



CHURCHES PARTNER TO SERVE THE HOMELESS IN TOWER HAMLETS

2015/16

GROWTH

CONTENTS

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Night shelter

Homelessness in Tower Hamlets 4-5

Churches helping their neighbours 6-7

Guest story: Tarik 8-9

Who are our guests? 10-13

Guest story: Abdalaziz 14-15

Resettlement

Finding a home 16-17

Guest story: Yemi 18-19

Guest story: Christine 20-21

Spiritual needs 22-23

Supported Housing

The story 26-27

Resident story: Uthman 28-29

Resident story: Steve 30-31

Employment

Guest story: Rui 32-33

Guest story: Aleksejs 36-37

RenewEL 38-39

Reflections

Volunteer story: Nikki 40-41

Guest feedback 42-43

Guests still waiting 44

Finance 46-47

THANKS BE TO GOD!

“As we complete our sixth night shelter season we are grateful to God for sustaining and growing our work and to the volunteers of churches in Tower Hamlets for their hard work. Every year it is a miracle that we are able to run a peaceful night shelter in church halls across the borough for seven months and we are grateful to the hundreds who sacrifice time, money and energy to make this happen.

GrowTH is all about partnership. This year 19 churches and community centres worked together to run the shelter. A particular welcome goes to Bethel RCGC church and St George's-in-the-East who participated for the first time this year.

Our Advocate Workers, Ben and Matt, saw great results as they assisted our guests in accessing accommodation. This year 56 guests secured more permanent accommodation, over a third of all who stayed in our shelter!

This season also saw the launch of our new Supported Housing Project. This new initiative has flourished and expanded. It is a privilege to be able to house our guests locally, in high-quality housing, coupled with longer-term, more in-depth, support.

Thank you to all those who served, gave and prayed. To God be the glory.”

Martin Vickery
GrowTH Operations Manager



IMPACT THIS YEAR

 **3075** bed spaces made available

 **6150** hot meals provided

 **145** homeless men and women given shelter

 **56** assisted into more permanent accommodation

 **38** assisted into further temporary shelter

 **44** engaged with a Bible study or attended church

HOMELESSNESS IN TOWER HAMLETS

Homelessness is an ever-increasing issue in London. The latest figures from the CHAIN database - the official monitor for levels of rough sleeping seen in the capital - show an escalation in street homelessness from 5678 people in 2012 to 7581 in 2015, an increase of a third in just three years. According to the same statistics, Tower Hamlets has the 5th highest number of rough sleepers out of all the 34 London boroughs.

This only tells a portion of the full story, however. There are more people homeless than those who are recorded in these stats, with the figures not taking into account those who aren't seen by outreach teams, those sofa surfing with



friends or those who are in unsuitable accommodation. The need for a solution is clearly there, and it is growing.

In Tower Hamlets, as across much of London, there are services available to those who are homeless. The local authority provides a Housing Options and Support Team and commissions a number of homelessness services, including an outreach team. The borough is blessed with organisations such as Crisis Skylight, The Whitechapel Mission, The Dellow Centre, Floating Support, Praxis Community Projects and many more, who provide vital services to those who are homeless.

However, the mounting pressure on resources due to the increased numbers of people in need means that it is becoming harder to find efficient solutions. Local authorities have to work within strict legal criteria that determine which homeless people they have a legal duty to house. Social housing stock is too low to meet the demand. Agency fees and high deposits make finding a home in the private rented sector extremely difficult, especially if unemployed.

Even with so much fantastic work being done, many people who find themselves homeless struggle to find a solution to their situation.

Left photo: Guests and volunteers socialise at the shelter in Wapping. Right photo: Beds ready in the shelter in Bow.

Night shelters such as GrowTH provide respite to the immediate issue of rough sleeping. Rough sleeping statistics across London show that during the months when night shelters typically operate, the London-wide levels of street homelessness fall substantially.¹ During the coldest months, churches in Tower Hamlets are able to meet this need with emergency shelter and - crucially - the continued support and advocacy needed to ensure as many people as possible don't return to sleeping on the street.

¹ CHAIN Full Report Greater London 2015-16



CHURCHES HELPING THEIR NEIGHBOURS

GrowTH is an initiative of local churches in Tower Hamlets. East End churches have a long tradition of social action. GrowTH was formed in 2010 out of a renewed sense that we need to do more to care for those in our community who are homeless.

