



St Mary's Parish Office
The Welcome Centre
8 Church End
Walthamstow
E17 9RJ
Email: info@forestnightshelter.org.uk
Web: www.forestnightshelter.org.uk

Handbook For Volunteers

Updated October 2016

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INTRODUCTION

Contact Information

Registered Address: St Marys Welcome Centre
8 Church End
Walthamstow
E17 9RJ
Telephone: 07739 870 411 (Shelter Coordinator)
Email: info@forestnightshelter.org.uk
Website www.forestnightshelter.org.uk

Our Mission

The project aims to relieve poverty among street homeless people in Waltham Forest by providing accommodation, advice and assistance.

History

The Forest Churches Emergency Night Shelters first opened in January 2009 when a small group of churches decided to meet the need for night shelter provision in the borough and open their doors for rough sleepers every night through the coldest winter months. We catered for 130 rough sleepers that first winter. Every year since, the shelters have grown and more and more homeless people are welcomed into a safe and warm environment. In 2011 FCENS registered both as a company limited by guarantee and as a charity.

Services

We provide:

- Waltham Forest's only winter night shelter
- Information on services for homeless people in the borough
- A casework service (dependant on funds raised each year)

Winter Night Shelters

The shelters usually run from 1st November until 31st March every year and provide emergency accommodation for up to 30 people every night. Our focus is very much on the quality of service to our guests:

welcoming, inclusive and non-judgmental, provided by a large number of committed volunteers.

Guests and volunteers sit and eat together which helps make our guests feel "at home" and has proved

successful in engaging those who have previously been unable or unwilling to work with mainstream support services.

Everybody who stays at the shelters is given a sleeping mat and a sleeping bag. The men and the women sleep in different areas. We offer everyone a cooked main evening meal as well as breakfast in the mornings. Even if some-one can't get into the shelter that night, they will always have hot drinks and a meal served outside and some friendly words.

Casework Service

Each year, we aim to employ a Shelter Coordinator/ Caseworker to offer advice, advocacy and practical support to our guests. For example, the Caseworker will help guests to make contact with drug and alcohol support projects, mental health services, register with a GP, obtain identification and set up benefit claims. Help to find work is also provided and guests are also referred to hostels and housing services when possible. They also take bookings for places at the shelter and organise the registration of guests.

Daytime Services

We aim to work closely with the Day Centre in the borough which offers daytime services to homeless people all year round. Here there are free shower facilities and a clothing store where donated items of clothes are collected and passed on to those in need.

Information Cards

We also produce an information card giving details of day centres, advice agencies, healthcare centres, refugee agencies and useful help lines. This is available to homeless people and interested members of the public.

WHO WE ARE

Management Team

FCENS is run by the trustees made up of 6 individuals all of whom are volunteers.

Shelter Coordinator/Caseworker

The Shelter Coordinator is employed each season to manage the day to day operation of the shelters. They work closely and in collaboration with the venue coordinators to ensure that the evening runs smoothly.

Venue Coordinators and Night Shelter Volunteers

Venue Coordinators act as the senior volunteer for each venue and work with the Shelter Coordinator. They are responsible for recruiting volunteers for the night shelters as well as managing the volunteer team on the night. This includes preparing the venue for the evening, overseeing preparation of food and drink and delegating tasks once the shelter is open.

Each venue has its own team of volunteers who prepare food, set up the eating area, assist on the door, serve food, chat with guests, wash dishes and tidy up before the guests' bed time. Volunteers also come in to help with breakfast preparation and service.

Night Awake Workers

The trustees employ two part-time night awake staff to cover the week. They take a handover from the Shelter Coordinator and Venue Coordinator and ensure safety and security through the night. The night awake staff on duty is supported by two volunteers sleeping in who can be called in an emergency or by one volunteer sleeping in and a local person on standby in emergency. They report any important occurrences to the Shelter Coordinator by text or email so they can be passed on to the next night's shelter team.

