

Oxford Winter Night Shelter/The Living Room

1. Winter Night Shelter 2022

OWNS did not run a night shelter during January and February. This was because many rough sleepers were accommodated in hotels, extended due to the new variant of Covid. However, by the end of February, exacerbated by the end of the lease on the Youth Hostel, Oxford City Council asked us to run a shelter for March. We had already made contingency plans, including negotiating for the single use of the Cabin, at St Ebbe's. They have been very generous towards us and we are most grateful to them.

At such short notice (a week) we had to muster sufficient volunteers to fill all the slots, as well as liaise with OCC regarding referrals. In the event almost all the guests were self referred, i.e. they were already engaged with The Living Room.

The cabin had 8 beds on offer, although there were never more than 5 guests at any one time. It ran well and was appreciated by our guests. Thanks are due to our amazing volunteers who worked, in some cases, many shifts in order to keep things running.

The plan was to close on 31st March, but due to the forecasted cold weather, and other venues not being available, we agreed to run for a further three nights, by which time the weather had become milder.

2. The Living Room

Since opening in September, 2021, The Living Room has offered day time sanctuary to homeless people who, for all sorts of reasons, are not engaging fully with other agencies – the hard to reach. We have seen some real transformation in our guests' lives. Some have moved into accommodation, started courses, and grown in self-esteem. But also, The Living Room has become a real community, with guests supporting each other.

We depend on a team of dedicated volunteers who are supported by Russell Hemmings our Centre Manager. We initially opened three days a week, but increased that to four in January. Opening days are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, 9.30 – 12.00 and 1.30 – 4.00.

We are extremely grateful to our donors, without whose support we could not offer either of these services.

3. The future

OCC have now commissioned Floyds Row for triage and short term emergency accommodation. At this point it is possible this building would serve as a winter night shelter/SWEP venue. However, nothing is certain and OWNS are already sounding out a venue to use should it be required.

The Living Room has now become our main focus and it would be good to open more days. However, this will depend on funding as salaries are our major expenditure. Because of the growing sense of community, we hope to arrange a summer outing and, working in partnership with St Clements' PPT, use the Mish for games etc from time to time.