



Safe Shelter 2014 - Report

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Safe Shelter Management Committee
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in partnership with
St Columba's Uniting Church, Canberra



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1.0 Safe Shelter Pilot 2013 – Project Deliverables

The Safe Shelter Pilot 2013 ran for one night per week on a Tuesday night from 15 May to 26 September 2013. In December 2013, a report was prepared by the safe Shelter Management Committee and distributed in a variety of formats to stakeholders. A copy of this comprehensive report is permanently available on open access through the Uniting Church, Canberra Region, Presbytery website:

<http://canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au>

The *Safe Shelter Pilot Project Review Report* made the following recommendations:

- Expansion of the Safe Shelter service to more than one night of the week, during the Winter months at St Columba's Uniting Church, Braddon
Rationale: Encouragement given by referring agencies and their suggestion that further nights at one venue would suit the guests better than single nights across a variety of venues. This feedback was also received from the congregation of St Columba's who are major stakeholders in this project
- Commitment by the Safe Shelter Management Committee to the original ethos of the pilot project and seek expansion of the service to other venues as a strategy to offer Safe Shelter services seven nights per week

1.2 In February 2014, St Columba's Church Council agreed to the use of Lewis Hall for three nights per week throughout the Winter of 2014. Lewis Hall would continue to be hired by organisations such as a body corporate and a community choir but Lewis Hall would be reserved for Safe Shelter on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 7.00pm. to 7.00am. the next day.

1.3 Throughout Autumn 2014, members of the Safe Shelter Management committee met with media and spoke to church congregations requesting assistance with the program and enquiring about the availability of alternative locations. In early March 2014, inner-city churches were contacted by letter requesting assistance with the delivery of Safe Shelter in 2014, including the provision of alternative accommodation .

1.4 In March 2014 it became evident that no other venues would be available. The decision was made by the Safe Shelter Management Committee to deliver Safe Shelter from Lewis Hall for three nights per week commencing on Tuesday 29 April 2014 and ending on Thursday 2 October 2014. The Committee, however, undertook to continue its quest for alternative/additional accommodation.

2.0 Planning and Implementation: Safe Shelter 2014

The extent to which the outcomes of the 2013 pilot informed the planning and implementation of Safe Shelter 2014 cannot be stressed enough. Feedback from stakeholders, the invaluable input from the volunteers and of course comment from the guests themselves helped to fine tune the Guidelines with which the Safe Shelter procedures comply. On 3 April 2014 the Safe Shelter Management Committee hosted a light lunch for referring agencies who welcomed the continuation of the Safe Shelter service into 2014 and the increase in availability from one night to three nights a week. The agencies, which included representatives from ACT Shelter and the Australian Federal Police, confirmed the value of an emergency shelter as a temporary place of refuge for men and as a much needed resource.

2.1 Management

The same governance structure was carried into 2014 with the Safe Shelter Management Committee reporting to Saint Columba's Church Council. The Safe Shelter Management Committee consisted of the Chair (one of two representatives from the St Columba's congregation), the Treasurer (the second of two representatives from the St Columba's congregation), the Safe Shelter Volunteers Coordinator and three ordinary members. Under this arrangement, all volunteers and guests of Safe Shelter were covered by the insurance policies of the Uniting Church. The Safe Shelter Management Committee took responsibility for the planning and implementation of Safe Shelter 2014 just as it had taken responsibility for the planning and implementation of the pilot in 2013. The Committee met weekly throughout March and April 2014 and regularly as required once Safe Shelter 2014 was up and running. The Safe Shelter Management committee oversaw the publicity and the preparation of Lewis Hall for the launch of Safe Shelter 2014. Maintenance issues such as inadequate external lighting, faulty door bell and poor reception on the television were passed on to the Church while advertising and communication with the media and stakeholders were handled by the committee. Maintenance costs specific to Safe Shelter, e.g. installation of an external television aerial, were met by Safe Shelter. The committee was also responsible for establishing a Safe Shelter pantry in the kitchen at Lewis Hall and for keeping it well stocked.

2.2 Media engagement

Once again the ACT media played a key role in promoting Safe Shelter to the community. The positive engagement by the media with the 2013 trial extended into 2014, providing essential support and generous coverage throughout the planning phase. Apart from reigniting discussion around homelessness in the ACT with various articles in the Chronicle newspaper and the Canberra Times, as well as with interviews on ABC radio and 2CC AM 1206, the media were, and continue to be, Safe Shelter's major communication tool. Safe Shelter relies on the media for volunteer recruitment. In order for Safe Shelter to achieve its planned expansion to three nights, the pool of volunteers had to increase from 30 in 2013 to 60+ in 2014. The expansion to three nights would not have been possible without the large pool of determined and committed volunteers on whom Safe Shelter depends. Without the media coming on board with the recruitment process, Safe Shelter 2014 would not have been possible.

