

## **Plymouth Soup Run Summary Report for 2022**

### **A year in numbers**

- We served 28,527 meals in 2022, equivalent to 78 meals per day and a 16% increase over 2021. Taking a longer view and evening out the turbulence created by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen an average increase of 6% per year since 2016. Notably, we didn't see the usual winter dip in numbers at the beginning of the year, and recorded our highest monthly figure ever in August, with 2,893 meals served.
- Teams made 232 referrals to the Plymouth Access to Housing (Path) Rough Sleeper Team, averaging 19 per month, and met many more rough sleepers known to Path. We gave out 715 sleeping bags or blankets, averaging 60 per month or 2 per night, representing a major cost for the service.

### **Our clientele and their needs**

- The majority of our clients were single people experiencing difficulties in coping with life challenges and making ends meet. A significant minority were rough sleepers. Ever higher levels of need and complexity were seen, and most clients were undeterred by hostile weather from coming to get food and support. Up to 20% of clients were female and we sought to connect vulnerable women with Trevi/Spark for specialist support. Occasionally, families came to the Soup Run and they were quickly connected with more appropriate sources of support. Over the year, we received requests to help families in B&B accommodation with food, which we fulfilled directly or by referral to partners.
- We gave out warm clothing in the cooler months, plus emergency clothing, toiletries and sanitary products year-round. A Plymouth City Council (PCC) Household Support Fund grant enabled us to offer slow cookers, flasks, hot water bottles, blankets and other goods to help clients keep warm.
- The New Beginnings Fund jointly administered with Path bought art materials for a client, helped two who had secured work with accommodation, bus fares and work clothing, provided two with a reconditioned TV for their new home, and two more with fridges for their multi-occupancy house.

### **Health and wellbeing**

- Many clients have significant health problems. There was often the need to dispense first aid, call for paramedic assistance or get a client to the Cumberland Centre or Derriford hospital. Through our Saturday morning service (see below) and Sunday Soup Kitchen, we were able to offer access to a number of health services. We publicised, assisted at and hosted COVID-19 and flu vaccination events, with the aim of reaching particularly vulnerable patients. We regularly referred clients to the Outreach GP service and the new Health Inclusion Pathway, Plymouth (HIPP). Occasionally, we paid for the accommodation of clients leaving hospital or who were otherwise highly vulnerable, to avoid their sleeping rough.
- Many clients struggle with their mental health, some being very distressed and needing to talk. Friction among clients sometimes boiled over into challenging behaviour or aggression, requiring de-escalation. We continued to tap into our collective resources to understand the difficulties that our clients experience and raised concerns with other services when we felt that clients were not coping.
- The deaths of clients saddened all who knew them. A remembrance service was held at Plymouth Methodist Central Hall on 21st December in memory of those we have loved and lost during 2022.

### **Our teams**

- Whilst we work alongside professionals, all of our Soup Run teams are made up of unpaid volunteers. We work to agreed guidelines covering policy and practice that aim to provide a consistent service and keep clients and volunteers alike safe. We estimate that in 2022, we had some 300 volunteers coming from churches, community groups, philanthropic organisations, workplace groups and businesses, plus individuals. Young volunteers from Plymouth University and Duke of Edinburgh Award students helped pack snacks, serve food, and distribute toiletries.
- StreetVet volunteers provided support for clients' companion animals on alternate weeks. Throughout the year, representatives of other organisations such as Shelter, Shekinah and PCC/Changing Futures accompanied teams to see our work first hand. And we were honoured to have the Lord Mayor and Consort join us to serve clients one evening,
- Our teams of volunteers are networked through a daily blog, social media posts and bi-monthly meetings. During 2022, volunteer capabilities and welfare were supported through training on digital connectivity, mental health, and vicarious and secondary trauma, plus relevant online resources.
- Most restrictions in place to keep everyone safe during the COVID-19 pandemic have gone but, early in 2022, significant numbers of volunteers became infected. Thanks to teams all pulling together, the service was uninterrupted. Management of team rotas is an ongoing onerous task. A particular

challenge in 2022 was the need to recruit teams to serve one night per week when the original team had to withdraw. This has created work but also opportunities to bring new teams on board.

