

Plymouth Soup Run Report for September 2023

Trends and quotes

- Thankfully, the rise in numbers seen throughout the year appeared to top out in September.
- We are often reminded that behind the numbers are individuals with their own stories: *"One of two young lads on The Hoe shared his sad story about being in care all around the country growing up and now a care leaver, happy to be in a decent emergency accommodation."*
- The month saw some of the wettest weather experienced of late: *"The heavens opened whilst out." "A wet but uneventful night; thought rain would reduce numbers a bit, but not so."*
- There was some tension at stops, but efforts are being made successfully by teams to manage behaviour and clients are generally cooperative, taking responsibility for themselves.
- Anecdotally, teams learned of attacks on rough sleepers as well as theft of damage to their possessions: *"Lots of men with black and purple eyes last night"*.

The month in numbers

- 2,947 meals served, 3% less than August 2023, but 17% up on September 2022.
- 24,095 meals served year-to-date, 10% up on the same period in 2022.
- An average of 29 clients supported at each Saturday morning session prioritising rough sleepers.
- 22 referrals made to the Path Rough Sleeper Team.
- 67 sleeping bags, 5 roll mats and 11 blankets given out.

Resourcing the service

- A sponsored bike ride held on 22nd September raised a fantastic £745. The ride was organised by a service user to show his appreciation of the help that he has received over the years, plus a supporting team of volunteers as fellow riders.
- Plympton St Maurice Church made a cash donation of £311.75.
- Our usual sources of food continued with supplies from food redistribution projects, shops and members of the public, complemented with purchased food. We appealed to supporters to remember us in their harvest plans and have started to receive donations.
- Kind members of the public and volunteers supported us with donations of clothing, paper towels and food bags, and various items from our Amazon wish list.

More than food

- As the weather is getting cooler on some nights, there was a high demand for clothing and shoes, as well as the usual need for toiletries.
- The wet weather meant that clients often needed replacements for wet sleeping bags.
- The current tranche of Household Support Funding from Plymouth City Council (PCC) and DWP came to an end in September. Over the 6 months, it enabled us to support 125 people with 232 items ranging from laundry vouchers and bus tickets to household goods for those setting up home.

Client health and wellbeing

- At a Saturday morning session, a volunteer podiatrist from Forgotten Feet/Plymouth University treated seven patients, including two with serious leg ulcers needing further medical attention.
- A diabetes specialist nurse attended a Saturday morning session to support a patient who is rough sleeping.
- We work with other agencies to support a number of clients, including joining in regular meetings regarding one client with complex mental health issues and limited options for help in the city.

Teams, partnerships and networking.

- During September, teams included volunteers from eight churches, six philanthropic or community groups, and seven business or workplace teams, plus two local councillors.
- A Path colleague supported on Saturday mornings and some evenings, and StreetVet volunteers joined Monday runs to tend clients' companion animals.
- The Soup Run Coordinator participated in weekly Rough Sleeper meetings. Volunteers attended meetings of Plymouth Food Aid Network and a meeting convened by PCC to discuss winter warm spaces. Team representatives came together in an information-sharing and planning meeting of the Plymouth Soup Run Development Group.
- Finally, we were saddened to learn of the death of John Walker, a good friend of the Plymouth Soup Run. We first knew John as a service user then as a Soup Run volunteer and Prayer Pastor. A thanksgiving service for John was held at Mutley Baptist Church on 14th September.