

Colchester Emergency Night Shelter



www.colchesternightshelter.org.uk

Annual report July 2006

INTRODUCTION

As we reported last year, the Night Shelter's accommodation policy was changed to extend the length of stay for a limited number of residents, those with complex problems and difficult housing histories. The change in policy was made to ensure that we did not compromise our key role, which is to provide emergency accommodation for the homeless in and around the Colchester area. This we have continued to do although, thankfully, the number of admissions was again down, from 398 last year to 378 in the year under review.

However, even though our numbers were down, because of the change in our policy, our overall occupancy level for the year increased to 100%! We were full for practically the whole year, therefore, for the second year running.

The resettlement work, which we do with all our residents resulted in a reduction in the number of those residents to whom we granted an extra-long stay (over 49 nights) from 34 in 2004/05 to 24 in 2005/06. This allowed us to still accommodate short-stay residents so that, during the year, 134 residents (35.3% of the total) stayed for less than one week. This is firmly in keeping with our main object, which is to be a provider of emergency accommodation for the Homeless in Colchester.

Once again, the Winter Reserve Accommodation Project proved to be an essential additional resource for us during the year. With the help of churches of all denominations in the town, during the cold winter months we provided an exceptionally high 196 bed nights to 52 individuals, who would otherwise have been sleeping rough in Colchester. We are very grateful to the churches who took part. These were Castle Methodist Church, St James the Great C of E on East Hill, St Leonard's C of E at Lexden, the Friends' Meeting House in the town centre, St James the Less Catholic Church in Priory Street, and St. Helen's Catholic Church at Lexden. As a new venture, the Bunting Rooms provided a central venue for the joint working of St Leonard's and St James-the-Great, and we are very grateful for this additional assistance.

WORKING TOGETHER - RESETTLEMENT

Our valuable staff have continued to work hard with many partner organisations during the year to help to resettle all residents. The good news is that in the first quarter of the calendar year 2006, 62% of residents were re-housed. Comparable figures for the preceding two years were 51% in the first quarter of 2005 and 36% the first quarter of 2004. This is not against a background of a client group with a less complicated profile of problems. On the contrary, as can be seen from the statistical information and charts later in this report. Neither is it because more housing has become available because, like many if not all areas of the United Kingdom, there is a shortage of suitable supported or affordable move-on

accommodation. Our success was due to our increasingly effective and better-focused resettlement programme, which is run by a dedicated worker seconded to us from the April Centre but ably and expertly supported by our wonderful staff. The resettlement programme, of which we are truly proud, is a great success as it ensures that we can help more of our homeless residents move into settled accommodation.

The nationwide network of Emmaus Projects have been especially valuable to our residents particularly those who are interested in acquiring skills and who have no special desire to stay in Colchester. Emmaus Colchester are very helpful in funding travel expenses for our residents to visit Emmaus projects around the country whilst looking for their own accommodation locally.

WORKING TOGETHER – SUCCESS STORIES

Many other residents have been helped to move into private or specialist accommodation both in Colchester and outside the area and the following are just a few of the success stories, which have been achieved through our extended support programme with a variety of partner organisations:

- Sam had a very difficult background, which included criminal behaviour and issues with alcohol. Colchester Borough Council accepted responsibility for him but, for various reasons, he could not be housed in Bed and Breakfast so the Night Shelter kept him for over three months. The Council referred him to Plowright House where he has now been settled safely for about nine months.
- John, who had mild learning difficulties and some mental health problems, was referred to us by his family. They continued to support him throughout his three-month stay at the Night Shelter. A Community Psychiatric Nurse was assigned to him and he has now been resettled into specialist 24 hour supported accommodation. He is comfortable there and still receives regular support from his family.
- Jane and Fred were trying very hard to find suitable housing in Colchester. Jane had a local connection but was intentionally homeless. Fred was vulnerable but did not have a local connection. Finding suitable housing was not easy but after a little more than two months they were re-housed in self-contained accommodation under the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme They continue to live happily together in their new found home.
- Susanna was referred as a refugee from Africa and had come to stay with friends in Colchester. She had serious health problems and suffered from post traumatic stress following rape in her home country. At first Colchester Borough Council did not accept responsibility as she had arrived from another local authority but, with the help of Shelter, she was accepted and moved into self-contained accommodation after just over three months.

