

Plymouth Soup Run Report for December 2023

Trends and quotes

- The Soup Run operated every night over Christmas and New Year, and held sessions on Saturday and Sunday mornings and on Boxing Day, to ensure that rough sleepers could come indoors for a few hours.
- As noted below, the goodwill shown towards the service and our clients has been remarkable: *"More fantastic donations arrived on Christmas Eve. The amazing generosity of people continues". "We distributed Christmas boxes donated by [a local primary school]. Everyone was so excited and couldn't thank the team enough".*
- Again, the weather was challenging: *"from bitterly cold to soaking wet in two days; the fact that anybody came out at all tonight shows how much they need food"*, with some respite on the occasional *"dry blustery evening"*.
- After reduced demand in November, numbers are increasing again. The level of individual need remains high and, as well as welcoming food and practical support, the sadness and isolation that some people feel at this time of year was evident: *"some hugs were also needed"*.
- The frustration felt by clients, especially rough sleepers was keenly sensed, and sometimes boiled over into aggression, requiring containment and de-escalation by teams. However, it was necessary to call the police on one occasion and, on another occasion, volunteers implemented emergency procedures and left the Soup Run location before they had finished serving all clients.

The month in numbers

- 2,458 meals served, averaging 79 per night, 2% more than November 2023, and 18% more than December 2022.
- 31,910 meals served over the year, 12% more than 2022.
- An average of 21 clients supported by Saturday or Sunday morning sessions prioritising rough sleepers.
- 28 referrals made to the Path Rough Sleeper Team.
- 48 sleeping bags and 31 blankets given out.

Resourcing the service

- Year round, we receive food via FareShare South West and the Co-op, other local businesses and food outlets.
- Throughout December, teams were able to supplement their normal offer with seasonal treats, thanks to abundant donations of clothes, food and toiletries in response to our Reverse Advent Calendar appeal and Amazon Wish List, gift bags, and cash, plus a complete Christmas Eve roast meal. Donors include businesses, a theatre group, the education sector, regular supporters, members of the public, and a grateful past client whom we had helped. They are too numerous to mention here but have been identified and thanked on social media.

More than food

- We have continued to assist clients with goods bought with Household Support Funding from PCC. During the quarter just ended, we provided 73 clients with 134 items ranging from food and laundry vouchers and bus tickets, to hot water bottles, clothing, small electrical goods and microwave ovens.
- Most nights, Soup Run teams have given out toiletries, and warm and waterproof clothing. For rough sleepers, we have provided replacements for both wet clothes and sleeping bags. Blankets given out were often for people in accommodation, suggesting that they were needing help to keep warm at this time of the year.
- At the Saturday and Sunday morning sessions at Shekinah run jointly with Path/Alliance colleagues, rough sleepers have enjoyed a cooked breakfast, a shower and the opportunity get advice on housing and other issues. They also played chess, cards and Scrabble, and made Christmas cards and decorations.

Teams, partnerships and networking.

- In December, teams included volunteers from eight churches, six philanthropic or community groups, and six business or workplace groups. Plymouth University dietetics students again joined some weekend sessions.
- Strong collaboration with the Path Rough Sleeper Team continues to impact positively on all of our activities.
- Our Coordinator attended weekly Rough Sleeper meetings, two school assemblies and a Creative Solutions meeting. Volunteers attended the Changing Futures Learning Event, and meetings of the Changing Futures volunteer network, Plymouth Food Aid Network, and the Rough Sleeper Strategy Implementation Group.

Client health and wellbeing

- Food was delivered for part of the month to a client with mobility issues and accommodated in a B&B.
- 'Forgotten Feet' volunteer podiatrists treated a total of fifteen patients at three Saturday morning sessions.
- The NHS Mass Vaccination team nurses attended two Sunday runs to give flu and Covid-19 vaccinations.
- Several clients with injuries, infections and other concerning symptoms were encouraged and/or assisted to go to either the Minor Injuries Unit or Derriford Hospital, some being admitted for treatment.
- We were grateful for assistance from the police when supporting a female client in considerable distress.
- Too many of the people we serve died during 2023, some very well known to us over many years. We remembered them at a service outside Plymouth Methodist Central Hall on 22nd December – the shortest day of the year. In the words of the PMCH minister: *"We take a moment of stillness to remember those we have known and loved. In their memory, we light candles to recognise their humanity and value."*