



Open Evening 20 March 2023

Merton Winter Night Shelter Report - Robin Goodchild, FiA Trustee

I have been looking forward to today since this event was announced.

This winter, thanks to the help of Faith in Action, financial support from a number of local charities, notably the Wimbledon Foundation, + the Faith community, and crucially around 300 volunteers, the Merton Winter Night Shelter, after a 2 year absence, has delivered over 1,000 bed space nights since 5 December when we opened, and 18 homeless people, predominantly men, have been able to enjoy a hot, home-cooked supper, a safe warm and dry place to sleep, and, if they didn't need to leave for work before 7.00, breakfast. And even then they would have left with a sandwich or two.

How does this happen? The Faith community, including the Wimbledon Synagogue, Wimbledon Mosque, the Shree Ganapathy Hindu Temple, plus a number of churches, come together. They each do a specific day of the week for 7 weeks in 2 blocks, so the Shelter was able to run for 14 weeks, 2 times 7. Each venue hosts up to 11 guests per night on its premises, typically a church hall. That number is set by the capacity of the smallest hall.

They deliver the service each with their own volunteers and in their own way, but to the same rules so the guests receive a consistent service across the venues.

How is that achieved? By coordination and that is why we are here at FiA's Open Evening.

MWNS started in 2012 under the sponsorship of the YMCA, led by Nicki Zisman and Rebecca Stockman. However, last winter the YMCA decided it could no longer provide the coordination. But it was very clear that the venues wanted to deliver their part, so MWNS needed a new home. Faith in Action MHP was the obvious group to approach and we were quickly made most welcome. And I'm pleased to report that the relationship is working very well.

Apart from raising central funds and negotiating with the Council, the key thing that FiA needed to do was employ a Project Coordinator. We had a limited time available between having the funds to pay a PC and run a recruitment campaign so that our PC was in place before the shelter opened. From the process, Ashling Flannery emerged and has developed into an excellent Project Coordinator. I'm pleased to announce that FiA is making her position a permanent one, so she can build on the experience she has gained this winter to make MWNS even better next time.

Our successes this winter have included:

- 5 guests have found work.
- 1 guest was able to achieve a qualification in accountancy, while another guest moved into permanent housing and applied for university.

- We have supported guests with health issues, one of whom was given a clean bill of health for the first time in over 15 years, a factor he put down to the warmth, safety and healthy meals he received.

Before wrapping up, I must first update you. Thanks to a successful application to the Mayor's Spring Transition Fund, when the shelter closed last Monday, a week ago, we have been able to put all our guests, for whom there were credible move-on plans, into hotel accommodation so only one person returned to the streets, instead of 9, which is a great result.

I must finish with some 'thank you's. First to all at FiA for being so welcoming - trustees, staff and volunteers; second to all the venue coordinators and their amazing volunteers without whom there would be no Shelter, and finally my two colleagues on our management team - Talat Malik of the Wimbledon Mosque and Jane Bush from St. Mary's in the Village, who have been the true driving force behind the project, making sure each venue had what it needed to operate its Shelter as well as the guests to care for. And I have to repeat this, because it makes me so proud, together we delivered over 1,000 bed space nights for people who would otherwise have been on the streets. Thank you all very much.