

Plymouth Soup Run Report for July 2022

In July 2022:

- Plymouth Soup Run served 2,560 meals (an average of 83 meals per night, equivalent to 5 meals or 6% less per night than June 2022, and 13 meals or 23% more per night than July 2021; all figures rounded). The year-to-date figure of 16,501 meals served represents a significant increase of 19% over 2021. The July 2022 figures include meals served on five Saturday mornings at Shekinah. However, even factoring those out, there was an increase of 15% over July 2021.
- Preparing the right amount of food has been a challenge. *“Every night there is a long queue of people waiting to be served, with people arriving all the time ... When we arrived one person said ‘I am so hungry’”*. Two teams had to buy extra food mid-run. Yet, a few days in the middle of the month had numbers below expectations, possibly corresponding to cost-of-living supplementary benefit payments, making the high figure for the month overall even more striking.
- The support from our food donors is gratefully acknowledged. This enables us to provide hot food, drinks and snacks, plus ambient food for clients to choose from. In July we received a substantial financial donation from a dockyard Unite Union group. An individual donor kindly provided hygiene products, and a generous response to our Amazon wish-list brought in cutlery, carrier bags, cartons of juice, and joggers.
- Teams made 28 referrals to the Path Rough Sleeper Team, and gave out 65 sleeping bags or blankets to rough sleepers and to a newly housed client who had no bedding. Requests for sleeping bags sometimes exceeded supply. A grant from the ‘New Beginnings’ fund jointly administered by the Soup Run and Path bought a bed for a client moving into independent accommodation.
- Collaboration with Alliance partners, especially the Path Rough Sleeper Team and Shekinah continues to be excellent: *“Following Thursday night’s referral, joined up partnership working meant a person was accommodated on Friday. A great result for a person who has been rough sleeping on and off for years”*. Collaboration with Trevi/Spark continued through referrals of vulnerable women clients and staff joining our Sunday teams. StreetVet volunteers joined alternate Monday runs, and several local business teams provided an important part of our volunteer complement. The new Changing Futures Programme Volunteer Coordinator joined a Saturday morning session and weekday evening run.
- The 6-month long University-funded phase of the Saturday morning service at Shekinah, supported by Alliance staff and Soup Run and PCC volunteers, finished at the end of July. The last Saturday of the month was one of our busiest, attended by 32 rough sleepers and people in emergency accommodation, 10 of whom were seen by ‘Forgotten Feet’ volunteer podiatrists. Over the course of the month, clients were also able to participate in art sessions and meet oral health educators, mental health peer mentors, and Hepatitis C Trust staff offering blood-borne virus testing. The report on the 6 months’ experience is being drafted along with plans to continue the service to meet the evident demand.
- The health of clients is an ongoing concern as is their vulnerability: *“We had a lady at King’s Road who said she hadn’t eaten for three days and was pregnant.”* Teams supported clients, taking one very unwell person directly to A&E, signposting another with an injured arm to the Cumberland Centre, and calling paramedics to a client suffering fits. Among the mental health issues reported was concern for a recently evicted individual at risk of self-harm, and a voluntary Glenbourne patient who was assisted to return to the hospital. As a preventative health measure during the recent very hot weather, teams provided ample quantities of water to clients on evening runs and via daytime outreach with Path staff.
- Team members came together in a meeting of the Soup Run Development Group. Soup Run representatives participated in a workshop organised by Plymouth University and Food Plymouth to contribute to the food strategy being developed by PCC. They also attended the inaugural Peninsula Trauma Informed Conference, meetings of the Creative Solutions Forum, a meeting on ‘Adult Safeguarding - Learning Disabled People and Homelessness’, training on ‘Personality Disorders’ organised by Path/Plymouth Frontline Network, and activities to mark World Hepatitis Day. To support digital connectivity for clients, two volunteers started Digital Champion training, and we were fortunate to receive a generous number of preloaded data SIM cards donated by the National Data Bank and the Good Things Foundation, via Plymouth Libraries Service. The ‘Plymouth After Dark’ exhibition at The Box included sketches of the Soup Run in action, made by an artist who had accompanied teams.
- A street service was held on 19th July to mark the death of a client well known to teams. We took that opportunity to remember with sadness the large number of other clients who had died this year.