

Frankston Winter Shelter

*A local church based initiative providing crisis accommodation
over the winter months*

June-August 2024



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1. Project Summary

“I liked having a bed and dinner every night, but what made a real difference to me was that you all know my name. You remember what I’ve told you, you ask me how I am and you remember the answer. The people here care - for real, they care - they’re not putting it on. I know that it’s ok to ask for help now and that people care about me.”

(2024 guest who stayed 3 weeks)

This was the third year for Frankston Winter Shelter, and most people felt settled in the program this year. With most of the volunteers being return volunteers, we were able to take on some Monash students for placements, which provided extra volunteers as well as supporting Monash to help students understand the needs in the community. It was extremely encouraging to also have a previous guest return to be a volunteer this year, now being well established with housing and work - his personal experience, empathy and willingness to share was extremely beneficial to both volunteers and guests.

The provision of a liaison person with Council meant that there was a positive connection allowing training to be established for volunteers in Conflict Management and Mental Health - this was an appreciated resource. Megan Peddle understood the needs of shelter and was able to provide ongoing encouragement and a visit to the shelter.

The relationships with Community Support Frankston, Bolton Clarke, Salvo Care, St Vincent de Paul and Launch Housing continued to be positive, with special thanks to the team at Community Support who were very proactive in providing us with information and feedback to support guests. It was also wonderful to have staff attend the shelter from the Melbourne City Mission / Health Care Connections /Detour / Rough Sleeper Program. This provided valuable, ‘on the ground’ support for both volunteers and guests who were able to spend time in a safe environment working with the Health Care Connections staff.

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 over winter for people experiencing homelessness 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

The Frankston model has evolved along with the needs and constraints of our local community and currently offers five nights per week in two church buildings.

Guests arrive at 5.30 pm and stay until 8:30 am the next morning. A warm meal, shower, activities and bed 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. Guests are also provided with essential clothing items, toiletries, reading material and a welcoming community environment.

Volunteers are pooled across a range of churches and community groups, which also includes churches not able to supply a building.

This year saw 160 volunteers come together to operate the shelter. Many of these were returning volunteers; approximately 30 volunteers were not able to return this year due to travel and health, but these were covered by new volunteers starting - leaving us with 16 more volunteers than the previous year.

44 guests registered to stay, with a mix of men and women included. Three guests returned from previous years. Of the 44 that registered, 30 actually attended: 20 were male and 10 were female. Non attendance continued to be a challenge for planning, with some nights being booked out, but not all guests attending on the night, meaning some missed out on a bed. However, the incidence of guests not presenting was much lower than last year, with many nights being booked out. The average actual attendance per night was 8 guests. The maximum that can be accommodated per night is 10.

With Peninsula City Church and St Anne's being host venues and Gateway as a key partner, churches providing volunteers included St Paul's Anglican church, St Luke's Anglican church, and the Seventh-day Adventist church - providing volunteers, laundering, food collection and preparation, donation of goods, baking, knitting, prayer, financial support and promotion of needs to their congregations. Individuals from various other churches and community groups also volunteered.

2. 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 through the winter months
2. To support local agencies working with people experiencing homelessness and to fill a gap in crisis accommodation 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

As well as working towards these goals, we were approached by other organisations seeking support to work towards similar goals or raise awareness. This included communities outside of the Frankston area wanting to establish similar programs and schools looking for ways of educating students on the issue of homelessness.

3. Partnerships

Health Care Connections:

Staff from Melbourne City Mission / Health Care Connections / Detour / Rough Sleeper Program attended Wednesday evenings for the last month and were an excellent resource for guests - supporting them in accessing medical support and working with referral agencies to access housing. Their knowledge, expertise and empathy towards guests provided a welcome support for volunteers as well and we hope this can continue in 2025.

Referral agencies:

- Frankston Community Support, Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, Salvo Care, Launch Housing, Neami and St Vincent de Paul acted as referrers for guests.
- The new booking system in 2024 ensured that referral agencies were able to see beds available for the night and receive instant confirmation - making this process far easier than in previous years
- Referral agencies were extremely helpful in providing information about guests and checking in to see how they were doing as well as updating us when guests had accommodation to go to
- Flyers were provided to referrers and volunteers to give to potential guests to make the program more accessible

4. Project Outcomes:

- 30 different guests stayed at the shelter. The maximum on any given night was 10
- 44 guests registered to stay, with 14 not attending
- Of the guests referred, 17 were female and 27 were male
- 2 guests were returning guests from 2023 and 1 from 2022.
- 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 cited by guests as the main reasons for homelessness.
- During their time at shelter, 2 people gained employment, 1 began 'work for the dole,' 1 moved to Queensland to reunite with family, 1 entered a medical institution, 10 are known to have found accommodation, 1 expressed the desire to continue to live in their current conditions after shelter and 1 expressed the desire to volunteer next year. 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. Several made speeches on their final nights thanking volunteers. Guests enjoyed being able to follow the Olympics this year, making for some relaxed and engaging evenings.
- Some guests had cars and were able to make their own way to the shelter
- Some guests had dogs, which posed too many challenges this year and will no longer be an option next year.

