



**5 YEAR
SPECIAL**

**Annual Report
2014/15**

GROWTH

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TOWER HAMLETS CHURCHES CARING FOR THE HOMELESS

"Welcome to GrowTH's fifth end of year report. Looking back over these past five years we want to thank God for all the ways that he has used GrowTH to bring together the local church to meet the needs of so many homeless people. Our aim has always been to help meet people's physical, spiritual and emotional needs.

GrowTH is Jesus Christ's heart, hands and feet in action through the local church. It's a grassroots project and happens because many Christians and friends in Tower Hamlets have decided to use their time, talents and resources to show hospitality and compassion to our neighbours who are in need.

GrowTH has sought to harness the compassion, community and care of the local church in Tower Hamlets and use that to empower homeless people to bring change to their circumstances. Time and time again we have been humbled by the determination and resourcefulness of our guests and have learned so much from their ability to face difficult circumstances with determination, patience and a willingness to serve others.

On behalf of the trustees and staff I want to say thank you to all of the church leaders, volunteers, supporters and partners. Together we make change happen. One of our big highlights has been to see former guests return to volunteer at GrowTH and bring their much needed experience and empathy to us; we particularly want to thank them for all that they have contributed.

To God be the Glory!"

Tony Uddin, Pastor of Tower Hamlets Community Church and Chair of GrowTH.

IMPACT IN 2014-15



3,075 Bed Spaces Made Available



6,150 Hot meals provided



151 Homeless men and women given shelter



49 Assisted into more permanent accommodation



26 Assisted into further temporary accommodation

HOMELESSNESS IN TOWER HAMLETS

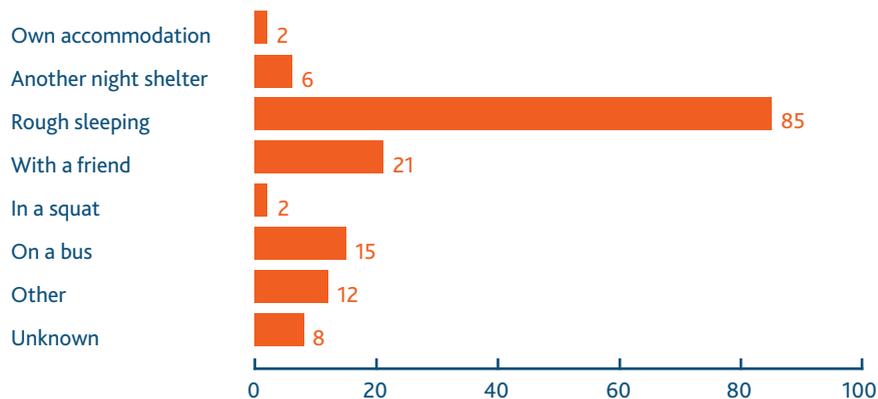
Since 2010 the local church through GrowTH has sought to reach out to the homeless of Tower Hamlets and make a lasting difference in their lives. Over the years we have seen many people move off the streets and move on to better things. However, five years on, homelessness in Tower Hamlets continues. According to London-wide data on rough sleeper numbers, 324 people were seen sleeping rough at some point in Tower Hamlets in 2013/14.¹ This is a slight reduction on the previous year, yet it is still the fifth highest across London.²

Hidden homelessness

Statistics on rough sleepers do not give the whole picture of homelessness. Many homeless men and women are never included in these statistics as they are sleeping on night buses, sofa surfing, squatting or staying in other unstable places. Those who are in temporary insecure accommodation are known as the 'hidden homeless' and could represent the majority of those experiencing homelessness. In a survey done by Crisis they found that 62% of single homeless people they interviewed were 'hidden homeless' at the time and a staggering 92% had been hidden homeless in the past.³

Being hidden homeless can have a number of detrimental consequences, from the poor living conditions of squats to the risks to personal safety on night buses. We often find that whilst a guest may be able to 'sofa surf' for a while, it is insecure as they never know when their friend will ask them to leave. Our own statistics in the graph below show a similar trend of hidden homelessness with 25% of our guests sleeping in squats, on buses or with friends before coming to the shelter.

Where did you sleep the night before the night shelter?



Guests enjoy dinner at the shelter

Breaking the cycle

A number of our shelter guests have been homeless on and off for many years. They are well acquainted with support services and have been through the 'system' many times. GrowTH is a tangible expression of the local church's heart to break that cycle and see long term change. People need more than just shelter. The fact that people repeatedly return to the streets shows that there are needs not being met. Many need emotional and consistent support to see change. We provide both help with immediate needs but also consistent and regular advocacy support.

Something more

Alongside the need for practical support for the guests, we believe there is a need for a spiritual foundation to rebuild their life. Many guests at the shelter talk about looking for something more than just a roof over their heads. This need for 'something more' is especially obvious for guests who have been in a cycle of homelessness, moving in and out of numerous types of accommodation. Our hope at GrowTH is to assist guests in exploring that spiritual aspect.

¹ 'CHAIN Annual Report: Tower Hamlets 1st April 2013 – 31st March 2014,' St Mungo's Broadway.

² 'CHAIN Annual Report: Street to Home 1st April 2013 – 31st March 2014,' St Mungo's Broadway.

³ 'The hidden truth about homelessness: Report Summary, May 2011,' Crisis.

THE NIGHT SHELTER

Our guests are referred to the night shelter through one of our trusted referral agencies. These agencies work with homeless or vulnerable people in Tower Hamlets. They are the essential link that allows the local church to reach the people who most need GrowTH's support. Since 2010 our main referral agencies have been:

- Whitechapel Mission
- Crisis Skylight
- Praxis Community Projects
- Spitalfields Crypt Trust
- Health E1
- City Gateway

How guests access the shelter

Working in partnership with other agencies in the borough, we try and make the process of accessing GrowTH as simple as possible:



New referral agency

This year Tower Hamlets Floating Support came on board as a new referral agency. This service provides support for those locally with a variety of needs with the aims of helping clients maintain tenancies and equipping them to live independently. Manager, Ryan Burke, reflects on our new partnership:

"We requested to join the list of referral agencies for GrowTH after seeing an ever increasing need for our customers to access shelter, as securing settled accommodation has become increasingly challenging for the individuals we support ... In the short time in which we have been a referral agency we have seen incredible outcomes, with our first ever referral successfully moving into permanent accommodation after 3 weeks accessing the night shelter thanks to the support of the GrowTH team."



Volunteers relax after cooking for our guests

Local churches

The night shelter is a partnership of local churches in Tower Hamlets. In 2014–15 17 churches were involved and 2 community centres. It is a privilege to work with them all:

- All Hallows Bow
- Bethnal Green Mission Church
- Bow Baptist Church
- Christ Church, Isle of Dogs
- ChristChurch London
- Christ Church, Spitalfields
- E1 Community Church
- East End Church
- ELT Baptist Church
- The Good Shepherd Mission
- The Hurtado Jesuit Centre
- Jubilee Hall, Redeemed Christian Church of God
- Lighthouse Baptist Church
- St Anne's Limehouse
- St Matthias Community Centre
- St Nicholas' Church, Poplar
- St Paul's Church, Shadwell
- St Peter's Barge
- Tower Hamlets Community Church

Reflections from a new church venue: Bow Baptist Church

"When we at Bow Baptist Church agreed to run the Night Shelter from March 2015, we had been in our rebuilt premises for 3 years, and the church family, previously quite small, was in a process of evolving. At such a stage in the church's development, the challenge was always going to be how many would be up for helping. Gradually, however, folk began to catch the vision: and we saw volunteer numbers increase encouragingly over the 13-week season. BBC is grateful to GrowTH for the opportunity to begin to see how we can serve God through serving our local community in this way." **Stuart Currie, Church Co-ordinator**

WHO ARE OUR GUESTS?

The night shelter offers shelter to all in Tower Hamlets who are homeless. We have the privilege of hosting guests from all different backgrounds, cultures and experiences. The vast majority of guests are men, a trend which is common right across the homeless sector. The average age for both men and women was 40 years old, similar to previous years. However, this season we have seen a number of guests above retirement age.



