



Safe Shelter in Canberra

A Combined Churches and Community Project

3 June 2019

MEDIA STATEMENT

Canberra's rough sleepers having a rough winter

In the 5 weeks since Safe Shelter ACT opened on 28 April, its volunteers have provided 202 “guest-nights” for homeless men across the three Inner North shelters. In the first 5 weeks of Winter 2018, the total was only 132 guest-nights. That's an increase of over 50%, as can be seen from the attached graph.

The shelters, in church halls, provide simply a safe, warm place to sleep on the floor. They are not even 'hostel' accommodation – just a place for the newly homeless to catch their breath and try to sort themselves out in safety. For the long-term rough sleepers, it provides a chance to get a few nights' sleep so they become better able to decide what they can do with the help of the support services. Safe Shelter's aim is to “get them off the streets tonight”. It's only temporary, but everything follows from that.

All the guests are encouraged to go to the Early Morning Centre for breakfast and to start to connect with supportive accommodation services and welfare agencies via Onelink. Unfortunately, some guests cannot be helped at all by Onelink, eg many refugees or asylum seekers, New Zealanders, men without ACT residential qualifications, etc.

Of those who can access ACT support services, [Onelink's most recent report](#), for October-December 2018, shows that it took an *average* of 3-4 weeks to place applicants into accommodation. For men sleeping on the streets in the cold for several weeks, the psychological and physiological effects may have become entrenched, sometimes permanent, with consequent costs to the ACT community – the men's physical and mental health, unemployment, or drug or alcohol addiction.

Safe Shelter's greatly increased numbers so far this winter suggest that either there are many more rough sleepers than in previous years, or that the ACT's supportive accommodation services are not achieving the results they once did.

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SAFE SHELTER ACT - NUMBER OF GUESTS (YEARLY CUMULATIVE TOTALS)

