

What is required of Volunteers?

- A heart for the marginalised, poor and needy and a willingness to be challenged and changed.
- Willingness to follow instructions from the shift leader, and work as part of a team, be respectful and work within boundaries.
- Ability to respond calmly but quickly in an emergency. Have sound judgment to recognise when to call for help.
- Familiarity with Open Church handbook 2018 and willingness to operate within its policies and guidelines, especially regarding Health & Safety procedures.
- Knowledge of basic first aid would be useful, but is not essential to volunteering.
- Sensitivity to issues relating to homelessness, including mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse.
- Basic knowledge of the building, especially the location of fire exits. (Information provided by Venue coordinators)

Volunteer Rules

- Be reliable and arrive on time
- Make sure you know the church layout, especially the emergency exits, and any areas that are out of bounds to guests.
- Treat guests with respect.
- Be friendly and make guests feel welcome.
- Work as a team and support your Shift Leader. Do not challenge their decisions in front of other volunteers or guests.
- Guests and volunteers should be known by first names. Never be alone with a guest – they should be in the spaces designated for them and so should volunteers .
- Arrangements should not be made to meet with guests outside the Shelter unless it is an activity arranged with the charity. Examples of this might be as part of a mentoring scheme where volunteers may meet guests to help with issues they have expertise in e.g. employment, career coaching, benefits etc.
- When speaking to guests it is best not to make promises; people can feel very let down by a promise not kept. We need to build trust in order to be effective in finding appropriate help for guests. Broken promises can undermine this work. ('I will try...' not 'I will...')
- For your own safety and respect for guests, do not wear or bring valuables to the shelter.
- There should be a minimum of three volunteers in the Open Churches Shelter at all times.
- Wear appropriate and sensible clothing

Golden Rules

- Check identities – know who people are on arrival
- Do not give personal information especially address, telephone number or e-mail address, and do not lend your mobile phone to any of the guests.
- Do not be alone with guests nor take guests to your home.

- Make sure neither you nor a colleague is left alone with a guest. This is not only for your own safety but so that if anyone alleges an impropriety against you there is a witness.
- Do not give or lend money to guests
- Do not touch guests unexpectedly and bear in mind some guests do not like being touched at all
- No alcohol is allowed on the premises for guests or volunteers
- Do not intervene physically should there be a fight (this is very rare)
- Do not give any medication to guests, not even aspirin, Plasters or paracetamol etc.

Respect and Confidentiality

The golden rule should be to engage in conversation that is appropriate to people who do not know each other. When talking to guests it is important not to push for information. Please acknowledge that some guests may feel hurt or let down by some experiences and may not wish to talk about them. Others will like nothing better than to tell you their story.

Respect guests' confidentiality and don't allow your conversation to become common gossip especially with other guests or volunteers. It is also important to respect guests' individuality and personality and not attempt to enforce jollity or expect guests to engage in activities they are not comfortable with.

Also importantly although we are Christian winter shelter and based in churches we do not use the shelter as a forum for 'Proselytism'. Our guests are frequently vulnerable and forcing beliefs of such individuals at a time when individuals are most vulnerable would be entirely unacceptable. If a guest asks you to pray with them, it is however perfectly acceptable to do this, or to engage in religious conversations if a guest initiates this. Most of our volunteers and venues are motivated by Christian values and it is also fine to talk about this when talking with guests.

Although confidentiality is important for building trust, it is not about keeping secrets and this should be made clear to guests. If at any time you feel that the person poses a threat to themselves or another person or to the safety of the Shelter you should advise the guest that you will need to let your coordinator/ shift leader know immediately. Likewise, if you feel as though a conversation is getting too demanding, tell the guest that you may have to tell your coordinator what is being said in order to get appropriate help. It is then up to the guest as to whether they want to continue.

Gifts

Guests should not be encouraged to give gifts. From time to time guests may wish to give gifts to staff or volunteers e.g. a box of chocolates. Small gifts may be accepted particularly if they can be shared. The general rule is that all gifts should be shared with the team, and the guest should be told that this is the policy. In any case all gifts should be noted in the Daybook. Any gift deemed to be too expensive or in some way inappropriate should be gently returned to the guest.