

The voices
of homeless
people in
Edinburgh

“Having
our say”

Introduction

About this project

Each year since 1996 Bethany Christian Trust has co-ordinated the provision of a temporary overnight Care Shelter for homeless people in Edinburgh during the winter period. The shelter is located at churches in Edinburgh. The bedding and food are organised by volunteers at each location and there is a small staff team which provide a support service at every shelter and makes sure that everyone using the shelter is safe.

Bethany now also provides a care shelter over the winter in Aberdeen and in 2009–2010 for the first time in Inverness.

Use of the Edinburgh Care Shelter

The winter of 2009 – 2010 was the coldest for decades, with long periods of freezing temperatures and heavy snow falls even in the cities.

The shelter in Edinburgh was open for 154 nights between the start of November and early April. 935 people used the shelter. The shelter provided 5,634 bed spaces and a further 1,157 meals to people who stayed for food and then moved on.

This year, Outside the Box has worked with Bethany and other community groups to gather the views and experiences of people who use the overnight shelter in Edinburgh.

There were several reasons why we gathered the feedback this year.

- There have been recent changes to the access to other overnight services for homeless people in Edinburgh. The community organisations wanted to learn what people were planning to do after the winter shelter closes in early April. They will feed the information into the arrangements for planning services for homeless people in Edinburgh.
- Bethany and the participating churches wanted to know about ways they can improve the service in Edinburgh.
- Bethany also wanted to draw on the feedback from people in Edinburgh to inform their plans for similar services elsewhere in Scotland.
- Some of the people using the shelter have been raising ideas they have about peer support services and other new ways of delivering support to people who are homeless. Community organisations wanted to hear more about these ideas, to help them look at how they could assist people to get at least some of these ideas started as practical services.

- Bethany can also learn from the experience of this initial survey and use it as a basis for getting feedback from people using the overnight shelter across Scotland during the winter of 2010–2011.

The methods we used to gather the information were determined as much by the wellbeing and interests of the people using the shelter as by the aim of having independent, reliable results.

- There was a short survey form, and people using the shelter could complete this themselves if they were comfortable doing this.
- Some people got a friend or other person using the service to write down their answers.
- People were encouraged to talk over with a worker any questions or concerns they had about any of the question in the survey.
- Staff and volunteers carried out short interviews, using the questions as a guide. If the questions promoted a discussion about what the person was going to do after the shelter closed, this was a good spin-off benefit.
- One of the workers translated the survey into Polish, as the main language other than English among the people using the shelter. He did some of the individual discussions with people in Polish and other languages.
- Outside the Box arranged for someone who spoke Polish and other languages that are used by people at the shelter to spend time at the shelter on 6 nights. He had worked as a volunteer at the shelter in previous years and knew some of the people using the shelter through other routes.
- There were 27 responses in English and 19 responses in Polish or another European language. Some of the responses in English were from people whose first language was not English. Overall, it is likely that just under half the 46 responses were from UK citizens.

We also spoke to the staff teams and other people who provide additional or specialist services to the people using the shelter.

700 people contribute to the provision of the shelter as volunteers. We distributed a survey through the churches, asking the volunteers about their role, the benefits they saw for the people using the shelter and their ideas on ways to improve services. We received 42 responses from volunteers: one of these was a joint response from a team based at one church.

About this report and how it will be used

The information will help Bethany, the other community organisations and volunteers who provide support at the shelter, and other groups in Edinburgh plan for better services for people who are homeless.

We will also use it to raise awareness with politicians and other people. We hope the report will help them better understand the circumstances of homeless people and the types of services they want.

Outside the Box will disseminate the report to people in other parts of Scotland. The views of homeless people and the suggestions here may encourage other people to work with homeless people to develop services that will provide the support that the people most affected think will be useful.

The report is written by Anne Connor from Outside the Box. The work has been done as part of the Working Towards programme, which is part-funded by the Big Lottery Fund. This project is helping community groups develop new services that are led by the people who will be using the services.

