

Hackney Winter Night Shelter, London



Hackney Winter Night Shelter (HWNS) provides a hot meal and a warm bed for homeless guests who would otherwise be out on the streets during the coldest winter months. It is a volunteer-led organisation, bringing together a network of over 700 volunteers and 50 coordinators to provide their service – which is often via local church halls.

They also support guests with more than a meal and a bed, with a team of paid advocate workers who offer holistic support all year round to help guests rebuild their lives. This could take the form of advocacy, supporting people to find more secure accommodation and to access appropriate services. HWNS use our group transport minibus service on six nights a week between January and March, transporting their guests from their evening meal to a dormitory for a safe and warm night's sleep.

'The night shelter service has a huge impact,' said Steve Mendel, volunteer minibus driver at HWNS. 'Guests can use the safe place the service provides – along with structured help – to make plans good plans. I've seen scores of people helped to get off the streets of Hackney permanently – along with many others supported to move into more secure temporary accommodation. Having somewhere safe to go makes a real difference.'

'Volunteers are at the very heart of the service,' explains Bri English, shelter administrator. 'They come from all walks of life and are mostly based here in Hackney. Many people end up on the streets because of insecure housing, losing their job or issues with mental health – these are all things that most of us can relate to. The service is a shared experience between volunteers and guests, breaking down barriers between them, so that guests move from being on the streets to being part of our community.'