

Plymouth Soup Run Report for Second Quarter: April-June 2024

April-June in numbers

- 8,480 meals served, average 93 per night; 652 per week; 8% up on 2023.
- 143 sleeping bags given out, average 11 per week.
- 100 referrals made to the Path Rough Sleeper Team, average 8 per week.

June in numbers (April and May are covered in previous monthly reports)

- 2,889 meals served, average 96 per night. Total meals served year to date: 16,021, averaging 88 per night.
- 54 sleeping bags, 6 blankets and 3 roll mats given out.
- 34 referrals made to the Path Rough Sleeper Team.

Themes and quotes

- The Soup Run goes out rain or shine and, fortunately, the weather generally improved from April onwards, often impacting on people's mood: *"A dry and relaxed evening". "A good atmosphere tonight with good spirits"*.
- However, teams had to be vigilant to manage the environment, to be able to work effectively and safely and look after clients, advising some to go to quieter stops where they could be given more support. Occasionally, teams needed to use de-escalation skills and well-rehearsed exit procedures. *"A verbal disagreement with threats was defused." "A taxi took two clients back to their accommodation and another was supported to walk away". "There was some conflict between clients. We packed up and left rapidly so we didn't get involved"*.
- The police responded to requests for a visible presence on occasions, and also drew on the Soup Run to locate missing persons or to help members of the public in difficulty: *"An officer collected food and some shoes for a client in need". "The police collected a sleeping bag for an elderly gentleman in accommodation"*.
- Increasing numbers meant that a lot of volunteers' time and energy went into serving food, but wider support was also prioritised by teams, including practical help and signposting to other services. *"[A seriously ill client] was helped with household necessities, registered with the HIPP team and connected with Shekinah and Citizens Advice for help with benefits". "One client needed help getting a replacement birth certificate"*.
- We are ever conscious of the role of the Soup Run in the lives of our most isolated clients, to listen, and share news both positive and negative. *"They were very pleased to show us photos of their new flat". "We saw a proud new dad tonight". "Volunteers spoke with a young man in a truly desperate, despondent state"*.
- Health and wellbeing are constant concerns, placing importance on team training. *"A young man collapsed after a drug overdose. He was brought round [with Naloxone carried by the team]". "A very distressed woman was referred to the women's team". "As we arrived, two ambulances were in attendance". "A man said he had not eaten for three days and was so pleased to find us". "Toothache was mentioned by several people"*.
- Most clients are single people but, over the quarter, we have supported a number of couples and families. *"A lady with a two-year-old in a pram was brought to the front of the queue and other clients held back until she left"*. We also try to respond to particular needs. *"Gluten and dairy free meals provided as requested"*.
- Rough sleepers are an important group. The Saturday morning service at the new Shekinah premises offered in collaboration with Path and Plymouth City Council (PCC), has enabled us to provide them with focused support, including a cooked breakfast, a shower, advice, footcare, and the opportunity to relax in a safe space.

Resources and networking

- Generous food donations came from supermarkets, a fish and chip shop, other local businesses, individuals and schools. Support via our subscription to FareShare South West was invaluable in meeting needs, especially at weekends. Additional purchases were made to provide sufficient food and balance.
- The Rough Sleeper Initiative supported Saturday morning sessions. The Household Support Fund provided by the Department for Work and Pensions via PCC helped 51 households over the quarter. And an Argyle Community Trust donation supported 47 people with electric blankets, socks, hats, gloves and slow cookers.
- We received cash and in-kind donations from churches, charities, individuals, and fund-raising efforts.
- Teams came from 10 churches, 14 businesses or workplace groups, and 7 community or philanthropic groups. The diversity of the Soup Run community is one of its strengths. No night is exactly the same and small pleasures have a big impact: *"So many smiling faces when the team arrived in an open-topped bus"*.
- We also welcome diversity in age, with young university, college and school volunteers including Prince's Trust and Duke of Edinburgh students gaining community experience with us. *"I feel I'm making a difference"*.
- During Volunteers Week in June, we celebrated our many volunteers on social media and at a social gathering.
- Close liaison with Alliance members, particularly Path and Shekinah continued to be enjoyed. Path and other partners including Trevi and StreetVet supported teams on outreach.
- We benefited from improved information management and a revamping of our website led by a volunteer.
- Volunteers came together twice as the Plymouth Soup Run Development Group, and representatives attended numerous meetings including the Rough Sleeper Strategy Implementation Group, weekly rough sleeper meetings, Changing Futures, Plymouth Food Aid Network, and safeguarding meetings.