Sources for further information

About Bethany

Bethany Christian Trust is a voluntary organisation based in Edinburgh. The organisation meets the needs of homeless and vulnerable people through a range of services.

There is more information at www.bethanychristiantrust.com

About the Care Shelter

The Care Shelter provides emergency accommodation in church halls around Edinburgh each night, from the start of November until the end of March. This service provides food, shelter and support for men and women over the age of 16 who cannot access other accommodation.

Transport is provided each evening from the Care Van on Waverley Bridge at 9.15 pm and 9.40 pm to the various church hall locations used by the shelter. Hot food is served at the shelter between 9.30 pm and 10.30 pm. Breakfast is served before the shelter closes the following morning at 7.30 am.

A staff team is on duty each night to provide advice and information about services and opportunities available to service users to enable them to move off the streets.

This winter 26 churches provided locations for the care shelter and 70 churches helped with catering and other support.

There is no charge for using the shelter, which is available to anyone who has nowhere else to sleep. Bethany recognises the partnership with the Edinburgh Churches that makes this service possible.

About Outside the Box

Outside the Box is a voluntary organisation which provides community development support to community groups and other organisations. This includes enabling people to have their say and participate in the services and policies that affect them.

There is more information at www.otbds.org

Scale of people using the shelter

Bethany gathers basic information from the people using the shelter. They also gather more detailed information from a small sample of people who use the shelter.

This is the pattern of people using the shelter in Edinburgh over the winter of 2009–2010.

- The service was open for 154 nights.
- The shelter provided a bed and a meal for someone 5,634 times.
- They provided a meal for someone who then moved on 1,157 times.
- The average number of people using the service for a bed and/or a meal each night was 43 people – 36 sleeping there plus another 7 coming for the meal.
- The highest use in one night was 64 people.
- New people came to the shelter every month through the winter.
- 935 people used the shelter at least once.
- A fifth of the people using the shelter are women and four-fifths are men.
- People's ages range from 21 to 68 years old. Almost a third of the people using the shelter are aged under 30, and almost one fifth are aged over 50.

- People come from 38 different countries.
- People from the UK make up 80% of the people using the shelter, but 41% of the attendances.
- People from Poland make up 14% of people using the shelter and 43% of the attendances.
- For most people it is a service that they use occasionally. Just over half the people used the shelter only once and four-fifths used the service fewer than 7 times over the winter.
- For other people, the care shelter is a major part of how they live over the winter. 56 people used the care shelter on 30 or more nights. 15 people used the service on over 100 nights and one person used the shelter on 150 of the 154 nights they were available.

The reasons people became homeless were often complex. These are the main, or precipitating, factors.

Reason the person became homeless	% of people in the sample
Relationship breakdown	23%
Alcohol problems	21%
Drugs	3%
Lost their job	21%
Rent arrears	8%
Eviction	10%
Other reasons	33%

People identified a range of other problems they were facing or where they would welcome some help. Only 18% of those asked did not identify any difficulties, or gave no answer.

Other problems the person is experiencing	% of people in the sample
Physical health	36%
Mental health	28%
Alcohol issues	31%
Drug issues	18%
Housing issues	72%
Managing finances	28%
Relationship issues	33%
Education/training	28%

The staff team who work in the shelter includes people who have provided this service for several years. The shelter also has access to people from other organisations who can give more specialist help and advice, for example around people’s mental health and wellbeing. They described the circumstances of people using the shelter and the changes they have seen in people over the years.

Quotes from staff

"There are folk who come here every year. Each year, you wonder if they've made it. And they have. They are surviving. They tell us that coming here over the winter makes all the difference, and I'm sure that's right, they wouldn't get through the winter without us."

"We're getting more people this year. The changes to the other services in Edinburgh mean that there is nowhere else for people to go."

"Some of the people you see are really unwell. The NHS mental health services can give them in-patient care if it is an emergency, but what they need is on-going, outpatient care and the encouragement and support to work with that."

