



## Homeless in Merton

We are seeing increasing numbers of people at the Drop-In who are sleeping rough – about half the average attendance of 65.

The official street count of Merton homeless follows strict government criteria and counts those visible on the streets. However our experience is that many of our service users choose to conceal themselves, hiding maybe in undergrowth or an unattended outhouse and they may not be included in the figures.

One such is Len, back in work and camping in an unobtrusive little tent until he'd earned enough money to pay the deposit on a room. He was then able to go on paying the rent, so we helped him with the deposit.



*Assistance with online form-filling, needed for registering with the Job Centre or looking for accommodation.*

**Ben** left his family home after being physically attacked by his father. He came to the Drop-In straight from hospital, having nowhere else to go. He was very distressed and we gave him a hot meal, a shower, and a friendly face. We immediately contacted the local 'Street Link' outreach team for assistance. We helped Ben arrange an appointment at the Job Centre to establish a claim for Job Seekers Allowance and help with housing costs. We lent Ben an Oyster card so he could get to the Job Centre and gave him a sleeping-bag. He hardly had to use the sleeping-bag, as he was picked up that same night and taken to 'No Second Night Out' who have found housing.

**Temilade** had lived and worked in Merton for 20 years. He went abroad to care for his elderly father, leaving a friend to pay his rent. When he returned, the rent had not been paid and Temilade had been evicted. He was not entitled to benefits as he had been abroad for longer than three months. FiA supported Temilade during these difficult months – referring him to the Winter Night Shelter, and helping him claim benefits as soon as he was entitled. We made referrals to various housing organizations, helping with forms and a rent deposit.

## Providing basic care

People sleeping rough may have gone for weeks without a wash or a decent meal. We provide a warm welcome, a square meal, and a shower. Volunteer Nic helps run the showers and the laundry. He describes the wonderfully positive change those who have had a shower and a shave for the first time in maybe three weeks. We provide nourishing hot meals, and do people's washing too.

## Working with Winter Night Shelters

The Merton Winter Night Shelter runs from 30 November to mid-March, and most of the 12 places available are taken by Homeless Drop-In Centre service users who would otherwise be sleeping rough.

This winter 14 venues and about 300 volunteers are involved in providing the Shelter. There are two Winter Night Shelter workers employed to help improve the situation of the guests. Over the course of last winter, 34 different people occupied the 12 places available in the Shelter, and we expect a similar outcome this year.



## Lunch, haircut, and second-hand clothes

Service users can select from second-hand clothes. Volunteers do haircuts too. Both of these help service users look more presentable, and so more likely to find work and move on.

We have volunteers helping with producing CVs, and applications for jobs and housing (see the front page photo).

## Specialist help for Eastern Europeans

We provide specialist help for Eastern European service users, some of whom have particular difficulty in finding work and accommodation.

This could involve getting a passport for identification as well as a Construction Skills Certificate card – needed for work in the building industry. We have a Polish-speaking alcohol support group to address alcohol-related issues, and potentially lead to treatment if needed.

## Funding the work of the Homeless Drop-In

We are grateful to the London Borough of Merton for continuing to support the Eastern European work.

We are grateful to faith groups, schools, and local businesses who are contributing to our work. These

include Wimbledon High School who generously supported us through their Christmas 2015 Carol Service, and Capsticks Solicitors who raised money for us as part of their 2015 sports tournament.

To ensure that we continue to provide and develop services for the homeless and vulnerably housed, we need more financial support from across the local community. With our costs rising and homelessness likely to increase, we appeal to our supporters for help in broadening our support.

We greatly appreciate the regular donations of the generous contributors to our Square Meal Appeal and aim to increase these. Can you help? For how to give please visit our website.

## Further Information

To learn more about the Drop-In and how you can help, visit our website or contact Andy our project manager on 07843 280419 or email [faithinaction@wimbledonguild.co.uk](mailto:faithinaction@wimbledonguild.co.uk).



*Some service users are only with us briefly while they sort themselves out, and it would be inappropriate to record their presence. All our service users are classified as 'vulnerable adults', and we only photograph them with their specific permission. This is why we only show the lunch table here.*

[www.mertonfaithinaction.org](http://www.mertonfaithinaction.org)

You can now follow us on Twitter

[twitter.com/mertondropin](https://twitter.com/mertondropin)