

Moravian Women's Association – Home & Overseas Paper – November 2016

Glass Door – Homeless support in West London Churches

As the clocks are going back, and the winter evenings are closing in, the “Glass Door” in West London is gearing up for their busy period.

As London's largest emergency winter night shelter, Glass Door provides a safe, warm place to sleep for 85 to 100 men and women, in partnership with churches across the boroughs of Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea and Wandsworth. Guests experiencing homelessness can also access advice, food, showers and laundry facilities from drop-in day centres. Glass Door not only saves lives by providing refuge from the cold, they also help their guests build more stable futures.

Night Shelter

The night shelter runs through the winter months – from mid-November to late March – and is based at a different church venue each night on a rota basis. They provide a warm, safe and welcoming shelter for at up to 100 guests who also receive a hot evening meal and a cooked breakfast in the morning. Everyone who stays at the shelter is given a sleeping mat and sleeping bag. Male and female guests sleep in different areas. Glass Door is constantly oversubscribed; more people come than they can accommodate. Those who cannot access the shelter when it is full are served a hot meal and drink with some friendly words. On nights when the temperature drops below freezing, they do try to accommodate everyone, as long as it is safe to do so.

Casework Service

Caseworkers are employed throughout the year to offer advice, advocacy and practical assistance. Glass Door helps guests access accommodation and other specialist services such as drug, alcohol and mental health services. Caseworkers also help guests obtain birth certificates, register with a GP and dental services, find employment, and deal with benefit issues.

Over the 2013-2014 winter season, the casework team met with 865 individuals, working with them to bring many positive changes:

- 127 moved into stable accommodation
- 153 claimed benefit entitlements
- 129 set up bank accounts
- 63 went into employment
- 40 were supported to return to their country of origin
- 36 acquired identification

Drop-in Centres

There are two drop-in centres in winter where guests can find showers, laundry and clothing facilities. Daytime resources are also free to those who have nowhere to go during the day. Looking and feeling clean can be a vital part of restoring dignity in those who have lost hope. Having somewhere warm and dry to spend the day is crucial to health and self-respect. Guests greatly value these daytime services. Like Glass Door's casework service, the drop-in is open-access and not restricted to guests of the night shelters.

The Guests

Here is a story which Glass Door has passed on about one of their guests, Alicia:

“Alicia became homeless when she left her abusive boyfriend. She was pregnant and had nowhere to go. She put her puppy in a kennel and asked the local authority for help. Alicia was unwilling to provide the information required in order for them to consider helping her, and she showed up at the homeless shelter six months pregnant.

After Alicia's first night sleeping in one of our church hall shelters, one of our caseworkers met with her to discuss options. We liaised with the local authority and provided some of the extra information they wanted, but Alicia was reluctant to provide too many identifying details about the situation she had left. As a victim of domestic violence, she feared for her safety and didn't want any trail she thought her former boyfriend could use to come after her.

Volunteers found pregnancy jeans and vitamins for Alicia while our caseworkers looked for options. After three weeks in our shelters, we managed to arrange a place for Alicia in a refuge outside of London and put her on a train to get there. Three months later, we received a call from Alicia thanking us and informing us that she and her new baby were doing well.”



The MWA has sent £750 to this very worthwhile and necessary charity.

Naomi Hancock