- In October, our coordinator Hilary Knight was awarded a Master of Education Honoris Causa by Plymouth Marjon University in recognition of her contribution to education and to the Plymouth Soup Run. We also bade farewell to volunteer Maddie Maddison and thanked her for her outstanding service leading the Hope Baptist Church team for 10 years.

### **Partnerships, networking and raising awareness**

- Our strongest partnerships continued to be with Alliance members, especially Path and Shekinah. Joined-up working meant that clients' needs were met in a timely and effective way throughout the year, and especially when the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) was called. A Path staff member joined the Sunday Soup Kitchen for several months of 2022, providing an invaluable opportunity for information gathering and linkage of clients to services. We have been grateful to the police and paramedics for assisting with clients in crisis, and the police have used the Soup Run to help locate vulnerable individuals.
- Throughout the year, Soup Run representatives attended meetings of the Creative Solutions Forum, the Rough Sleeper Strategy Implementation Group, the Plymouth Homelessness Prevention Partnership, PCC safeguarding and risk management meetings, Plymouth Food Aid Network, Next Meal Global Forum, Trauma Informed Plymouth Network, PCC/Changing Futures, Plymouth University events on Food Systems Equality and Tackling Male Violence Against Women and Girls, and attended an event to mark the visit of TRHs the Earl and Countess of Wessex to the city.
- The Soup Run was approached by the media throughout the year for information and interviews, often prompted by our social media posts. We took the opportunity of World Homeless Day and World Food Day in October, to draw attention to challenges facing our clients. The 'Plymouth After Dark' exhibition at The Box included sketches of the Soup Run in action, created by an artist who accompanied teams.
- These connections have helped us draw attention to homelessness, learn from others, share best practice, and influence strategy on the design and delivery of complex needs services in Plymouth.

### **Saturday morning rough sleeper service**

- The Saturday morning service at Shekinah supported by Soup Run, Alliance and PCC staff volunteers that began in November 2021, continued throughout 2022. In January 2022, Plymouth University awarded a Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) grant to the activity to support operations for six months, covering some staff time and costs to bring in health and wellbeing practitioners each week. Flexible working by Path and PCC staff provided professional support for the remainder of 2022, with the Soup Run bearing other costs. PCC has agreed to provide funding from early 2023.
- The sessions offered the opportunity to relax in a safe space and receive personalised support regarding housing and other issues, with excellent outcomes. In a typical week, around 20 clients enjoyed a cooked breakfast and takeaway lunch, and were able to have a shower and clean clothing. According to needs, clients were provided with laundry vouchers and bus tickets to enable them to attend appointments or access medical treatment, especially if they had mobility issues. Most weeks, particularly during the HEIF-funded phase, health practitioners provided podiatry services, oral health advice, blood-borne virus testing, nursing care, an optometry session, smoking cessation advice, and mental health peer support. A volunteer artist ran creative sessions on alternate weeks.

### **Resourcing the Soup Run**

- Our aim is to provide a hot meal, soup, sandwiches, hot drinks and snacks each night and, whenever possible, ambient food for clients to choose from. We were able to access surplus food from FareShare South West, supermarkets and other food businesses. Local restaurants and food outlets generously provided meals at Christmas and on other occasions.
- Despite this support, we had to buy food and drinks most weeks to enable us to offer sufficient food and provide balance, as well as to meet particular needs such as for water in hot weather. As the year progressed, it was increasingly common to supplement donations with purchases and even to restock supplies mid-run when numbers exceeded expectations.
- Donations of clothing by individuals and businesses, and targeted appeals such as for sleeping bags, helped meet needs. Cash donations came from individuals, community and workplace groups, and a local Councillor's Community Fund. At Christmas, we launched a Reverse Advent Calendar Appeal that brought in supplies of hats and gloves, snacks, drinks and toiletries. Specific fund-raising events helped boost finances, and in 2022, four volunteers raised £1,284 by scaling Mount Snowdon.