Welcome

I am really pleased to welcome you to our latest newsletter and enjoy reading about all the brilliant work taking place here. The nature of Wintercomfort is very busy, and the newsletter allows me a window of opportunity to reflect on the impact our work has on the lives of so many people.

Our work continues all year round – supporting homeless people and those who are vulnerably housed to get their lives back on track. Here at Wintercomfort we continue to see a steady number of individuals rough sleeping, something that I personally find difficult to accept in a city such as Cambridge.

Remember the Beast from the East that battered Britain just a few weeks ago? The arctic blast motivated students from the University of Cambridge RAG fundraising team to raise an amazing £6,593 for us in just one weekend. So many other generous hearted people have helped us too, for which we are all very grateful. We simply could not continue the work we do without your support. I thank you all – and please do continue as the need for our services will continue.

Part of our success is due to the excellent relationship we have with our partners and we demonstrate that with our report from the latest Service Users’ Forum and the work of Change, Grow, Live. Without doubt our dedicated and highly professional staff are our greatest asset. When people walk through our front door at Overstream House they can always be assured of a warm welcome, shown courtesy and treated with respect. We have written a short article about our reception team Lesley-Ann and Kevin. You can read their story - and discover which sport for GB Lesley-Ann excels in!

It’s heartwarming to read on the back page about Sean who is featured in our staff profile. He was once homeless himself and now works as a project worker with us.

I am proud that 45% of our staff team have lived experience of homelessness and believe this greatly enhances the support and services we offer. Over the course of the next year we will be bringing more articles about the tangible difference our work makes. To get you started we feature Nick and Mark’s personal stories.

As I write this I imagine many people are thinking ahead to their summer holidays, while a homeless person might be thinking about where their next meal is coming from. Please remember that our work is also vital throughout the summer months, not just the winter; we are here every day for homeless people.

I look forward to meeting you at our Open Day on Wednesday, 13 June, from 1-3pm. There is no need to book, just come along and find out more about our work here at Overstream House.

Sarah Halls
Director of Wintercomfort

Join us for a tastebud sensation
7.30pm, Friday, 18 May, Overstream House

We are thrilled to have two amazing chefs and food writers host a fundraising seasonal spring supper at Overstream House.

Rosie Sykes and Rachel Roddy, who both write for the Guardian, will cook up a rare treat at Overstream House as part of the Eat Cambridge food festival. It is a rare chance to join them for a three course meal, plus amuse bouche, and BYO wine.

Rosie said: “I think Wintercomfort is such an amazing resource for the homeless people of Cambridge. Coming into the building fills you with a feeling of warmth and generosity of spirit. I am very excited to be able to support its work and very pleased that we will be working with some of the people who come to Wintercomfort who will be helping us in the kitchen and with serving the food.”

Tickets cost £35
(plus £2.27 booking fee)
www.eat-cambridge.co.uk
Nick’s Story

“If Wintercomfort wasn’t here I don’t know what I would do. A lot of cities don’t have somewhere like Wintercomfort.”

Those are the words of Nick Pritchard who has a history of rough sleeping going back 20 years after being asked to leave a flat he shared in London.

“I didn’t know it would lead to this, to an uncertain future over so many years of living in hostels, shelters, sofa surfing and sleeping in the street,” said Nick.

Nick has been in Cambridge for 13 months and found temporary work shelf filling at a supermarket and as a warehouseman. But as he is sleeping on the streets, he says it is difficult to keep down a job without a proper roof over his head. He has also worked as a delivery driver for our social enterprise Food4Food and holds an LGV driving license.

“I have found that Cambridge is such a lovely city and people are kind to homeless people. I would like to stay here and find a job as a driver,” says Nick.

“Today I chatted with Emma, the volunteer coordinator at Wintercomfort. We did the crossword and talked about jobs and voluntary positions. I feel respected here and am treated very well. The staff are keen and supportive towards people that use their services.”

Nick is an avid photographer and joins in Wintercomfort’s photography classes, taking photos on trips.

“We go out on nature trips and they taught me about taking portraits. I come to Wintercomfort because of the fantastic support I get here from the staff,” added Nick.

