



COLD WEATHER GROUP

Night Centre 2008

Volunteer Handbook

“For many years the work of the Night Centre has been supplemented by volunteers from the Cold Weather Group. The use of these volunteers has been a key to the successful running of the projects each year.”

Bristol Homelessness Review, 2003

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COMMON ABBREVIATIONS

AA – Alcoholics Anonymous
ACAD – Advice and Counselling on Alcohol and Drugs
ARA – Accommodation for Recovery from Addiction
BCC – Bristol City Council
BDP – Bristol Drugs Project
CPN – Community Psychiatric Nurse
CWG – Cold Weather Group
ECHG – English Churches Housing Group
HA – Housing Association
HAC – Housing Advice Centre
H&ASH – Health and Advice for Single Homeless
ICMHT – Inner City Mental Health Team
NA – Narcotics Anonymous
ODPM – Office of the Deputy Prime Minister



COLD WEATHER GROUP

Night Centre
English Churches Housing Group
1 Jamaica Street
Kingsdown
Bristol BS2 8JP
T: 0117 924 6415

The Night Centre is now in the new Compass Centre, which forms part of the ECHG Hostel on Jamaica Street.

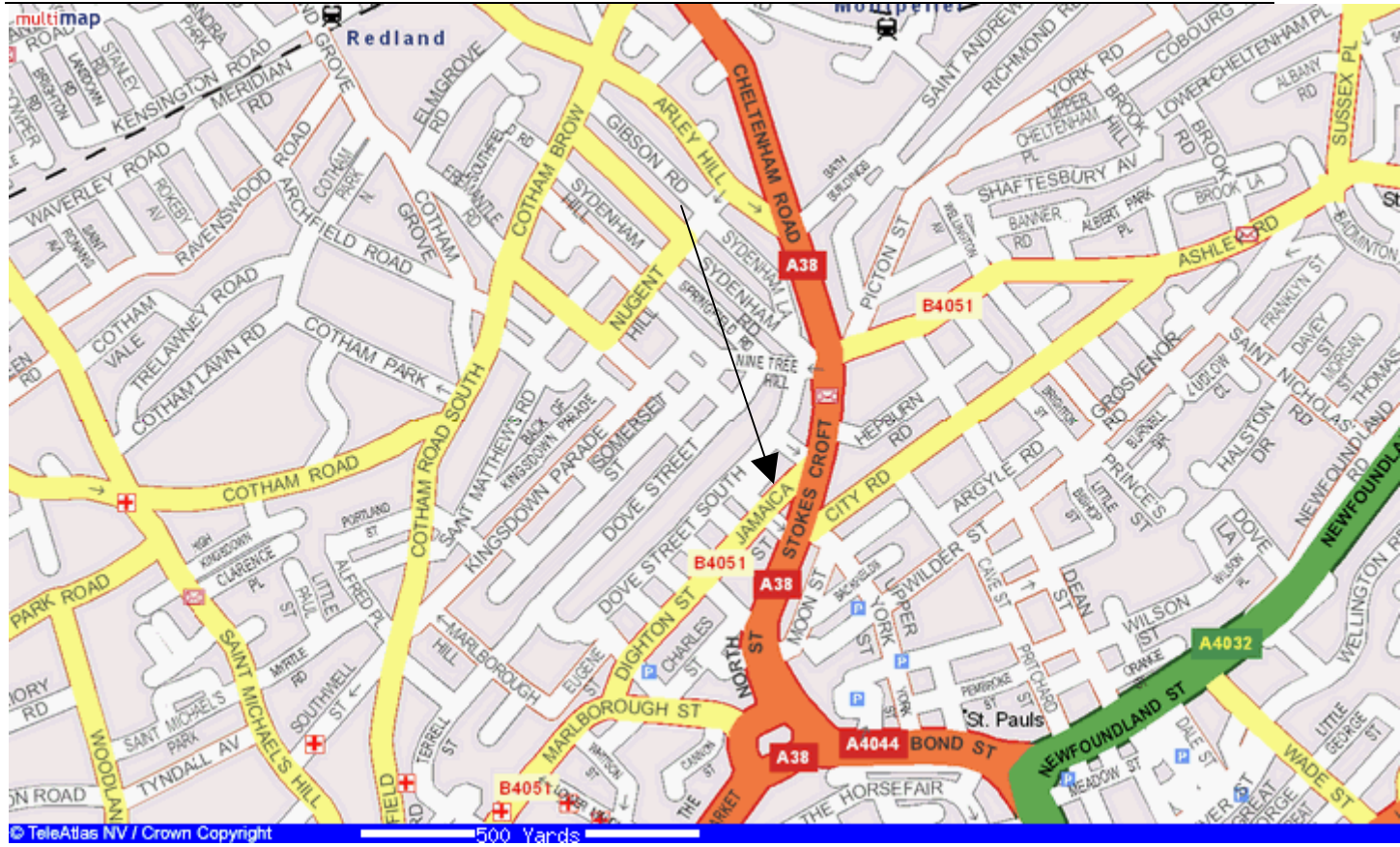
The Hostel is on the corner of Jamaica Street and King Square. There is on-street parking on Dighton Street, Jamaica Street and on King Square, which is free after 6pm. If travelling from North Bristol down the A38 turn right onto Jamaica Street at the traffic lights following the Ashley Road junction.