The Trustees wish these and all of our residents who embark on a life of independent living every success and happiness with their venture.

WORKING TOGETHER - RESIDENTS

Over the years, our residents were always invited on a regular basis to contribute their views and suggestions to the monthly staff meeting. However, during the year, as an extension of this facility, and to involve residents more directly in the service, we introduced a formal consultation between staff, current residents, and ex-residents. We wanted to discover what our residents thought of the services provided and how they are managed. The aim was to discover if there were areas where we need to make adjustments and improvements to services and, wherever possible, in accordance with residents' wishes, to make these changes. Twelve residents and ex-residents took part together with all front-line members of staff. Some of the ex-residents, who participated in the early discussions, volunteer at the Night Shelter. Some of our current residents, some of whom stayed at the Night Shelter on a previous occasion, also took part. This cross section of persons helped to make the work especially fruitful.

Three groups were formed and each worked on a variety of issues. Their deliberations led to the publication of three very important statements, which the Trustees will utilise as the work of the Night Shelter is taken forward. These are;

- We must have clarity and mutual trust,
- The way forward is helping us help you, and
- Generally, there are no problems with the rules; they are good for the Shelter.

One of the requests to come out of the discussions held so far was for changes in procedures to allow residents to take a more positive role in activities such as daily room checks and cleaning tasks. These changes are being piloted and later on the results of the pilot scheme will be evaluated by staff for report to the Trustees.

Trustees and staff will take into account the views expressed and requests made from the residents' consultation in planning future developments. Some can, and will, be implemented immediately and at little cost. Other issues raised, such as earlier opening in the winter, will need to be explored positively by the Trustees to review implications for additional staffing and finance in order to try find a way to implement, what on the face of it, is a reasonable and sensible request.

Unfortunately, not everything we attempted during the year under review was a roaring success. Despite all the facilities put in place and the arrangements made, the Trustees have reluctantly concluded that the Bed Rest Project, which was launched in March 2005 with funding from the Primary Care Trust, will not be continued. Over the year, nine individual residents used the project on 12 days, but because of the intermittent

nature of the requirement at very short notice, it proved not always possible to find sufficient trained people to cover the project. We recruited and trained ten volunteers to act as daytime carers before putting the project in place but, in the event, the pool of people at our disposal was not sufficient.

The Trustees and the staff have worked throughout the year to improve the environment for residents and staff. Following the gradual extension of our no smoking areas and no smoking days, the inside areas of the Night Shelter now form a completely no smoking environment. The Trustees acknowledge that some residents and staff still wish to smoke, so our Assistant Co-ordinator has used his carpentry skills to build an open shelter in the rear yard where both staff and residents will be able to smoke without too much discomfort when the weather is bad. To help maintain a clean environment, purpose built boxes have been installed for collecting cigarette ends by the front door and in the rear yard. This project, which will be of great benefit to both residents and staff, was over and above our normal running costs so the total cost of £715 has been met by donations made by our many supporters, for which we are always extremely grateful.

One of our Trustees, with help from friends, has made new curtains for the many windows throughout the Night Shelter. These have now been fitted in all the bedrooms and they have made an immense difference to the comfort and homeliness of the facility. Plans to provide new lockers and wardrobes although agreed have not yet been implemented but funding is available and the Trustees intend to ensure that these are put in place before the end of this year.

The Trustees continue a programme of regular maintenance by decoration and refurbishment despite limited availability of funds. Generous donations last year allowed for the replacement of all three central heating boilers and the installation of valves in bedroom radiators to give residents more control over heating levels.

Plans for the present year include a rearrangement of the household facilities in order to provide a central laundry where three washing machines and two tumble dryers will be available to residents. This arrangement will replace the present limited arrangements provided for the residents and will meet a need, expressed by residents at the recent consultation, for better laundry facilities.