133
men



18
women

Average age: 40 years

Oldest age: 78 years

Youngest age: 19 years

The most common feedback we get from new volunteers is that the night shelter guests were not who they had expected. The majority of our guests have not been homeless for long and they do not conform to stereotypes. Many guests have qualifications and experience in influential positions. This season we had an accountant, car mechanic, doctor, actor, baker, nurse, plumber, engineer, tailor, electrician and even a former athlete, just to name a few!

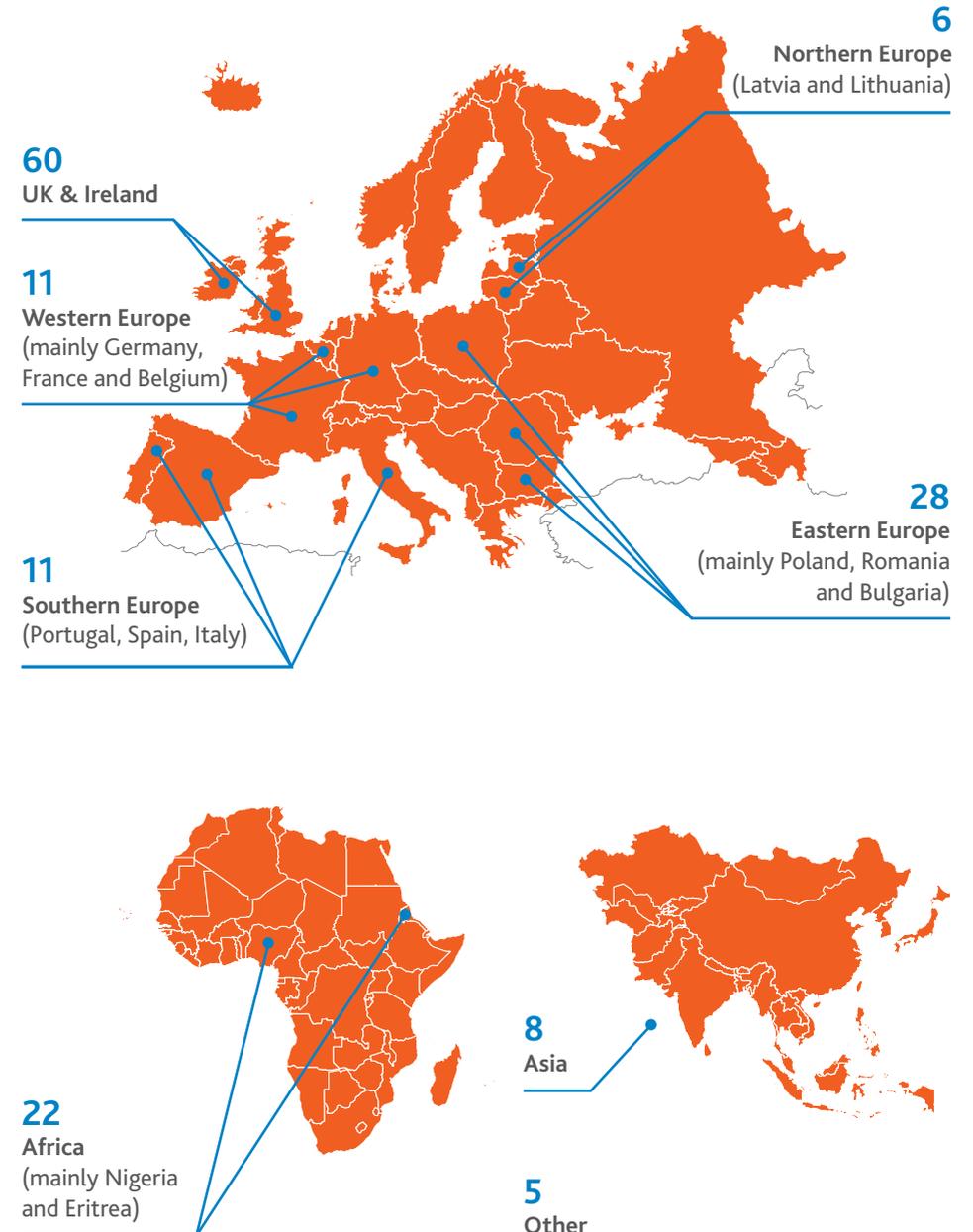
WHERE DO OUR GUESTS COME FROM?

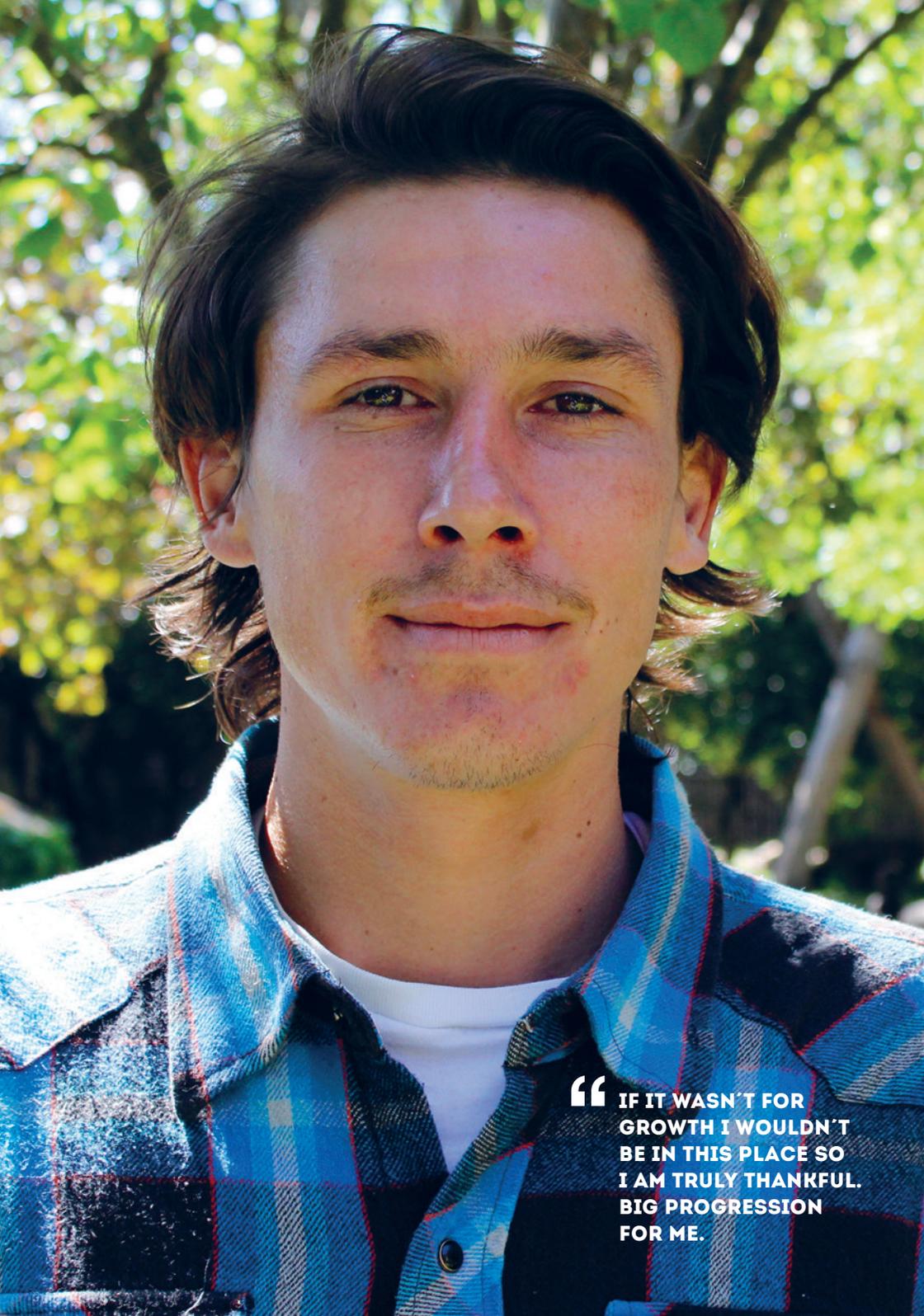
The night shelter reflects the global demographic of London. We have guests that were brought up in Stepney and we have guests that grew up on the other side of the world. The map to the right shows the nationality of our shelter guests. The largest single group in the shelter are those from the UK and Ireland. This shows that homelessness is not just a problem for migrants with no local support network, but also many who were born and brought up in the UK.

