



Dover Outreach Centre Annual Report

We first opened our doors on 26th September 2016 to a relatively slow start but each month the number of people we see seems to increase. The winter was definitely busier than the summer, who wants to sit outside in the rain, after all? The number of people we see each day fluctuates as well, this is because there are other people in need who we help, as well as the rough sleepers and we see these much more frequently towards the end of their benefit month, as the money begins to run out. This tells us that these people are trying to cope on a low income but aren't always managing to. Since the introduction of Universal Credit our numbers have increased and we do not doubt that it is having an impact on the lives of many people and an effect on the living standards of all who have to claim it.

Although we offer a basic breakfast each weekday and we have shower and laundry facilities for Rough Sleepers this is not our main function. We also offer general help and advice regarding other services within the town, benefit claiming, CV writing, job applications, letter writing, family contact, literacy, health and nutrition, first aid and medical self-help to name only a few. We also run the **Winter Night Shelters** and have become the first port of call for anyone in need of a dry pair of socks, a winter coat or a new groundsheet.

However the real purpose of the Outreach Centre is not to support people to be homeless; **our aim is to help them out of homelessness** and to break the circle of: "you can't have a job because you haven't got a home, you can't have a home because you haven't got a job..."

The first thing we offer is a postal address and for those people who want to work we offer CV writing and voluntary work to help with references. This also shows that the person's intention to change their circumstances is genuine. Coming off of benefits, working for a short period of time and then failing will only compound the problems due to the long wait necessary before a new benefit claim can be actioned and so everyone needs to be sure that the person concerned will be able to sustain their change of lifestyle.

On a day to day basis the Outreach Centre is mainly staffed by volunteers who come from a cross section of the community. The main things that they have in common is that they care about the people they serve and they all work incredibly hard to make the Centre successful. Most of them work more than one shift per week and without fail all pitch in and help when there is additional help required to cover sickness and holidays. They are joined by a fully qualified Mental Health Therapist who is paid for by the 'Police and Crime Commissioner's Fund'. Many of the homeless people we see are suffering some form of mental health illness. For some it is the cause of their homelessness, for others it is as a result of it.

With the NHS under pressure, we are grateful to have received the grant from the PCC to help address this serious and ongoing problem. Once our own 'in house' training is completed we will be offering basic training in identifying needs relating to mental health issues to other agencies within Dover, as well as be able to receive referrals from outside agencies for treatment of their clients where appropriate.

We work with other services and agencies within the region and have had huge support from most of the churches, Dover District Council, Dover Town Council, the Police, local shops and supermarkets, Emmaus, Porchlight, Rapt (formerly Turning Point). We have been helped by schools, youth groups, the Brownies, the Trefoil Guild, Soup Kitchen, Street Pastors, Food Bank as well as vast numbers of kind and caring individuals, many of whom donate to us regularly.

We are geographically located immediately behind our principal group of supporters at St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church. Led by Father Jeff Cridland, their impact has been the greatest of all and has altered the course of where we first believed we were going. In allowing us to use a large chunk of their building, St. Paul's put their faith into action and pretty much their lives on hold for a time too! In addition to using 'our

half of the meeting rooms, we were sharing most of 'their half' at one point as well, while we decorated and cleaned the areas which had been unused for a while. Later, they gave us the chance to take two of our homeless volunteers into the St. Paul's meeting rooms to do some voluntary work for two weeks. As these men had already volunteered in the Outreach Centre itself, making tea and coffee, washing-up and cleaning, it was not long before we felt they were ready for employment. St. Paul's again came through for us and offered to pay for decorating to be done throughout the building. A third homeless man joined the team and when the work was completed he joined St. Paul's as a member of the congregation because he had been made to feel so cared for there.

By far the largest impact though was that the congregation supported and encouraged the (previously) homeless people throughout the upheaval of redecoration. This has helped to reinforce a measure of self-worth and of pride in a job well done. It must have been well done because more work has been offered by other churches and other individuals as well and from this Dover Outreach Enterprise was born; a Social Enterprise paying its workforce a fair wage and increasing their income from basic benefits level to something which has allowed them to save deposits for private rented accommodation. Although we refuse to exploit anyone - due to the fact that some of the work is being done by unskilled labourers who have been out of the workplace for some time; as well as some for whom this is their first ever employment; the prices for work are low in comparison to most commercial companies with large overhead costs. All manner of work is being undertaken as the men who are in charge of the projects and of overseeing and mentoring the workforce, are skilled in a variety of professions themselves.

During our first year the Dover Outreach Centre has helped:

- 41 people** to find housing,
- 28** to find work,
- 4** to be repatriated to their home nation and
- 8** return to family within the UK.

We are amazed and humbled by these results and hope to continue from this incredible start. We feel that the Lord has blessed us and that, as it's been done in His Name and with the help and support of all of the churches in Dover, the glory should go to Him.

It is also sobering to think that the average life expectancy for a homeless person is 47 years of age, this is a figure which has not increased in the UK for some time, while the average life expectancy of a 'housed' person in the same geographical area has recently increased from 79 to 81 years of age. This is why we always ask people to not give directly to homeless people in the street but rather to donate to one of the charities which aim to house them and / or help them to find work.

With the Winter Night Shelters approaching we would value the continued support of the churches in Dover for both funding and volunteers and, as always your prayers are a huge blessing to us.