"There are guys from Poland who have been coming here for the past 4 or 5 years. At the beginning they were sure that this was just temporary, that they would get their lives together soon. Now they are still homeless and the prospect of changing that looks a lot harder. But however bad things are here, they are clear that it is better than going back – so whatever happened in their lives has left a lot of scars."

"People are struggling with their alcohol problems and other addictions. Their lives are complicated. That's why they are in the situation that brought them to here."

Feedback from people using the overnight shelter

What people like about the overnight shelter

The great majority of people who used the Care Shelter were very positive about the shelter and the difference it made for them. Only 2 of the 46 people taking part said they did not like the shelter and did not want to be there.

The main features that people raised again and again were:

- Being somewhere safe, that felt secure.
- Food – having a meal and what the food and its preparation represented.
- Warmth.
- A place to sleep.

The attitudes of the staff and volunteers working at the shelter and the way they behaved to the people using the shelter was important. People valued the care and support they got and the way they felt welcomed. People also valued the support and company of other people who used the service.

A few people commented on the structure and rules which help make the shelter a safe place.

A few people said they also valued the extra support that was available from the staff.

Quotes from people using the shelter

“The staff keep the shelter very safe.”

“Give us a good meal and somewhere warm and safe to stay.”

“I like getting direction for during the day.”

“The staff phone the council for you - very helpful.”

“I like having a roof over my head.”

“You get treated like human beings.”

“Helps me a lot and gives me food.”

“Safe and warm.”

“Very welcoming.”

“Staff are brilliant and fair. They deal well with unknown situations and people. They should be paid more.”

“There are no drugs.”

“Pleased to get something. I feel safer here than in the temporary accommodation I have been given. Have friends that stay here.”

“There are nice people serving good food. The shelter is made to make us feel safe.”

“A place to sleep. When I have nowhere else to sleep, I sleep on the streets.”

“The atmosphere is warm, almost like a family.”

What people would change about the shelter

Although the people using the shelter were very positive about them, there are features which they would like to see changed. Only a third of people responding wanted to change nothing.

The main change people wanted to see was the times the care shelter is open. They made some clear suggestions.

- Earlier opening in the evenings, e.g. at 8 pm, or even just 15 minutes earlier at 9.15 pm.
- Stay open longer in the mornings, e.g. until 8 or 9 am.
- Later wake up.
- 12 hour shelter.
- Have at least 3 pick ups at Waverly Bridge.

The other overall suggestion was that the shelter be in the one location throughout the winter – this was raised by 4 people.

There were also suggestions about the details of the arrangements within the care shelter.

The sleeping arrangements were raised by 7 people. They would like to have sleeping bags, fold up beds or mattresses and bedding.

A few people suggested changes to the food, such as a longer food service or in the variety of food. However more people had praised the food.

A concern raised by a small number of people is the safety of the care shelter, even if the problems had only arisen occasionally. For a few people this worried them – they came back to this aspect later in their interview or written comments. People made suggestions on ways to help this, such as planning the sleeping areas to have a separate area for people who wanted to be quiet, and even stricter handling of the ‘no alcohol’ rules.

Another set of comments is around ways the shelter could be more comfortable and more like home for the people using them – having music and a TV, for example. Again, it was a small number of people who suggested this.

There were very few suggestions about changes involving the staff or volunteers. Continuity in staffing from year to year may be a factor in how far people feel safe and confident at the shelter.

Quotes from people using the shelter

“Prefer staff that I know from last year.”

“I would like to change “sleeping on the floor.”

“No, nothing. It works well.”

“Variety of meals (I’m Spanish).”

“Stay open longer because we are out in morning in the cold. Don’t change the sleeping hours, but have a drop in/chill out section.”

“Assigned sleeping - so people who are noisy are away from me.”

“I come for meals but don’t stay because of safety concern.”

“People drink, take drugs, are aggressive and cause problems.”

“It would be great if there was a TV or music here. This is people’s home when they have to stay in this situation.”