The imperative to care for the poor has always been central to historic Christian faith. One of the key pieces of advice that Jerusalem's early Church Fathers gave to the Apostle Paul was to "remember the poor" (Galatians 2:10). The early church leader James makes it clear that the church's offer of spiritual help should also be accompanied by practical help (James 2).

Starting the night shelter was a significant step of faith: Would we have enough churches? Would we have enough volunteers? We are proud to say that the volunteers of Tower Hamlets far exceeded expectations and not only enabled the shelter to run, but also expand so that now the shelter is open for seven months of the year.

In 2015-16 17 churches and 2 community centres partnered to run the night shelter. It is a privilege to work with each of them and we are regularly humbled by the commitment our volunteers have to serve our guests and meet their immediate needs for shelter and support.

- › All Hallows Bow
- › Bow Baptist Church
- › Bethel, Redeemed Christian Church of God
- › Christ Church Isle of Dogs
- › ChristChurch London
- › Christ Church Spitalfields
- › E1 Community Church
- › East End Church
- › ELT Baptist Church
- › Jubilee Hall, Redeemed Christian Church of God
- › St Anne's Limehouse
- › St George's-in-the-East
- › St Luke's Millwall
- › St Matthias Community Centre
- › St Nicholas, Poplar
- › St Paul's Shadwell
- › The Good Shepherd Mission
- › The Hurtado Jesuit Centre
- › Tower Hamlets Community Church



Dinner in the shelter for guests and volunteers.

GUEST STORY: TARIK

"... you have rain falling on your head and it's cold and you have nowhere to go ... I can never forget that"

Tarik with the keys to his new home.



How did you come to GrowTH?

"I was unemployed and sofa surfing at a friend's house and I was put in a situation where my flatmate had issues where his daughters had to move back into the house. I had one week to try to sort out accommodation with no money."

Tarik slept rough for two nights before Crisis Skylight were able to refer him to GrowTH. We ask him what that was like: "Sleeping in a corridor! Even just those two days on the streets were enough to realise never to take shelter for granted again. The first night [in the shelter] was relief. When you go in and there's a bed you're not thinking of anything else!

Before then I might have said 'Maybe I'll need a hotel' or something like that but when you've slept in a corridor on the cold cement everything changes – your whole perspective changes and you appreciate the small things. GrowTH is a wonderful set up. You have really, genuinely good human beings who consider other people at all times. The volunteers were some of the best people I ever talked to."

"A burden lifted"

"I stayed at the shelter and I got a text message saying to go to a property management company which GrowTH knows.

It just happened so quickly: 'This is the house, do you like this one?' and I was like 'Yes! Do I like it? Of course I do!' I wasn't expecting that. It was just such a sigh of relief because you're carrying your whole world with you on your back for the time you're going from shelter to shelter. When you finally put that rucksack down into a place of rest it's one of the best feelings I can describe. Literally a burden has been lifted. You have somewhere to sleep. You don't have to walk around with a rucksack unless you want to! I think I was very lucky for my situation to be sorted out as quickly as it was. At the moment I'm just appreciating every day as it comes."

"It opens your eyes"

"Homelessness can happen to anyone. I was working in sales as a consultant at one stage in Canary Wharf. You don't think things can go bad in a really short turnaround. That's an important thing to remember: things can go really bad really quickly. Now when I walk down the street I can tell the people who are suffering. It opens your eyes to appreciate what you have in life. After you've been through this you should take time to reflect and think of others, the homeless especially. Because if you have rain falling on your head and it's cold and you have nowhere to go that's when it really dawns on you what they're going through and I can never forget that. I'll never forget that."

WHO ARE OUR GUESTS?

Accessing the shelter

Guests access our night shelter by being referred to us by one of our referral agency partners. These partners are all based in Tower Hamlets and work with homeless or vulnerable people locally. They are the vital link for GrowTH to reach the people who most need our help. This season we received referrals from:

- › [Crisis Skylight](#)
- › [Praxis Community Projects](#)
- › [The Whitechapel Mission](#)
- › [Health E1 \(GP Surgery\)](#)
- › [Spitalfields Crypt Trust](#)
- › [Tower Hamlets Floating Support](#)

Anyone who has become homeless can ask one of these agencies for help. The referral agency will do a risk assessment and then make a referral to GrowTH. All being well, and provided we have space available, we can then accept that person onto the list for the shelter that night.