“My philosophy for life is that everything has a reason or purpose, try not to worry about things.”

Nick is being supported in his search for accommodation by his key worker at Wintercomfort, alongside support from Jon Canesa, Chaplain to the homeless working with Wintercomfort.

Alison Nolan, Nick’s key worker, added: “We have provided Nick with welfare advice and support to find work, as well as two meals a day, showers and a place of security off the streets.

“Nick gives a lot back too and offers a great deal of advice during photography lessons. In fact, we bought cameras following his advice and he has taught us all how to use them effectively.”

Mark’s Story

Mark came to Wintercomfort in 2011 after being released from prison and had nowhere to live. He was also suffering from schizoid personality and referred to us by Street Outreach based at the Access Surgery in Newmarket Road (now known as Change, Grow, Live)*

Mark’s project worker at Wintercomfort was able to support him with welfare and housing advice, supporting him to bid on social housing accommodation. He finally secured a small flat, after living in different hostels and shelters in Cambridge.

Towards the end of 2015 when Mark when was feeling at a low ebb he went to Monkeyland, a primate sanctuary in South Africa as a volunteer photographer to help him deal with this. Whilst there he met Anita, a tour guide, who he married in Cambridge in September 2017.

Mark now wants to take his life forward and become a professional wildlife photographer. Wintercomfort helped Mark apply for a grant from Cambridge City Council’s Street Aid, which awards donated funds to homeless people to enable them to do something positive with their lives. Mark was awarded £750 to buy a laptop - and discovered he had an astonishing 33,864 photos which he saved on memory cards.

“I need someone who can give me honest feedback. People hear my story and are kind when they see my work. But I would value feedback on the artistic side of what I am doing, the composition and lighting. This will help me decide which photos to choose for framing and taking forward commercially,” he said.

Although Mark is no longer homeless, he appreciates that he is still supported by Wintercomfort.

This lovely metaphor from Mark sums up how he feels about starting out on his new photographic venture, with Wintercomfort holding the towel: “It’s kind of scary when you are going to dip your toe in the water and you know it’s going to be really cold. It’s much easier doing that if you know someone is standing behind you with a towel, ready just in case you turn back and say “no, no, no,” and come running back in and they put a towel around you.”

Mark’s project worker, Fran Bailey, said it was wonderful to see how Mark had progressed and was feeling positive about his future. “It is lovely when you see someone moving on with their life. As Mark said, homelessness, and the other difficulties that individuals face, can be cyclical and even when you find a home, your problems don’t all magically disappear,” she said.

“At Wintercomfort we appreciate and understand that people need ongoing support and advice and we try and do our best to help them at all stages. Mark has been really proactive and determined and he has found a passion in photography which he can develop and progress in the future. His photos are very good and I wish him every success in the future.”

If you are able to support Mark and advise him about his photography and taking this forward as a business, please contact us at info@wintercomfort.org.uk and we’ll put you in contact.

“You can read our report on Change, Grow, Live on p4

Wintercomfort Open Day - Wednesday, 13 June, 1-3 pm

We are opening our doors at Overstream House on Wednesday, 13 June to host an Open Day for our friends and supporters, and those who would like to learn more about what we do. Please do let others know who might be interested. There is no need to book, just turn up on the day. We look forward to seeing you!

Crisis Charity Calls For More Social Housing

The latest Homeless Monitor: England 2018 highlights the need for more affordable homes as rising numbers of people end up trapped in B&Bs and temporary accommodation.

The study, funded by Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, reports that the majority of local councils in England are struggling to find any stable housing for homeless people in their area, leaving them forced to place more and more people in unstable temporary accommodation.

As housing supply dwindles and rents outstrip wages and benefits, 70% of local authorities surveyed for the report said they had difficulties finding social housing for homeless people last year, while a striking 89% reported difficulties in finding private rented accommodation.

The report warns that 78,000 homeless households in England are in temporary accommodation and, if current trends continue, more than 100,000 such households will be trapped in temporary accommodation by 2020.

Crisis and JRF say more must be done to solve the problem – in particular that the government must build more social housing and ensure that homeless people can access it.