What benefits people get from the shelter

People were very positive about the impact for themselves and for other people they knew. The benefits people raised most often were food, safety, shelter from the cold, and a place to sleep. Company from others who used the service and the people who worked and volunteered at the shelter was also a major benefit for many people.

Quotes from people using the shelter

“People are available. Freedom to come and go and still be safe and warm.”

“I don’t have to walk the streets like last night.”

“We don’t have to stay on street at night where it’s dangerous.”

“Place to sleep, food and support.”

“Food. Can talk to any helpers.”

“Safety, security from the street. Somewhere warm from the cold.”

“Safety of being off the streets. Get food. Light. Heating.”

“Company and friends.”

“I get warm food, stay overnight at warm place, free clothing, toiletries etc”

“Shelter, food, I think that’s all I want.”

“I get socks.”

“Just over the winter how many people die of the cold? Now put yourself there. Now think what the night shelter can give.”

What people planned to do when the shelter closes

At the time we did the survey the shelter was due to close in a few weeks. At that point, there would be no overnight care services in Edinburgh for people who did not have accommodation.

We asked people what they would do when the shelter closed. There were 4 broad responses for the people at the shelter.

It is likely that at least four-fifths of people using the shelter would be sleeping rough once the shelter closed.

Some people had not thought about this – ‘don’t know yet’ was the most frequent response.

Some people knew that they would be living on the streets again.

Some people talked of hopefully finding accommodation by then, but in general terms.

Some people were positive that they would have found accommodation by then and had specific plans. From the other information available, it seemed that this group were mostly younger and included more people who had travelled from other countries – but were still a minority of this group.

Quotes from people using the shelter

“I will be back on the streets.”

“I’ll be looking for work, other places to sleep or sleeping rough.”

“Find a place to stay before that time.”

“I haven’t thought about it, probably go back to streets.”

“I will seek accommodation before that time.”

“I am planning to find work, rent flat, start living decently.”

“Hopefully I’ll have money by then and try to build some plans for 2010.”

“Hoping I can get sorted by then. I had problems (relationship) and am now homeless.”

“I will be on the streets with no food or help.”

“Sleep outside.”

“Stay in my camper.”

"I am not going to be in Edinburgh. 3rd April 2010 I am going to Holland for a job I had promised for a while."

"Sleep rough on the streets."

"I don't know, I'll have to deal with it when it comes."

"Cross that bridge when I get there."

"Hopefully have somewhere by then."

People's contact with other services

The majority – three-quarters – of people using the services are, or recently have been, in touch with other services. The services included those working with homeless people in Edinburgh, such as Streetwork and the Cowgate Centre, and other services such as Immigration and Citizens Advice Bureau.

Those people who are not in touch with other services included people from Eastern Europe and people who appeared to be from the UK.

Many people commented on the informal support they had from other people who are homeless or from friends as well as, or instead of, other services.

Some of the people who are from the accession countries said that they did not have access to services, or to informal support.

We did not ask people about their views on the other services, but some were clear that they did not find the other service welcoming or that it had not been able to help them.

Quotes from people using the shelter

"No. I meet with other people who have come to Scotland. We know each other."

"I have some contact with other users of Night Shelter."

"Places where I can get free food."

"Drop into Streetwork for a shower."

The services people would like to have

The service most people using the shelter would like to see is the current shelter – or something similar to it – available throughout the year.

Other suggestions are:

- Reopening previous services that gave overnight support.
- Day time facilities – a place to be off the streets, food, and access to clothes.
Accommodation – bed and breakfast, flats and/or a location for facilities like caravans.
- Support to help you keep your accommodation.
- Help to homeless people to get job.
- A place to meet friends.

Many of the suggestions included a comment about services that recognise all aspects of people's circumstances, such as wanting support for an addiction or health needs.

Quotes from people using the shelter

"The current shelter all year."

"A place where we can meet and keep warm. Watch TV, listen to music, meet friends."

"Services to help people with their drug problems and their homelessness."

"Night service, or Care Shelter also all year round."

