

# Leighton Linlade Homeless Service



Lockdown due to COVID-19  
Black Horse Night Shelter

## Coronavirus: Strict new curbs on life in UK announced by PM

•24 March 2020

### Impact on the 'night shelter' was immediate.

An emergency meeting was held and a decision made that our guests must be allowed to stay in the shelter. This meant cover to be organised on a rota of forty-eight-hour shifts, between three members of staff so the shelter would stay open 24 hours every day. An isolation room was set up with hopes that it would not be needed. An emergency protocol for the possibility of a person becoming infected was created.

It's been like a family. We got to know each other. I've felt happy and safe. I felt I could open up more and talk about myself. I took part in things. The experience has made me feel more confident about

protection  
Supported RESPECT  
opportunities future  
understanding  
secure patience safety  
COVID together care  
safe TRUST family  
people shelter  
coronavirus

For me, it was mainly the pandemic itself that worried me.

Lockdown meant I had the security of somewhere to stay, I was safe and although there were rules, they were to keep us safe e.g. cleanliness. To be able to come into this building and feel safe in the environment was a huge weight off my shoulders.



This 'word cloud' was created from the reflections of people who sheltered in The Black Horse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Short quotes from these reflections are included in this report. Each guest is working with us to create his/her own photographic diary to accompany personal reflections and to act as a reminder not only of the work they have done to support the charity but also to highlight how, in the process of caring and improving the shelter, they have themselves made great personal progress.





In February 2020, almost all of our 61 volunteers gathered to enjoy a meal at a local restaurant, courtesy of the owners, as a thank you for the work done to help people in need. The Grove Lock in Leighton Buzzard was a lovely venue for a very happy and celebratory evening. Little did anyone know that within a few short weeks, most of the volunteers would have to withdraw their support for some considerable time because of a virus that invaded the world. There were many emails written in response to one we sent out – urging people to consider their health and that of their loved ones and the need to follow Government health guidance – all indicating how difficult a decision it was to withdraw. Over 40 of our volunteers were over 65 years of age and some over 70 but all very dedicated and hard-working; all who withdrew did so with regret but very sensible awareness for the need to keep safe and healthy. As lockdown took force and we recognised the importance of keeping all within the shelter safe, we respectfully asked volunteers to help by supporting from a distance. With the exception of two volunteers who helped with sleepovers, all other volunteers were asked to stay safe and stay at home. Any visitors to the shelter were kept at the gates and strict rules were followed in keeping with social distancing. It could have become a very challenging time but instead, it provided an opportunity for immense progress.

## Services Previously Provided

Monday	Shelter is open from 5:30 pm until 8:00 am	<i>*Wednesday: Hot meal prepared at <u>Trinity Methodist Church, North Street</u></i>  <i>SWEP - during periods of severe weather, the shelter is kept open and extended hours are offered in the event of inclement weather</i>
Tuesday	Shelter is open from 5:30 pm until 8:00 am	
Wednesday	Shelter is open from 7:30 p m – 8:00 am	
Thursday	Shelter is open from 5:30 pm until 8:00 am	
Friday	Shelter is open from 5:30 pm until 8:00 am	
Saturday	Shelter is open from 5:30 pm until 8:00 am	
Sunday	Shelter is open from 5:30 pm until 9:00 am	

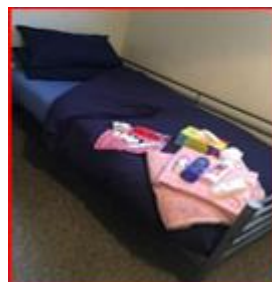
Lunchtime 'Drop-In'		
Monday	11 am – 2 pm	<i>*Salvation Army, Lammas Walk Pick-up point for food parcels</i>
Tuesday	10:30 am – 1:30 pm	Open Door Café, Hockliffe Street Baptist Church
Wednesday	11 am – 2 pm	<i>*Black Horse Shelter North Street Pick-up point for food parcels</i>
Thursday	11 am – 2 pm	
Friday	11 am – 1 pm	Sacred Heart R C Church Beaudesert
Saturday	12:30 – 2 pm	TBA
Sunday	10 am -12 pm	Duncombe Drive Day Centre

Pre-COVID 19, the shelter opened every evening, there were also lunch time 'Drop-In' services offered by volunteers, not only in the shelter, but hosted also by local churches and supportive communities. This all changed with social distancing and health guidance.

