very' likely to recommend The Living Room to other homeless people. They all also reported that The Living Room had a 'slight' or 'very' positive impact upon both their health and happiness and social relationships and friendships. All except one said that it had had a 'slightly' or 'very' positive impact on their connections with local people and organisations who can help them.



## **Case Study**

Tom (name changed) aged 26 came to us having been evicted from his previous accommodation. He was on the streets and sofa-surfing when possible. Tom had previous work experience in catering but had not worked recently. He stayed at The Living Room throughout December and January. The Living Room Project Co-ordinator supported Tom to contact and meet the Neighbourhoods that Work Community Connector and provided support for him when he attended court. Whilst attending The Living Room Tom met one of our volunteers who owns a Guest House. She suggested that he came for a job interview and this resulted in Tom starting a job catering at the Guest House. Tom continues to work in this role and as a result also has his own permanent accommodation. He also has a group of new friends whom he has met through his new life. He comes back to The Living Room drop-ins to help us with cooking. He has said that without The Living Room he would not be alive and that what the Living Room has done for him is "beyond expectation."

## **Thank you**

We continue to be extremely grateful to everyone who has contributed to the running of The Living Room:

Trustees

The three hosting churches: Great Yarmouth Minster, Park Baptist Church, Kingsgate Community Church

Christchurch Methodist Church for allowing us room to store our bedding

DIAL Great Yarmouth for letting us use their bank account

All volunteers including those who have volunteered during the nights we were open, those who have cooked and those who have washed bedding.

All who took part in the Advent Sleepout to raise money and awareness

Dreams and Visions and Caritas East Anglia (Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia) for grant funding.

All who have given financially or in other ways, including gifts from individuals and local



churches.

The kind people from Smeeth Parish Church who knitted 30 blankets for us!

Jo Morrison, Project Co-ordinator who has worked tirelessly with our visitors and volunteers

Our visitors who have inspired us and made it all worthwhile



### **What next...?**

The Living Room team feel that the increase in visitors to The Living Room this winter proves the ongoing need for our provision. We plan to re-open for 3 nights a week next winter at the same 3 venues. We are also continuing to run a weekly meal drop-in so that we can keep in touch with our visitors and support them during the summer months. In order to run this and continue to work with the visitors, our Project Co-ordinator continues to work with us for 10 hours a week until next winter.

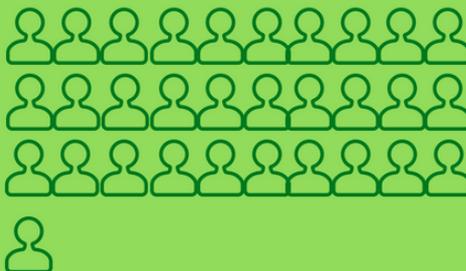




# Key Facts

**31**

Different  
visitors



Nights off  
the street

**229**



**11**

Moved into  
accommodation



**3**

Found  
employment



**8**

Successfully  
applied for  
benefits

**1634**

Volunteer  
hours