Roughly a third of guests were from the rest of the Economic European Area. The EEA is the 31 European countries than have a trade agreement allowing free movement of labour across national borders. In the shelter we found that most EEA migrants were from Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. With these guests we do have to have hard conversations. We try to help them be realistic about what their job prospects are in the UK and if a return to their home country may be best. Whatever the decision of the guests though, it is a privilege to be able to offer help to those on our doorsteps in need.

A fifth of guests had a nationality from outside Europe, a number of whom are refugees fleeing dangers in their home countries. In particular we hosted a number of Eritrean and Nigerian guests.

Nationality





“ IF IT WASN'T FOR GROWTH I WOULDN'T BE IN THIS PLACE SO I AM TRULY THANKFUL. BIG PROGRESSION FOR ME.

GUEST STORY: DEAN

For over a year Dean had been moving from squat to squat. He describes the time: “It was kinda terrible, it felt as if it was getting worse and worse and worse. I had 14 evictions in one year in squats, moving around. The things you see in squats: there can be violence, drugs and alcohol. I've had my fair share of that. I decided I couldn't take it anymore – that's why I came to GrowTH.”

Cold feet?

This was not the first time Dean had been to the shelter, the previous season GrowTH had helped him obtain ID, but Dean left the shelter before housing support could be secured. Moving into the shelter was a transition Dean found difficult. He explains “I had cold feet initially, I don't know why I did, because it was gonna give me peace of mind, a nice environment, food cooked every night. I was so used to a lifestyle that was chaotic it was really hard for me to settle down. I missed a couple of nights here and there and I thought finally, 'well, I'm gonna commit to it'.”

This decision is one that Dean describes as: “one of the best things I ever decided to do. If I hadn't come into GrowTH I would have been in the same situation. Coming into GrowTH was a complete blessing, they were really amazing people, giving up their time. Food was good, really good. Conversations with people, you learn more about yourself, trying to renew your mind as well, you're trying to move forward and not regress into old ways.”

The best birthday present

Once Dean committed to the shelter, GrowTH helped him to collect the relevant paperwork and make an application to a local supported hostel. After 3 weeks Dean got some great news: “I was at church on Sunday, I didn't even know. I went for the interview, you guys arranged an interview. Then [I] found out on the Sunday that I was going on the Monday to sign the tenancy agreement. So it was a massive surprise, a great surprise, just before my birthday. It was the best birthday present. Its a good step, I could finally see light at the end of the tunnel, I couldn't be happier, stoked.”

It brought me closer to God

Dean shared openly about one the key factors that helped him make this transition. Staying in the shelter “brought me closer to God, being in the church every night, I would read the bible a lot, I would sit there every night, I would read the Gospels. On Sunday morning everyone would get together and go to church. It was a good feeling, walking up with the volunteers, it was good. It did bring me closer to God. Even now I have calmed down a lot, things I use to do. It made me realise a lot of things, my faith is a lot stronger.”

The future

“I've been 8 weeks in my new place. I couldn't be happier. I do a lot of community gardening and trying to find some full employment. This time last year it's worlds apart. I think I was in a squat in Bethnal Green and it was horrible. Having my own peace of mind is a great thing. If it wasn't for GrowTH I wouldn't be in this place so I am truly thankful. Big progression for me.”



Darry helping in the night shelter

SPIRITUAL CARE

GrowTH has always been about more than just meeting the immediate physical needs of those who are homeless. We believe that each person who stays at the shelter is uniquely created. We believe they have value, worth and a purpose in life. Our desire is to see each guest reach their potential. We believe that despite society marginalising them, God's plan is to lift them up to a place of honour. His heart is to restore and transform them. This is the good news of Jesus Christ.

The night shelter supports people of all religious beliefs and none. In the shelter there are opportunities for guests who are interested to investigate the claims of Christianity through a discussion course called Soul. Many guests also enjoy informal chats with volunteers about matters of

faith. We offer prayer to all guests and the vast majority accept the offer and appreciate this act of love and concern.

"I have been going to Tower Hamlets Community Church almost 2 years. I started when I was in the shelter. People were very welcoming, inviting me for lunch. At the time I was very much depressed, but the love they showed me, the way they have welcomed me, it has helped with my depression. Hopefully we can encourage more people from the shelter to come to church".

Darry, Former guest

CHURCH COMMUNITY

Homelessness can often be a isolating and lonely experience. Our hope is that many of those we assist continue to be connected to one of the local church communities long after the shelter has finished. Sukiathan has been regularly attending East End Church ever since he left the night shelter 18 months ago. He says "Going to church makes my heart happy ... each person is good. I am going every Sunday and I'm happy helping".

SNAPSHOT THIS YEAR

-  59 guests attended a Sunday service
-  34 guests participated in a Christianity discussion course
-  22 guests received a Bible in a language of their choice
-  3 guests made commitments of faith

"We have absolutely loved the impact GrowTH has had on us as a church and our ability to serve a strata of society that we feel called to reach out to [but often with no natural openings]. We've seen lots of guests visit, resulting in some sticking around and helping us build something glorious for God. Sukiathan and John [former GrowTH guests] have been genuine assets to East End Church. They are not treated as a project known to a few specialists, rather they are loved and valued members of the family, who themselves now help us to build church and serve others who find themselves in similar circumstances to what they did, a year ago."

Tom Head, Leader of East End Church



Sukiathan with East End Church leaders Tom and Evans



“ WHEN I GOT THE KEY
I FELT RELIEF ... I MOVED
IN ON THE FINAL DAY
OF THE NIGHT SHELTER.

GUEST STORY: JULIE

Julie was born in Mile End Hospital in Tower Hamlets in 1963 and had lived in the area her whole life. Therefore, when her landlord decided to sell up, her life changed dramatically. Julie reflects on her experience: "I did wonder if that was how I would be. I was at my brothers' but I was getting no help. I was on a low, 'cos I didn't even have my own privacy. My living quarters were in the living room, I felt like a school kid again 'cos when they were out I never even got a set of keys. I had been there for 3 months."

Night shelter

Julie was referred to the night shelter by her support worker at Look Ahead. She remembers her first night well: "I was anxious at first which is obvious. No, it was a good experience and we stuck together, we was like a unit, even when I was the only girl I still felt safe. The food was brilliant apart from when we kept having curries 'cos I don't really do spicy foods."

"I felt like throwing in the towel.."

GrowTH referred her to the housing team of another local charity Crisis, however a number of opportunities fell through and it looked like nothing would materialise in time. Julie explains: "towards the end I began to think 'Was I ever gonna to get anywhere?' After having a few pulled under the carpet from me. You feel deflated. Many times I felt like throwing in the towel, but I think that's because of my bad health."

On the final day

With only a few nights left before the shelter closed for the summer Julie had a breakthrough. "I viewed a place, a bedsit and I got accepted on that day. When I got the key I felt relief ... I moved in on the final day of the night shelter."