### Friday, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Central Government directives meant we had to organise a room for each individual guest – unless a couple. We have seven rooms.

We had to ensure three of our guests found alternative accommodation. It was not an easy day. One guest was moving into a bedsit in town – organised prior to lockdown, two other guests moved to Dunstable into a hotel that had been taken over by the council, taking with them a food supply from our food bank. Throughout lockdown, we supported this hotel which housed some 20+ rough sleepers as well as people like our guests, with food and essential items – toiletries etc.





The work of Leighton Linslade Homeless Service involves helping people who, whilst not officially deemed homeless, continue to benefit from support. Drop-In services had to stop, but offering help in the way of food parcels could and did continue.

There was an initial concern – would people, who so generously donate to our food bank, be able to continue to do so.

We had absolutely nothing to fear.



Local schools and individuals who recognised the difficulties ahead, provided donations at a time when people were concerned about the availability of items on supermarket shelves. We had no such worry – we were blessed with the generosity of the people of the town and local villages. Coronavirus, whilst causing restriction on the lives of many, did not prevent the continued kindness of people. Frequently, those unable to leave their homes, telephoned to ask how they could help.

## Updating our Services with Helping Hands

Food donations, financial donations, continued to come into the shelter to support our food bank but the system of organising items in our food bank, making up food parcels ready for collection, had to be continued. With the loss of all but two volunteers who supported us with sleepover duties, we needed help as the demand for food parcels increased. People who had previously felt secure, were facing difficulties they had not expected.



Our 'guests' – people who had previously slept on the street, two having sheltered under the bridge near a local supermarket, stepped up to support the work of LLHS. The opportunity to help was offered and all accepted the responsibility readily. A shift in how we supported each other 'evolved'; trusting relationships were founded as we collectively recognised how important it was to be there for people who needed support.

We received telephone calls from elderly people who were alone and unable to attend social gatherings where they would have would have been provided with hot meals; we received a plea for help from a head teacher in Houghton Regis who had, with her staff, set up a food bank in her school but could not get the quantity of food needed and in Leighton

Buzzard, the COVID-19 task force had organised a second food bank which needed our support as the focus for this food-bank was to help people who were shielding from the virus and we continued to have individuals who needed food parcels, people who depend upon our service.



## Meeting the Demand

I love doing the food parcels, love helping out if there's anything that needed doing, I'm allowed to do it and this made me feel more positive about myself. I've felt like I was valued. We all put our heads together and decided on things to do which would be useful. Even the flowers we chose for the garden and doing up the benches. I felt that there was no bossing about if you decided to help others. People became more aware of each other and worked together.



We are very familiar with making and providing food parcels but during lockdown, parcels became much bigger. We were able to help, through donations given to us, a second foodbank in town and another in Houghton Regis. We also supplied food for a local hotel which had been taken over to house several people who had been rough sleeping. Staff and guests worked together and all we provided, was replaced.



## Providing and Receiving; The Power of Kindness



Amongst many acts of kindness from which we benefitted, came (and continues to come) weekly deliveries of donations organised by the people of Cheddington Village.

Extraordinary generosity which meant we could meet the demands of all who sought help.

People helping people who they did not know nor meet, but recognising the situation of need – the response was, at times, overwhelming.

Sorting bags, organising food and other donations, fell to the work of our guests and we, as a group of people, whilst protected to a very large extent from the virus, could play a part in supporting the community.