IMPROVING STANDARDS – LARGE CAPITAL PROJECTS PLANNED

The Trustees are currently taking advice and obtaining quotes from professional kitchen installers to cover the replacement of our ageing kitchen fittings, and catering equipment.

In addition to the normal daily evening meals and breakfasts provided for our residents, we provide two meals a day to those using the WRAP project. We also provide lunches on Sundays and Bank Holidays. As our kitchen is used to prepare well over 15,000 meals each year it is little wonder that

after many years since it was last fitted out it is looking very tired and in need of a major refurbishment. Indications are that the installation of a professional kitchen, which the Trustees feel is essential to meet all current and prospective regulations for the safe preparation of healthy food, will cost in the region of £35,000 including VAT.

In addition to the kitchen, we urgently need further funding in the region of £80,000, including VAT, to meet the cost of our property repair and renewal programme. This is not only to maintain the fabric of the resource, which the Trustees are required to preserve, but it is also to retain our homely atmosphere for our residents to enjoy. We are planning to hold an open day in the autumn for our supporters to come and see for themselves what we have already achieved and how much more needs to be done.

Unfortunately, like most charities, we are unable to reclaim VAT, which therefore adds 17.5% to the quoted cost of any such work. In the figures quoted above, the total requirement for extra funds with VAT is £115,000. Of this sum, £17,500 covers the VAT bill!

PROFILE OF SERVICE AND SERVICE USER NEEDS:

Generally, the trend for fewer admissions but higher occupancy has continued from last year, with a corresponding increase in the average length of stay from 18 to 19.3 days. Of our total residents, 15.3% were female, which is a comparable figure to previous years.

We now have records of resident profiles for the past ten years. The tendency for people to stay longer and the number of people using our service to go up has continued, but overall over this period, referral and gender patterns, unemployment levels, and area origins have remained stable. This year, there has been a shift in the pattern of referrals, with a reduction in self-referrals to 50%, this being down from 57% in the previous year and the lowest level in the ten years for which we hold records. The Trustees are able to point to this as a reflection of our success in resettling some of the most vulnerable residents, who, in the past, often returned to us on a regular basis.

The fact mentioned earlier about our residents having needs that are more complex is evidenced by the fact that two-thirds of our residents declare a medical condition and/or a substance misuse problem. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of new residents suffering from depression, learning difficulties or personality disorder. Last year it was 22.6% of the total, whilst this year this proportion has increased to 28.6%.

A large number of our new residents during the year came from very insecure or no accommodation. Amazingly, this year 27.2% reported that they had been sleeping rough whereas, last year, this total was 17.3% of newcomers. A similar proportion, namely 22.2% in this year and 20.4% last year, told us that they had been staying with friends before they came to us. A further measure of vulnerability and need of residents is that over the

past ten years a consistent 5.5% to 7.5% have come to the Night Shelter directly on leaving prison

We continue to serve the homeless and vulnerable in the Colchester and Essex areas as the statistics show. In the year under review an exceptionally high level, 61.4% of our residents came from the local areas. Of these, 39.6% this year as against 36.9% last year were already living in Colchester. If we look further a field, we notice that, last year, a further 12.2% of our new residents came from our near neighbours Suffolk and Norfolk.

In general, our population has become older. This is partly, but not entirely, due to the change in 2003 to give local authorities responsibility for housing 16 and 17 year olds. Youngsters from this age group are no longer accepted for referral to the Night Shelter. At the same time, an increasing number of our residents are over 50 years old - 9.5% of admissions in 2005-06 - and there is a significant drop in the past year of 25-35 year olds. Last year 102, or 27%, of our residents came from this age group, with 137 residents, or 34.4%, of the total in the year previous.

The charts at the end of this report show further information on the profile of residents during the year under review.

OTHER PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Successful resettlement outcomes remain a priority and Trustees and staff will continue to work with residents to improve services offered. Planning has already started for the second consultation with residents and friends. The Co-ordinator, on behalf of the Night Shelter, plays an active part in the Housing Forum and other networking bodies. The Trustees will continue to support this work, which promotes better conditions for housing and other facilities for the homeless.