“Our guests often do not reflect the commonly held stereotypes about homeless people”

A wide variety of backgrounds

At the night shelter, we welcome homeless men and women of all backgrounds who are homeless in Tower Hamlets. From Brazil to Australia, Estonia to Cameroon, Iraq to Vietnam, and Whitechapel to Poplar, it is a privilege to host guests from such a variety of cultures and experiences.

This year, there was a wide range of ages in the shelter, with our youngest guest being only 18 years old and the oldest being 62. The average age of a guest was 39, similar to previous years. As with every year, the vast majority of our referrals are for men, which is a common trend in the homelessness sector.

Our guests often do not reflect the commonly held stereotypes about homeless people. Volunteers are constantly surprised when they meet the guests in the shelter. Most of our guests have only been homeless for a relatively short length of time, and some of them are in work.



Photo: Guests enjoying some singing in the night shelter.

Total number of guests
in 2015–16 season: **145**

 **127**
men

 **18**
women

Average age: **39 years**

Oldest age: **62 years**
Youngest age: **18 years**

Hosting refugees

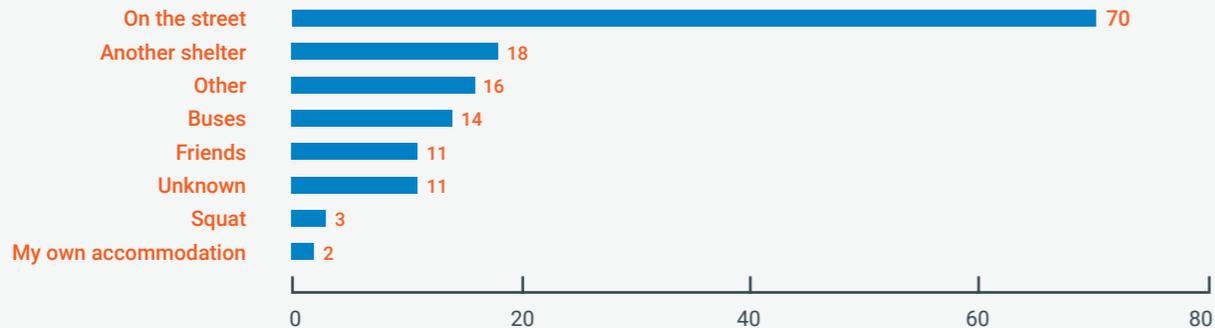
This year the number of guests from outside Europe increased, possibly due to the 2015 Refugee Crisis in Europe. 20 asylum seekers and refugees were given shelter at GrowTH this season. These guests were fleeing either war, political persecution or ethnic persecution. Over half of those came from the three neighbouring East African nations of Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Despite the media's emphasis on refugees from Syria, we only had one Middle Eastern refugee stay with us this season, who was fleeing the conflict in Iraq, and we hosted none from Syria.