## Support from local supermarkets

Local supermarkets, Morrisons and Tesco, generously support the foodbank on a regular basis. Every week we receive trays of donations from Morrison's and Tesco customers are extremely generous in placing donations in collection boxes. Four evenings every week we receive fresh items from Marks and Spencer's. This is food and items that have not been sold and we can use - bread, cakes and pastries, fresh vegetables and fruit - within the shelter and also to supplement food parcels.

We also receive flowers which have not been sold, whilst it may seem strange, the flowers have helped bring about the blossoming of a new talent in one of our 'guests'. He was asked if he could help in placing flowers in vases around the shelter and he decided to create beautiful displays which have really enhanced the look of the shelter and, importantly, helped in lifting spirits with how attractive they look.



MARKS &  
SPENCER

TESCO

  
**Morrisons**  
Since 1899

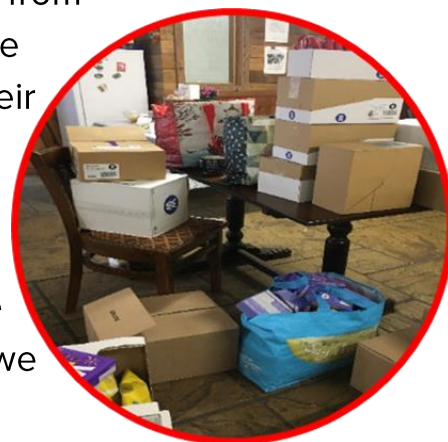


This is a man who was living in a tent beside the river, having no experience of flower arranging but who, like all of our guests, has enjoyed being trusted with the responsibility and the creative experience.

Whilst we wondered about the continued supply of donations when 'lockdown' began, we need not have worried, the donations continued to be plentiful providing support for people throughout the town and local area.

# Support from local and nationwide businesses

We have been extremely grateful at how representatives from within large companies have provided food that otherwise would have been wasted. Having acknowledged with their companies that waste during the time of an emergency could not be allowed, we were given large quantities of goodies from Costa and from Weight Watchers. From a local butcher's, Stratton's, a hot meal, every week, for the people who stay in the shelter and from a local Pizzeria, we were served fresh pizzas.



Our local newspaper, The Leighton Buzzard Observer, wanted to highlight the work of the shelter and foodbank which gave an opportunity to also thank people who support our work. The report explained how our guests played an important part in caring about people – and this extended in making a banner which was collectively made and displayed when clapping in appreciation for front-line workers and NHS workers. Every week, everyone stood outside to clap and the banner was produced with collective awareness of the importance of being grateful.





# Support from local businesses and VOLUNTEERS!

Volunteers generously offered home baked delights for our guests... cakes and puddings, and stews and casseroles were all presented and appreciated, even homemade ice-cream.

As guests have become more involved with cooking, we are hoping volunteers, when they return, will become tutors – sharing some of their culinary expertise.



Hot meal delivered courtesy of local butcher's shop – Stratton's



Donations from Weight Watchers



# LOCKDOWN IN BLACK HORSE HOUSE



**Saturday 2nd May 2020 22:00 pm** 111 telephone conversations followed the extremely high temperature of one of our guests and led to the need to have a period of quarantine in the shelter. Our request for advice was transferred to a senior medical advisor because of the nature of our shelter. We were advised that the individual displaying symptoms must be isolated and other people within the shelter must self-isolate for a period of 14 days. When giving this advice, the medical advisor was sympathetic and very supportive as he recognised how difficult this may be considering the nature of the individuals being asked to remain indoors for such a long period of time.