If travelling up the A38 take the second left (King Square Avenue – there is a big Pianos shop and sign on the corner) after the St James Barton Roundabout.

Any bus which travels along Stokes Croft / Gloucester Road will get you close to Jamaica Street. If you use the bus stop opposite the Full Moon pub and walk up King Square Avenue you will come out on Jamaica Street and opposite the Centre.

If you are lost please call Jenny on her mobile 07972 911042 and she will try and direct you!

Compass Centre
English Churches Housing Group
1 Jamaica Street
Kingsdown
Bristol BS2 8JP
T: 0117 924 6415



The Cold Weather Group

The Cold Weather Group (CWG) was set up in 1991 as an alliance of groups and individuals with the aim of increasing co-ordination and provision for homeless people sleeping rough in Bristol during the winter months. Registered as a charity in 1999, the CWG's current management committee consists of five trustees. We do not have any permanent staff or office base of our own, and are dependent for our income on donations and grants from charitable trusts.

For the first six years the CWG set up and ran a direct access emergency Cold Weather Shelter each winter; these were in different locations and managed with the support of Shelter, Bristol City Council and other agencies. From 1997 to 1998, the CWG worked in partnership with Bristol Cyrenians and ECHG who took on the direct management of the shelters and received funding through the Government's Rough Sleepers Initiative. Since 2000 the shelter has been called a "Night Centre", as it is only open between the hours of 10pm and 8am and is not intended to be accommodation. The aim of the Night Centre as opposed to a Shelter is to help people move on and get off the streets, whereas a Shelter focuses on a bed and meal for that night.

● **Aims of the CWG**

The CWG's key aim is the provision of a Winter Night Centre, which fulfils all of the following:

- Shelter, warmth, food and safety
- An environment free from bullying, violence and intimidation
- Priority and a safe place for women
- Preparation for and access to resettlement opportunities
- Help in accessing other services
- Improvement in personal health
- Support in developing self-esteem and addressing issues
- Additional support and befriending from volunteers
- Participation through activities and Night Centre user surveys

Associated aims are fundraising and working with other agencies to identify and raise awareness of homelessness and people's needs.

● **Cold Weather Group & ECHG**

For the last five years the Night Centre has been run in partnership with the Cold Weather Group and ECHG, a Housing Association that provides hostel accommodation and services for rough sleepers across the country. ECHG are responsible for the Night Centre's paid staff and day-to-day management. The CWG concentrates on the following areas:

- Recruitment and training of volunteers to provide additional support services to Night Centre users
- Fundraising for additional equipment and services
- Funding items to meet the 'welfare' needs of Night Centre users (e.g. roll mats, clothes, blankets, toiletries etc)
- Raising issues such as access to healthcare for homeless people, or gaps in services for those with drug dependency
- Working with ECHG to identify ways of improving the services provided at the Night Centre
- Carrying out Night Centre user and volunteer surveys to monitor the success and effectiveness of the Night Centre

The Night Centre

- **How does the Night Centre work?**

The Night Centre is based in the Compass Centre in Jamaica Street Hostel. With space for up to twenty people, the Centre provides shelter and support from 10.00pm - 8.00am, as well as an evening meal and breakfast. There is at least two staff on duty while the Centre is open, and we ideally need two volunteers every night to give additional support.

The aim of the Night Centre is to provide emergency shelter and enable users to find accommodation with appropriate support as soon as possible. Night Centre users are given priority access to any vacancies in Bristol's hostels. The Night Centre is intended to engage in particular with entrenched and vulnerable rough sleepers that are prioritised by the Outreach Team (who are employed by ECHG and based at the Compass Centre). The rough sleepers Outreach Team are funded by Bristol City Council to make contact with rough sleepers in the city, make assessments on their vulnerability and needs, and make referrals to appropriate agencies - including the emergency hostels and the Night Centre. Outreach compile a list of the 'entrenched and vulnerable' rough sleepers in Bristol and it is normally only those on this list that will be allowed into the Night Centre. In emergency situations the Night Centre will also accept vulnerable people referred that night by the police, Street-smart (a homelessness charity) and the One25 project (an outreach program for women working in the sex industry).

This "controlled entry" system means that all the service users have been risk assessed before entry. The Outreach Team will have made the first contact with people before they stay at the Night Centre and made an initial assessment of their needs. This helps Night Centre staff to manage any problems or issues that might arise and start to work effectively straight away to address the needs of those staying. Service users will often have a complex set of needs that may include drug / alcohol issues and physical and mental health needs. To support the individual in the most appropriate and effective way will mean developing a comprehensive support plan that will include more than just finding a permanent roof.

- **When is it open?**

The Night Centre used to open each year in October/November and close in March/April. This year is the first year that it is to be open permanently – cold weather or not.