EEA nationals

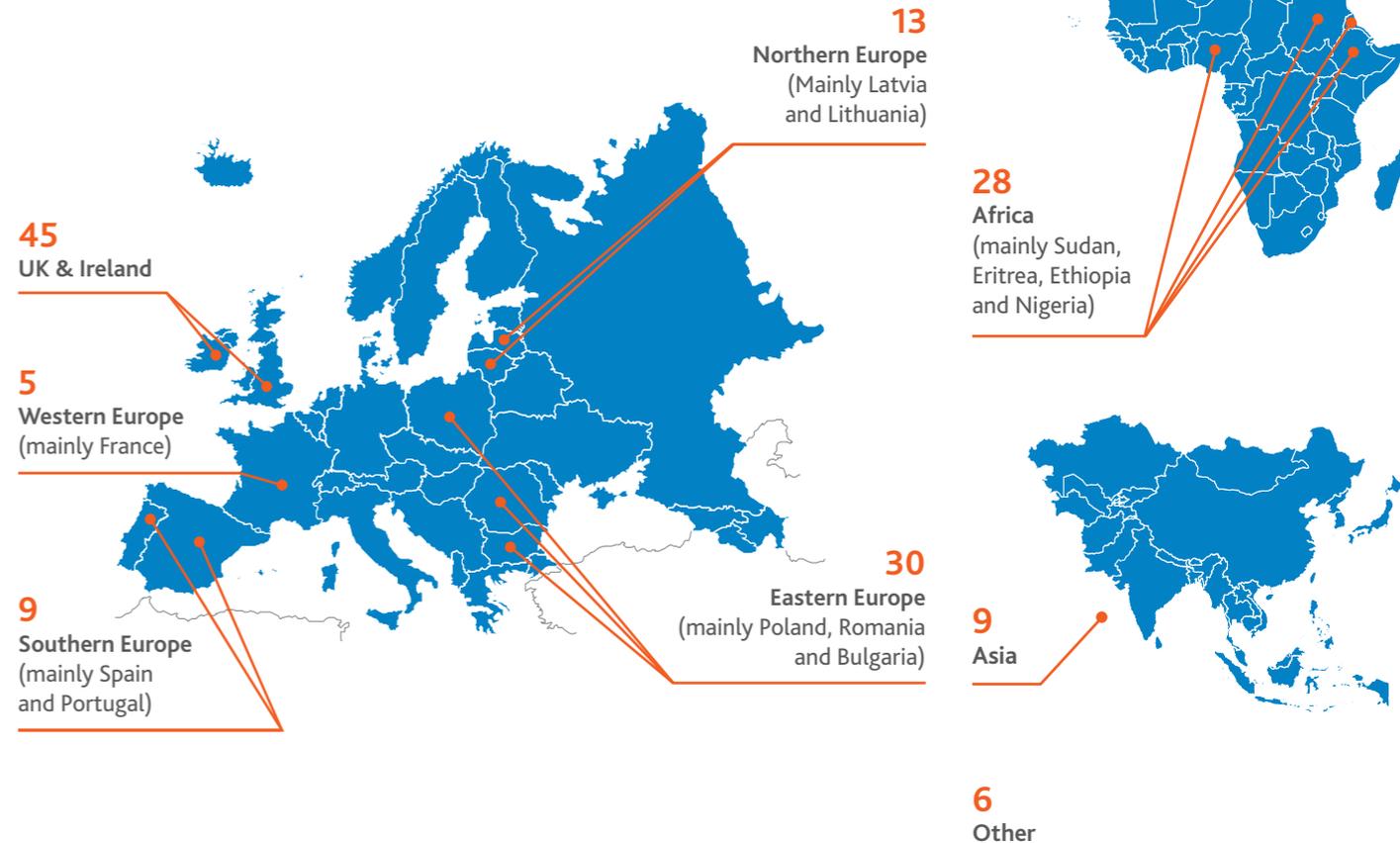
Just under 40% of our guests were from other countries within the EEA (European Economic Area). Citizens of EEA countries can travel freely to other EEA countries and have the right to work and live there without the need for a visa. Virtually all of our guests who were from these countries had come to the UK to find work, and many were working while they were staying at the shelter. EEA migrants are no longer automatically entitled to state benefits here in the UK, so finding work and saving up money is often the only option. Together with the fact that many do not have a support

network of friends and family in the UK, this means that night shelters are often the only safety net for EEA migrants who hit hard times. Inevitably, we have to have frank conversations with many of these guests, and decide with them whether returning to their home country would be a better option. Although there was no real increase in the number of guests from EEA countries this season, there was an increase in the proportion of guests from Latvia and Lithuania.

Where did guests sleep the night before coming to the shelter?



Nationality of our shelter guests



GUEST STORY: ABDALAZIZ

This is the boat that carried Abdalaziz part way across the Mediterranean Sea, until the boat tragically sank. 250 people died and Abdalaziz was one of about 50 rescued.



Above photo: Abdalaziz in one of GrowTH's supported homes.

Abdalaziz is one of twenty refugees and asylum seekers that GrowTH gave shelter to this season. He spoke to us about his experience travelling to the UK after having fled persecution in Darfur, Sudan.

“Big problems”

Darfur in western Sudan has been in a state of humanitarian emergency since 2003, due to the war between Sudanese government forces and the indigenous population. Abdalaziz showed me the scars from beatings he received, mostly from the authorities. He and many others fled to Libya in 2012.

Life in Libya was hardly an improvement for Abdalaziz. Daesh began to take control of parts of the country, and violence was widespread. After roughly 3 years in Libya, he had saved up some money to pay to get to Europe. On the Libyan coast, he paid a trafficker £750 to be put on a small, very unsafe and extremely overcrowded boat which set out across the Mediterranean.

After a day in the sea, the boat tragically sank and its 300 passengers had to try desperately to stay afloat in the sea until help arrived. A German lifeboat came and rescued them out of the water, a group at a time, and took them to a larger ship. However they were overwhelmed with the number of people and sadly were only able to rescue 50 of the 300. Abdalaziz is grateful to be alive.

