

Plymouth Soup Run Report for August 2022

In August 2022:

- Plymouth Soup Run served 2,893 meals (an average of 93 meals per night, equivalent to 10 meals or 13% more per night than July 2022, and 21 meals or 26% more per night than August 2021). The August 2022 figure is the highest on record, exceeding the elevated demand during the first Covid lockdown in 2020. The year-to-date figure of 19,394 meals served represents a significant increase of 20% over 2021. The August 2022 figures include meals served on Saturday mornings at Shekinah. Even factoring those out, there was an increase of 17% over August 2021.
- The increasing demand makes sourcing and preparing enough food challenging. The food only just stretched to meet demand on several nights: *"This was a very busy night for us. We ran out of hot meals at the last stop but still had pot noodles, loaves of bread, fruit and veg. Back at church a man came looking for food, so the team gave him the last two sandwiches, remaining fruit etc."* As just one example of the many contacts made by phone or email, a young couple who had no food, no money, and were awaiting a Food Bank referral contacted us and were provided with a food parcel on the same day by the Soup Run team on duty. We also get requests for pet food and are able to link clients with support.
- The support from our food donors helps meet needs, but significant purchases are always necessary to provide a balanced meal and to supply specific items such as for Saturday morning breakfasts and the large amount of water that was provided to clients during recent hot weather, along with sunscreen. Clothing is always in demand and was distributed most nights.
- A total of 29 referrals were made to the Path Rough Sleeper Team, and 93 sleeping bags or blankets and eight rucksacks were given out to rough sleepers. The 43% increase over July in the number of sleeping bags and blankets given out highlights this as a major outlay for the service. BBC Radio Devon approached the Soup Run for interviews twice during the month to comment on increasing numbers of meals served and to appeal for sleeping bags and blankets. This has had a positive response as had an appeal made by two Soup Run volunteers. The donations generously made should cover demands for September at least.
- Although the University-funded phase of the Saturday morning sessions at Shekinah for rough sleepers and those in emergency accommodation came to an end in July, the service is continuing with bridging funding from Soup Run resources, support from volunteers and Path staff, and hosting by Shekinah. An average of 27 clients attended the sessions each week in August and were able to enjoy a cooked breakfast and take-away lunch. In the hot weather, the opportunity to have a shower was particularly welcome as was the offer of clean clothing or laundry vouchers. The sessions offered a quiet and safe space, personalised support, and the chance to join in an artistic or recreational activity. Peer mentors from Heads Count and volunteers from the Big Issue and PCC participated during August.
- The mental health of clients is always a concern, and this was manifested in episodes of tension on some nights. Sometimes sadness was the overwhelming feeling conveyed: *"Worryingly, lots of sad people who are grateful for the soup run's service to them and others."* Yet, appreciation, good humour and camaraderie are commonly reported by teams, highlighting the important social function of the Soup Run: *"It was a lovely evening with lots of people in fine form. We laughed at every stop with the service users."* *"A peaceful night with lots of jovial conversations."*
- Support was provided to a client to travel to his new job for the two weeks until he receives his first pay. This was covered by the Soup Run and by the New Beginnings Fund jointly administered by Path and the Soup Run. The latter fund also provided a client with art materials.
- During August, Soup Run representatives underwent 'Digital Champion' training to be able to support clients in accessing online information sources and procedures. They also participated in a meeting of the Trauma Informed Plymouth Network in conversation with the Wolseley Trust Social Prescribing Team, a meeting of the Rough Sleeper Strategy Implementation Group, a University Hospitals Plymouth stakeholder consultation on engaging under-represented people with liver disease in research and clinical service development, and visited Harbour colleagues on community outreach at Plymouth Pride and International Overdose Awareness Day events.
- In September, volunteers are hoping to climb Mount Snowdon to celebrate a colleague's birthday and to raise funds for the Soup Run through sponsorship.