Once a month, the Night Centre will be closed for two - four consecutive days. The reasoning behind these temporary closures of the Night Centre is that the Government does not wish Night Centre users to become dependant on the Night Centre as their only means of somewhere to stay. The idea is to encourage Night Centre users into looking at longer term and more permanent options that may be available to them.

- **What do volunteers do?**

The main role of the volunteers is to assist Night Centre staff by:

- Providing practical assistance, such as help in serving and clearing up the evening meal.
- Befriending users by talking listening and supporting them - often the knowledge that a volunteer has given up their time to be at the Night Centre is important in itself.

Volunteers normally arrive at 9.30pm and will help out for two - three hours on each shift. Usually there are two volunteers on shift at any one time and at least two members of staff on duty. A total of 24 volunteers worked at the Night Centre last year. We normally ask volunteers to volunteer once a week/fortnight. We try to be as flexible as possible to fit in with your availability. However, inevitably it is harder to cover weekends than weekdays and we may ask volunteers to work an

occasional Saturday or Sunday.

- **Funding**

Most of the funding for the Night Centre comes via a bid made by English Churches Housing Group (ECHG) to Bristol City Council for grant funding. This funding pays for running costs and staff salaries. The Volunteer Co-ordinator's post is funded by the Cold Weather Group. However, we also receive a small amount of the grant money from ECHG towards our costs.

- **Staff**

ECHG recruit the paid staff, including the Night Centre manager and deputy manager. There is always at least two staff members on duty at all times. Their shifts change frequently, so there won't always be the same people on duty at the same time each week.

- **Management**

ECHG is responsible for setting up the project and recruiting, managing and supporting the paid staff. The Cold Weather Group is responsible for the recruiting and supporting the Volunteers. The staff are ultimately responsible for the running of the centre, and also for the welfare of the Night Centre users and Volunteers when they are on shift.

Who uses the Night Centre?

Bristol has proportionately one of the highest rough sleeper populations outside of London. Whilst the number on the streets has been reduced significantly in recent years, some of those who remain rough sleepers are very entrenched and often find it difficult to sustain a life away from the street.

Over the winter of 2004/5 a total of 197 people accessed the Night Centre services. Of that figure 171 were male and 26 were female. Night Centre user profiles always show that users have had damaging life experiences. In 2004/5 for example, of the 197 users:

- 90% had drug and/or alcohol dependency
- 78% had experienced homelessness before
- 30% had long term mental health needs
- 14% had long term physical health needs

Other issues included emotional or physical abuse, violent behaviour, financial difficulties and illiteracy. According to the Bristol Homelessness Review of 2003, the profile of homeless people in Bristol has shifted to include increasing numbers of young people (under 25) and asylum seekers. Furthermore, an increasing proportion of homeless people are individuals with "high support" needs resulting from a combination of drug and alcohol misuse. In addition, a higher percentage of people have mental health needs.

Of the 197 people staying in 2004/5, 119 successfully moved on to longer-term accommodation, mainly to hostels or other supported housing projects. This shows the vital role the Centre plays in helping people get off the streets and get the support they need.

- **What problems do rough sleepers' experience?**

They face exclusion from labour markets (it's practically impossible to get a job without an address); depression and mental health problems; harassment; abuse; stigmatisation; physical health problems (exacerbated by the effects of severe weather); bad nutrition; lack of sleep; and limited access to hygiene facilities. A dose of flu that would be trivial to a housed person can be a serious

illness for someone with nowhere to live. Research by London homelessness charity St Mungo's found that the average life expectancy for someone living on the street is 42 years old.

Reasons for Homelessness

- **Why people become homeless**

People can become homeless for many, many different reasons. Relationship breakdown or bereavement can be so damaging that it results in the collapse of their previous lifestyle. Someone could become institutionalised through an upbringing in care, time spent in prison, or served in the armed forces. They may be discharged from this institution with nowhere to go or the adequate support or skills to manage in the community. They may have experienced abuse – mental, physical or sexual – that made it difficult for them to move forward with their lives. Financial problems could have become too much that they lost their home. Mental Health and drug / alcohol addiction can be a fast track to homelessness if the individual isn't linked in with support agencies soon enough. The list goes on. It is important to recognise that an individual is more than just the sum of their problems and they will have complex needs and reasons as to why they have ended up in the night centre.

- **The myths about homelessness**

Homeless people have to contend with various myths about why they don't have anywhere to live, and what their lifestyles are. Alcohol and drug misuse affects many homeless people but by no means all. Some people who do not want to be around drugs or alcohol may feel that the street is safer than the place they had to leave.

People sleep out because there isn't anywhere else available to them. Emergency hostels become 'silted up' because many people stay there longer than intended due to the shortage of permanent housing for them to move on to. In Bristol there is a "Priority Access Scheme" where the council's homelessness officers and the Outreach Team decide who can have places within the hostels. It is therefore very difficult for homeless people to get direct access to hostel spaces without being referred.

Everyone who is homeless is entitled to apply to the council and be assessed for help. The council only has a duty to provide accommodation for people who are particularly vulnerable or who have children. However, even for these groups of people the council will only provide accommodation for a very short period of time if they are judged to have become homeless through their own fault ("intentionally homeless"). The council does have a duty to provide advice and assistance to all homeless people, but this can be quite limited in practice, such as providing a list of B&B's or estate agents.