Surviving in Europe

The rescue ship took Abdalaziz and the other survivors to Italy. He had no shelter or money, and often went days without sleeping or eating. Abdalaziz explains how, at that time, he didn't know what day or month it was. On the advice of others, he found a way of getting to France and eventually to Calais.

He was smuggled across the Channel and was met by police in Dover, who then took him to an Initial Accommodation Centre for asylum seekers in Wakefield, West Yorkshire. While the Home Office reviewed his application for asylum, he was given temporary housing in Sheffield, but had to leave once the Home Office had decided to grant him leave to remain as a refugee. Although he was now legally allowed to live and work in the UK, he was homeless once again, and stayed on the street in London for 3 months.

“All people were very nice”

Abdalaziz came to the shelter after having been referred to us from Crisis Skylight. “Before I come here, no good. Sleeping in the street, raining very much, sometimes no sleep, sometimes too cold.” Abdalaziz appreciated the warm welcome he received from volunteers: “All people were very nice.” Within 4 weeks of staying at the night shelter, he got the keys to a room in a permanent residential hostel in Leyton, which he was very happy about.

After spending 6 months there, he moved into GrowTH's supported accommodation where he is receiving ongoing support. He is now also working part-time in a restaurant. He is so grateful for the way GrowTH has helped him, which he demonstrated by volunteering at the shelter on some Monday evenings with the Christ Church Spitalfields team!



Ben speaks with guest Arthur about his return to Nigeria.

FINDING A HOME

Our desire at GrowTH is to see guests move on into more permanent accommodation and not have to return to the streets. We employ two Advocate Workers, Ben Pugh and Matt Endersby, to advocate on each guest's behalf and help them out of homelessness. Their work could be summarised in four key steps:

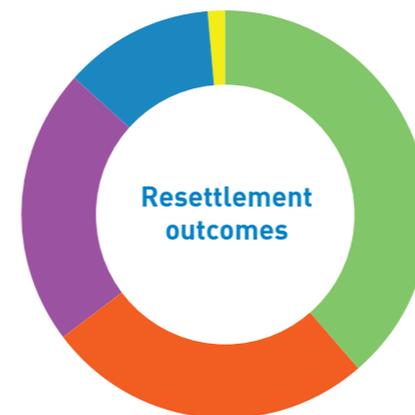
Meet: Every guest has a different story and individual needs. To provide personalised support our workers meet with every guest to understand how they became homeless and to assess what support and assistance they need. Our workers also contact any other agencies also working with the guest, so that we can all work together.

Support: If a guest has support needs, such as physical or mental health issues, or substance misuse issues, we will assist the guest in accessing this support.

Essential papers: To secure more permanent housing, a guest will always need identification and proof that they can pay rent (either through state benefits or wages). Our workers work hard to secure these essential documents, liaising with embassies and benefit departments when needed.

Applications and interviews: With the the right papers in place and the right support services in place, our guests can then access more permanent housing options. This can involve interviews and waiting lists and our workers will support each guest through this process.

Right photo: Matt listens to guest Radoslav in the night shelter.



- More permanent accommodation 56
- Further temporary shelter 38
- Disengaged 32
- No option 17
- Unsuccessful 2



- Hostels and supported homes 29
- Private rented sector 17
- Return to home country or area 5
- Home office accommodation 4
- Alcohol rehabilitation 1



- Another night shelter 20
- Family or friends 11
- A paid backpacker hostel 7

GUEST STORY: YEMI

"I lay on the bed! I didn't even go out; I was just indoors because I was so pleased to have my own bed and somewhere stable to sleep. So thank God for providing me with shelter!"

Photo: Yemi by the park opposite her new home.



"Now I have a job too as a carer for elderly people. It's amazing."

Yemi became homeless as a result of an informal tenancy which went wrong. She fell out with the person who she was living with and was forced to leave, ending up spending several weeks sleeping on night buses and the street. Eventually she was referred to GrowTH in November 2015 by Crisis Skylight.

A shared experience

"You came to rescue me!" she says. "Being on the streets was hell. Thank God it wasn't really winter yet – if it was I don't know what could have happened. [After being referred] I was really happy to know that I had a temporary shelter. If it wasn't for that I wouldn't be where I am now. The shelter was very amazing. I shared my experience with all different kinds of people. I was happy."

Finding a home

Over the first couple of weeks we were able to help Yemi resolve the issue at her former home and help her to search and apply for accommodation. After being put on the waiting list for a couple of different housing options it looked like Yemi might finish her stay with us with nowhere to go, but at the end of her final week an opportunity with a private landlord came through. "[On my first day] I lay on the bed! I didn't even go out; I was just indoors because I was so pleased to have my own bed and

somewhere stable to sleep. So thank God for providing me with shelter!" Yemi has made herself at home in her new area in South East London. "Now I have a job too as a carer for elderly people. It's amazing."