In order to achieve our aims, additional resources are urgently required. Of course, more money is required to secure a sound base to continue and to develop the work of the Night Shelter. As is to be expected, the Trustees and the Co-ordinator will continue to work to create a more stable fundraising base, both by extending core funding and by encouraging more people to donate through tax effective ways of giving. To this end, the Trustees have appointed a professional fundraiser to help to attract funding for some of the smaller projects and they are exploring the use of the internet. They see this as a useful resource for fundraising opportunities and have registered with the Charities Aid Foundation and other organisations for on-line giving. The Night Shelter's own website www.colchesternightshelter.org.uk is being improved and updated to include more information on funding and fundraising. We will also include a Gift Aid form, which donors can download and complete to ensure we recover as much income tax from the exchequer as possible.

However, it is not all about money because no money in the world will buy the people on whom we depend so much, those who give so freely of their time. Additional human resources are also and always very welcome. These can be volunteers to help with the catering; volunteers who are good listeners who can help the residents to talk over their problems and plans; and others who can help to bear the heavy load of ever-increasing legislation and bureaucracy. This alone has generated an immense task list of form filling, procedural necessities, and local and central government control - not quite, but almost, overshadowing the primary purpose for the Night Shelter's existence.

In the past year, the Night Shelter has accepted volunteer secondment placements from different sources such as the Police and Church Ministries. This is a development, which the Trustees will continue to encourage as it strengthens our links with partner organisations and increases their understanding of how the Night Shelter operates.

Volunteers are also needed to fill some of the vacancies we have for Trustees. This has become rather urgent as the small core of existing Trustees is finding it ever more difficult to deal with the large workload. Anyone who would like to contribute in this capacity is invited to contact us at the Night Shelter or by email to Trustees@colchesternightshelter.org.uk

OUR THANKS

Finally, and most importantly, we, the Trustees, must thank our staff and volunteers who work so hard not only to support our residents in their time of need but also to improve their opportunities, when they move on.

We would also wish to thank all those in other organisations who work with us to achieve successful outcomes for vulnerable homeless people. This includes those who support us financially, both through generous donations and those who manage our various regular funding streams: Supporting People, Essex Drugs and Action Team, Colchester Borough Council and Maldon Council.

The Colchester Emergency Night Shelter is more needed than ever, in view of a national trend towards closure of night shelters or conversion to longer-stay hostels. The Trustees hope to be able to carry on offering help and hope to the homeless for many years to come. However, this will only be possible if our funding is increased and the number of volunteers we boast is maintained and increased as well.

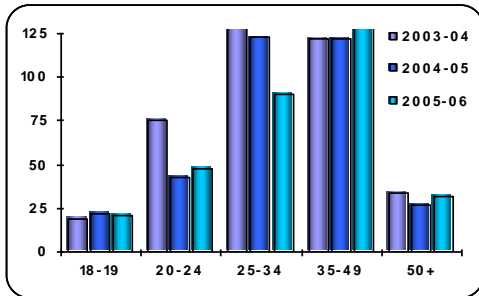
We look forward to welcoming you to our autumn open day to show you how we intend to achieve both our short-term and our long-term aims. Further details will be available after the summer holidays.

Gordon Evans Acting Chairman

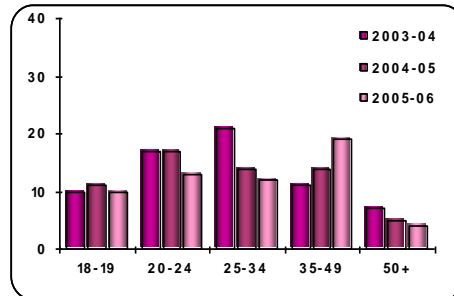
RESIDENTS' PROFILE: 2005-06

ADMISSIONS (NUMBER):

