

Plymouth Soup Run Report for October 2023

Trends and quotes

- October saw some mild evenings, with others marked by torrential rain. Yet even in the worst weather, large numbers of people came to the Soup Run: *"We were basically concentrating on getting everyone fed and keeping the food dry"* (on a Sunday night when >140 meals were served). *"A very, very wet night with torrential rain throughout the run, a real test of waterproof clothing!"*
- The tensions seen over recent weeks were less evident, with clients generally calm and respectful: *"A busy but peaceful night."* *"Some good conversations and most in good spirits everyone calm."*
- We were reminded again of the hardships experienced by individuals: *"A sleeping bag was given to a man in very cold accommodation."* *"One woman had walked in from Crownhill very quiet and withdrawn gave her a bus ticket to get home and a food voucher."*
- A poignant quote from a Saturday morning rough sleeping client speaks for itself: *"If you told me that you had a banging headache, I would put you in a calm room; we continue to be put in chaos."*

The month in numbers

- 3,028 meals served, slightly (0.6%) less per night than September 2023, but 17% up on October 2022.
- 27,123 meals served year-to-date, 11% up on the same period in 2022.
- An average of 29 clients supported at each Saturday morning session for rough sleepers.
- 25 referrals made to the Path Rough Sleeper Team.
- 53 sleeping bags, 5 roll mats and 16 blankets given out.

Resourcing the service

- The final total raised by the sponsored bike ride held on 22nd September reached £915, including £100 donated by Saltram Rotary Club following a talk by a Soup Run volunteer who was one of the riders.
- The Co-op Plympton Depot donated £300 from its community fund to support clients into the winter.
- As well as continuing support from FareShare South West and the Co-op, we received food donations from Woodford Methodist Church, Westcountry Seafoods and Ginsters. A kind shopper, seeing a supermarket trolley full of bread for a Sunday evening, donated £10. Other spontaneous cash donations totalling £450 are gratefully acknowledged, along with regular monthly donations from supporters.
- We benefited from various Harvest Festivals, and our Coordinator talked to a school Harvest Assembly about the work of the Soup Run, accepting a generous donation shared with Plymouth Food Bank.
- We launched our Reverse Advent Calendar Appeal as detailed in pinned posts on social media.

More than food

- We thank Plymouth City Council for Rough Sleeper Initiative funding for our Saturday morning sessions, and for a Household Support Fund award to extend the service to Sundays. These sessions provide a conducive environment for personalised support for people who are street homeless.
- The often cold and wet weather generated a high demand for warm and waterproof clothing and shoes, as well as the ongoing need for toiletries and replacements for wet sleeping bags.
- The New Beginnings Fund, jointly administered by Path and the Soup Run, enables us to creatively support clients to move forward with their lives. In October, we provided one client with a battery pack to power their health monitoring devices, and funded another's employment medical.

Client health and wellbeing

- At a Saturday morning session, a volunteer podiatrist from Forgotten Feet treated six patients.
- Two diabetes specialist nurses from University Hospitals Plymouth attended a Saturday morning session to support a patient who was rough sleeping, and nurses from the NHS Mass Vaccination team attended a Sunday Soup Kitchen and Run to give winter flu and Covid-19 vaccinations.
- We often witness the raw emotions of clients who envisage little improvement in their situation, especially those rough sleeping for a long time. Skilled inputs of our partners and volunteers experienced in housing, benefits and mental health support are invaluable at such times.

Teams, partnerships and networking.

- During October, teams included volunteers from nine churches, six philanthropic or community groups, and six businesses or workplace groups.
- A Path colleague supported Saturday morning sessions and some evening runs, and StreetVet volunteers joined Monday runs to tend clients' companion animals.
- The Soup Run Coordinator participated in weekly Rough Sleeper meetings, monthly Female Interest Group meetings, and a presentation on reducing serious violence. Volunteers attended meetings of the Rough Sleeper Strategy Implementation Group and the Next Meal Global Forum, and participated in Shelter's awareness-raising event to mark World Homeless Day on 10th October.