

Frankston Winter Shelter

June-August 2023



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1. Introduction

This was the second year for Frankston Winter Shelter, after the initial pilot project commenced in 2022.

Despite the expectation being that the process around buildings would be simpler the second time, multiple challenges were encountered around gaining appropriate permits. This continues to be a key obstacle for the program to be established in multiple church buildings, and ongoing conversations with council are continuing.

With an established connection with Community Support Frankston, Bolton Clarke and Salvo Care, the Shelter was able to work more closely with referrers in developing the most effective processes to refer guests and provide feedback loops for all involved with the guests. St Vincents also joined as a referrer as well as Launch Housing. These were all very positive partnerships and allowed for better follow up of guests. It was wonderful to be able to welcome referrers to visit the shelter as well.

We were appreciative of a growing understanding by council of the needs in our community and of ways to work together. It was particularly helpful to have stable communications with various staff at council, as well as a visit by Councillor Sue Baker who also volunteered her time for one night.

Frankston Winter Shelter is a local church initiative that was originally based on the model by Stable One. The concept is to provide crisis shelter for the homeless in the Frankston area. The winter shelter has several goals:

- To provide food and shelter for those in immediate need
- To provide a safe place for people in crisis
- To assist in creating a sense of community that will extend beyond the simple meeting of physical needs
- To mobilise the wider church community and raise awareness of the issues in their local area

Whilst we continue to aim for the key elements of the original model by Stable One (7 buildings provided by 7 churches, 7 nights of shelter per week, 10 guests per night, 13 weeks over the winter period), the Frankston model has evolved along with the needs and constraints of our local community.

The Frankston model currently offers 5 nights per week in 2 church buildings.

Guests arrive at 5.30 pm and stay until 8:30 am the next morning. A meal, activities and shelter are provided with breakfast the next morning. A bus is used to collect guests from a pick up point in the Young St carpark near Tasman meats.

Volunteers are pooled across a range of churches, which also include churches not able to supply a building. Not all people feel comfortable working with guests, but are happy to volunteer time in setting up beds, packing up, preparing meals, laundering sheets, driving the trailer to the next church etc.

This year also saw an increase in community based volunteers who brought a range of new skills from their various organisations.

2. 2023 Project summary

This was the second year of operation for Frankston Winter Shelter. With referrers familiar with the project and council providing permits in time for the beginning of winter for our Peninsula City Church venue, we were able to open from the beginning of June this year, offering 4 nights per week (Monday - Thursday).

Most of our 90 volunteers from the previous year re-engaged with Shelter for 2023, and many new volunteers signed up - a total of 144 volunteers overall.

58 guests registered to stay, with a mix of men and women included. Three guests returned from the previous year. Of the 58 that registered, 35 actually attended. This was a challenge for planning, with some nights being booked out, but not all guests attending on the night. Referrers were notified the following day when this happened so that they could follow up directly with the person.

Whilst the program is designed to have 7 church buildings, only the Peninsula City Church building was ready to be used at this time. St Anne's also made applications to gain a permit and were granted this two months into the program, allowing them to open their building at 26 Moreton St, Frankston North as a host venue from 27 July. This enabled Winter Shelter to offer a fifth night on Fridays.

With Peninsula City Church as the host venue for four nights, St Anne's as a host for one night and Gateway church as a key partner, support churches also

included St Paul's Anglican church, St Luke's Anglican church, and the Seventh-day Adventist church - providing volunteers, laundering, food preparation, donation of goods, baking, knitting, prayer, financial support and promotion of needs to their congregations.

3. Project objectives

The objectives of the project were:

1. To provide overnight shelter for people experiencing homelessness in the Frankston area for as many nights a week as possible
2. To support local agencies working with people experiencing homelessness and to fill a gap in services in Frankston
3. To offer 'more than a place to stay' - welcome, care, rest, healthy meals
4. To build relationships with guests and provide community, encouraging and supporting those who wanted to move towards a more stable living condition
5. Facilitate and support local congregations to offer a coordinated approach and to work together across denominations
6. Increase awareness in the church and the community of the issues and challenges that people face when they don't have permanent and stable living conditions

With the exception of providing 7 nights, all our objectives were met. We were only able to offer 5 nights, due to the lack of venues available, but also the number of volunteers needed to sustain night shifts.

