

Plymouth Soup Run Report for August 2023

Trends and quotes

- August saw more people than ever supported by Plymouth Soup Run. Since November 2022, demand has grown from an average of 65 to 101 meals per night, stretching human and financial resources.
- Teams expressed their concerns: *"A very high level of need within the rough sleeping community at the moment: health issues, physical and mental, plus frustration [about accommodation]". "You could feel a lot of people's desperation which I've not picked up on previously to the same extent." "There was a huge need tonight and folk were looking street weary." "... so much brokenness and injustice."*
- The bad weather on some days during the month impacted on volunteers and clients: *"Another really, really wet night. But still amazingly busy at Mayflower Street where, although it was pouring with rain, people just kept coming." "We were paddling and soaked through by the end of the evening, but we were very aware we were not sleeping out in the dreadful conditions."*

The month in numbers

- 3,122 meals served, slightly more than July 2023 (by 4 meals) and 8% up on August 2022.
- 21,148 meals served year-to-date.
- An average of 25 clients supported at each Saturday morning session prioritising rough sleepers.
- 27 referrals made to the Path Rough Sleeper Team.
- 63 sleeping bags, 7 roll mats and 15 blankets given out.

Resourcing the service

- Some unexpected and welcome donations of surplus food from community events complemented food redistribution sources and purchased food.
- Kind members of the public donated food and other goods in person or via our Amazon Wish List.
- Thanks to Household Support Funding from Plymouth City Council (PCC), 43 clients were supported with 68 items: food and laundry vouchers, bus tickets to get to hospital, clothing and sleeping bags.

More than food

- There was a high demand for clothing, shoes and toiletries, and the need to replace wet sleeping bags.
- Even though pressure of numbers leaves teams less time to talk to people, listening to clients' concerns is as vital as ever and important in managing anxieties and tensions. The presence of Street Pastors on one night helped manage a difficult situation involving a vulnerable woman.

Client health and wellbeing

- At one Saturday morning session, a volunteer podiatrist from Forgotten Feet/Plymouth University treated eight street homeless patients, including two in need of a GP referral for medication, and one who was advised to go to A&E for urgent treatment for a serious infection.
- Particular care was exercised in supporting a client with very limited options for help in the city due to his aggressive behaviour and complex mental health. This included attending regular meetings and liaison with other services, in a collective effort to keep everyone safe.
- Teams communicated concerns over the welfare of one young and highly vulnerable rough sleeper and took care to check on him regularly.
- Several clients in recent difficulties and in need of help contacted the Soup Run via social media and subsequently came to run stops where they were signposted to other help.
- The Soup Run arranged overnight accommodation via the PCC Out of Hours service for a client with considerable health issues, and paid for a total of seven nights' accommodation for two others.
- Two clients in wheelchairs were supported as well as possible considering they were rough sleeping.
- Soup Run volunteers were saddened to learn of the deaths of two clients.

Teams, partnerships and networking.

- During August, teams included volunteers from nine churches, five philanthropic or community groups, and seven business or workplace teams, plus a newly-elected local councillor.
- A Path colleague supported on Saturday mornings and some evenings, a project worker from Caritas joined one run, as did a Shelter colleague on a particularly challenging evening, and StreetVet volunteers joined Monday runs to tend clients' companion animals.
- The Soup Run Coordinator participated in weekly Rough Sleeper meetings, Creative Solutions meetings, and spoke about clients' housing situations at an Alliance Accommodation Sub-Group meeting, providing follow-up information on female clients. She was also alerted by services to concerns regarding individuals which were then passed on to team leaders.
- Volunteers attended meetings of the Rough Sleeper Strategy Implementation Group and Plymouth Food Aid Network, and team representatives came together in a meeting of the Plymouth Soup Run Development Group to discuss current issues and challenges, and agree on a written Constitution.