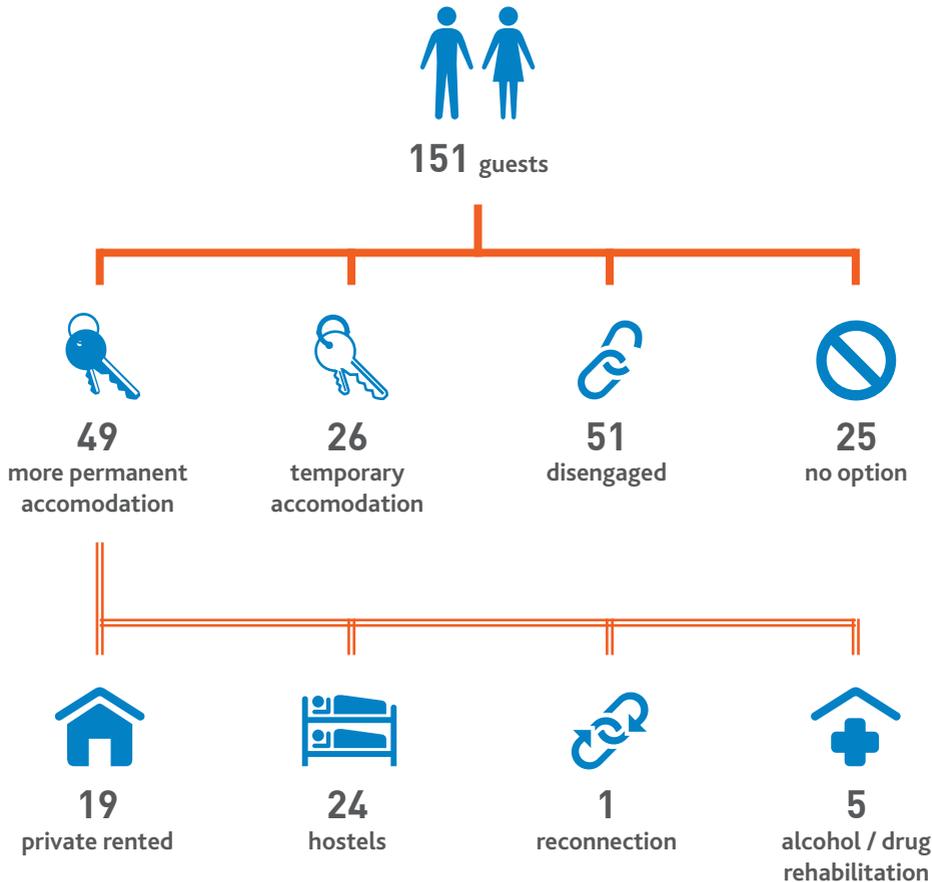
"I've never been brought up with religion but..."

As well as finding community in the shelter Julie also found it when visiting one of the local churches on a Sunday. Julie explains "I have been coming for 5 weeks, I like the atmosphere. I have never been brought up with religion, but it's not really like a church it's different especially the singing and they're all friendly everyone. Some are complete strangers but absolutely friendly, I think I will stick around."

RESETTLEMENT

The vision of GrowTH has always been about long term change. A local church provides an emergency shelter that meets our guests immediate needs. However, our aim has always been to see guests move off the streets permanently. To do this, each guest is given a 28 night stay at the shelter. In this time the employed Advocate Workers 'get alongside' the guest and provide assistance in finding a longer term housing solution.

This year we saw a total of 49 guests move on to more permanent accommodation. 75% of guests who engaged fully with the resettlement support offered by the GrowTH staff moved on to more permanent accommodation and 93% of those who engaged and were entitled to UK benefits moved on to more permanent accommodation.



Overcoming challenges

Despite new laws restricting access for EEA migrants to Housing Benefit and further restrictions on those who can access Crisis and Support Grants, this season's resettlement support has continued to be fruitful. This has involved creativity on the part of GrowTH Advocate Workers to find new solutions to complex housing problems. One particular success this season has been the 5 guests who moved into residential rehabilitation centres. These were huge personal steps for each of the men involved and for GrowTH it is the highest number we have seen move into rehab in any season!

Engagement improves

We say that a guest engages with GrowTH when they stay in the shelter and are able to work with our Advocate Workers to try and find a housing solution. Whilst we appreciate that there are a range of reasons why a guest may not want to engage with GrowTH, we always try hard to build a rapport with each guest so that the maximum number may choose to engage with us. In the first year 57% of guests engaged with our Advocate Workers. Five years on, this has increased to 66%, our highest ever rate! As an organisation we have grown in experience and understanding of how to best engage those who are homeless and we continue to develop approaches that are both challenging and people centred.



Mark in his new hostel room in Poplar

CHURCH VOLUNTEERS HOST GUESTS

This year it was amazing to see volunteers from local churches not only opening the doors to their church buildings, but opening the doors to their homes. This happened on three occasions this year. Twice it provided a crucial temporary place to stay before those guests move on to something more permanent and the third guest was able to avoid moving back onto the streets in June when the shelter closed.

To ensure the welfare of both guests and volunteers, GrowTH did risk assessments and had meetings to establish ground rules and expectations. We avoided open-ended agreements that could lead to misunderstandings, so each guest moved into a home for a pre-agreed time period, e.g. a week. We are glad to say that all three stays were positive for both guests and volunteers!

Andy & Anna

Andy and Anna hosted a guest for a couple of weeks before he moved into a flat of his own in south London. That guest now has a full-time job and is hugely grateful for the help Anna and Andy gave him. We asked Andy and Anna about their experience:

What made you think about doing this?

Anna: People I met [in the night shelter] just seemed like really ordinary people who had no home. I said to my husband "We've got a spare bed! I think this person needs to come and stay!" People in the homeless shelter really are having the worst times of their lives and we've got it very comfortable.

Andy: What GrowTH does, that's different from just going out on the street and inviting a homeless person in, GrowTH provides that sort of vetting or introduction. Through staying in the shelter, people had gotten to know the guest and gotten to know their situation, so it was helpful for him but also not unduly risky for us.

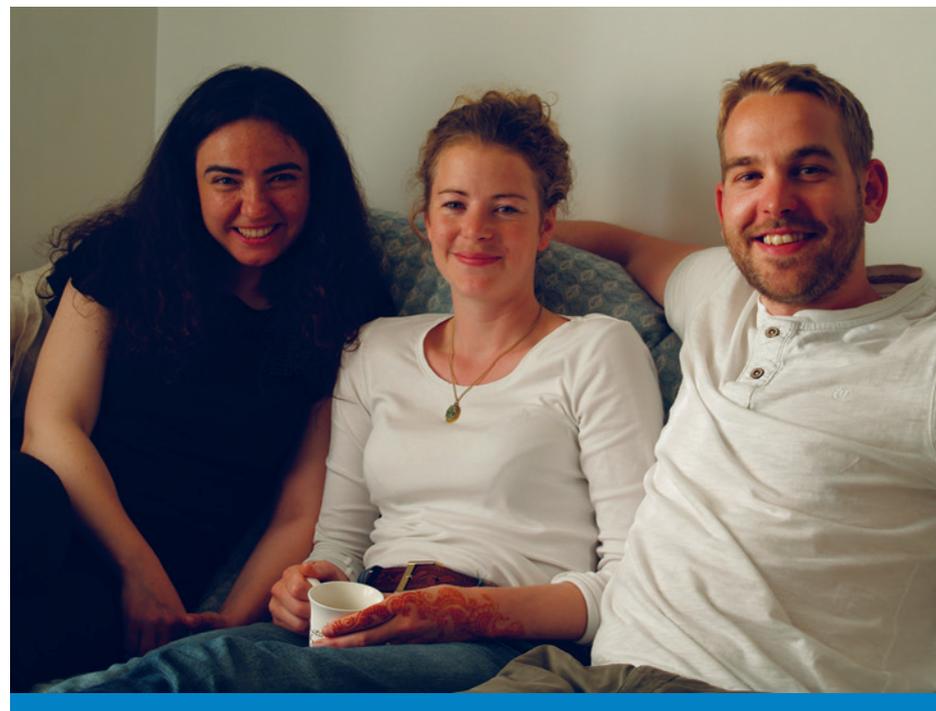
GrowTH helped put an agreement in place, how did it help?

Andy: In terms of being time limited, it was really helpful for both of us... it was helpful for him as he could tell agencies working with him 'look I need to have a flat by this date' and I think it made things happen quicker than if there was no definite date... it also kept him motivated.

Should others do it?

Andy: We would definitely do it again. I think anyone who is considering it needs to weigh up for themselves whether this is something they feel able to do and weigh up the risks for themselves. We are also called as Christians to a life of sacrificial generosity, and that involves taking a risk. Start with GrowTH and people with more experience of these things, it's invaluable. It's really important you are supported.