Most single homeless people have to rely on the private rented sector, where rents are high and landlords require large amounts of money up-front for deposits and rent-in-advance. Many homeless people do not have any savings or ways of borrowing money and so find it impossible to secure accommodation. Landlords often judge potential tenants on appearance, want references from previous landlords and will not take people that are unemployed or on benefits. In Bristol, single homeless people can apply to the council at the HUB in St Pauls for help and advice.

Local Services and Resources

You may wish to know more about services that are available to homeless people in Bristol. All volunteers should receive a copy of the Survival Guide, which is written and published by Caring at Christmas. This is the most up to date and comprehensive source of information on the kinds of support available in Bristol. Please bear in mind that homeless people have to be referred to

accommodation providers by the relevant agency and this is not within the remit of a volunteer. If you haven't received a copy of the Survival Guide, please ask the Volunteer Co-ordinator for one.

What Volunteers Do

- **Serving food and drinks**

Everyone coming into the Night Centre will be offered a hot meal, tea, coffee or a soft drink. This is one of the main roles of volunteers and may well be your first point of contact with people and a chance to get to know them by name. Everyone needs to be welcomed, and a warm smile can make all the difference to someone who is cold, tired and hungry.

- **Talk to people!**

Volunteers have sometimes told us they didn't feel they were doing anything useful, as 'all they did' was talk to Night Centre users.

Don't underestimate this – from a Night Centre user's point of view, this can be the most valuable thing a volunteer can do. For people who have experienced discrimination on a daily basis, abuse and exclusion over long periods, a good friendly relationship and a decent conversation with a person who isn't judging them can make the difference between the Night Centre just being a place to sleep, and somewhere which feels welcoming and warm.

The other side of this is that for some Night Centre users, the Night Centre is the first bit of safety and comfort they have had for ages. If someone wants to spend all the time in bed not talking, then that's fine as well!

- **Use any skills you have**

If you have any skills in counselling, painting, music, crafts running workshops, or similar please tell us about them! If there is an interest from the Night Centre users we will do our best to supply the resources or materials needed. Take up from Night Centre users can be low but it's still of enormous value to those who do want to get involved.

Currently the Night Centre has a TV/Video, Games and a Pool Table. Staff also organise occasional cinema trips or other activities.

- **Encourage people to look after the place**

It's difficult to make the transition from living on the street to living in a building, and sometimes the place can become a bit of a tip. Some Night Centre users (and some volunteers) have suggested that people could all have a domestic job to do. We don't want to impose this on anyone, but some people may like to do it, and lots of people will appreciate the difference it makes.

- **Ask the staff**

Staff levels are never enough for the number of people needing support and there will always be jobs to do – don't be shy about asking. Part of your role will be to support the staff and free them up to do intensive work with Night Centre users. You may be asked to help staff at the front door when people are arriving, or perhaps just keep an eye on things while they are busy.

Getting Support

Most Night Centre users have had long term experience of drug and alcohol dependency, abuse, homelessness, and/or mental and physical health problems. Most people will have also had problems getting, or being denied access to, the services they need. They may well be cynical about what they can gain from the Night Centre.

Working with rough sleepers can sometimes be frustrating, distressing and confusing. It can also be rewarding and illuminating. It certainly is challenging, and you may encounter some of the following difficulties.

- You may be frustrated that you can't resolve someone's problems or help them as much as you want to, or feel that you are not doing anything.
- You may feel that you've got too involved.
- You may be trusted with information that you feel is hard to keep to yourself.
- You may be threatened or insulted by someone else's behaviour.
- You may disagree with what the staff do.
- You may feel that you can't talk about your concerns to the staff, as they are too busy.
- You may feel that the line between staff and volunteer responsibilities is unclear.

We want to make sure that no one **has** to stop volunteering for any of these reasons, and we hope that you will gain from the work you put in.

Our confidentiality policy gives guidelines about whom you should, and should not, disclose information about Night Centre users to. It's essential that this is adhered to, but this doesn't mean you have to bottle it up, take difficulties home with you, or feel isolated.

- **Talk to the Volunteer Co-ordinator**

The Volunteer Co-ordinator isn't there to judge you, but to help you get the best out of what you are doing and make sure that you aren't undermined by it. They will be aware of the sort of difficulties you may be having. It will also be useful for them to know the sort of problems that are coming up – it may be that there's something we can change. The volunteer support line number is **07972911042**.

- **Talk to staff**

If it's about a particular Night Centre user, the staff may share your concerns or may need to know what's happening. (Please see the Confidentiality section on page 11).

- **Talk to an experienced volunteer**

We aim to place new volunteers with volunteers who are returning from previous years. They will have experience in working at the Centre and remember what it was like to do shifts for the first time so will be able to help you with problems on shift. Please remember that staff are always responsible for what happens on shifts so make sure they know of any problems as well.

Communication

- **Staff and other volunteers**

Do introduce yourself, ask what you need to know, tell staff if you're unclear about what to do, ask for help, and help newer volunteers.