"Food and clothes."

"Bed and breakfast."

"An evening class that gives exercise for people."

"Drop in centre - tea, seat, chill out."

People have also talked to the staff teams about the gaps they see and ideas for ways to fill those.

One example is a group for people who speak Polish and who want to deal with alcohol problems, with advice and a self-help element. They have since identified a source of advice and support for the initial stage of setting up the group.

People's feedback on other matters

We gave people an opportunity to raise anything they wanted to say.

The most frequent thing people did say was their thanks to the people who run the shelter and provide the back-up support. A few people also commented on being asked their views, which rarely happened for them.

"Thank you to everyone who provides the shelter."

"Thank you to all the Care Shelter Teams, all the churches and the volunteers."

"We thank you for everything."

"Thank you for asking us."

A few people added some comments about the shelter itself, especially the role of the staff team.

"I think Mike plays a huge role in the safe running of the shelter and should get a medal for all that he has done."

"At times it is hard to sleep. The numbers at the care shelter have risen dramatically. Something has to be done as the care shelter seems to be running at high numbers."

"The staff are great. I will miss them when the shelter closes down."

"I appreciate all the help I get from the staff."

The survey and interviews did not ask people about their own circumstances, but some people took the opportunity to say something about themselves.

“I have been on the streets of Edinburgh for 3 years.”

“I used to work renovating houses.”

“I used to work and look after myself. I want to get back to doing that again.”

“There has been much sadness in my life. Maybe one day I will bet back to having a good life again.”

Some people commented on wider issues around homelessness.

“Too much hassle to get out of homelessness, too many forms and questions.”

“What needs to change? Homelessness - the need for the shelter!!”

Feedback from the volunteers

The people taking part in the parallel survey of the volunteers who support the shelter raised many of the same issues as the people who use the shelter.

The volunteers had a wide range of experience. For 10 of the people taking part, this was the first year they had been involved, while 12 responses were from people who had been volunteering for 10 year or longer – often since the care shelter first started in Edinburgh.

One person explained this was his first year as a volunteer, but a few years previously he had been one of the homeless people who used the shelter.

What works well from the volunteers' perspective

Overall, the volunteers were positive about how the care shelter works – the most frequent response was that everything was going well. The specific aspects people praised most often were:

- Good organisation, planning.
- Liaison between the churches and Bethany/Bethany team and volunteers, including people knowing how the roles connected.
- Staff team.
- The care that the shelter gives – food, warmth, shelter.
- Getting the balance of welcome/support and maintaining the rules.

Quotes from volunteers

“Experienced Bethany overnight team including a Polish speaker.”

“I think it works well – runs very smoothly, everyone is aware of their role.”

“Almost everything! Good organisations and supervision. Great food.”

“The Bethany teams are excellent in terms of zero tolerance.”

“Collection of people working together.”

“Warm welcome, attitudes.”

“Opportunity for people to meet people who are homeless and be of service to them.”

What the volunteers would change

The majority of volunteers did not see anything that needed to be changed.

The people who were part of preparing and serving the meals thought that recent changes to these arrangements had not helped, and wanted a return

to the previous arrangements if possible. There were a few other suggestions on how the overall team could respond better to the range of needs that the people using the shelter had. (We have passed on to Bethany all the suggestions on ways to improve an aspect of the current service.)

The other set of changes related to the need for the shelter – more spaces and a permanent shelter.

Quotes from volunteers

“Bethany overnight team should have both male and female members.”

“The changes to catering arranging this year made organising the meals, cooking and serving them on time a difficult challenge, which resulted in reduced choice for service users.”
“I would like more time for chat with clients.”

“I think the evening could start earlier as a lot of clients don’t eat and go to bed.”

“Making the Shelter an all year thing, as people are homeless 365 days a year.”

“It would be nice, I don’t know that it is practical, to have smaller units so there is less fear of bullying. (I meet quite a few homeless people who say that they do not use the shelter because of other clients.)”

“A chance to give people support and advice about moving on.”