Please note that GrowTH would not advise that volunteers host homeless men and women in their home without the support of an organisation like GrowTH that knows the background of the guest, can assist in setting boundaries and can do an informed risk assessment.



Hilal relaxes at home with volunteers Kate and Jules

Hilal

Hilal stayed with volunteers Jules and Kate for one week after leaving the night shelter, before moving into a room in S.E. London. She avoided a week on the streets and all three enjoyed the experience:

"After night shelter time finished I stayed with Jules & Kate. They were very nice, friendly, helpful, lovely family, it was a great one week. They gave me a comfortable bed, separate bathroom, could use a computer and everyday in the evening time we had a family dinner, and in the morning already my breakfast and lunch pack. I remember nice discussions, about Jesus, people, different culture, everything. It was great help for me." **Hilal, Guest**

"Sharing our home was only a small sacrifice for us but for Hilal it was the difference between sleeping on the street and being safe and warm. When we found out she was a vegetarian we did wonder how we'd cope, but it turns out you don't need meat every day to survive! It was great fun, we really enjoyed getting to know her and we were just pleased she didn't have to be on the street." **Jules & Kate, Volunteers**

THE BEGINNINGS

In 2009–10 a number of Tower Hamlets churches from different denominations felt it was time to start new initiatives to care for those who are homeless and marginalised. This is how Growth began:

Whitechapel, February 2009

One Monday night a volunteer from a local church, was driving a homeless person to The Good Shepherd Mission to collect a sleeping bag. She had met him through the Teen Challenge bus outreach in Whitechapel. On receiving their sleeping bag, the guest proceeded to climb over the fence into the park adjacent to the church to bed down for the night. The volunteer saw this and challenged Ryan Lynch, one of the church workers: "How can your church allow this to happen on it's door." She cried out, "Please God, open up the Good Shepherd Mission to take in homeless people."

Bethnal Green, Winter 2009

Still remembering this challenge, in late December Ryan received a call from the homeless day centre Whitechapel Mission. An elderly client was being discharged from hospital literally onto the street. In response the church leaders decided they would be able to host the gentleman in the church building. Within 3 days Sonia had referred 8 homeless people to The Good Shepherd Mission! A team of volunteers from a few churches came together to host the guests with supper and a bed for the night over the Christmas period and into the New Year.

Tower Hamlets Evangelical Fellowship, early 2010

Leaders of evangelical churches in Tower Hamlets meet regularly to pray together. At their first meeting in 2010 Ryan shared what had happened at The Good Shepherd Mission over Christmas. Those present felt inspired to take a step of faith and start new projects to serve those on the margins of Tower Hamlets. In that one meeting no less than three projects were agreed upon: the Tower Hamlets Foodbank (which has since fed over 3,500 people in the borough), Street Pastors (an initiative to serve the local community) and a night shelter that would later be called Growth.

Following the meeting, Tony Uddin, leader of Tower Hamlets Community Church, was going to meet a member of his church, Rory Paget-Wilkes. Rory did not know what had been discussed at the earlier meeting, yet he shared that he wanted to give a day of his week to volunteer for the church and that he felt a night shelter should be started in the East End!

5 YEAR
CELEBRATION!



Volunteers prepare a dinner during the first year of the shelter

THE LAUNCH

So, with a lot of vision but not much experience, these churches set about preparing to run a night shelter over the coldest winter months. A temporary worker was employed and a charity was founded. It was felt that this work would grow in Tower Hamlets, hence the name "Growth" was adopted.

The night shelter began but there were only five churches signed up. Two nights were empty and our guests would not have had church venues to go to. However, at the last moment, two more churches stepped in. That season was a huge success and revealed to us more of the huge need in our communities.



Growth trustee Henk van der Meer chats with guest Valentin in the first year of the shelter

GUEST STORY: DANIEL

Daniel first came to GrowTH in January 2011. He had been spending a hard night sleeping rough on Brick Lane, something he'd never experienced before. He found himself alone and on the streets after a career opportunity failed to come through for him. At the time GrowTH was limited with the help it could offer as he had no access to public funding, but with support from volunteers, another stay with GrowTH and a couple of successful referrals, Daniel's life began to change.

Finding a home

"GrowTH helped with the connections and people I met. It's like a puzzle – GrowTH referred me forward to another shelter in Camden and then that shelter helped me get into a hostel they were connected with, and I have not been homeless since. Eventually from that hostel I came to my own place in Shoreditch in 2013 and I'm really blessed with my accommodation."

Work

"[My] experience and volunteering ... helped me to get my work. In 2013 January I started as a relief worker [with a homeless charity]. Now I'm permanent staff, an assistant support worker. I work in an assessment centre for supported housing. We assess clients and support them into other accommodation and independent living. We help with life skills, budgeting, benefits, with training and education."

Church

"I have been going to Good Shepherd Mission since 2014 September. I didn't go while I was in Newham in the hostel, now it is my local place. They invited me to the home group and it was really good to be there." Daniel remembered that when in the shelter "the pastor and other people there had a really positive impact on me."

Marriage

"We got married in 2013 May... we were apart [she was in the Philippines]... but we were talking everyday all the time, like millions of facebook messages! It was 51 months waiting, which was incredible, but she was an inspiration, even now my wife she is an inspiration. It's amazing that eventually we succeeded and now we are together."

What stands out about the shelter?

"The food, the lovely volunteers provided amazing food! Also I'm Christian and I remember the Christian faith and the talks and passion from Ryan [church co-ordinator]. It was always really good to see the volunteers, their enthusiasm and that they really take this thing – your situation – seriously, and it is serious being homeless. God, help, food, kindness, love and the volunteers actually, probably the volunteers stand out the most."

Could you have seen yourself being where you are now 4 years ago?

"I wanted to imagine it, but I can't help but see God's hand. God helped me so much, through GrowTH, through my wife, through many people. It's like a puzzle and GrowTH

**5 YEAR
CELEBRATION!**



Daniel in 2015, five years after he first came to GrowTH as a guest

was part of that puzzle. You especially need that support, the emotional support of the volunteers and they have a lot to share. They have experience and expertise, everyone of them has something to offer, some kind of good experience – they can help a lot."

What would you say to yourself 4 years ago:

"Hold on, it will be better. You can make it, you can do it too, keep going, you will get a job eventually if you are persistent. Keep listening to your volunteer, your mentor, this is the thing I know GrowTH does – befriending. It's a good start, it's

very important, that would be like a unique opportunity for the homeless guys. We need the Holy Spirit, there are so many hidden talents in the church, how can we, how can GrowTH use them to benefit the homeless more?"

“ WE NEED THE HOLY SPIRIT, THERE ARE SO MANY HIDDEN TALENTS IN THE CHURCH. HOW CAN WE, HOW CAN GROWTH USE THEM TO BENEFIT THE HOMELESS MORE? ”

WHAT MAKES GROWTH SPECIAL?

FIVE YEAR RESULTS:



630 total guests



214 into more permanent accommodation



117 into further temporary accommodation

FIVE YEAR ALTERNATIVE STATS!