Decision Making

The lead person on any shift is the Venue Coordinator. Please do not question their decisions in front of other volunteers or guests. **If you feel something is unfair then please talk to the Coordinator in private. If you still feel that your views are not being considered fairly, then please ask to make a complaint to the Shelter coordinator who will advise you on how to follow the correct procedure.**

VOLUNTEERING WITH FCENS

Volunteers are an essential part of the team contributing to the overall success of FCENS. It can be a heart-warming and rewarding experience, sharing your time and effort with an interesting and varied group of people, both guests and fellow volunteers. If, at any time, you are not sure of your role, or you are worried about anything, please do not hesitate to contact the Venue Coordinator or Shelter Coordinator who will try to remedy any problem as soon as possible.

Working as a Team

Never work alone in any area of the venue. This rule is for the protection both of yourself and of the guests many of whom are very vulnerable. Always make sure that someone else knows where you are. If you should have to go anywhere with a guest, always get someone to go with you. **NEVER** find yourself alone in a room, or leave some-one alone in a room with a guest should it be necessary to leave the main area of the venue for any reason.

Threatening Situations

The following section aims to raise your awareness of difficult situations – not to put you off volunteering! If this section makes you anxious, please ask to speak to one of our experienced volunteers, who can give reassurance and answer your questions.

Most of the time the shelters are a calm and happy place for guests and volunteers, but please be aware that you may see a guest being angry or aggressive. The most important point here is that **as a volunteer you have absolutely no responsibility for responding to this behaviour**. This is the responsibility of the shelter coordinator and venue coordinator. If they ask you to support them, perhaps by calling the police or moving away from a certain area, then please do this. The Coordinators have the experience and ability to deal with these situations and will know what course of action to take.

Although it is unlikely, if at any time you are in a situation you cannot handle, **the golden rule is to back off**. For example, if someone starts shouting at you, do not shout back. Speak gently and clearly and avoid being drawn into further argument. The aim is to ensure that the person does not become more irritated and starts to calm down.

Remember that your first duty is to yourself. When faced by a person acting aggressively, the first priority is to ensure your own personal safety. If there is the potential for the situation to become more serious, search for and establish an escape route. Never turn your back; and be prepared to move very quickly if necessary! If you feel someone else is in a threatening situation, get help for them as quickly as possible.

After being involved in a threatening situation, a person may feel scared or embarrassed. At these times it is always better to admit to these emotions and find someone to talk to and share with them what you are feeling.

Health and Safety

Working with a large number of vulnerable people, we are very aware of health and safety issues. The Venue Coordinator is responsible for Health and Safety. They check access to fire escapes, positions of fire extinguishers and make sure First Aid and safety equipment is available.

Everyone has a responsibility to ensure that we provide a safe environment. If you see something which is unsafe, or could become unsafe, then either solve the problem and tell the Venue coordinator what you have done, or ask them to deal with it.

Boundaries

Never disclose personal details such as surname, address or workplace to guests. If you feel there might be a constructive reason for doing so, then contact the Venue Coordinator to discuss it. If you do give out details without consulting the Venue Coordinator or the Shelter Coordinator first, FCENS reserves the right to prevent you from volunteering with us in future. This rule is for your own safety and for the safety of our guests.

For the same reasons, FCENS also insist that, as a volunteer, you do not arrange to meet with or make any contact with guests away from the shelter unless it is an activity specifically approved by FCENS. This includes phone calls and e-mails.

Another important rule is: **NEVER give out money to guests, no matter how small the amount.** If a guest says that they need money to get to an appointment or any other important reason – please ask them to speak to the Venue Coordinator or speak to the Venue Coordinator on their behalf.

Respecting Others

Perhaps the most important role as a volunteer is to offer every person who uses the shelters the respect they de-serve as a member of society. This means that as a group of volunteers or staff we do NOT patronise the people using the project, but instead welcome them as fellow human beings. This way we can offer our guests an ambience in which they may feel safe to express themselves and, we hope, have an increased sense of self-confidence which may help them to take a move away from homelessness.