Jon Sparkes, chief executive of Crisis, said: “It’s truly terrible that, across England, councils are finding it increasingly difficult to find homeless people somewhere to live. This means ever more people are ending up trapped in B&Bs and hostels, with no stability and often in cramped conditions.

“Today’s report makes it clear that, unless we take action as a society, this problem will only keep getting worse. Homelessness is not inevitable and our research has shown how it can become a thing of the past.”

“We warmly welcome the government’s pledges to tackle rough sleeping and the new Homelessness Reduction Act, but the government must provide more social housing that all homeless people can access if this push is going to succeed.”

To read more about the report published in April see https://bit.ly/2HpJnC

www.wintercomfort.org.uk | 01223 518140 | info@wintercomfort.org.uk | Keep in touch wintercomfort.org.uk/donate

wintercomfort for the homeless
Change, Grow, Live.

Working Collaboratively with Wintercomfort

Great partnerships achieve the best results, and we are delighted of our successful partnership with Change, Grow, Live (CGL). Their Street and Mental Health Outreach Service works with rough sleepers in Cambridge.

Team leader Vicky Knighton describes their work:

1. When was Change, Grow, Live formed and what do they do? How is it funded?

Change, Grow, Live is a social care charity that works with individuals who want to change their lives for the better and achieve positive and life-affirming goals. It was formed in 1977 under the name SARO. The charity rebranded in 2012 as Crime Reduction Initiatives and again in 2016 under the new name Change, Grow, Live (CGL). CGL now has over 160 services across the country, providing substance misuse services, young people’s services and health and wellbeing initiatives, among others. CGL is funded primarily through contracting to provide services to a range of local authorities and other commissioning teams.

2. How does CGL work with Wintercomfort?

Cambridge Street and Mental Health Outreach Team (CSMHOT) is a street and community based outreach service that identifies and works with people over the age of 18 in the city of Cambridge who are either rough sleepers or engaged in a street based lifestyle. We provide advice and access to accommodation, primary health care, substance misuse services and welfare benefits. We have a dedicated project worker and a homeless prevention officer who works with people to prevent homeless discharge from the psychiatric hospital.

We work with a number of other organisations in the city, including Wintercomfort and Jimmy’s Cambridge to offer signposting and support to everyone who needs it. We host a number of outreach surgeries at Wintercomfort each week where we assess rough sleepers or vulnerably housed people to identify support needs. We have and will continue to work collaboratively on many cases where individuals will access their service for support regularly.

3. What successes have you had with helping homeless people get their lives back on track?

In the last quarter of 2017 we identified 70 individuals who were rough sleeping, and we supported 38% of them to leave the streets and transition into an array of different accommodation solutions. Our service works hard to help as many people throughout the year as possible, in partnership with other organisations in Cambridge.

4. What is your vision for the future?

I’m very hopeful for the long-term future. Cambridge City commissioners are planning long term housing solutions for people who have experienced homelessness. For now, we continue to work with commissioners and partner agencies to use the resources we have in inspired and new ways to best suit the needs of the homeless community, with initiatives like the Flexible Beds at Jimmy’s. We work closely with Riversides Willow Walk to seek positive moves for the most stuck rough sleepers. We are always striving to make sure the pathway works as best it can to try and prevent eviction, by facilitating and coordinating a Multi-Agency Housing and Resettlement Housing Group.

5. Do you have an example of how you helped a rough sleeper?

Through a joint approach with Wintercomfort we sought funding and provided daily support for an extremely complex entrenched rough sleeper with serious mental health issues. This allowed him to access a temporary bed in the night shelter, but only with the bespoke care package Wintercomfort and CGL jointly delivered. Our client is now doing very well in a high sought after leading mental health rehab centre.

Without this innovative approach and support from Wintercomfort, we could have had a very different outcome with this client.

Welcome to Wintercomfort, from Lesley-Ann and Kevin

Our service users and visitors can always be assured of a warm welcome by our two experienced reception staff, Lesley-Ann Parker and Kevin Appleby.

