

Plymouth Soup Run Report for Fourth Quarter: October-December 2024

October-December in numbers

- 7,559 meals served, average 82 per night; 575 per week (3% lower than the same period in 2023)
- 176 sleeping bags given out, average 13 per week.
- 130 referrals made to the Path Rough Sleeper Team, average 10 per week.

December in numbers (October and November are covered in previous monthly reports)

- 2,513 meals served, average 81 per night; total meals served year to date: 32,571, average 89 per night.
- 47 sleeping bags, 23 blankets and 3 roll mats given out.
- 40 referrals made to the Path Rough Sleeper Team.

Themes and quotes

- **Extreme weather:** Over the quarter, it rained two days out of three, storm warnings were issued and extreme wet, windy or cold weather triggered mechanisms to provide emergency accommodation on two occasions. Close collaboration with Path and Plymouth City Council (PCC) maximised sharing of information and signposting of clients to allocated accommodation. In less severe but still hostile weather, we used our resources to provide emergency accommodation for particularly vulnerable clients for respite and/or while awaiting a service response. *"On Saturday with Storm Darragh still raging, the volunteers served 60 people... All were glad of hot food and soup on such a cold and windy night."* *"Serving food was challenging, but the team were struck by how uncomplaining the people they served were."* *"Deterioration in the weather has ramped up need for warm clothing to help battle the elements."* *"Several people exchanged soaking wet sleeping bags."*
- **Personalised support:** We talk about the numbers of meals served but each represents an individual with their own story and challenges. The Soup Run provides continuity in people's lives and teams make every effort to have the capacity to listen to people and understand how best to support them. *"[name] is struggling with her health and [her partner] is totally frustrated with their situation."* *"A number of people displayed a high level of need tonight at Mayflower Street."* *"A lady approached asking for the times of the run as she was anxious and wanted to avoid the crowds, ... she was sofa surfing but desperate"*. *"A man on the Hoe needed to talk, very stressed – information will be passed to [Path staff]"*. Our Saturday morning rough sleeper sessions at Shekinah in collaboration with Path have continued throughout the quarter. The indoor environment is conducive to addressing people's individual needs as well as providing some relief from the harsh conditions on the street.
- **Special dates:** On 10 October we marked World Homeless Day and World Mental Health Day with targeted social media posts to raise awareness. Yet, as noted by one of our volunteers: *"It was not really a special date. It was like the preceding and following days, when we all witness the continuing scar across our community of homelessness, poverty and wider deprivation."* Similarly when, on 21st December we held a memorial service to remember and honour those people whose lives were affected by homelessness and whom had loved and lost, those leading the service reminded us that it was *"The shortest day of the year but another long day for many"*. As the quarter culminated with Christmas and New Year celebrations, we were able provide festive meals, gifts and lots of extras for our clients: *"Everybody was pleased to receive their first Christmas presents."* *"A delightful evening with all service users genuinely very grateful for tonight's provision, especially the 'luxury' hot chocolate ... and the hot, mulled apple juice."* But we remained mindful that for people to continue to come out in significant numbers for food and for company despite the cold was a statement in itself.
- **Resources:** Christmas brought some significant cash donations as well as an amazing response to our annual Reverse Advent Calendar appeal, with donations from diverse sources including families, businesses and schools. The appeal, as well as our Amazon Wish List enabled the wider community to feel involved and contribute so generously to making a difference. *"As yet more donations keep arriving, the word thank you just doesn't seem big enough."* We continued to benefit from the food provided by our subscription to FareShare South West, plus regular donations from local shops, food businesses, supermarkets, and individuals, as well as several schools' Harvest donations in October. Details of donors are given on our social media posts. A Household Support Fund grant from the UK Government via the Department for Work and Pensions and PCC helped 65, mostly single person households over the quarter, providing 120 items to help people cope with hardship, keep warm, and use energy efficiently. Rough Sleeper Initiative funding supported activities including our Saturday morning sessions.
- **Teams and networking:** Our volunteers have come from 13 churches, 15 businesses or workplace groups, and 8 community or philanthropic groups. They also included school, college and university students, and former service users. We continued to enjoy a very positive relationship with Plymouth Alliance members, notably Path and Shekinah, and have been pleased to host colleagues from StreetVet, Trevi, Citizens Advice, Shelter, Forgotten Feet and the NHS Mass Vaccination Team. Regular mental health support from the Changing Futures Occupational Therapist has been particularly valuable. Assistance when needed from the police and paramedics has been appreciated. Soup Run representatives attended numerous meetings of an operational and strategic nature addressing homelessness and complex needs.