- **Volunteer Co-ordinator**

This person is the main point of contact and support for volunteers and will help you with any problems you have whilst volunteering. Please contact our Volunteer Co-ordinator Jenny on 07972911042 if there is anything at all which you would like to clarify or if there are any problems or suggestions you would like to feedback to the Night Centre management or the Cold Weather Group Committee.

- **Experienced Volunteer**

On your first shift you will be paired with an experienced volunteer who will be able to answer your questions and "show you the ropes". They are another point of contact for any questions or problems that arise during your shift.

- **CWG Committee Meetings**

These are held once a month whilst the Night Centre is open, and are usually attended by the Night Centre manager or deputy manager and the Volunteer Co-ordinator. Do pass on anything you think we should discuss.

- **Contacting the CWG**

You can leave a message on our volunteer line 07972911042. Alternatively you can contact the management committee of the Cold Weather Group at:

Chair of the Cold Weather Group, PO Box 2175, Bristol BS99 7LL or email info@coldweathergroup.org.uk

- **Cancellations or Illness**

If you are unable to attend your shift, please call the Volunteer Co-ordinator in the first instance, giving as much notice as possible. If you cannot reach them on the volunteer line, please leave a message. If they have not got back to you and it is getting close to your shift call the Centre reception on **07972911042**.

- **Volunteer Socials**

A good opportunity to meet other volunteers, committee members and staff is to go along to the socials that are organised. These are organised periodically throughout the opening period of the Night Centre. If you have any suggestions of venues for socials please let the Volunteer Co-ordinator know.

- **Logbook**

There is a Logbook kept at the Centre in the office. This is for volunteers to leave details of anything which happened on shift that other volunteers may want to know about. Do not leave messages relating to confidential information about clients. You may also find it useful to check the book before going on your shift. The Staff encourage you to leave a message after every shift as it helps them support the clients as well.

Confidentiality

Within the Bristol Night Centre there is a policy of sharing information about users between staff and volunteers that operates on a "need to know" basis. At their initial contact with the Night Centre, all service users sign a confidentiality waiver accepting this policy.

Volunteers are only expected to share relevant information about Night Centre users with the staff team where there is a benefit to the service user and also in situations where information raises an issue about the welfare or support needs or safety of the service user themselves, another Night Centre user, or a member of the staff/volunteer team. This approach offers opportunities for developing trusting relationships with service users.

The only circumstances where information about a user might be shared outside the volunteer/staff team is where there is an immediate risk either to the service user themselves, to other service users, to the staff or to the public. However, you should always consult a member of staff first, as they will have the responsibility for deciding whether the risk justifies information being given to outside agencies.

- **Ownership of information**

As a rule, information that someone shares about herself or himself should be regarded as the personal property of that person. In other words, the information is "on loan" and should remain under the control of the person it is about.

- **Basic rules**

- Volunteers should not disclose information about Night Centre users to other agencies/individuals beyond the staff/volunteer team without the consent of the Night Centre user concerned.
- Volunteers should not discuss individuals within earshot of other Night Centre users or people outside the team.
- Although unlikely you may have to answer the phone at the Centre if all staff are busy. If you do ask the person to hold while you get a member of staff.

Before your first shift, you will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement and provide emergency contact details.

- **Data Protection**

Please note that Cold Weather Group hold a database of all volunteers contact details and records of their attendance on shifts. This is for our use only and will not be shared with any other organisations. This helps us provide references for volunteers and also to contact volunteers who may be interested in volunteering again in future projects. If you would like any more information on this, or to make any comments, please contact the Volunteer Co-ordinator.

Professional Boundaries

Boundaries outline what is and what is not acceptable behaviour by staff and volunteers in the workplace, and help to protect and inform everyone.

Boundaries give volunteers confidence as they know how to react in different situations, and they help to develop trusting relationships with service users who will know what to expect from volunteers.

Boundaries are particularly challenging in Night Centre user projects, because they are more intense. Workers see people at all their highest and lowest points and consequently get to know them very well.

The following list of **do's** and **don'ts** is not exhaustive, but gives a rough guide to the types of things volunteers need to consider.

Thanks to Richard Turner from Second Step Housing Association for these guidelines.

DON'TS

• **Socialising**

Do not socialise with Night Centre users outside of work time, or have sexual relations with Night Centre users. If a Night Centre user expresses a sexual interest in you, politely but clearly inform them that you are a worker and you are bound not to do so. If it persists, it may begin to be harassment – be firm and clear and inform a member of staff.

• **Reasons**

Socialising with Night Centre users blurs the private and professional roles. It may make challenging that particular individual at work very difficult. It may make maintaining confidentiality a problem. Other workers and Night Centre users may be resentful and suspect favouritism. It is likely to make you confuse your emotional needs and the needs of the Night Centre user.

• **Exceptions**

Socialising with Night Centre users **in work time** is fine within health and safety guidelines, provided it is made clear that this is part of your support role. If you have a chance social meeting (in a pub for example) you should, without being rude, make it clear that you are not 'at work' and are having time out. If the Night Centre user persists, it may be appropriate to leave.

