

# Helping those living on Toowoomba's streets

Forty parishioners from the Parish of Toowoomba West have completed one-day training with Lifeline in order to volunteer at a shelter for those living on the streets. They have taken on a variety of roles, including cooking, welcoming and chatting with guests, making beds, staying overnight to be a listening ear, cooking breakfast, preparing packed lunches and packing up beds.

There are around 10-12 other parishioners who volunteer offsite by washing the linen and towels, cooking desserts and baking biscuits, collecting toiletries for guests' packs and lovingly sewing fabric bags for care packages. By serving in this way, parishioners are living the Gospel call to [love their neighbour](#) and [welcome the stranger](#). They were inspired after engaging in a parish Bible study in Lent this year, which was prepared by Bishop Jeremy. The Bible study was called *Head, Heart and Hands: Practising Faith Today*, and over 70 parishioners met in small groups to do this Lenten study. Coming out of the Bible study, parishioners were keen to use their hands and do something practical for their neighbour as an expression of their faith. The Bible study explored taking risks for one's faith and acknowledging that a lived faith has a cost for the individual and their respective faith community.

## DIRECT SERVICE

Projects that provide a service or product to an individual, group, or the community as a whole. This is typically how community work has been expressed historically. The risk of disempowering people by doing things for them rather than with them, should be considered when using this approach. However, it is still a valid expression of community engagement, when people are treated with dignity and respect, and when the approach is one of a suite of complementary approaches in a community. Examples include filling a volunteer shift at a local organisation, creating social media tools for an organisation, or creating a community mural.



The 'Winter Shelter Toowoomba' operates under the auspices of Lifeline Darling Downs in South West Queensland Ltd, alongside seven other churches of different denominations. Our shelter is open on Saturday nights, with other churches each providing a given night during the winter months. Toowoomba West parishioners not only volunteer at their own shelter, but also at the shelters in the halls of other denominations.

The model used is the Christian 'Stable One Winter Shelter Network' model. The mission of Stable One is to: "...support the Church as it works together to share the love of God by providing accommodation to those in need. To journey with each person towards stability, offering physical and spiritual care."



### Top 10 tips for setting up your own Winter Shelter:

1. Educate your faith community through Bible studies, homilies, social media posts and newsletters about the causes of homelessness and how people can help.
2. Select a proven model to base your shelter on, such as the [Stable One model](#).
3. Connect with an organisation like Lifeline, who can assist with administration, volunteer training and logistics.
4. In the enquiring stages, liaise with Diocesan staff based in St Martin's House, such as from insurance and workplace health and safety, to seek any required advice and guidance; your Regional Bishop; and, partnering organisations (we had to have a building assessment done by an independent builder for Lifeline).
5. To make your shelter sustainable, connect with other churches in your area, so each church offers a place for people to stay on a given night per week during the winter months.
6. Ensure your volunteers are trained in the necessary areas, including regarding Diocesan volunteer requirements and any training required by partnering organisations.
7. Ensure your volunteers are given the pastoral care and prayer support they need to serve.
8. Offer opportunities for people in your faith community to volunteer both onsite at the shelter and offsite behind the scenes.
9. Get word out about your shelter through social media channels and the media.
10. Talk to other faith community leaders in our Diocese to find out what works and what doesn't work and to share ideas.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How would you summarise the tips above using the following headings:
  - research, education and training
  - partnering
  - pastoral care and prayer
  - communications
- What alternative approaches that are less resource-intensive could a parish adopt if it has identified affordable housing as an issue in its area?

#### MORE INFORMATION

Contact The Rev'd Pauline Harley,  
The Parish of Toowoomba West:  
[pauline.harley@anglicanchurchsq.org.au](mailto:pauline.harley@anglicanchurchsq.org.au)

Or, visit [donorbox](#).