4. Findings

Referrers:

- Frankston Community Support, Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, Salvo Care, Launch Housing and St Vincent de Paul acted as referrers for guests. Other agencies asked to be referrers as the project continued, but it was decided to limit this and streamline processes in order to ensure that guests were appropriately screened and relatively local to the area.

Agencies were provided with the details of referral agencies so that they could send their clients to them for a referral.

- Referral agencies were easy to work with and quick with communication as well as being positive and helpful with feedback
- Initial referrals were slower than expected, but within a week the shelter was at capacity.
- An online referral process was used with an online calendar for referrers to see how many beds were available each night
- Referrers found it helpful to come and visit the shelter so that they could reassure guests about where they were going
- Flyers were provided to referrers and volunteers to give to potential guests to make the program more accessible

Guests:

- 35 different guests stayed at the shelter. The maximum on any given night was 10
- 58 guests registered to stay, with 23 not attending
- Of the guests referred, 21 were female and 37 were male
- Unsuitable accommodation, increasing rental costs, lack of affordable housing, family or relationship breakdown, job loss, mental health issues, domestic violence and costs of living were the main reasons for homelessness.
- During their time at shelter, 3 people gained employment, 1 moved to Byron Bay (to seek warmer climates for homelessness), 2 entered a medical facility, 10 found accommodation, 3 were reunited with family, 2 expressed the desire to continue to live in their current conditions after shelter. To our knowledge, the other guests remain without housing.
- Guests were very positive. They reported to referring agencies that they felt welcomed, enjoyed the food and enjoyed their times at the shelter. One guest chose to leave after 6 weeks of being at the shelter, as he was no longer happy to follow the rules. One guest chose to leave after a week due to an unwillingness to abide by the rules of the shelter.
- Guests also appreciated being provided with meals to take during the day
- Some guests had cars and were able to make their own way to the shelter
- Some guests had dogs, which posed a challenge this year. The existing policy was that only one dog could be accommodated onsite. In order to

allow for more dogs, the policy was altered so that guests could keep their dog in their car.

Volunteers:

- The majority of volunteers were from the local churches, reflecting the nature of the project being church driven
- Many new volunteers came from local community groups, health services and students studying social work
- Illness was the main challenge for volunteers, with shifts having to be covered quickly through the winter months
- Night shifts continued to be difficult to cover, particularly as illness set in
- The nature of volunteers - many retired- also meant that travel took people away for large portions of time
- Some volunteers found it difficult to just remain within the confines of providing shelter and meals - wanting to be able to do more for guests. It was important to remind people that our purpose is to provide shelter for the winter and that other organisations provide other services.

Staffing:

- A committee of 6 volunteers representing Peninsula City Church, Gateway Church, St Luke's and St Anne's oversaw the ongoing coordination
- One committee member oversaw administration and daily coordination of the program as an employee of Peninsula City Church.
- One committee member oversaw all the food and meal preparation and coordination of cooking team as an employee of Gateway church
- 144 volunteers coordinated the nights, staffed shifts, cooked meals, washed laundry, drove the bus and gathered food.
- A full day of training was provided for all volunteers before the commencement of the program, and two further condensed training sessions were offered as new volunteers joined throughout the project

Challenges:

- Only being able to offer 4 nights for the majority of shelter was emotionally challenging for volunteers. Introducing the Fridays was a huge encouragement to both volunteers and guests
- This year had more challenging guests that needed to be addressed in relation to use of alcohol or drugs. They were provided with written warnings and overall did not repeat the behaviour. Two guests pushed boundaries with rules and decided to leave.
- COVID and the flu made covering some night shifts difficult due to volunteer illness
- Night shifts were increasingly difficult to cover as the winter months progressed and fatigue/illness set in. We continue to look for possible solutions to this moving forward.
- Obtaining permits continued to be a key obstacle for the program