3 tonnes of chilli con carne served



40,000+ hours given by volunteers



8,500+ miles cycled by our Advocate Workers



Alex shows his football skills, 2014

"Over the past 5 years many guests have shared with me how much Growth has meant to them when they were in need, often desperate need. Amongst this number some have told me of the many different ways that Growth has been a blessing to them in a special spiritual way. i.e. either coming to faith or restoring their faith in a personal loving God. One guest who came to faith after having a dream about Jesus Christ stands out in particular. I have also been deeply moved over the past 5 years by the unexpected way in which Growth has developed ecumenically across the different local Christian denominations, with our neighbours of other faiths and none getting involved and how well Growth staff and referral agencies work together to address guests needs. It is for these reasons that Growth is very special to me". **Ryan Lynch, Founding trustee**



5 YEAR CELEBRATION!

A guest relaxes in the shelter, 2011-12

"When my situation was bad Growth put a roof over my head and helped me find accommodation. Accommodation was the priority and after that I could settle down and try to live my own life" **Amanzghi, Guest May 2013**

"The Growth shelters are special because of the way they reach out to everyone, no matter who they are or where they are at. The volunteers welcome guests in and genuinely want to get to know them, hear their story and build a relationship with them. Over the past five years Growth has had opportunities to remind people on the edge of society that they are valued, they are loved and there is hope. The guests bring so much with them, I remember in the first year of the shelter one of the guests was an electrician and spent hours in the day fixing a fan in our venue that had broken. He gave his time and his skills so willingly. Each of the guests brings something individual and special with them, it is a privilege to get to know them while they are in the shelter". **Sarah Opie, Trustee**



Guests on a day trip to Essex, 2014

"To be perfectly honest Growth saved my life, I had nowhere else to go, it provided a light at the end of the tunnel. It gave me the foundation I needed to find work, I am now in part-time work". **Paul, Guest Feb 2014**



Dinner is served, 2012-13

"One of the things that sets Growth apart is its independence. The fact that Growth is wholly funded by churches and individual supporters enabled us to take an objective, compassionate approach to our guests' situations. Each individual was treated on a case-by-case basis and then given the most appropriate support. Growth's ability to be independent and act wholly in the interests of its guests is precious and should be celebrated." **Seb Rumsby, Advocate Worker 2011-12**

WHAT NEXT?

As we listen to our guests and referral agencies, we see that there are many more opportunities for local churches to serve the marginalised in our community. The night shelter and resettlement support has been a lifeline for hundreds of men and women and there is a need for this hospitality and help to continue. There is also a need for new initiatives to begin. Over the coming years we aim to help local churches serve guests in three key areas:

Housing

There is a need for supported housing to prepare guests for independent living. There is a need for local housing for those guests that have a support network in the East End. There is a need for local housing for guests that are joining local churches and exploring questions of faith. We are therefore delighted that we have been able to take over the management of two local Housing Association properties to provide short-term supported housing for night shelter guests! We pray that this may be a pilot that grows into a real solution for the housing needs of our guests.

Employment

Being able to work, be it paid or unpaid, empowers you to move forward in life and allows you to play your part in the flourishing of your community. We believe our guests have huge potential – indeed the Bible says that God can do more than we could ask or imagine! It is a travesty that

men and women come to us who can work and are willing to work, yet for a variety of reasons struggle to simply get into work. We aim to continue expanding our employment support and we will pilot social enterprises in the areas of carpentry and retail that could release men and women back into mainstream employment.

Befriend

We all know there is more to life than a house and a job. We all need a community to enjoy life. However, many guests come to our shelter in the first place because that community was not there. If we could assist guests in rebuilding social support networks, we could put night shelters out of business! Local churches could contribute towards this community. Befriend, our befriending project, is simply a way of facilitating the local church to welcome in and reach out to resettled men and women.

**5 YEAR
CELEBRATION!**



Befriend: Guests enjoy a game Upton Park



Housing: One of our two new supported houses



Employment: Furniture painting underway



**SIGN UP
TODAY!**

Run the British 10K for GrowTH in July 2016

Enjoy a run through central London
and raise essential funds to allow
GrowTH's work to continue.

www.thisisgrowth.org



By popular demand join the GrowTH Bike Ride in Summer 2016

Riders of all abilities welcome for a great
Summer day out in the countryside for
a great cause.

www.thisisgrowth.org

**SIGN UP
TODAY!**

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT FOR GUESTS



A guest enjoys painting training kindly provided by our friends at the Spitalfields Crypt Trust

Right from the beginnings of GrowTH, we were more than just about shelter and housing. Our vision was always to give holistic help meeting not only basic physical needs, but spiritual needs and the human desire to work and contribute to society.

We have taken steps towards assisting guests in this area. For example, over the past three years we have seen a total of nine guests successfully complete the apprenticeship scheme offered by Pret a Manger and they all secured a job in the company on completion.

With a staff team of three this season we were able to increase our employment support. We have connected with employment schemes across London as diverse as bike maintenance courses, a chocolate making business and a mentoring scheme run by a City law firm.

Employment results this year:

- 3 Assisted in maintaining their employment by staying in the shelter
- 2 Into employment through referrals from GrowTH
- 10 Into employment with some support from GrowTH, e.g. providing a suit or travel money

It is great to see these steps forward, but we know there is so much more for our guests. We believe there are many companies in our city that will give these men and women a chance in employment. Do pray for us as we make those links and seek to serve our guests in this area.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

What if we had our own business?

What if we could train and employ guests ourselves?

This has been the vision of a number of volunteers linked with the GrowTH and NEWway (Newham) night shelters. For a number of years now, a small group has prayed regularly for this provision for our guests under the name of RenewEL – 'Renew East London.' In the Summer of 2014 this group grew and an opportunity arose for to use space in the Emmaus Poplar charity shop. We found ourselves in a position to begin piloting an informal furniture repairs and upcycling volunteer programme! Two volunteers, Kaspars and Karl, had the experience to do this and 13 different former GrowTH guests took part.

We've spent time over the season visiting projects across the UK that are providing employment training and we have learnt a lot. It has been our privilege to gather through this season with representatives of other social enterprises in East London to pray for each other – so much good is happening in our community! In the Summer of 2015 we are now praying and trying new ideas... Watch this space.



Tables painted by former GrowTH guests



Our first day of making wooden pallets into furniture

GUEST STORY: CLAUDIO

"I think everyone should be homeless once in their life ..."

"... Hardship forces you to find yourself. You have to start from zero, from ground zero. It is a fresh start, like being born again." I sit with Claudio in his new flat in Stamford Hill. He reflects on his journey that resulted in him becoming homeless for over two years. It was relationship breakdown that hit him hardest and he felt "if other people survive on the streets, why not me?" I ask what it was like to stay at the night shelter:

"Finally being treated as a human being."

Claudio was referred to the shelter by Crisis Skylight in November as Winter was drawing in. Being treated with dignity and respect is what he appreciated most from his time in the shelter. Claudio met with Tom and they realised that due to the rules of benefit entitlement, Claudio's only way off the streets in the UK was to find employment. Claudio's positive and enthusiastic attitude made him a good fit with the Pret a Manger apprenticeship scheme.

Apprenticeship at Pret

Claudio went for his interview in Victoria and described how he was shaky beforehand. He hadn't been to an interview for a long time so was nervous, even though he had prepared as much as he could. He was successful and very soon he was serving coffees on the Strand! "Giuseppe [the manager at Pret] could see the person behind the 'homeless person.' He gave me an opportunity to see how well I can do."

"The difference is like night and day"

"That is the difference between where I am at and six months ago." Claudio has now passed six months at Pret and with the help of Crisis Skylight moved into a flat of his own. Everything is not perfect, but he is looking to the future. "I want to live for 200 years! I want to see my son and grandson and share my life experience with them. I want to do good and find a career." I ask if he has any thoughts for the readers of our Annual Report:

"Homeless does not mean hopeless"

"Being homeless is just a matter of circumstances. Everyone should focus on improving society." Outside of his flat buses stop on the busy street. He jokes: "I can still see the bus stop, but I no longer need to sleep there!"



“ THE DIFFERENCE IS
LIKE NIGHT AND DAY ...

BEFRIEND

Typically we are able to assist one third of all guests at the night shelter into more permanent accommodation. However the story must not end there. Nationally one in four homeless individuals that are resettled go on to become homeless again. Loneliness and isolation have been found to be the main causes.⁴ At GrowTH we believe resettlement needs to last. God has good and lasting plans for each and every guest.

As a result, in June 2014 we launched Befriend. Our thanks must go to the Church Urban Fund for their Mustard Seed Grant that facilitated the start of this new venture.

Befriend connects volunteers with former GrowTH guests to provide informal social support and encouragement when they first move into accommodation. Volunteers commit to meeting with a guest once a month for a period of 6 months.

New ground

In this first summer we supported eleven befriending friendships. Five of those met together three or more times. Through the 2014–15 season we ran Befriend alongside the night shelter. Nine meetings happened between befrienders and guests. In the summer of 2015 we hope to build on this further and have high hopes that this simple idea will be beneficial to guest and befriender alike.