You may also feel curious about some guest's life experiences. Please understand that some of the guests may feel let down or deeply saddened by these and may not want to talk about them.

However, some guests do like to talk about their experiences. We ask you to respect their privacy and not to repeat anything you may hear in conversation with another person while at the night shelter. However, if you hear information that you feel could compromise the safety of anyone in the night shelter, then we ask you to pass this on to the Shelter Coordinator immediately.

Please do not make any promises. We want our guests to trust in our service and to work with us to improve it. If we fail to develop that level of trust, it will have a bad effect on our guests and the service we provide. We may raise false expectations and make the job of the staff far more difficult.

Offering Support as a Christian

FCENS is a Christian project, however, this does not mean that we do not welcome guests, staff and volunteers who are not Christian. Above all, we do not force any belief – religious, political, moral or any other on those around us. Christian beliefs and fellowship provided the motivation to start the project and continue to provide the inspiration for much of the work that goes on. However, treating

each person as an equal means respecting their views and not trying to force your own views onto other, sometimes very vulnerable, people. In short, as a volunteer we ask you not to proselytise.

Valuables

We advise you not to bring valuable items to the shelter as FCENS is not responsible for anything that goes missing. We are aware that you may have handbags, briefcases, mobile phones etc., with you. Please ask the Venue Coordinator where these can be stored. However, even if stored away, FCENS is not responsible for these items or for their loss.

Support Offered to Volunteers

If you feel you need any emotional support during/after your time spent at the shelter, please don't hesitate to talk to someone. If you don't feel comfortable speaking to either the Venue Coordinator or the Shelter Coordinator then perhaps you may want to talk to another volunteer. There are always people ready to listen.

Minimum and Maximum Age

We do not allow anyone under the age of 18 to volunteer alone due to safety concerns and because they are not covered by our insurance. If you would like to talk to someone about this, please contact the Shelter Coordinator. Unfortunately, our indemnity insurance does not cover anyone over the age of 70 either. If you would like to volunteer but are over the age of 70, we welcome you, as long as you understand that you are not insured and that you volunteer at your own risk. We do have many older volunteers who are valuable and happy members of our teams.

Vulnerable Adults

Many people who use the shelters are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation because of their personal difficulties. FCENS has a legal obligation to ensure that all our guests stay in a safe environment and that none of our guests are abused or exploited in any way.

If you feel that any of our guests may be at risk from any person (e.g. staff member/volunteer/other guest) or for any other reason, you must inform the Venue Coordinator immediately. You can also contact the Shelter Coordinator as soon as possible. If you have good reason not to report to either Coordinator, please ask to be put in touch with a member of the Management Team.

Remember, if you witness or suspect inappropriate behaviour in the shelters – you must report it.

Our lead Safeguarding officer is David Britton (Chair of FCENS) Tel: 07732 135 178 / 020 8279 7738

E-mail: rev.britton@gmail.com

The Golden Rules of Volunteering

Last but not least, please remember these important rules of working as a volunteer with FCENS. For your own safety, and the safety of others, we could intervene and might stop you from volunteering should you break these basic rules:

- Respect the people you meet at the shelters and treat them accordingly
- Don't give out personal details
- Don't contact a guest outside the shelters e.g. telephone calls, meetings, emails
- Don't carry valuables in the shelters
- Don't give away money
- Never work alone
- Alcohol and drugs are strictly prohibited from the shelters, as is being under the influence of them

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR VOLUNTEERS

Who are our guests? They are people from all walks of life who are homeless for a variety of reasons. Some of the common causes are:

- Mental health problems – including depression
- Drugs, alcohol and related problems
- Family breakdown – death, divorce, conflict with family members
- Change of circumstances – e.g. was living with a parent/relative who has died
- A history of being in care
- Former members of the Armed Services
- Unemployed /Debt
- Jail/crime – history of offending
- Gambling addiction
- Lack of papers – birth certificates/passports
- An inability to access services such as benefits and doctors

SHELTER OPERATIONS

The following section contains basic information on how the shelters are run and what you can expect from an average night at the night shelters. All shelters operate in a similar way

The Evening Shift

Volunteers can give as much time as they are able to and are welcome to come just for an hour or for anything

up to the whole shift. Some people prefer to come early and help with the meal preparation and the setting up of

the venue. Other jobs are serving, chatting to guests or washing up.