Donations received

- Frankston City Council grant for trailer and bedding
- Peninsula City Church provided staff to coordinate and provide admin support as well as the venue for Monday - Thursday
- Gateway Church provided staff to coordinate and provide media support as well as collecting food donations
- St Anne's provided a venue for Fridays as well as collecting food and other donations
- Toiletry packs were donated by St Luke's
- Rotary donated funds as well as a defibrillator for the new venue
- RSL provided funds for sleeping bags
- Justice of the Peace donated wheelie travel packs for guests
- Seventh day adventist church raised funds for bedding and kitchen supplies for the new venue
- St Luke's raised funds through a Bunnings fund raiser, donations of snack food, baking, bedding, knitted scarves, gloves, beanies and socks
- Orange Sky laundry services meant guests could do regular washing on Thursdays
- This year, we had three nurses volunteering their time each week

- Bayside Christian College provided lockers for guests to store belongings, as well as meals made by students
- Local businesses donated food required (Aldi, Temptation pies, Somerville Eggs, Coles, Woolworths,)
- Nandos provided fortnightly meals one night a week
- Avis provided half price bus hire
- Karingal Kraft girls donated funds
- St Joachim's Primary School - crazy sock fundraiser
- Flinders Christian Community College ELC
- Donation of freezer and a fridge
- First Impressions signs provided signage for the bus as well as donating labeling for volunteer gift candles
- St Paul's Frankston provided regular soups to be distributed to guests
- A range of churches and individuals provided donations of goods, food and funds throughout the program

5. Finances

This is a general overview of finances, and amounts have been rounded for ease of reading.

Expenses directly related to the project amounted to \$ 23,700.00

This included:

- Sign up fee to Stable one of - \$500
- Shower van costs of - \$5000
- Occupancy Permit fee of - \$1200
- Avis bus - \$4600
- Food purchases - \$2000
- Food vouchers - \$250
- Defibrillator - \$1400
- Trailer purchase - \$4450
- Bedding - \$150
- First Aid supplies - \$500
- Mattresses - \$700
- Sleeping bags - \$500
- Electricity - \$800

- Phone - \$170
- Wheelie bags for guests - \$1800
- Incidentals (Petrol, gas bottles, toiletry items, laundry, ear plugs, dog mat etc)

Total costs: \$24,000

Grants received - \$11,000

Donations received- \$19,700

Total funds received - \$30,700

Grants:

Of these, one was specifically for the purchase of a trailer and bedding supplies. Another grant was to contribute to the costs of coordinating the program. A grant was also received to cover the cost of the permit.

Remaining funds of \$6,700 have been carried over for 2024.

6. Media and communications

This was kept to a minimum in terms of public attention, with a mind to protecting the privacy of guests. Gateway promoted needs for the shelter through facebook. FWS communicated regularly via email with volunteers. Peninsula City Church created access to the FWS referral process via their website. A new online platform was also introduced to support new volunteer sign ups and rostering.

7. Venues

- Peninsula City Church was able to obtain a Temporary Occupancy Permit in order to offer their building.
- St Anne's in Frankston North offered their building, and were able to obtain a permit by the end of July, allowing them to open their venue for the final 5 weeks

Other churches have expressed the desire to offer their venues, which would allow for further nights to be covered, but challenges with applying for permits continue to be an obstacle.

10. Policies and procedures

Consistency of implementation of policies and procedures was an important part of ensuring the safety of both guests and volunteers. At times this was challenging due to people's good intentions and desire to help the guests. It was at times difficult to find a balance between compassion and regulations.

Stable One has recommended that 'bending the rules' sends mixed messages to guests and, in light of this, it is important to hold to the stated policies and procedures. Some more training in the lead up to 2024 shelter will support volunteers in this.