Moving forwards

She goes on to sum up her experience of being at GrowTH. "When you are going through something you have never experienced before, you feel down in many ways, but now I am a stronger person. I see people in a different way. For example now I get along fine with my neighbours and I can move forwards. I would say that GrowTH is a good place for people to go. They are really helpful, really tolerant. I really appreciate what GrowTH has done for me. You've done a job well done!"

What's next for you?

"For now I don't think I have any plans. I'm going to carry on doing what I'm doing, keep working and see what the future holds."

GUEST STORY: CHRISTINE

"I feel a lot, lot better than I did... I feel that there are things that are positive actually happening in my life again. I feel a lot more positive about the future."



Christine's life took a turn for the worse when she was evicted unexpectedly from her room in East Ham. She describes what happened: "At nine o'clock in the morning, we was evicted. The Housing Officer asked if I could stay at my dad's, so I stayed there, but he didn't want to talk about the situation and he didn't really want me there. He said he wanted the place to himself... He chucked me out. He said he'd had enough. I then went over to a friend's but... she couldn't have me there so she chucked me out. Then I went to my sister's but she's in a council house and she couldn't have me there and she chucked me out."

"I had nowhere else to go"

Christine didn't know where she would go next. "I got to the point that I knew any day, at any point, I was gonna be on the street and I was gonna be sleeping rough... I had nowhere else to go". Christine thought her options had run out, so she asked Crisis Skylight what they could do. "That night they [Crisis] rang and they said 'Hold on to

your phone, they [GrowTH] might ring', and that night they rang and said 'Yeah we've got a bed for you, and you can stay tonight.'"

"They were so helpful"

When Christine arrived at the night shelter she didn't know what to expect. "I was so nervous... I didn't know who would be sleeping next to me. I didn't know what was gonna happen." Thankfully, Christine was pleasantly surprised. "It was so excellent. They are so welcoming." She explains, "They were so relaxed and they were so helpful. They sit down and talk to you. They really chat, they're really polite, they really support you, and it's just such a relaxed atmosphere... People really talk to you like you're a really good person. Everyone's really nice and relaxed about the whole situation."

New beginnings

Before long, we were able to help find Christine a room. "I was in the shelter two weeks and I was found a room with Changing Lives Housing Trust. It's

supported accommodation, and it was agreed that I could have a room there. I'm now living at Greenwich." Christine is feeling settled in her new home and is enjoying getting to know the area. "I feel a lot, lot better than I did... I feel that there are things that are positive actually happening in my life again. I feel a lot more positive about the future."

"I'm trying to live a Christian life"

Christine is grateful that the church was there for her in her time of need. "I've always been a Christian... I very much believe that at times when you haven't got anything, you really turn your life over to religion, because you don't have anywhere else to go... I've always followed a very Christian faith and I'm trying to live a Christian life... You just need the support in your life." Christine is now part of a local church in Greenwich where she's been going since she moved to the area. The church family gave her a warm welcome. "They're really positive and it's really nice and they're really friendly."

SPIRITUAL NEEDS

At GrowTH we believe that offering shelter from the streets and providing housing support is vital, however we know that a house or a job is not the ultimate answer. While being crucial to our wellbeing, these material elements do not provide the everlasting solution to the problems that we face. We try our hardest to ensure that none of our guests return to sleeping rough, but do so in light of the promise of an ultimate home for everyone who asks for it, one where we are fully alive in a relationship with God and a part of the church family.

Photo: A volunteer and guest chat over food. The dinner table often becomes a forum for conversations about spiritual things.



44 engaged with a Bible study or attended church

Every person has physical needs, which for the men and women we seek to serve are often obvious. However in a world which is at times a hard place to live, we acknowledge that we all have spiritual needs as well. These sometimes stem from a point when we ask 'Is this really it?', sometimes from a yearning within us that is seeking something beyond ourselves, or perhaps deep questions of what it really means to be human.

Homelessness is a prime example that things are not completely right with the world, but we believe that there is a God who loves us and who, in the person of Jesus, modelled what it means to love: with His life, death and resurrection providing a way for us to enter into His spiritual family. In the Bible it says 'we love because he first loved us' and it is as a consequence of the love of God that GrowTH exists.