7.00pm (Starting times vary for each venue)

– onwards Set up tables and chairs for meals

Put on urn/kettle for tea/coffee.

Begin meal preparation.

Check toilets area for cleanliness, soap, towels, etc.

7:45pm The Venue Coordinator will bring the whole team together to pass on any important notices and to introduce new faces. We will also make everybody aware of any incidents, problems or concerns.

Jobs will be allocated to volunteers, e.g. reception/serving drinks/food. This is also a chance to ensure that all volunteers are aware of the rules, where the fire exits are, the names of their colleagues for the evening, and to link new volunteers with experienced volunteers.

7:55pm Teams usually pray before opening.

8:00pm Open doors, welcome and register guests and serve tea, coffee, hot chocolate.

Start mingling with the guests and offering companionship

8:30pm Serve main meal. Volunteers and guests are encouraged to sit down and eat together.

10:00pm End of shift

Overnight Team come on duty and handover with Venue Coordinator

10.30pm Doors closed

11.00pm Lights out

Overnight Shift

A minimum of two persons cover the overnight shift. One is the Night Awake Worker who is a paid and experienced member of staff. They are vigilant through the night ensuring guests are safe and comfortable. They are assisted either by two volunteers who can sleep through the night but are there to be called upon in an emergency or by one volunteer and a local person on standby in case of emergency.

5.00am Switch the urn on

5.50am. Wake up guests

Morning Shift

Also known as the breakfast shift. Guests do like to see volunteers helping to prepare and serve drinks and breakfast. Don't expect conversation to be as good as in the evening and be ready to see people trudging off into cold winter mornings.

6.00am Arrive and begin breakfast preparation.

The guests are woken up, wash, etc.

Sleeping mats and blankets etc. folded and put away.

6.10am Breakfast is served.

6.50am Last teas & coffees served

7:30am Guests leave.

Ensure venue is left clean and tidy. Night Awake staff makes final check to see building is secure.

Night Shelter Rules for Guests

The rules for guests at the night shelters are very simple. These are as follows:

- 1.) No drugs in or around the night shelter**
- 2.) No alcohol in or around the night shelter**
- 3.) No anti-social behaviour of any kind**
- 4.) No possession of an object that can be used as a weapon**
- 5.) No leaving the shelter after 8pm if wishing to return to sleep.**
- 6.) Respect our neighbours and the local neighbourhood.**

These rules are enforced in order to ensure the safety of everyone within the shelter. If guests break these rules they may well be asked to leave the night shelter for that evening and, in more extreme circumstances, they may be excluded. As volunteers, we ask you to report any breach of these rules to either the Venue Coordinator or the Shelter Coordinator.

Admitting guests to the shelter

The night shelters accommodate 30 men and women over the age of 18 years and a waiting list ensures the fairest method for entry to the night shelters.

FCENS works with people who have a local connection to Waltham Forest. We will work with No Second Night Out to accommodate referrals from them who have a local connection. Guests who do not have a local connection will be offered a bed for one night only if it is available and be required to return to their borough of origin to be accommodated on subsequent nights.

The referral procedure into the shelter for guests is to telephone the Shelter Coordinator in order to secure a bed for that night if available. Guests should not be encouraged by any third parties to turn up at any shelter venue without first contacting the Shelter Coordinator. The telephone number is available in the shelter, Day Centre or on our website and at other venues e.g. libraries in the Borough.

All guests will be asked to complete an initial assessment and sign an agreement to say that they comply with our boundaries as stated earlier. If a guest stayed the night before and was signed in by

the Shelter Coordinator he/she will automatically have a place the next night. The aim of this is to prevent large crowds congregating around the shelter before it opens.