2.3 Advertising

The design of the 2013 poster and fliers was used for the 2014 advertising material. The brief was to make the information as clear as possible including a simple map showing the locations of the Red Cross Road House, Lewis Hall and the Early Morning Centre; three invaluable resources in the support of the homeless. A4 coloured posters were distributed around central Canberra, targeting venues such as all night chemists, the hospitals, police, newsagents, poster pillars in shopping centres and of course referring agencies' premises. A3 fliers were handed out to as many groups of interested people as possible with an undertaking to distribute them with maximum result. Electronic copies of the poster and flier were emailed to referring agencies and churches for dissemination.

2.4 Recruitment and Training of Volunteers

The majority of volunteers were recruited through the media and came from the ACT community. Training commenced prior to the opening of Safe Shelter on 29 April 2014 and continued throughout the Winter as new volunteers came on board. Training sessions usually consisted of two evenings from 7.00pm to 9.00pm. The venue was Lewis Hall or, if the hall was in use for Safe Shelter, the Church.

Safe Shelter 2014 – training of volunteers	
Dates	Numbers
9/16 April	14
10/17 April	8
23/24 April	6
14/21 May	17
15/21 May	8
10/17 June	2
13 August	2
Total	57

Those volunteers who had participated in the 2013 trial were required to undergo one refresher session.

The training material was based on the *Safe Shelter Guidelines* which had been drafted for the 2013 trial but had been regularly revised as experience and feedback dictated. Referral agencies had contributed to the original draft and continued to advise in 2014. The training was managed by the Safe Shelter Volunteers Coordinator with input from the Coordinator of St Benedict's Community Day Centre in Queanbeyan and the Director of ACT's Early Morning Centre, both of whom attended training sessions to motivate and inform volunteers from their experience in the sector. Volunteers were asked to register with the ACT Government for *Working With Vulnerable People* which will be a legislative compliance for all volunteers in 2015.

2.5 Engagement with Referring Agencies

Guests could turn up on their own initiative without a referral and were given overnight shelter as long as they arrived before 10.00pm. However, many were referred to Safe Shelter.

Guests could be referred by any source and were not required to book or have their name on a list before turning up. Referring agencies included Samaritan House, the AFP, the Canberra Hospital, St Benedict's Queanbeyan and St John's Care and welcomed the "emergency" aspect of the service allowing them to source accommodation at very short notice. The variety of referrals in 2014 reflect the disparate nature of homelessness itself. This engagement worked both ways. Safe Shelter volunteers referred guests to the Early Morning Centre where those in need were helped to link to ACT support and welfare agencies as well as enjoy a nourishing breakfast.

3.0 Safe Shelter 2014 - The Volunteers

The volunteers were surveyed using an online survey tool. Of the 57 volunteers surveyed, 25 responded.

In answer to the question *Do you feel better informed about the issues around homelessness as a result of volunteering with Safe Shelter?* 28% responded with "Somewhat" while 72% responded with "Absolutely"

In answer to the question *Will you be volunteering for Safe Shelter 2015?* 8.70% responded "No" while 91.30% responded "Yes"

In answer to the next question *Would you be willing to help set up an expanded Safe Shelter in other inner city halls and/or do some of your rostered nights at other halls?* The overwhelming response was "Yes" with 1 "Not sure" and 1 "No"

Examples of some of the feedback from the volunteers on the experience of being a volunteer for Safe Shelter 2014 are:

- The feeling of making a positive difference in someone's life, even if only a very small one
- Meeting the homeless and chatting with them
- Sense of contributing to community and doing something worthwhile
- Learning of the guests' lives, the reason for their need of us and more about the homeless community
- I met new people we had nice conversations and got to know how inadequate the system is for homeless men
- Giving back to Society. Meeting people, the guests always had a story and we enjoyed talking with them and the other volunteers
- Meeting new people from all walks of life
- Helping people in genuine need
- Helping the homeless have a safe/warm place to stay
- Making a difference, and getting to meet the men who stayed there and hear their stories. It gives you a much better insight into the causes and effects of homelessness on an individual and on a societal level
- Seeing some increase in patronage over 6 months
- The company and dedication of the other volunteers
- Chatting with volunteers and clients
- So many people I meet are interested to hear about Safe Shelter. There's this complete fascination with homeless people, but not many people know what to do or are fearful. I guess every volunteer has this experience
- One amazing evening when we all watched State of Origin and the guests were teaching me all about the game