Lesley-Ann joined us eight years ago and is dedicated to supporting homeless people.

“We provide a service where our clients are always striving to make sure the pathway works as best it can to try and prevent eviction, by facilitating and coordinating a Multi-Agency Housing and Resettlement Housing Group.”

Our partner agencies on this occasion were: Jo Brand and Amanda Brudenell (Cambridge Street Vets); Christine Leonard and Tim Tyndall (Wintercomfort Trustees); Dom Thorne (Electoral Roll Services); Vicky Knighton (Cambridge Street & Mental Health Outreach Team); Sall Dyer (Cambridge Sustainable Food,) as well as staff from Wintercomfort. Julie reported on the latest survey which showed what service users like most about Wintercomfort. They said:

- Staff help with difficulties between service users
- Help with benefits and electricity
- Access to the allotment which helps socially
- Friendly people
- Volunteering opportunities
- Access to showers and toilets
- Good food
- Access to other services
- Help with employment
- “Wintercomfort changed me”

“Relaxed, easy going, no pressure

The Service Users’ Forum will meet again on the following dates in 2018. Please email Julie if you would like to attend, juliepotter@wintercomfort.org.uk

The Service Users’ Forum
Wednesday, 13 June
Wednesday, 12 September
Wednesday, 12 December

For more information about the Access Surgery see their website: http://www.mhcambridgeaccess.co.uk/
Fundraising update

We mark another edition of Overstream News and as normal there are way too many people and businesses to thank for their support. Here are a few people and businesses we would like to mention:

10 year old Eddie Lord raised a brilliant £325 completing a fantastic 109 keepie uppies with his football. Eddie is another great example of our younger supporters getting behind the issue of homelessness. Good job Eddie!

A huge shout out to the team from the Parker’s Tavern and hugely well known chefs Tristan Welch and Alex Rushmere who organised the Rubbish Cooks supper events raising an amazing £750 to support Wintercomfort.

We were very sad to hear that we lost one of our long term supporters Lui Di Martino after he passed away in February. Lui was a local musician and only last year was part of the Speak Out Festival team which raised lots of money for Wintercomfort. Lui’s family and friends set up a fund to support our welfare service which raised over £2,000. We are most grateful to Lui’s family and friends, and we will hold good memories of Lui’s support for our work.

We couldn’t not include a mention again The Cambridge RAG appeal, the university students responded very generously to the Beast from the East by launching an emergency appeal and raising over £6,593. Thanks to all involved.

Cambridge Building Society’s team have been fundraising for us since January and we look forward to bringing you a big total on this in the next edition of Overstream News.

Overstream Clean Impact Report Launch 17th May

We are very much looking forward to the launch this month of our first impact report into the work of our social enterprise, Overstream Clean.

It is taking place on Thursday 17th May 2:30pm, at Overstream House, and we very much hope you can join us.

Rachel Newell, Social Enterprise Manager, said she was delighted with the positive outcomes reported by Cambridge University student Ross Duncan following his internship at Wintercomfort. “Overstream Clean is an excellent example of the unique role social enterprises have to play in moving individuals closer to employment through boosting their skills, confidence and self esteem, while operating with a sustainable business,” said Rachel.

“We are exceptionally pleased with all that Overstream Clean has achieved in a relatively short space of time since we started trading in 2014 “We are most grateful to Ross Duncan from The Student Hub internship scheme. Ross has produced an excellent Impact Report and has captured the spirit of the unique role Overstream Clean has in tackling homelessness and increasing the life chances of individuals with experience of homelessness.”

See page 7 for this months Overstream Clean Special Offer.

Have you tried our pop up cafe?

Every month our fabulous Food4Food social enterprise dishes up delicious lunches made with the freshest locally sourced ingredients.

It is very popular with our regular customers, and we would like to welcome more people to join us; we do not want it to be Cambridge’s best kept secret. The cafe is held on the third Tuesday of every month at St Andrew’s Church Hall, Chesterton.

Each month the menu has a theme which is based on the season or marks a special commemorative day. Three courses are on offer, including a vegetarian option, with main courses costing as little as £7.