- Those who did not stay the night before will be offered a place on the waiting list if they are at the shelter between 7.30pm and 8.00pm.
- Guests will be offered a bed for a period of 28 days during which time they must show us that they want to engage with us and our casework service. This period may be extended at the discretion of the Shelter Co-ordinator. Guests who are uncooperative or do not engage with the services offered will be asked to leave the shelter at the end of this period.
- The doors open at 8 o'clock and the first people to be signed in are those who stayed the night before. Vacancies will be filled by individuals at the top of the list. If an individual is offered a place from the top of the waiting list, but is NOT present then their name will be removed from the list and they will have to start the process again from the bottom of the list.
- 30 guests will be admitted except in the event of the Emergency Cold Weather Procedure (see below) being invoked, when more may be allowed in. This is determined by the Shelter Coordinator in consultation with the Trustees.

Exclusion policy

The Shelter and Venue Coordinators have the right to refuse entry to anyone on the grounds of ensuring the health and safety of everyone in the shelter. If an individual is behaving in an anti-social manner, then the Shelter Coordinator holds the right to refuse entry to any or all of the shelters. The Venue Coordinator has the final say on who can stay in their venue.

There are four possible courses of action available for guests who break the rules

- Formal Warning
- Exclusion from the shelter for one night
- Exclusion for a specified period
- Permanent Exclusion

Emergency Cold Weather Procedure

In the event of severe cold weather, as outlined below, we will operate according to Waltham Forest's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).

- Extraordinarily low temperatures e.g. 0° and below
- Serious storm
- Heavy snowfall
- Total daytime ground frost.

The Shelter Coordinator will instruct the Venue Coordinators about what to do in this situation.

FCENS POLICIES

Further details of FCENS policies are available from the website .
www.forestnightshelter.org.uk/volunteer

These include:

- Protection of Vulnerable Adults Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Equalities Policy

HELPING HOMELESS PEOPLE ON THE STREET

Many volunteers feel motivated to do more for homeless people once they have shared time with our guests

There are other indirect ways that you can help homeless people. Confidence is usually very low when someone is living on the streets, so if you meet someone who is homeless treat them with respect and friendliness. Ignoring someone can make them feel even more marginalised. Many homeless people feel frustrated that 'the system' may have let them down and after a period of living on the streets, often feel disillusioned. Encouraging people contact a service or make an appointment could help them towards a new start.

An information card, produced by FCENS is available from the Shelter Coordinator. Volunteers are welcome to take some of these cards to hand to people on the streets.

If you have a particular concern about a homeless person, please contact the Shelter Coordinator.

In conclusion, thank you for offering to volunteer with FCENS.

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VOLUNTEER DECLARATION- Sign and return to Co-ordinator

All volunteers must sign to say they have read and will abide by the policies and procedures of the Volunteer handbook and that they are aware of the policies of FCENS (especially Vulnerable Adults & Safeguarding policies) available on the website www.forestnightshelter.org.uk and from your Venue Coordinator.

You should also sign in with your venue each time you volunteer

Signed

Date

Venue

Signature of Co-ordinator:

The Golden Rules of Volunteering

Last but not least, please remember these important rules of working as a volunteer with FCENS. For your own safety, and the safety of others, we could intervene and might stop you from volunteering should you break these basic rules.

Please tick that you have read and understand the following:

- Respect the people you meet at the shelters and treat them accordingly
- Don't give out personal details
- Don't contact a guest outside the shelters e.g. telephone calls, meetings, emails
- Don't carry valuables in the shelters
- Don't give away money
- Never work alone
- Alcohol and drugs are strictly prohibited from the shelters, as is being under the influence of them
- I have read the Vulnerable Adults & Safeguarding policies

VOLUNTEER DECLARATION - Your copy

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Signed

Date

Signature of Co-ordinator:

Venue:

The Golden Rules of Volunteering

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