Examples of some of the suggestions from the volunteers for improvements are:

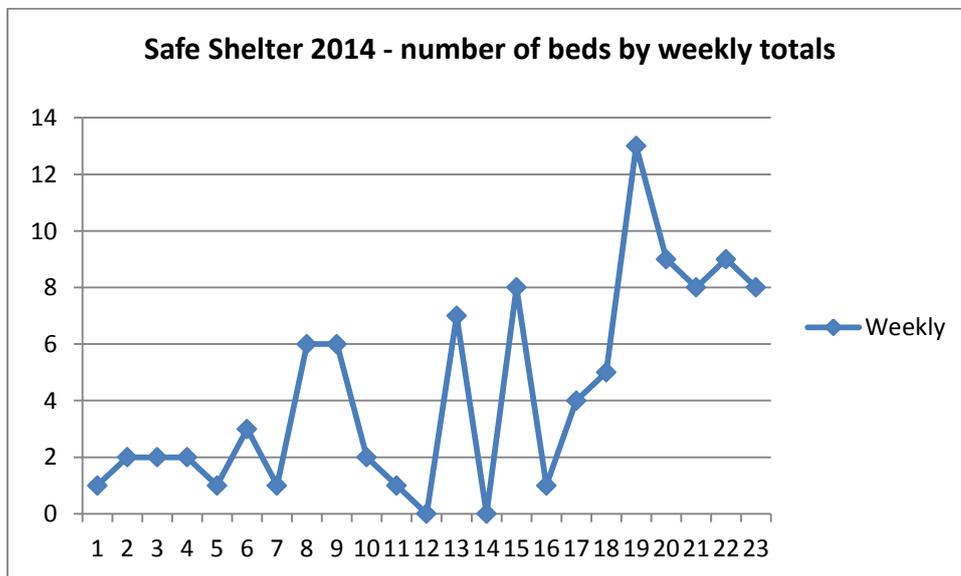
- Perhaps some foam pieces for putting under swags
- Logistical nightmare that it is, it would be so great if we could run seven nights a week and have multiple venues throughout Canberra. Something to work towards I guess.
- There could be a little more training on working with people who are homeless - particularly around working with people with mental illness. A small guidebook or directory of services/organisations that guests can use to access specific assistance would be useful. It would be great if the shelter could operate over more nights as well
- I think the basic structure of the shelter is sound. Further improvements will be incremental, much as they have been over the two years it has been running.
- Create a Facebook page where all the volunteers can post their personal comments and experiences
- Being able to open more nights
- Open every night
- I don't think much should change. KISS principle applies

- A lot of the guests seem to be people passing through Canberra or have just arrived here. I feel we still need to be targeting our local homeless population more. We need to ask them why they aren't using Safe Shelter and what changes we need to make
- Training was OK, but maybe some role-plays to help us handle multiple guests all arriving at the same time
- Also get some people to play guests and give scenarios and practice writing up reports. It would bring home all that is taught
- Also socks, donated winter socks would be a lovely gift, and beanies

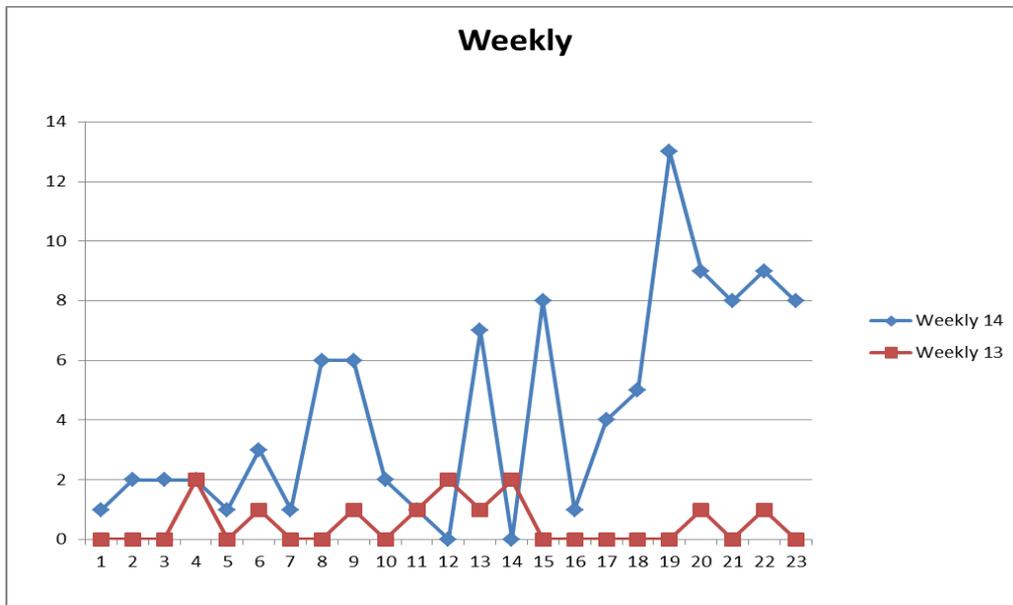
Statement by a volunteer in the survey – “I was so impressed by the guests, their dignity and respect was awe inspiring”

