

Plymouth Soup Run Report for December 2021

In December 2021:

- Plymouth Soup Run served 2023 meals (an average of 65 meals per night, equivalent to 6 meals or 8% fewer per night than November 2021, and 10 meals or 18% more per night than December 2020; all figures rounded); the year-to-date total is 24,668 meals served.
- Donations of food were gratefully received from food businesses/restaurants, including two full cooked meals donated around Christmas time.
- The response from work and social groups and members of the public to our 'Reverse Advent Calendar Appeal' has been overwhelming, allowing us to give out both practical gifts (socks, hats etc) and treats (toiletries, sweets etc) on several nights as well as replenish stocks of ambient food.
- Generous cash donations from individuals and families, community groups and businesses will fund purchases of items including sleeping bags, rucksacks and clothing well into the new year.
- Teams made 23 referrals to the Path Rough Sleeper Team; they met 43 other rough sleepers (some sightings will have been of the same individuals on different nights); 32 sleeping bags or blankets and 2 rucksacks were given out to rough sleepers. Two clients gratefully returned unused sleeping bags when they were able to access accommodation.
- As in previous months, teams encountered a rough sleeper who had been released from prison without adequate accommodation arrangements in place. Equally challenging was the situation of someone who had lost the accommodation that she had been sharing with her partner when he died suddenly. Fortunately, she was able to access emergency hostel accommodation through coordinated Soup Run, Path and BCHA action.
- We provide hot food and drinks, warm coats, hats, gloves and scarves to mitigate the impact that the cold and wet weather is having, especially on night shelter users and rough sleepers. "[One night] it was so cold that some people were physically shaking" (Path worker).
- Christmas is a challenging time for many clients, evidenced through a number of family and relationship issues surfacing, and inter-personal friction, often borne of frustration.
- Reports of concerns over the mental health of clients were conspicuously common. A worrying number of clients expressed desperation at their situation, fear, loneliness and suicidal thoughts, as well as volatile behaviour.
- Some physical health issues were dealt with by Community Outreach nurses and volunteers, one case requiring paramedic assistance.
- The Soup Run collaborates closely with the Path Rough Sleepers team, as well as with PCC, the probation service and the police to facilitate contact with vulnerable individuals, reflecting increasing awareness that the Soup Run can be the last service in direct contact with people at night.
- Plymouth University Islamic Society students and medical students volunteered at the Sunday Soup Kitchen during December, serving food and providing toiletries.
- The Saturday morning drop-in at Shekinah for rough sleepers and winter provision users, operating since 6th November and supported by Soup Run and Alliance staff volunteers, is going well. Up to 24 people attend over the 3-hour opening time. A cooked breakfast and take-away lunch are provided, and clients can take a shower and get clean clothes. The environment allows for in-depth conversations, rest and companionship, plus the opportunity to provide advice on issues such as benefits entitlements and GP registration.
- On December 21st, the longest night of the year, a candle-lit service of remembrance was held outside Plymouth Methodist Central Hall to commemorate those who had experienced homelessness and who had died during the year.