“Facilities for people to have a wash, clean their clothes.”

Volunteers’ perception of benefits for the people using the shelter

The volunteers described the benefits they saw people gaining, or that people told them about.

The same benefits came up in most people’s descriptions – and these echo the benefits that the people using the shelter described themselves.

- Hot meal, food.
- Warmth.

- Shelter, place to sleep.
- Safety.
- Company, friendship.
- Knowing someone cares.

Quotes from volunteers

“Contact with staff, volunteers - people who can/might help with a problem, welcome, acceptance.”

“Chance to build trusted relationships.”

“Warmth, a good night’s sleep, hot food, friendship, safety.”
“Hopefully they feel people do care.”

“People are treated like human beings - unlike other services.”

“A place to sleep when it is cold; hot meal; chance to chat with the workers.”

“A chance to escape perhaps for a while from the challenges of the street.”

Outcomes for the volunteers

We asked the volunteers about the benefits for themselves and for other people they knew who are involved in supporting the winter overnight shelter.

The main impact people described were:

- Knowing – or hoping – they had made a difference for people who are homeless.
- Tackling a social issue that they care about in a practical way.
- Understanding more about the circumstances of people who are homeless, including those who come from other countries.
- An opportunity to be of service to others – which some people described in terms of their faith.
- Working as part of a team – with others from that church, with the Bethany staff team, and/or linking with the other churches to deliver the whole care shelter programme over the winter.

Quotes from volunteers

"Feel it is a small help and show people are not alone. It is a privilege to help."

"Sometimes a sense of futility that after all these years it is still necessary but also a feeling of gratitude that we are able to provide a service for those who need it."

"Spiritual growth. Reality check - I never really thought about the life of a homeless person before."

"It has opened my eyes to the plight of the homeless and just how many people who are on the street are Polish. From my personal point of view it makes me feel like I am giving something small to help others less fortunate than myself."

"Working together as a church group to plan/organise our part and provide nutritious warm meal."

"Reminds you of the needs of homeless people around Edinburgh."

"It gives me pleasure to see folk safe for the night and well fed."

"It shows the church doing something."

"Our congregation help by providing a catering team - the rest contribute money, groceries and most recently, toiletries and socks for those in the shelter - we all feel very strongly that this is really helping and is a very positive way of showing our faith in action."

"Our whole team find the experience very rewarding."

Volunteers' suggestions on useful services

We asked the volunteers what sort of services they thought would help homeless people in Edinburgh. People offered many suggestions that were aspects of a consistent set of possible developments. Some of these are support for people who are rough sleepers, and others are ways to prevent people being in that situation.

- Services that reflected the needs of each person, and all aspects of their situation.
- A permanent and/or year - round overnight shelter and other support for people who are on the streets during the day and/or at night.

- More of each of the services that make up the range of support – outreach, accommodation, day centres, practical support, follow up and on-going support.
- Services that help people have wider opportunities in life.
- Befriending and peer support.

They also highlighted the importance of the quality of care and attitudes of service providers.

Quotes from volunteers

“More supported accommodation. More day centres. More access to health facilities, especially for mental health.”

“Services that treat people with respect.”

“Education - opportunities to learn.”

“Most people have a drug/alcohol dependency, so services that help people with that.”

“Services such as Bethany provides, which need consistent funding.”

“Places that provide evening meals and hot drinks.”

“Showers and facilities for laundry and driers.”

“Replacement for The Ark daytime provision, round the year night care shelter supported financially by the Council, as in Aberdeen.”

“It would be possible for our Church to provide more nights in the night shelter if some sort of extended service were set up that needed it.”

“Opportunities to train and find employment.”

“Other activities apart from sleep and food, where people are encouraged or welcome to attend. Could there be sports facilities or a football group that people can be part of?”

“A more humane approach from other organisations.”

We also asked the people who volunteered if there was anything else they wanted to say.