4.0 Safe Shelter 2014 – The Guests

Usage is measured by the number of “beds”. The graph below shows the number of beds per. week throughout the 23 weeks of Winter 2014. Note the peaks and the trend upward.



The graph below compares the number of beds per week during the Safe Shelter 2013 pilot with the number of beds per week during Safe Shelter 2014. The increase in use of Safe Shelter is evident.



The table below shows the total number of guests and their frequency of nights spent in Safe Shelter 2014. Note that, in the interest of confidentiality, guests are recorded in the register simply by their first names, therefore, the data used to count the number of guests could possibly include more than one guest with the same name.

Safe Shelter 2014 – number of guests against frequency of stays	
Number of guests by name	Number of nights
10	1
3	2
5	3
3	4
2	5
1	6
2	7
0	8
0	9
1	10
1	16
Total 25	Total 99

4.1 Who are the men who used Safe Shelter in the Winter of 2014?

Volunteers undertake to respect the privacy of guests and do not pry into how each guest has arrived at Safe Shelter. On occasion a guest has been referred by an agency but has not turned up at the Shelter. The following profile is based on the available data:

- Several guests came off the street on their own initiative having seen a poster, received a pamphlet or heard about the shelter through word of mouth.
- At least one used the Shelter facilities and companionship but slept in his car.
- One was discharged from hospital but, having missed the last bus to a town on the coast, was referred by Canberra Hospital and slept in Safe Shelter
- Two were taken to Safe Shelter by the Federal Police
- One came from country Victoria and was referred by Samaritan House
- One was referred by a member of St Columba's Church
- Two were referred by Ainslie Village
- At least two were referred by St Benedict's Day Care Centre in Queanbeyan
- At least one was brought in by Samaritan House staff

4.2 What could a guest expect during an overnight stay at Safe Shelter?

After agreeing to comply with the *Safe Shelter Guidelines* and giving his first name, a guest would be assured of a warm, dry, safe and respectful night ahead:

- A free swag or warm jacket would be offered to keep
- A large mat would be given to the guest in order to mark out his own sleeping area on the carpeted floor of Lewis Hall
- While guests are not allowed in the kitchen, tea, coffee, Milo and biscuits are made available during the evening
- The television would be on and conversation between the guests and the volunteers would be enjoyed by all
- Throughout the evening until 10.00pm guests could go outside for a smoke
- One volunteer would leave at 10.00pm when the door would be locked and no further entry allowed until after 6.00am.

- Two volunteers, at least one of whom would be male, would sleep on the floor in Lewis Hall along with the guests and share the facilities
- In the morning, pack up and head off to the Early Morning Centre on Northbourne Avenue for a shower and breakfast

Quotation from a guest one morning before heading off, “ I always sleep well here” (recorded in the sheet for that night by a volunteer).

One evening there were two guests in Safe Shelter and one, Mick, noticed the other’s shoes were in a sorry state. Mick rummaged in his bag and produced a pair of shoes. Here , Mate, he said to Ken, “have these. They’re only two weeks old, nearly new” and he gave the shoes to Ken. The next morning, Mick and Ken headed off together for breakfast. (recorded in the sheet for that night by a volunteer)

5.0 Recommendations for Safe Shelter 2015

The Safe Shelter Management Committee make the following recommendations for consideration in the planning and implementation of a Safe Shelter 2015:

- Based on the evidence of the increase in the use of Safe Shelter in 2014 as compared to the use in the 2013 pilot, Safe Shelter 2015 should be available for seven nights per week in multiple venues across central Canberra
- Safe Shelter 2015 should continue to be run in Lewis Hall for three of those seven nights per week
- In light of the huge amount of work and responsibility involved in the planning and implementation of Safe Shelter, a possible alliance with Rotary is to be explored
- The increased management workload needs to be shared by a larger group of enthusiasts