Through GrowTH the local church can be a reflection of God's love, shown to the people who need it most. We give all of our guests the opportunity

to engage with the Christian faith. We offer to pray with them when they are finding situations difficult. We encourage our guests to attend local churches to experience the welcoming community they can offer, and this season we saw dozens of guests come along. Through Alpha and Christianity Explored courses we allow 'big questions' to be raised in a safe and caring environment, with numerous guests taking up the chance to learn more. We invite people to entrust their lives to God and to allow him to transform them and, hopefully, their situations too.

The fact that people are forced to sleep rough is a vivid reminder of the poverty and injustice around us, yet fortunately for our guests we have a God who stands in opposition to those things and is doing many things, including using GrowTH, to extend His good and loving purposes throughout all of Tower Hamlets.

Photo: Local church leader Tom Head shares about Christianity at a GrowTH service.





GrowTH could not run without the hard work of volunteers across Tower Hamlets. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for all you do.



SUPPORTED HOUSING: THE STORY

GrowTH now manages a small number of local properties as supported housing for formerly homeless guests. This has been our biggest breakthrough this year! For a number of years many people in our churches have hoped for local churches to be able to run homes to care for marginalised people.

In the Summer of 2014 our Advocate Workers were sitting down brainstorming how we could possibly get homes. We were coming up with all sorts of ideas to try and secure an option, from calling a mortgage company to looking at the prices of houseboats!

In the Autumn of 2014 a local connection bore fruit and by partnering with a local Housing Association we have been able to make short-term use of properties vacated for redevelopment. It is a joy to be able to provide local and high quality housing for our guests. The shorter-

term nature of the arrangement fits our desire to provide in-depth support for 6-12 months for each resident, before many transition into independent living. Our first residents moved in during the summer months of 2015.

Tom Newby is employed as a Supported Housing Manager to assist guests achieve personal goals on an agreement support plan. These goals are personalised to the guest and often cover areas such as job seeking, volunteering, learning English and accessing health care.

Eight residents have now either stayed or are living in these properties. We have seen residents take real concrete steps forward in the security of these homes, such as accessing long overdue healthcare, volunteering, doing work experience, completing a college course, moving to a permanent contract and securing work.

We would like to publicly thank London Catalyst who kindly donated a grant towards the costs of the Supported Housing project in 2016.



"GrowTH has helped me with flat... it is good I'm very happy. I go to Foodbank to volunteer and I volunteer in GrowTH nightshelter and I go to another church [where] I speak and talk to many people, that is better for my language. In the future I want to be a lawyer and go to university."

Yousif, current resident

RESIDENT STORY: UTHMAN

"We meet every week for updates to see how I'm getting on... and feedback... it's been very useful."



Right photo: Uthman at the door of his flat.

Far right photo: Uthman graduates from college in April 2016.

Before coming to the Growth Supported Housing, Uthman had become trapped in a cycle of homelessness. He had found it hard to sustain accommodation and found himself on and off homeless for a number of years. He describes his situation "I was sleeping in a hostel. When I started the [college] course the housing benefit stopped and the money I got from the student support couldn't cover the rent, it was £220 a week, and I couldn't pay that so I had to leave the hostel."

Moving into the Supported Housing, Uthman found a good environment to complete his Network Engineering course. Living in a shared flat with two other residents Uthman said the flat was "well furnished and got everything we need, me and the other two flatmates get on when we're together, no arguments yet! It's going smoothly."

The Supported Housing Manager met regularly with Uthman, support which he found "very useful, with housing and also helping me to find a new accommodation and help me look for jobs. We meet every week for updates to see how I'm getting on, it's useful to update and get feedback, it's been very useful."

Supported Housing works in partnership with many other organisations to make sure the best support is offered to each resident. To help Uthman move closer to employment he was referred to the Resco employability program in West London. Uthman reflects on the experience: "It's given me a chance to get into a working routine, getting up in the morning, very useful when I start a full time job."

Recently Uthman has started paid work with an agency and has secured further paid work starting shortly. When asked about the future Uthman says: "I hope to get accommodation of my own so I can start to live again. It's been a long time since I've [not] been homeless so I am looking forward to getting a place of my own."



RESIDENT STORY: STEVE

"I was sleeping in a car. I was working, but couldn't afford to get anywhere. Then I ended up losing the job ..."