**Sunday 3rd May 2020 9:00 am** We followed the protocol of our emergency COVID-19 action plan.

Two people had to remain in the shelter who previously would have returned home after forty-eight-hour shifts. This alone was a very different experience. The decision to 'move in' was not difficult for there was no alternative. But how the individuals, already restricted to one-hour breaks from the shelter, would accept the new situation was not clear. As it turned out, what was expressed was a very reasonable understanding. One or two were unsure and showed signs of concern but only in a mild manner. We had, after all, established a safe environment, one where rules had been adapted whilst always ensuring safety and appropriate respect. Speaking to the group we, who were about to live with the guests, were able to express our position and without exception, every guest acknowledged the practical situation for us both and expressed appreciation. Practical questions regarding medication were posed immediately but all were reassured with the arrangement that medication would be collected on their behalf.

Family members of the two people moving into the shelter immediately responded with offers to support – clothing, shopping, basic things to help make this period, acceptable.

What followed, was not just acceptable, it was a very positive and uplifting experience.



# LOCKDOWN IN BLACK HORSE HOUSE



Identifying weaknesses would only have supported the negative image of being a 'homeless person'. During this lockdown there were opportunities for all within the shelter to become someone who offers much, if given the opportunity. Whatever (and there has been much) a guest has done, be it gardening or cleaning or flower arranging, it has been honestly respected. Undoubtedly, help has been provided but this has essentially been in the form of facilitating work and this facilitating has nurtured personal development.

Acknowledging that our guests were benefiting from positive encouragement meant it became all the more important that we nurture very obvious potential. Individual effort was appreciated and our gratitude and praise remained genuine. Help offered has been needed and appreciated. And for all the support provided, it facilitated opportunities to promote well-being and personal self-confidence.

We watched, over the weeks, a move from 'survival mode' to one where guests recognised how much they have to offer and demonstrated a genuine desire to become involved. Importantly, all recognised what others were doing; an important factor to the success of this period was how individual guests respected one another.

From the beginning of lockdown, provision was made for guests to be entertained. This was an important factor and demonstrates the insight of management – provision of the table tennis, darts board, computer console, easing rules regarding time in rooms all provided an important basis upon which kind was reciprocated with kind. Give and take. Concern for the well-being of guests was reciprocated with questions about the well-being of staff. Genuine concern was expressed and a family of sorts, strange though it seemed, was formed.

Stable, positive working relationships were role modelled and appreciated.













Celebrating VE Day  
In Lockdown!