• **Personal Information**

Never give out personal information about your work colleagues, and be very careful about information you disclose about yourself. Don't give out your address, phone number or personal information.

• **Reasons**

You may open up yourself or others to robbery, harassment or violence if you upset someone, for example if you have to evict them. Workers may receive abusive phone calls if their telephone number is known.

• **Exceptions**

Disclosing some personal information at work is necessary to develop relationships with users e.g. your preferences, interests, and life experiences if appropriate, but think of the potential consequences of any disclosure. If in doubt, don't say it – you can always do so later when you've thought more about it.

- **Drink/Drugs**

Don't come into work drunk or under the influence of non-prescribed drugs.

- **Reasons**

Your judgement, emotions and ability to cope with challenging situations will be affected. Night Centre users with dependency problems may find intoxicated staff unacceptable. The Cold Weather Group Night Centre's insurance is invalid if a worker is intoxicated.

- **Exceptions**

There are NO EXCEPTIONS to this rule.

- **Betting**

Don't put bets on for Night Centre users, ask Night Centre users to put bets on for you or encourage gambling in any way (including the Lottery or Grand National).

- **Reasons**

Gambling can be addictive and is usually a waste of money. The handling of winnings may put temptation unnecessarily in the way of Night Centre users and workers, and lead to accusations against you.

- **Exceptions**

There are NO EXCEPTIONS to this rule.

- **Gifts**

Don't give or receive personal gifts to or from Night Centre users.

- **Reasons**

Receiving gifts from people on low incomes is inappropriate and may be compromising if they turn out to be stolen. It may give the impression of favouritism, which other workers and Night Centre users will resent.

- **Exceptions**

There are NO EXCEPTIONS to this rule.

- **Lending and Borrowing**

Do not lend or borrow from Night Centre users, especially money.

- **Reasons**

Pressure for the return of a borrowed item could strain the worker/Night Centre user relationship and affect hostel work. Items could be stolen, or it could give an impression of favouritism.

- **Exceptions**

It may be appropriate to lend or borrow non-valuable items (e.g. books and tapes) as long as workers and Night Centre users are clear about the consequences of non-return or damage of property. Responsibility must lie with you.

- **Buying**

Don't buy anything from a Night Centre user or sell anything to them.

- **Reasons**

Items you buy or sell could be stolen or illegal (e.g. duty-free tobacco). It is immoral to make money out of people you work with, especially if they are on low incomes. It may detrimentally alter the worker-client relationship.

- **Exceptions**

The Big Issue.

- **Favouritism**

Don't show favouritism to any Night Centre users (even though it is impossible not to like or dislike certain individuals more than others).

- **Reasons**

All Night Centre users need time and support; not just those that we like best or get on with. It's useful to develop the skills to establish contact with all types of people. Favouritism creates resentment, which can upset the harmony of the hostel.

- **Exceptions**

At certain times, different Night Centre users will be in a crisis where they will need a lot of staff input.

- **Lying / Misleading**

Don't lie to, mislead, or give unrealistic information to Night Centre users.

- **Reasons**

Workers are in positions of trust, and to lie or mislead is an abuse of this. Unrealistic expectations can jeopardise a person's chances of progression, and make them feel like they have 'failed', as what they expected didn't happen.

- **Exceptions**

If the health or safety of a colleague or Night Centre user may be jeopardised by being honest.

DO'S

- **Joking**

Do be careful when joking with Night Centre users. It is not appropriate to be sarcastic as Centre user's perception of what you're saying may be negative and they may not realise you are joking. If something is taken the wrong way a situation can escalate. It is safer not to try and be funny through sarcasm.

- **Reasons**

Jokes about how you may evict a certain Night Centre user if they do or don't do a certain thing can be taken more seriously than you realise. Well-intended jokes can easily hurt a person's feelings, set up challenging situations and even lead to formal complaints.

- **Exceptions**

When you have developed a good trusting relationship with someone, joking may be fine.

- **Challenge Colleagues**

Do challenge other workers who you feel are overstepping boundaries or being unprofessional – and do it as privately and as constructively as possible.

Reasons:

To ensure that the unprofessional behaviour stops and as a learning opportunity for the worker as well as to protect users from abuse.

Exceptions:

If you feel uncomfortable challenging a colleague, report it to management who can challenge for you if appropriate.

- **Respect colleagues**

Do respect colleagues when on shift.

Reasons:

To support each other e.g. not to contradict one another and respect one another's boundaries. To share the workload. To be consistent in front of other Night Centre users.

Managing Challenging & Aggressive Behaviour

Please be aware when reading this section that we've had very few problems at the Night Centre involving volunteers. You will never be left unsupervised by staff. However, we feel it's important that volunteers are made aware of the kinds of behaviour that promote a non-aggressive environment.