The most frequent comments were:

- Thanks to Bethany for organising the service.
- Praise for the staff team.
- The involvement of local groups and communities across Edinburgh.
- Concerns for the people using the shelter.
- The need for the shelter – policies and practices around support for people who are homeless in Edinburgh.

Some people gave detailed suggestions for ways to develop the current service or for complementary services, and we have passed all of these on to Bethany.

Quotes from volunteers

“Bethany night shelter saved and changed my life.” (volunteer who used the service a few years ago)

“Not sure if enough people realise how much help is needed. Great work by Bethany. Not easy to do so many night shifts and cope with ‘situations’.”

“Is it possible to engage the people who are rough sleepers in conversations to see how they can be assisted to get back on their feet in life?”

“Thanks to Bethany for persevering with providing the care shelter despite uncertainties about funding.”

“The staff teams are amazing.”

“It’s good to involve as many churches as possible to show the needs of our city.”

“I feel it is important for local groups to provide this service.”

“I am concerned that so many of the people using the shelter in recent years come from Eastern Europe and seem to have few other supports.”

“It seems that Edinburgh Council think there are no rough sleepers - I would love to have the council members at our night shelter or meet with homeless people and hear them tell it like it is!”

“It’s sad that the Council will not acknowledge the depth of this problem.”

Summary and action points

Summary

- The winter Care Shelter is filling a significant gap in the range of services that are available for homeless people in Edinburgh.
- They are valued by the people who use them and are having a positive impact.
- Many of the people using the winter shelter have no other place to go once the shelter ends.
- The shelter relies on the contribution from both staff and volunteers – the volume of the service would not be possible without the huge volunteer input. The quality of the support given would also be less in the view of many people using the shelter, as the volunteers' role is one way of people seeing that someone else cares about them.
- People also value the support they get from each other.
- People have suggestions on ways to improve the shelter – especially by extending the opening times.
- Most people find the shelter to be safe and welcoming. A few people find the behaviour of other people intimidating and feel less safe, and they have suggestions on ways to make the shelter feel safe for everyone.
- Some people are in touch with other services, but this service is providing support that they do not get elsewhere.
- People have ideas on the types of support they would like. These include a strong peer support element.
- The new service that people most wanted to see was a service similar to the hostels available all year round.
- People also identified other services that would do more to help people move on in their lives and have less need for overnight shelter.
- For around 50 –100 people, living on the streets is their situation, at least for the foreseeable future. They describe the shelter as being their home and the people who are there – especially other people who are homeless – as their family. They would like the shelter to be more homely and access to facilities such as showers
- The volunteers also have ideas on ways to improve the range of support for people who are homeless. These include ways of responding to the needs of people who would otherwise be sleeping on the streets and ways to enable people to move on from this situation or prevent it from occurring.
- The suggestions include ways the Churches can continue to be involved, contributions by other local organisations to help vulnerable people in their community, changes in the other formal services and a change in the policies of the local authority.

Suggested action points

- Bethany should work with the other organisations in Edinburgh to look at ways to meet the needs of people who need occasional emergency or short-term overnight accommodation.
- They should also look at ways to respond to the needs of the smaller group of people who are looking to use the shelter on a more frequent basis.
- Bethany, the Churches and other organisations should look at ways to involve other community groups in responding to the needs of people who are homeless and especially those who are sleeping rough.
- Bethany should work with other organisations to look at ways in which homeless people can have more opportunities to contribute their experiences and ideas on the types of services that will be helpful to them and others in their situation.
- Bethany should consider the suggestions made by the people who use the shelter and the volunteers on ways to improve the current service and build on its strengths. These suggestions may also be useful to the teams providing the shelter in other locations in Scotland.
- Outside the Box and Bethany should follow up the ideas that people made about new services designed around the needs and preferences of homeless people.
- * Outside the Box and Bethany should work with other organisations to raise awareness of the circumstances of people who are homeless and their ideas they and others have on ways to improve the support and opportunities open to homeless people. This will include disseminating this report to Councillors and officials in Edinburgh, other local authorities, MPs and MSPs.

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