**VE DAY**

75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

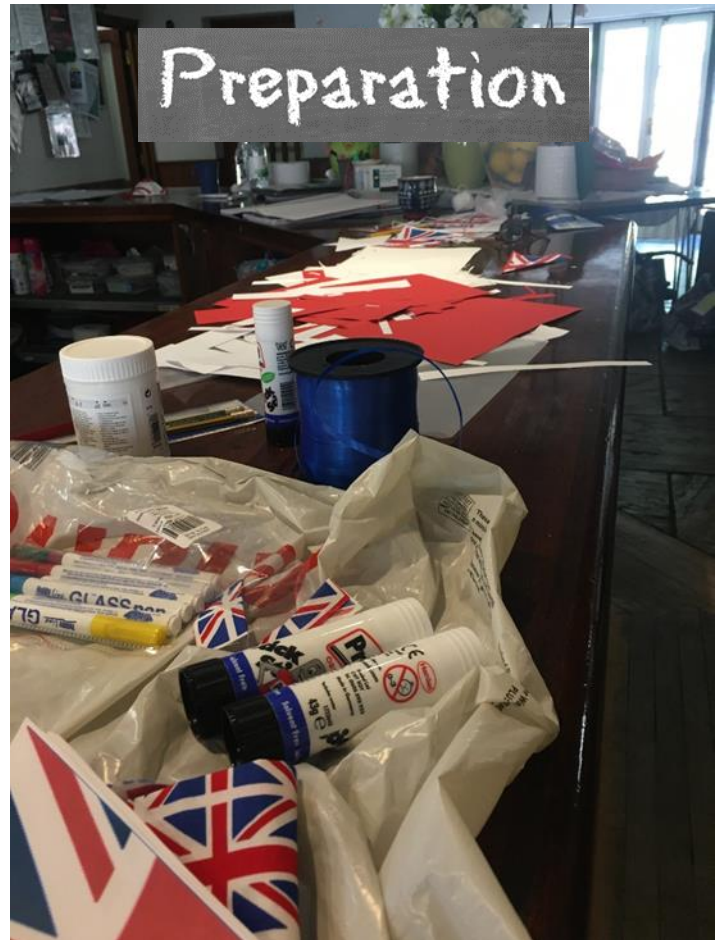
A SHARED MOMENT OF CELEBRATION

8 - 10 MAY 2020



**In lockdown, involvement, ownership and collective participation was important for it to be successful**

Under lockdown restrictions, it was not easy to ensure we had materials to help in showcasing our commemoration and celebration of the 75th anniversary of VE Day. But it was achieved. We were helped with donations of flags and bunting from the local community who wanted to help. Union Jack bowler hats and home-made bunting added to the scene and all within the shelter participated in working together to make the day special.



Music played throughout the day from the era of WW2, windows were dressed, food prepared and the table organised with flower arrangements courtesy of Ben. The night before, clapping to appreciate the efforts of front-line workers took place within the confines of the yard but was no less enthusiastic. The theme of gratitude and thanks was central to our decorations. Union Jack bunting was hung through windows and one window was dedicated to recognising the current situation. We all decorated a piece of Perspex which focused on the various 'front-line' workers. Interestingly people were able to make personal links. One wanted to thank Rachael Carne our PCSO, another, delivery drivers to acknowledge his father, and another wanted to thank Morrison's which is where his sister works – and so on.





## Support from local and nationwide businesses

Through the donations of generous people in and around our town, we have been able to help many who needed support, we could offer individual food parcels for families and individuals, large crates for food banks in Leighton Buzzard and Houghton Regis, crates for people staying at Redwings Hotel (previously rough sleepers or homeless) and to provide many crates for Central Bedfordshire Council allowing people who lived further afield to receive help.



Up To 14 <sup>th</sup> July 2020	Leighton Buzzard Helpers (COVID-19)	CBC Out Of area	CBC Redwings Hotel	Tithe Farm Emergency Food Bank Houghton Regis	Total
Tinned/dried food etc	64 crates	9 crates	23 crates	31 crates	127 crates
Cereals	4 crates	0	3 crates	7 crates	14 crates
M and S	9 crates	0	8 crates	11 crates	28 crates
Weight Watchers	9 boxes	0	0	0	9 boxes
Costa	35 boxes	0	0	0	35 boxes
Toiletries	0	0	0	2 crates	2 crates
Easter Eggs	0	0	15	94	109
Leighton Community Foodbank	Food Parcels	Number	People		
	1 person	117	117		
	2 people	71	142		
		3 – 4 people	84	252	
		5 people	57	285	
		Totals	329	726	

Summarising the ‘details’, we feel very proud of the support we were able to provide; the guests who helped us and we remain extremely grateful for the people who provided the essential food donations.



And now.... having 'created' a different way of sharing Black Horse House, things have changed and continue to develop.

We learned that people respond and benefit from a nurturing and stable environment. Trusting people to accept responsibility, to be respected for the skills they were willing to share, we learned investment in relationships makes a world of difference but time is important to allow relationships to develop.

We have learned of the significance of P.I.E. – psychologically informed environments and we want to learn more about the different aspects of P.I.E.

We are thankful that although we had one nervous time, it turned out results were 'negative'. The negativity of our results came at a time when we were experiencing a growing positivity about the future development of Black Horse House.

We are very proud of the guests who helped us and in so doing made strides in how they felt about themselves, about their future especially at a time when the world was struggling with restrictions and continue to struggle.

We recognise there is work to do and we appreciate that it is essential we build upon the positives that came about from an unprecedented period; good things can flourish even in the darkest of times.

And when so much was of concern, people showed strength of character, kindness and extraordinary generosity.

July 2020