"The befriending project is a great way to put yourself in the shoes of a former guest. I enjoy finding out what their life is really like. I have made a friend too and have been totally blessed when praying for her. These are real people with real lives. Definitely challenging but always a blessing."

Kerry, befriender

⁴ Gerard Lemos, Homelessness and Loneliness: The want of conviviality, Crisis, 2000, p. 9.



BEFRIEND STORY: RYAN & DANNY

Ryan: "Danny and I have been meeting for about a year now. When Danny left the shelter Tom [a GrowTH Advocate Worker] approached me and said 'would I like to meet up with Danny as part of the Befriend Project?' I thought: 'that's weird 'cos I would want to meet with Danny anyway.' Tom organised a first meeting and we have met up a few times over the past year. We mainly meet around the football project I run."

Danny: "The meetings so far have been quite positive and encouraging and have given me more stable path within my growth with God. After finishing the shelter I faced other challenges and through meeting Ryan we discussed the challenges. Challenges we face on a day to day basis

and how to overcome them. It just gave me that encouragement and it has been quite an adventurous journey. Meetings we have had together have been shedding a lot of light where I have found someone I can always go back and share my experiences and have a listening ear and also have that support and encouragement, has been very helpful".

Ryan: "I don't think Danny fully realises that when he shares about how the Holy Spirit is working in his life how encouraging and challenging that is for me. I definitely think it is a two way thing. Danny comes to me for encouragement but I end up thinking: 'wow, Jesus is alive in this man!'"

HELPING OTHER SHELTERS

GrowTH can only do its work by working in partnership with others. The night shelter is a partnership of churches and volunteers. Our guests come to the night shelter from our partner referral agencies and our guests move into permanent accommodation managed by partner landlords and organisations. The experience of other shelters helped us decide how GrowTH would run and our costs are covered by the generous donations of others.

Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew: "Freely you have received, freely give." We want to be generous with what we have been blessed with.

New shelters

GrowTH follows a night shelter model that can easily be replicated. All that's needed are seven church venues and volunteers eager to be God's hand and feet on earth! In 2012 we had the privilege of sharing our experience with churches in Horsham who wanted to start a shelter and Ollie Kendal, one of the GrowTH Trustees, did a training day with them. Horsham Churches Night Shelter has just completed its fourth year of running a seasonal shelter through the coldest months of the year.



GrowTH has a close relationship with the NEWway shelter in our neighbouring borough of Newham. One of the founders was Jonny Adams who began volunteering at GrowTH in 2012. Jonny writes:

'After sharing my first-hand experience of what a simple and effective model a night shelter is for alleviating homelessness, a group of us decided to launch a Newham night shelter in November 2013 called NEWway. From sharing their experiences with us, to advising us on policies and procedures, the team from GrowTH were incredibly supportive in helping us get NEWway up and running. With 2 winter seasons now under our belt, we've been able to provide shelter, food and support to a total number of 136 guests, with 53 of them being helped to find permanent accommodation. None of that would have been possible without the invaluable assistance GrowTH offered.'



Shelterplus

In 2013 a grant from the Pret Foundation Trust allowed GrowTH to develop a bespoke online referral system. This combined all our case notes, night shelter administration, referrals and statistics in one automated system, avoiding a large amount of administration and allowing us to focus our time on helping guests secure housing. We have made this system available for free to a number of shelters across the UK, such as NEWway, and we will continue to offer it as a tool to facilitate the growth of night shelters.

CHILDREN'S UPLIFT PROGRAMME, BANGLADESH

We know that homelessness is a global issue. With the East End's connections to Bangladesh, we knew of the Children's Uplift Programme that reaches out to mothers and their children who are homeless in Dhaka. CUP runs a drop-in where these vulnerable women and children can rest, eat and wash, meeting their immediate needs. They provide a training programme on areas such as literacy, life skills and vocational skills to enable adults to leave the dangers of the streets and access dignified employment. It was our privilege to donate £2,500 towards their work in 2014.

GUEST STORY: ANKAR

For Ankar this was not the first time he had been homeless, in fact homelessness began at a very young age. "I was homeless at the age of 15. I was kicked out of the house by my brother. I use to go out all the time, mixing with the wrong people, I ended up going to prison. Afterwards I moved around different hostels. This time I was homeless because the landlord wanted to get rid of me 'cos they wanted to rebuild the house. The council told me they can't help me. I was homeless for 2 days I was walking around in Aldgate, hopeless. It was very cold and then I went to see Sonia [at the Whitechapel Mission] and she helped me go to GrowTH".

A safety net

When you are homeless you spend all your time and energy finding your next meal and somewhere safe to sleep, simply trying to survive. For Ankar it was similar "I was relieved to get off the street and finding out they had a shower and toilets – it was like a home basically. My favourite thing was it was somewhere to stay, a safety net. I knew I was going somewhere to sleep that night the food was there and the people were lovely, you felt like there was a safety net, you've got somewhere to go."

A community

"I was living with 15 other people, I enjoyed it, it was nice because I was lonely, you get company. I had never been to church in my life and it was a nice experience and you meet other people in a similar situation as you are. Its a lonely time when your homeless, it was the first time in my life I got to live with other people."

Move to the countryside?

Working with another organisation, Ankar was able to move off the streets and into more permanent accommodation. "They found me a place in a shared house somewhere to live. I feel great because you need a rooftop over your head, you can get your life back together". He now has plans for a better future "I want to get a job and maybe move to the countryside and build my own life, I want to stay off welfare, I didn't come to this country to sign on I came here to work. My plan is to tell others about what happened to me so it doesn't happen to them".

“ YOU FELT LIKE
THERE WAS A SAFETY
NET, YOU’VE GOT
SOMEWHERE TO GO.



GUEST FEEDBACK

In order to better understand how our guests experience the shelter, and to see what we can improve, we ask our guests to complete feedback forms about their stay. This year 61 guests completed the form.

Average guest rating for different aspects of the shelter 0–10:



How would you sum up your experience at the shelter?

In summing up their experience in the night shelter 22 guests used the word 'good', 4 used 'excellent', 6 guests referred to their experience as 'challenging' or 'testing' but this was generally referring to their experience of homelessness as a whole. One guest who referred to his experience as 'enlightening and disturbing' did also say that the volunteers' charity 'made situation tolerable'. Many said they 'liked' or 'enjoyed' their time, one guest even saying 'I will miss it'.

Were the volunteers friendly and helpful?

The most overwhelmingly positive section of the feedback was describing the volunteers. When asked 'were they friendly and helpful?' 56 responded positively or simply with a yes, whilst 13 qualified it with 'very' and 8 with 'all'. Two guests only highlighted specific venues, two others said some good some bad in one case 'Some very helpful, others couldn't really gel in a more personal touch with guests' and only one guest had nothing positive to say. Other descriptions included; warm, caring, good hearted, brilliant, excellent, cool. One guest commented; 'The volunteers were very generous in their time, not just providing food and shelter but also willing to listen', another 'they were the best part'. A guest found the volunteers' 'walking testaments of their faith' was 'inspirational'.



Guest and volunteer relax at Bow Baptist Church

Were there any food dishes that were served too often?

When asked if any dishes were served too often 41 said 'no' or didn't comment, 8 said it was 'varied' one stated he was 'surprised from the variety', others comments included 'very good', 'very nice', 'very excellent' and 'delicious'. 20 guests said something was served too often, the English breakfast/bacon/beans made up half of these responses, and a few people also mentioned pasta, rice and curry. The only suggestion was for variety at breakfast of 'scrambled egg, mushroom, yoghurt'. One guest also said they preferred 'simple food' and another liked when there was no spice. Fun responses included: 'Bacon lol', 'haha BACON' and 'No – although fish and chips more often!'.

What do you think the scheme could do better at finding accommodation for guests?