You don’t have to just take our word, this is what our satisfied diners say about the cafe:

David Hindmarsh “The food is delicious. We love coming here. It is a very relaxed atmosphere. The people who serve you are very nice. The food is very good and beautifully prepared and there is a lovely atmosphere.”

Rev Nick Moir, vicar of St Andrew’s Church “It is great to have this café within our community. We love the food and the company and the wider community of Wintercomfort.”

David Stubbings “I have always found the quality of food is good and it is good value compared to places in town. It also makes a nice social gathering before our monthly local history meeting.”

The Food4Food team includes former homeless people who have been trained in catering by Wintercomfort to enable them to move forward with their lives equipped with new skills.

Rachel Newell, Social Enterprise Manager at Wintercomfort said: “We do not want our pop-up café to be Cambridge’s best kept secret. All our customers tell us they really enjoy our food and we would like more to come and see for themselves. At the same time people will be supporting a homeless charity and giving opportunities for people to get back into work.”

“We are committed to using fresh ingredients, local where possible, which our customers tell us they enjoy and this commitment led to us gaining a Silver Award from Cambridge Sustainable Food.”

Our forthcoming lunch dates

Tues. 19 June, Midsummer lunch
Tues. 17 July, American diner

Food4Food catering service offering the finest buffet lunches, delegate packs, hot buffets for Cambridge events and functions.

Thinking of having a spring clean?

Our highly trained team are hugely dedicated. All our team have lived their experience of homelessness.

The service is also environmentally clean, with operatives getting around the city on bicycles.

A recent Impact Report into Overstream Clean found that clients praised the work carried out by our team, with 87.5% saying they would recommend it. The in-depth study will be officially launched at Overstream House on 17 May. If you would like to attend contact Rachel Newell at rachelnewell@wintercomfort.org.uk

Our operatives provide the following services:

- Office cleaning
- Window cleaning
- Pre/post tenancy cleans
- Gardening
- Rubbish removal

Do look out for our latest special offer too on the website. This month we are offering a free window clean with every deep cleaning contract.

For a free consultation contact 01223 272957 email info@overstreamclean.co.uk website http://www.overstreamclean.co.uk/index.php
Karen’s advice to volunteers

– be kind, non-judgemental, compassionate and have a sense of humour!

Karen is the latest volunteer under our spotlight. She gives at least two days a week supporting Wintercomfort, having joined us four years ago. She describes how she was “immediately drawn” to us: “The hours I do vary from week to week. On Mondays I volunteer on the floor, helping with laundry, tidying the clothes store and restocking the toiletries cupboard when necessary.

“I help with service users when they request items of clothing and toiletries. I lend a hand to service users with filling out forms, sending emails, making phone calls or just chatting to them. I often give out the lunch (usually sandwiches or soup on a Monday). When the centre closes for the day, I help tidy up.

“On Tuesdays I help in the office with admin, filing, entering data on to the computer, or anything else that is needed. I also support staff on some of the social evenings which are varied and a great deal of fun.

“What made me choose Wintercomfort? When my children had gone off to university I decided I wanted to do some volunteering. I rang Wintercomfort and came along to meet Emma, the volunteer coordinator. I was immediately drawn to Wintercomfort and all the valuable and much needed work that they do. I felt then, and feel even stronger now, four years on, that they are an amazing charity and a vital service for Cambridge’s most vulnerable people. It is a wonderful and welcoming centre. I love being a small part of the team.

“Before I had my children, I worked in Exports, so those skills are not necessarily transferable to volunteering at Wintercomfort. But I suppose, being reasonably organised and level-headed has come in handy on numerous occasions.

“I thoroughly enjoy my two days Wintercomfort and never know what to expect when I walk through the door. No two days are ever the same. Some days are a lot of fun and there is a lot of banter. Then some days can be just the opposite and more challenging.

“What advice would I give others who want to volunteer here? To be kind, non-judgemental, compassionate, but also to have a sense of humour, that is very important.”

If you would like to volunteer with Wintercomfort please check our website for opportunities

volunteers@wintercomfort.org.uk
to register your interest

Email: volunteers@wintercomfort.org.uk