Anticipating, risk assessment and avoiding violence

- It is obviously better to avoid violence by establishing a safe project. Good teamwork is vital – know your team, pass information on, e.g., incidents, personality clashes, breakages, and atmosphere. Keep checking in with each other.
- Be aware of your environment, e.g. staffing levels, roles, blindspots, possible flashpoints etc.
- Be aware of your client group – know them and be known, be aware of their names, friends, their state (e.g. hungry, tired, frustrated, drunk, drugged, race). Be aware of any altered behavioural patterns, and any build up.
- Be aware of yourself, know your weaknesses, avoid unsafe places, don't take it personally, get someone else to deal with it, be aware of stress levels, keep team consistency, use supervision/support, share feelings.
- Never have potential weapons lying around, e.g. milk bottles, sharp items. If this is not practical put them out of reach or sight as soon as you think violence might occur. If you can't do this without the aggressor seeing, then leave them alone as it may give people ideas.
- Be very alert to the possibility of violence. The point of intervention varies from situation to situation and in some cases intervention is inappropriate and may actually spark off violence. Monitor signs of impending trouble. This is of course easier if you know the individuals involved, but never ignore the sounds of raised voices, bumps and thuds etc.
- If possible, warn clients in advance of any possible disappointments, or problems. Often we are afraid of clients with short fuses and we consciously or unconsciously portray things in a rosier light than we would for others. It is better to be brave early on than hope that whatever it is will not happen.
- Let colleagues know where you are going and how long you expect to be wherever possible. It may be useful to agree with colleagues in advance a subtle signal to let them know that you may need help.

Managing violent or aggressive situations

- Before you become involved in a situation, where possible assess the risks involved to yourself, colleagues and other Night Centre users. Get rid of people who are not involved – sometimes other people can be helpful and if you are concerned you may decide not to do this, but an audience may make things worse.
- Don't back either yourself or the client into a corner – be aware of your escape routes as you enter the situation and also allow the aggressor a way out. Physically make sure they are able to get out of the room easily, psychologically make sure they can back down easily without losing face, particularly if other people are present. For example, offer alternatives, agree to talk later, ask them to think about it, or say you want to think about it.

- Make sure the environment is as calm and normal as possible e.g. turn on lights, turn off TV, open curtains.
- Don't get between fighters.
- If you suspect you are making things worse, or that you may be in danger, remove yourself from the situation – don't be a hero. If you feel the situation is dangerous and beyond your control, the guideline is to get out. You may feel that the situation requires police help – don't be afraid to call the police if a situation reaches this point.
- Be careful with body language. Take care not to stoop or look apologetic, neither should you look defensive or aggressive. What you are aiming for is assertive and confident so stand straight, use open hand gestures and an open, interested expression. Don't move quickly, point your finger at the person, don't clench your fists.
- Make sure that the person has physical space. Many people feel threatened if you stand too close or 'over' them.
- Try to engage in a routine physical activity, e.g. roll a cigarette, clear up etc.
- Be objective and calm. Make sure you listen to what the person has to say before deciding what to do. Be clear about the facts and let them know that you have heard what they have to say (even if you then have to say there is nothing you can do about it).
- Don't promise anything you can't deliver – if you let them down, you may make things more difficult for yourself and the next person who has to deal with them.
- Don't row with the clients. This is not the same as being angry, which is sometimes appropriate, but if you lose your own temper, you have stepped out of the role and lost control of the situation.
- Use your voice, speak calmly, and be honest and straightforward. Speaking lightly, calmly, slowly or affectionately can also have a dramatic effect on an atmosphere full of noise and tension. There is no hard and fast rule, but this can work particularly well if someone has been drinking or using drugs. They may not be able to hear the words properly, but they can hear the tone.
- Remind the individual what they may lose if they continue to act in this way, and ask them if it is worth it.
- It may be appropriate to leave the client alone – i.e. don't ignore them but let them know that you are leaving them in peace for a bit and that you will see them later.
- Be clear about what you are going to do, and let them know any future action that is likely to happen.
- Try to leave the client's self-respect intact.

After the event (depending on the nature of the event)

- Get the aggressors out – you may need help from colleagues, police etc.
- Secure the building, keep away from vulnerable parts of the building, ie near windows or doors.

- Clear up, reassure and support other Night Centre users and staff. Show that it is all under control. If you feel unable to do this, be honest about it, and look after your own needs. Workers involved in a violent or aggressive incident should be given reassurance and time to get over the incident immediately afterwards.
- All staff need accurate information about the incident as soon as possible.
- Talk it through with another member of staff, get some space, let go of feelings etc. Even small incidents can have long-term effects on confidence.
- Report/record and discuss how the incident was dealt with, who did what, what worked well, what was unhelpful (take care to avoid individual staff from feeling blamed for what occurred).
- Discuss and decide any appropriate actions e.g. evictions, bans, legal action etc.
- Talk to the Volunteer Co-ordinator. This should help you to look more objectively at how the situation was managed, remind you that no one is perfect and that dealing with such an incident is a very difficult and skilful thing to do.

Drugs, Health & Safety

Many of the Night Centre's users will have drug or alcohol addictions. The Night Centre has to take a particular approach to this. If we said that people had to be 'clean' (not using drugs) to come to the Night Centre, we would be excluding a large number of the people we should be there for. However, no alcohol or illegal drug use is permitted in the Night Centre itself.