The most common response was one of praise for the job GrowTH has done, with 9 guests using words like good, excellent or 'couldn't have done any more'. The second most popular suggestion was more ongoing support after their stay at the shelter, with 7 guests using phrases like keeping in touch, more support and contact afterwards. There were other suggestions about different support for those not eligible for housing benefit and more housing options in their local areas. 3 guests mentioned the council with one guest cheekily suggesting GrowTH should run the council. Other humorous responses included giving guests £2000 each or converting church buildings into luxury suites with wifi and power showers!

REFLECTIONS FROM THE STAFF TEAM



Left to right: Tom, Martin and Andrew

It has been my privilege to be on the GrowTH staff team for three years now. Recently as a staff team we read Psalm 95. This psalm begins by telling us to sing to God because He has done great things. We ended our season this year doing just that. We had nearly 200 guests and volunteers celebrating five years of GrowTH at our Thanksgiving Service. Former guests shared how the care of local churches helped them through hard times and there was so much to celebrate. We have now grown as an organisation to have three staff, a minibus, a seven month night shelter, successful resettlement, employment support, a befriending project and now two flats for supported housing!

Psalm 95 continues with a reminder to keep our hearts soft and "kneel before the Lord, our Maker." As we look forward to the next five years, I am challenged to be on my knees. There are so many opportunities for local churches to be God's hands and feet to the marginalised in our communities.

Good quality local housing is a huge need: Can we resettle guests in Tower Hamlets? Help accessing mainstream employment is a need: Can we provide employment opportunities? Economic migration within Europe has brought newcomers to our community: How do we respond with truth and compassion when these migrants fall on hard times? We invite you to join us on our knees as we seek to serve the marginalised in our communities over the next five years.

[Martin Vickery, Operations Manager](#)

Being part of GrowTH is amazing. Since starting with GrowTH in November last year I've discovered that I love the team, I love the guests I meet and I love what happens thanks to the churches of this borough. In amongst settling into my role and doing my best to resettle guests facing many different challenges, it is always humbling to take a step back and realise what is being achieved through churches working together. It's an amazing joint effort that provides the venues and hundreds of volunteers to ensure that every single night for 7 months 15 beds are made available to the most vulnerable people in our community. They are not just sheltered, but welcomed into a safe place, given a kind ear and offered sincere support. For many of our guests it has been too long since they last experienced these things.

God's heart is to 'set the lonely in families' (Psalm 68:6), He is all about adopting and as Jesus said, 'my Father's house has many rooms' (John 14:2). No one needs to be left out of God's house and people need to know that. God is speaking these words through His Church and I'm eager for GrowTH to create more opportunities for people to hear that message.

[Andrew Wheate, Advocate Worker](#)

I have seen cycles of homelessness ended when guests have come to GrowTH. I have seen guests who were destitute, separated from their family with no means to return, successfully re-connected. I have seen guests who have lost contact with their children have those relationships restored. I have seen guests who were suicidal and without hope, come to the shelter and find life and a purpose. I have seen guests who were ensnared by addictions come to the shelter and not only overcome their addictions, but now help others to do the same. This is my third season working for GrowTH and there have definitely been some challenging times over the years, but by God's grace he continues to save! I really believe, even more so now, that God's arm is 'not to short to save' (Isaiah 59:1). God continues to love the poor, broken and marginalised and to raise them up to a place of honor (1 Samuel 2:8).

[Tom Newby, Welfare Manager](#)

VOLUNTEER STORY: OWAIN

Tell us about yourself?

I'm originally from Aberystwyth, Wales but I moved to London in 1994. I have been running my own business in digital marketing and social media for about 18 months. I have been a member of Christ Church Spitalfields since 2010, I'm married to my wife Anna and have an 8 month old son called Noah.

How did you first hear/get involved in the shelter?

I can't quite remember. I've been doing it for 3 years. I think I saw an email. I've always been more of a breakfast man than an evening man. First got involved at Hanbury Hall, just loved it, I've always been passionate about social justice ... and the British breakfast, so marrying the two together doesn't get any better!

Did anything surprise you?

The first time I did it, I was really surprised by the general type of guests and appearance of guests. I was expecting it to be the stereotypes, but I was really surprised people were in suit jackets and well dressed. These guys have just fallen on hard luck, they've lost their jobs or been evicted from their homes. That was what was surprising – they weren't what you have in mind when you think of homeless people.

Has it affected your faith?

It's definitely had an affect on my faith. I remember Matthew 25, "whatever you did for the least of these brothers you did for me". So we're not just serving these people but we are serving God – you just really feel you're serving God when you do it. Times when you're travelling there and you're cold and tired but as soon as you get there it's amazing. You really feel you have served Him, communicated with God.

What is your favourite thing about the shelter?

I like the fact just being able offer something to people who have nothing and it just means the world to them. The amount of times they've said, 'I've no words to describe how grateful I am'. I love meeting with people, both the guests and the volunteers – it's fun, people talk, play board games, it's just good to share a meal. It's great to see people sort their lives out with just a little bit of help.



“ I'VE ALWAYS BEEN PASSIONATE ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE ... AND THE BRITISH BREAKFAST, SO MARRYING THE TWO TOGETHER DOESN'T GET ANY BETTER!

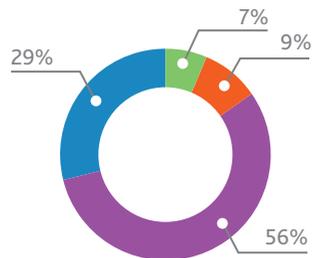
OPENING THE BOOKS

We are so grateful to those that give financially to the work of GrowTH. We receive no public funding so are entirely dependent on the generosity of people such as yourself. It is thanks to the support of churches, individuals and grant-giving trusts that we are able to pay the costs of running the night shelter, paying our Advocate Workers and covering the costs of resettlement and employment support. As you are so generous to us, we want to be open with you about where your money goes and share how God has provided for us through our five year journey so far.

Five years of giving

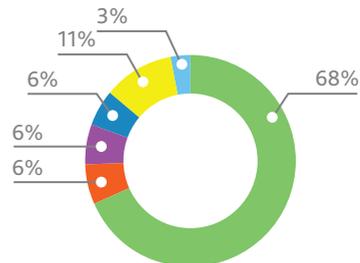
	Income	Expenditure
2010-11	£12,045	£9,463
2011-12	£5,518	£13,133
2012-13	£30,585	£22,701
2013-14	£63,900	£54,195
2014-15	£76,626	£91,336

In detail: Income 2014-15



Churches	£5,027
Individuals	£6,872
Charitable Trusts	£42,773
Sponsorship Events	£21,954

In detail: Expenditure 2014-15



3 x Staff costs	£62,460
Charity costs	£5,720
Night shelter costs	£5,520
Resettlement costs	£5,039
Installation of showers	£10,051
Giving to other shelters	£2,547

Growth gets showers

Thanks to the generosity of the Pret Foundation Trust we were able to install showers at St Matthias Community Centre and Lansbury Lodge this year. These were hugely appreciated by our guests, many of whom would otherwise have struggled to find access to hot showers.



Growth gets wheels

Thanks to the generosity of TNT Ministries, we now have a minibus that we can use to help guests move into accommodation and facilitate the running of the night shelter. We are sure it will fast become an essential part of the running of GrowTH and we are so grateful for this gift.



THANK YOU

We would like to say a huge thank you to the following charitable trusts who so generously supported GrowTH in the 2014-15 season:

- Albert Hunt Trust
- Alexandra Trust
- Beatrice Laing Trust
- Church Urban Fund: Mustard Seed
- East London Nursing Society Trust
- Green Hall Foundation
- Hilden Charitable Trust
- Marsh Christian trust
- Mary Baker Fund
- Pyne Charitable Fund
- RBS Community Grants
- Rothschilds



GROWTH

WOULD YOU GIVE REGULARLY TO GROWTH?

Regular giving enables us to plan ahead Growth's activities. It means we can be confident that we can expand our services for guests, knowing that the money will be there. Even a small amount given regularly makes a significant contribution. Would you consider giving regularly to Growth?

To make a one-off or regular donation to Growth go to:
www.give.net/20116607

www.thisisgrowth.org

Charity Number: 1161226 (Formerly: 1138837)

Company Number: 8172757

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