Male: 320

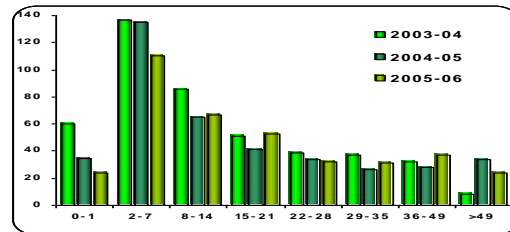


Female: 58

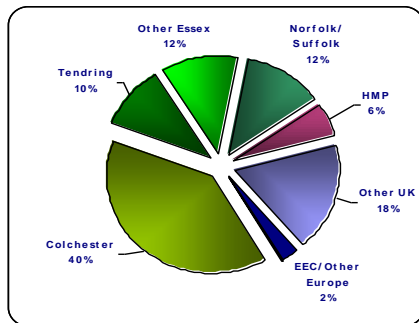


LENGTH OF STAY (DAYS)

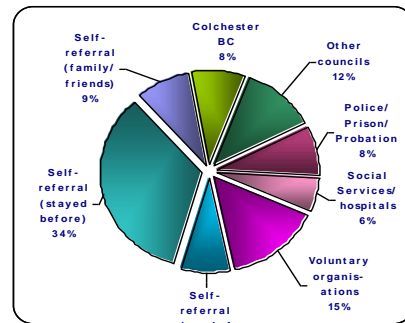
Average: 19.3 days



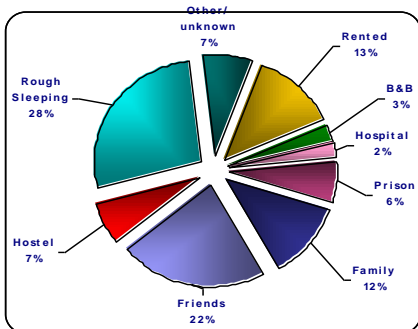
PREVIOUS AREA:



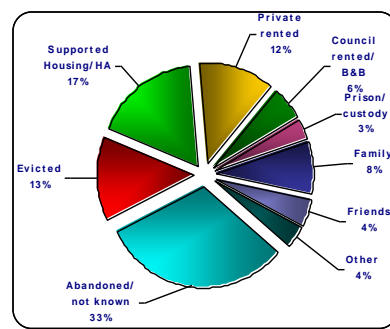
REFERRED BY:



PREVIOUS ACCOMMODATION:



LEFT FOR:



INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR TO 31 MARCH 2006

	12 months ended 31 st March 2006 (unaudited)		12 months ended 31 st March 2005	
	£	£	£	£
INCOME				
Donations	21,112		10,803	
Grants	54,284		55,117	
Rent & other income	74,824		71,750	
		<u>150,219</u>		<u>137,670</u>
EXPENDITURE				
<u>Staff & volunteer costs</u>				
Wages & salaries	89,814		89,179	
NI/Pension and other staff costs	6,176	95,990	6,841	96,020
<u>Direct Costs:</u>				
Food & provisions	12,073		12,434	
Cleaning materials	1,362		1,136	
Domestic Equipment Repair & renewal	1,756		1,582	
Health & Safety/Property security	2,537	17,728	3,750	18,902
<u>Property Costs:</u>				
Insurance premiums	7,358		7,081	
Council Tax, Water & sewage rates	2,516		2,408	
Light, heat & power	3,067		3,003	
Repairs to the freehold	8,760	21,701	2,224	14,716
<u>Office Costs:</u>				
Telephone expenses	2,777		3,960	
Postage, Printing and stationery	922		1,700	
Office equipment maintenance & computer costs	1,811	5,550	992	6,652
<u>Other Costs:</u>				
Audit	2,056		1,526	
Legal & Professional	645		151	
Fundraising expenses	325		-	
Subscriptions	259		96	
Bank charges	802	4,087	649	2,422
		<u>145,016</u>		<u>138,712</u>
SURPLUS /(DEFICIT) ON THE YEAR'S ACTIVITIES		£ 5,203		£ (1,042)