Even more importantly, we cannot allow dealing in the Night Centre. As many Night Centre users are using drugs the Night Centre can be a magnet for dealers – we want to discourage this for the sake of everyone who uses the Night Centre and the staff, who could be imprisoned for allowing dealing to take place.

Always be vigilant for needles. There are 'sharps' boxes for the safe disposal of the needles. If you see a needle lying around, inform a member of staff immediately who can dispose of it safely.

Dealing with blood spillages or Night Centre Users with open wounds

There may be potential health risks relating to any spillage of blood or other bodily fluid when dealing with a Night Centre user who has an open wound. Staff have received training on dealing with these kinds of situation and volunteers should notify the staff or manager rather than try and tackle the situation themselves.

Food Hygiene

In previous years, volunteers had to complete a full day training course in food hygiene. This is now no longer necessary but volunteers must complete a basic food hygiene workshop before their first shift.

- **Handwashing**

Remember - thoroughly wash your hands before preparing to serve food! – If hands aren't clean they can spread food poisoning bacteria all around the kitchen. A quick rinse won't make sure they're really clean so it's important to wash your hands thoroughly when ever you go into the Night Centre kitchen.

- **Cooking**

Thorough cooking is very important because it kills harmful bacteria in food. If food isn't cooked properly it could make the Night Centre users ill. Microwave food needs to be checked before serving to ensure it is piping hot right the way through.

- **Cleaning**

Effective cleaning is essential to get rid of harmful bacteria in the kitchen and to stop them spreading. Ensure all equipment and surfaces are thoroughly clean before and after use.

Previous Feedback From Night Centre Users

What are your thoughts about the staff and volunteers working at the Night Centre?

- Great, absolutely wonderful, fantastic job. If it wasn't for them I wouldn't be here.
- Very helpful, understanding and supportive.
- I don't know what I'd do without their help. I've slept out all over this country and never found another centre like this, so full respect for all involved specially the volunteers

What do you like most about the Night Centre?

- Food, showers, opening times and laundry facilities
- TV – but needs a better picture!
- Somewhere safe to get your head down, socialise a bit with people in the same boat. Warm. Chilled.

What don't you like about the service?

- Only covers the worst months
- Sleeping on the floor

Is there anything we could do better?

- Open earlier
- Mats to sleep on instead of the floor
- Open for longer

Feedback From Volunteers

Here are some comments from volunteers from 2004/2005:

- I learnt that homeless people are not scary but are normal people with problems. My preconceptions were totally changed.
- I got the chance to meet a wide variety of people and building a rapport with those staying at the Centre.
- I felt like I was able to help and got a lovely response from some of the clients.
- Everyone was incredibly nice to us – I never felt threatened or uncomfortable in any way – even when we gave out the wrong meals!
- 100% chuffed with this experience, thank you very much!
- I have thoroughly enjoyed working at the shelter and will miss it greatly. I think the shelter has a great Karma and warmth. There is always a very apparent respect between staff and users that has helped towards creating this atmosphere.
- A very enjoyable and positive experience.

Jo Coles volunteered with the Cold Weather Group for two years and is now working in the housing sector. Here's her experience of volunteering in 2005:

I first applied to be a volunteer befriender for the Cold Weather Group in 2003, after learning about the position from the Bristol Volunteer Bureau. I was sent an application pack, which was fairly straightforward to complete, and after a chat with the Volunteer Co-ordinator, I was invited to attend the two main training sessions; "Dealing with Challenging Behaviour" and "Effective Listening". Both courses were really well run and informative, and gave us all a chance to meet each other before starting our volunteer shifts at the night shelter. It also gave us the opportunity to share our expectations (and nerves!) about what being a volunteer befriender would be like.

It turned out that most of our worries were unfounded, as we were given lots of support in our role, and the project workers were always on hand to answer any questions and offer advice when we needed it (much appreciated!). The homeless visitors at the night centre were a pleasure to work with too, and there were many occasions when I stayed on after all the food had been served to chat to those staying at the shelter. I heard some amazing life stories, and it was lovely to feel that I was making a difference, however small, by lending a non-judgemental ear to someone who might not get the chance to have such a chat otherwise. The majority of people were very friendly, and really appreciated the fact that we were giving up our spare time voluntarily to help out at the shelter – I was really touched on numerous occasions by people's gratitude and respect towards the volunteers.

I was really sad when the project ended, so it was lovely that on the last night we held a barbeque for all those who had stayed at the night shelter throughout the winter. It was good to see some old faces, and to hear some of the success stories of people who had gone on to find longer-term accommodation after the shelter.

Having enjoyed my experience as a volunteer so much, I was delighted when the Cold Weather Group phoned me up the following year to ask if I would like to come back – and of course I said yes! Furthermore, I was really interested to learn more about the homelessness sector, and in February of this year, I found the courage to leave my old job as an auditor to apply for a job at a busy homeless hostel. The fact that I had been a volunteer for the Cold Weather Group meant that I already knew the client group really well, and so had lots to talk about at the interview. I've now been working at the hostel for 10 months, and I gain great satisfaction from what I do... and it makes me smile to think that I could still be stuck in a job I didn't enjoy if I hadn't volunteered for the Cold Weather Group!