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
- A team of Occupational Therapy Monash students completed 45 hours of placement hours each through shifts at the shelter
- Illness was the main challenge for volunteers, with shifts having to be covered quickly through the winter months
- Night shifts continued to be the most 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

Staffing:

Frankson Winter Shelter does not employ any staff and relies on a combination of volunteer hours and local churches donating work hours by their ministry teams

- A committee of 7 volunteers representing Peninsula City Church, Gateway Church, St Luke Anglican Church and St Anne Catholic Church oversaw the ongoing coordination of the program
- One committee member who is also an employee of Peninsula City Church oversaw administration, rostering, liaising with agencies and coordination of the program
- One committee member who is also an employee of Gateway church oversaw all the food, meal preparation, coordination of cooking teams and supported venue coordination
- Two new committee members coordinated the St Anne's venue evenings for the first time this year
- 160 volunteers staffed set up, cooking, driving, evening, night and morning shifts, washed laundry, and gathered food donations
- A day and multiple evenings of training was provided for all volunteers before the commencement of the program
- Multiple tailored training sessions in Conflict Management and Mental Health were provided by Council

Challenges:

- One of the greatest challenges was dealing with various illnesses, which mostly impacted night shifts. These shifts were always covered at little notice, showing the incredible strength of community and the willingness of volunteers to step in and do extra shifts. Having a large demographic of senior volunteers as well as overseas students also meant that there were many volunteers traveling during portions of the project - further adding to pressures on filling shifts.
- 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.

5. 'In kind' donations received

A range of churches and individuals provided donations of goods, food and funds throughout the program - too many to be listed here, but every one gratefully received and appreciated.

- Peninsula City Church supported staff to coordinate the project and provide admin and other support for venues from Monday - Sunday
- Gateway Church supported staff to coordinate as well as collect food donations throughout the week from Monday - Sunday
- St Anne's provided a venue for Thursdays and Fridays as well as collecting food and other donations
- RSL provided funds for sleeping bags and other resources
- Seventh day adventist church provided breakfast foods and snack items
- Autumn Aged care provided knitted blankets
- Sew nSews provided a starter pack of materials for a guest moving into accommodation
- Yamala Open Mic night provided breakfast and snack food items
- St Luke's raised funds, donations of snack food, baking, bedding, knitted scarves, gloves, beanies, socks and toiletry packs
- Orange Sky laundry services meant guests could do regular washing on Thursdays
- Bayside Christian College provided lockers for guests to store belongings, as well as meals made by students and students to help pack up beds
- 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
- St Joachim's Primary School - fundraiser
- Frankston Homeless Support Group - fundraiser
- Flinders Christian Community College ELC provided breakfast foods
- St Paul's Frankston provided weekly soups and laundering of bedding
- Frankston Mental Health and Wellbeing Local provided our guests with seventeen wheelie travel bags, sleeping bags, tents and mattresses.
- Individuals sponsored the purchase of new beds, mattresses, and wheelie bags, donated clothing items and food items

6. Venues

- Peninsula City Church provided three nights per week (Mon-Wed)
- St Anne's offered provided two nights per week (Thurs - Fri)

7. Finances

This is a general indication of finances only and is not a financial report - amounts have been rounded for ease of reading. Figures are provided from January 2024.

Expenses directly related to the project amounted to approximately \$18,200. This does not include any staffing costs.

Expenses included:

- Sign up fee to Stable one of - \$500
- Access Consultant fee - \$550
- Avis bus - \$4600
- Fuel - \$400
- Food purchases - \$4200
- Food vouchers for guests - \$300
- Beds for second venue- \$3000
- Bedding - \$550
- Utilities - \$1500
- Phone - \$400
- Shower hire - \$1200
- Incidentals (toiletry items, clothing, laundry, ear plugs, padlocks, maintenance etc) - \$1000

Total costs: \$18200

Donations received- \$21 530

Donations were again received mostly from private individuals.

Grants:

Two grants were received from Frankston City Council by the two churches providing venues to support the Shelter. These were paid specifically to those venues and not to Shelter, and provide for building works/equipment including a new stove, oven and dishwasher at the St Anne's venue and an all access shower and toilet to be built at Peninsula City Church for the 2025 shelter.

The Frankston City Council also provided training for volunteers in Conflict management and Mental health as well as waiving permit application fees and reimbursing the fee for the access consultant.

Remaining funds will be carried over for 2025.

8. Conclusion

The need for crisis accommodation in Frankston continues to be a pressing issue. As this report was being written, a call came in asking if someone could be sent to the shelter. Explaining that this is only a winter shelter is difficult at best and yet this is the only option currently. The need for a more permanent solution remains in order to protect the most vulnerable in our community.

The organisations across Frankston that work throughout the year with vulnerable people do an incredible job and play a significant role in providing care and support. For many of our guests, these organisations are their lifeline. The lack of crisis accommodation available for referral on an ongoing basis creates added strain for these essential support organisations.

As with previous years, coming to the end of the program is bittersweet for volunteers who, whilst experiencing high levels of exhaustion are well aware that there is no alternative for the people they have welcomed in and who continue to experience homelessness. However, the only way for this program to be sustainable in terms of volunteer recruitment is to commit to the winter months and be able to repeat the program the following year.

The guests we have met this year are wonderful people, with whom all our volunteers connected willingly. They are intelligent people with dreams and hopes and a deep desire to connect and to belong. They showed care and compassion towards volunteers and each other. They expressed gratitude and a desire to give back. These people are valuable and worthy of our attention - they are worthy of people at all levels of authority committing to a concerted effort to do better as a community in caring for our vulnerable.

We look forward to 2025 and an ongoing partnership between the churches and the incredible agencies that support people in crisis every day.