

Responding to Severe Weather

Plymouth's SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) for rough sleepers offers them somewhere to sleep during high risk weather if temperatures are predicted to drop to 0°C or below for three consecutive nights. Agencies across the city team together to provide extra beds and get people off the streets. SWEP is funded by the local authority and this provision has been in place in Plymouth since 2011. SWEP has been initiated three times so far this year for a total of 14 nights, with extra beds/floorspace, mats, duvets and pillows being available at Shekinah and Devonport Lifehouse. Amongst the 17 SWEP overnight volunteers from the Soup Run network were Norma Fry and Les Dennis who worked alongside Shekinah staff.



Norma has been a Soup Run volunteer for around 6 years in Plymouth, having previously volunteered in London for about

4 years. For 4 nights in March Norma stayed at Shekinah from 7pm to 1am. On the first night, not knowing quite what to expect, Norma took a book to read thinking at some point it might be quiet... Well, no time for that! By 12pm everyone was settled in their sleeping bags, but not for long... folks were up and down for coffee, chats, cigarettes, etc; the longest it was quiet was for just 3 minutes! **"It was a real privilege to work with Shekinah, who do such an amazing job and I feel that now, having done SWEP I can relate in a more meaningful way to some of the rough sleepers that I didn't know well before. When they go to sleep they're at their most vulnerable and always anxious in case they're beaten up or robbed. Here they can sleep, knowing they can trust us to watch over them."**

Les spent 3 nights at Shekinah in March, and having built up relationships through Soup Run and Soup Kitchen during the 2 years or so he's been volunteering, Les already knew almost everyone. **"There was a lot of laughter and it was great to see folks singing and dancing. Some of these people don't have much to**

laugh about, but once they knew they had somewhere safe to stay they could relax and enjoy the warmth and camaraderie at Shekinah. The hardest thing is knowing that they'll be out on the streets again in the morning. It can take years to get to know them and it's important not to think of them 'en mass' but to treat people individually and also to be consistent in order to build up relationships and trust. Others can also help by donating items like sleeping bags, rainproof coats, socks etc and food... a special thankyou to KFC in Crowhill whose consistent donations are really appreciated."

Both Norma and Les would also like to thank Shekinah for opening their doors and allowing the Soup Run to work alongside and support them while they continue to help change lives that would otherwise feel abandoned. Would Les and Norma do it all again? ...**"yes, definitely"**.

Many thanks also to the teams that provided SWEP food: Hope Baptist Church, Mutley Baptist Church, Plymouth Christian Centre, Rotary Club, Soup Kitchen, St Cleer Community Church and St Andrew's Church.

Information Sharing Day

10am -12 noon Saturday 21st April, Hamoaze House, Devonport PL1 4JQ. Find out more about other services available and agencies offering support to Soup Run users in Plymouth. Please email info@plymouthsoup.run.org.uk to reserve a place. Allocation will be 'first come, first served' but similar events may be arranged in the future.

Shekinah opening on Sundays



from 1st April for rough sleepers from 10am to 12 noon (cooked brunch, showers etc). Please refer to the Soup Run leaflet for other opening times.

A community and faith driven service providing free food and hot drinks to homeless, hungry and vulnerable people 365 days a year.



With the number of people sleeping rough rising every year, ITV West Country News

recently sent a film crew to meet volunteers and users of the Plymouth Soup Run to talk about some of the issues relating to homelessness. Shekinah was also featured. The report was aired on 13th March. Here are a few snippets...

"A bit of bad luck, what these guys are going through could happen to any one of us."

"People take the time to stop and chat ... it's great, lifts me right up, I feel like living again,

there is kindness in people."

"Last year we gave out 22,000 meals."

"You get to know a few people; it's quite shocking that it's not just people running away from home, it's people that have been fired or quit their jobs, missed one or two pay cheques and they're out on the streets, it's a dispute with the family, a divorce, and all of a sudden they're out on the streets."

"It did make it feel much more real how vulnerable we all are."

"This is a Godsend."

"The Soup Run gives him some sense of hope."

"If it wasn't for these guys I would just wither away."

"You can't just walk away."

"Thankfully, they (the volunteers) don't walk away."

"We need to do something quickly and something different."

Are there any quick solutions? Can we do something different? Of course there are some things we can't change but with the courage and commitment of the many people who work amongst the homeless and vulnerable, together we can offer kindness, hope and a lifeline, making a real difference to not just a few, but to many.

Just one more luxury yacht please, it must be rough sleeping!...

[Poem by Soup Run volunteer Nigel Pain in response to a night on SWEP duty at Shekinah]

Bodies moving slowly, not as a dance, more like the sea.

The smell of tobacco and sweat somehow mingle with the sleeping snores of those that can and the hollow-eyed stares of those that can't.

Those considered flotsam and jetsam have washed up on our shores, our floors tonight.

Yet there is a warmth of love, shared by the rough jokes, the replacing of a cast-off duvet, the gift of a reheated Kentucky, handmade sandwiches and end-

of-the-day cakes.

As the helpers feel helpless and oddly ashamed, the ones we often ignore try to sleep, try to please, so that this little, this bare minimum isn't taken away.

Meanwhile, those who can't cope with this sleeping sea, shiver somewhere else. Wondering "Will this be the night?" "Will there be a tomorrow for me, or will I be found ... A frozen mannequin for display in the local paper?"

In our shock and shame we blame the Government. "What on earth are they doing?", whilst drinking our cocoa in front of the telly.

Yet, here, the very ones we moan about our taxes going towards, cost you less than a thought this night.

Are these "pilgrims", these "adventurers", who sit outside

society's norms (and often McDonald's) irrelevant, or to be ignored?

As their different views, health or addictions bring them closer than a knife-edge to death. We turn away or demand them moved on.

I stop. My God doesn't have a scrap heap. Surely no-one's God, or lack of one, does.

Yet here the just-living stands, or in fact lies on a floor, reminding me of the sea.

And are proof of how much we care for our brother or sister in our world of excesss.

"... God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference..."

Amen