11. Risk and Safety

Risk management was undertaken before commencement of the project as part of the application to Council as well as for the safety of guests and volunteers. A risk Management plan was in place. A nightly checklist was utilised to ensure that all safety measures were in place, including ratios.

A referral matrix was developed for the referral agencies as a means of flagging any unsuitable guests before the referral process began. No major incidents occurred with guests throughout the program. Only one guest showed some behavioural problems that became difficult for volunteers, and this guest was spoken to and provided with a warning by the coordinator. The guest chose to not return.

12. Summary of findings and key recommendations:

1. Steering committee continued to be an effective way of managing this program
2. Relationships built between volunteers from a range of churches and community groups was one of the great strengths and positive outcomes

3. Encourage wider church ownership in terms of buildings and people taking on coordination roles
4. Continue to work with the Council to develop a more streamlined approach for churches wanting to offer their buildings
5. Investigate alternative shower solutions rather than the shower bus
6. Look into ways to connect with local universities and Tafes seeking to place students for community service placements
7. Having a bus to transport guests is essential
8. Continue to have nurses as part of the roster
9. Investigate ways to streamline and simplify rostering process

13. Reflections

The FWS ended the program with a dinner for all volunteers which allowed many of the volunteers who had worked in the same shifts but across different nights to finally meet and compare stories. A representative from Community Support Frankston was also able to come and share feedback from guests and staff with the volunteers, which was encouraging for volunteers to hear. Many volunteers expressed the desire to continue in 2024.

The most difficult part for all was the end of the program. Knowing that, for many guests, the challenges would continue was extremely difficult. Sleeping bags were provided, along with gift vouchers, food and other supplies to all guests in the final week. Exhaustion levels were high amongst volunteers in the last week.

One of the greatest challenges was dealing with COVID and various illnesses, which impacted the ability to cover night shifts. These shifts were always covered, showing the incredible strength of community and the willingness of volunteers to step in. Having a large demographic of senior volunteers also meant that there were many volunteers traveling during portions of the project - further adding to pressures on filling shifts.

The guests were wonderful people, with whom all our volunteers connected deeply. They shared their stories and enjoyed being a part of community. Card games helped people to connect in practical ways, and drawing was also a favourite.

One guest sent a letter to be included in this report - this is attached at the back of the report.

14. Conclusion

The FWS provided an avenue for people to connect and make a tangible difference in the lives of those experiencing homelessness. It demonstrated the willingness of the community to work together to find solutions and to contribute to the greater good. Bringing together churches and community groups enables people to express their love for others in a way that allows community to be strengthened and lives to be impacted.

The Winter Shelter was a place that provided rest and refuge and allowed people to show the love of Christ in a practical way.

Guests were grateful for the care they were shown, which was reflected in a range of cards and well wishes given to volunteers. To see some guests reconnecting to family, finding employment and others finding stable accommodation was extremely encouraging.

We look forward to 2024 and an ongoing partnership between the churches and the incredible agencies that support people in crisis every day.

Letter from guest (name removed for privacy)

To the homeless shelter

I have been staying at the homeless shelter over the winter months in Frankston South. This is an amazing organisation. The staff here have been fantastic and thankfully I am now on the road to recovery by having amazing meals that helped my mental state. Being able to speak with the different volunteers, opening up, telling my story and knowing that the volunteers do care for us as a group of volunteers that are giving up their time to help others less fortunate than themselves. I have had times that having staff to talk with has helped me a lot to get through my

different issues just having a decent meal has improved my mental health a nice shower and breakfast each morning made me feel like a human again that most people think nothing of i am so thankful being able to attend each night i would walk in and feel like i was loved and wanted And made very welcome the volunter staff can not do enought to help people out and every day it has made me a stronger person i hope this keeps going in the future so the staff can continue to help other people like myself who dont ask for a hand out but a hand up to get back on top of there issues some of the advice that i have been given has been exellent just having a place to be a roof over our heads and a decent meal every night and breakfast and not being out in the cold every night makes so much difference in peoples lives and have made some very good freinds threw all the time i have been coming here.