

Plymouth Soup Run Report for December 2022

- We served 2,091 meals in December, a more typical winter level after a dip in November. An average of 67 meals were served each night, equivalent to 2 meals or 3% more than December 2021, and 3 meals or 5% more than November 2022. Over the year, 28,527 meals were served, representing a 16% increase over 2021. Among several requests for food parcels, we were asked to support a mother and young child placed in a B&B.
- The cold and wet weather experienced during the month may have deterred some from coming out, but we were acutely aware that the Soup Run is the main source of food for many clients: *"The icy conditions did not put people off - we served a total of 103 people."* *"We were battling with the wind at that point and everyone waiting looked cold."* *"Some people were very hungry and so grateful for a second pasty."*
- As well as our regular food sources who continued their support, businesses kindly donated prepared meals on several days during the Christmas period, and gifts for distribution to clients. Huge public generosity was also evident in the response to our Amazon Wish List and our Reverse Advent Calendar appeal. Donations to the appeal were delivered to drop-off points including Shekinah, where we were pleased to meet families, school groups and businesses bringing in plentiful supplies of ambient food, toiletries and clothing. Christmas cash donations from supporting organisations will enable us to provision our teams well into the New Year.
- We were contacted by a large number of people offering to volunteer at Christmas but had already reached capacity, so they were redirected to other volunteering opportunities. Contacts with businesses who got in touch offering to organise a run will be followed up in January. Most of our regular volunteers continued to serve throughout December, including over Christmas and New Year, with teams being supported by volunteers from businesses, Path and StreetVet.
- 7 referrals were made to the Path Rough Sleeper Team (RST). 35 sleeping bags were given out to rough sleepers. 9 blankets were also given out, some to help people in accommodation keep warm. During December, the grant we received at the end of November from the Plymouth City Council (PCC) Household Support Fund was used to buy blankets, sleeping bags, vacuum flasks and mugs, hot water bottles, kettles, and slow cookers for distribution to clients.
- The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) was activated for 9 days in December. To help locate clients who had been allocated SWEP places, we were in daily contact with a Path worker who also came to runs to meet clients and check all were in accommodation. Outside SWEP provisions, regular contact between the Soup Run and Path resulted in vulnerable clients being placed in emergency accommodation and/or connecting with the RST the following day.
- Volunteers understand that, for many clients, particularly those we see regularly, Christmas is a difficult time and so were sensitive to how people were feeling. The atmosphere on runs was generally calm with, importantly, time to listen, talk and share news. However, one incident resulted in damage to a volunteer's car, and a medical emergency led to a team driving a client to hospital as an ambulance would have taken at least 6 hours to arrive.
- Saturday morning sessions at Shekinah continued with an average of 20 clients, mostly rough sleepers, being supported. As well as enjoying a cooked breakfast, the opportunity of a shower, clean clothing and a take-away lunch, clients were supported according to individual need. This included assistance to reach the Cumberland Centre or Derriford, or connect with friends and family, and help with accessing accommodation and other services. A peer mentor from Heads Count and a volunteer from PCC supported the sessions. On Christmas Eve, Medhi from Fuel Catering and his amazing team of volunteers provided Christmas Lunch and gift bags.
- Soup Run representatives participated in meetings of the Rough Sleeper Strategy Implementation Group, Creative Solutions Forum, Changing Futures volunteer network, and the Health Inclusion Pathway, Plymouth (HIPP), plus a Plymouth University/PCC workshop on impact of food initiatives.
- The NHS Mass Vaccination team provided Covid and flu vaccinations at a drop-in clinic at the Sunday Soup Kitchen at Shekinah on 11th December. This will be repeated on January 8th with a mobile team also attending the four Soup Run stops.
- A service of remembrance was held outside Plymouth Methodist Central Hall on Wednesday 21st December in memory of those we have loved and lost during 2022. Volunteers, partners and clients came together to remember with fondness and compassion people whose lives were affected and often cut short by homelessness.