Before GrowTH

"I was sleeping in a car. I was working, but couldn't afford to get anywhere. Then I ended up losing the job, then staying in the car for a few more months, then eventually getting into contact with GrowTH. When I came to GrowTH I had like 3 sets of clothes to my name, it had got that bad."

Supported Homes

After staying in the shelter Steve was one of the first guests to move into our new Supported Housing. "I was given a place with GrowTH housing scheme which had just started, which gave me a great base ground to get back on my feet. The flat was great, it was basically a new flat, it felt like a new flat, it felt like a new start, just got to start afresh, start rebuilding your life, rebuilding from scratch."

Steve would meet regularly with our Supported Housing Manager. "Having people around that are there to believe in you and help you achieve what it is you want to achieve. Obviously

"Having people around that are there to believe in you and help you achieve what it is you want to achieve."

having yourself [GrowTH], being able to phone and get support if I needed anything or a bit of reassurance about anything that was cool, it was great help, being in a car one moment you've got nobody around."

"Get a job and be stable"

In the 12 months Steve stayed with GrowTH he was able to "get a job and be stable, pay decent rent and be stable enough to sort out my life and getting everything back that I need and be self-mobile." Steve shares how having the right length of time was key to him progressing "just to have that security, knowing that I had time to get everything in place that I needed to rather than rushing... to stay out of that situation [of homelessness]."

Once spending winter sleeping in a car, lonely and out of work, Steve has now moved on from the project into his own accommodation, paid for from the earnings he saved. In just 12 months Steve took this opportunity with both hands and has taken great steps forward.

GUEST STORY: RUI

"They referred me to you guys because I had nowhere to go. It was a pretty stressful time, having come out of prison with no options."



"I thought it would be something different from what it was but we were like family, you know?"

Rui came out of prison with nowhere safe to stay, having to sleep rough for three weeks before he was referred to GrowTH by a local homeless GP surgery, Health E1. "They referred me to you guys because I had nowhere to go. It was a pretty stressful time, having come out of prison with no options. I was thankful GrowTH was still open because it gave me some time to sort out what I was doing and to get a bit of rest."

Family

Rui stayed in the shelter towards the end of the season. He describes his time with us: "The shelter was good. Good people – they helped me out a lot. I had food and a roof over my head which was great. It was cold outside so I got showers and cleaned myself up. It was good to have people like GrowTH around to help people like us. To have you there when we lose our jobs or find ourselves in situations we shouldn't be in was huge. You guys gave me a place I can get my post sent to which was really important. It was excellent – nice, friendly people. Good prayers at mealtimes which I liked! I'm a Christian and I really appreciated that. The company and the bed were nice. You guys were great. The other guys were friendly and we all got along together. I thought it would be something different from what it was but we were like family, you know?"

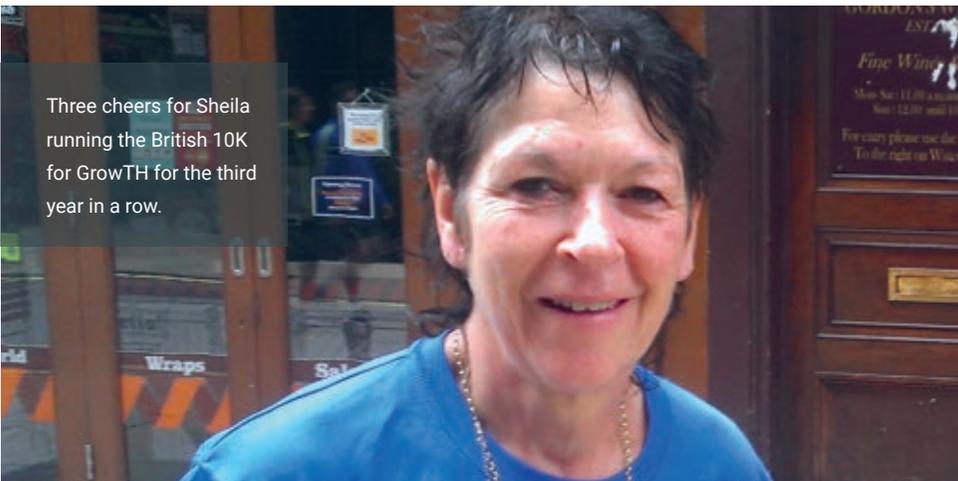
A grounds maintenance operative

Rui is in now in full-time time employment, working locally and often comes by the GrowTH office to let us know how things are going. "Yeah I have a job. I work for Tower Hamlets Homes. I'm a grounds maintenance operative. I maintain the lawns for the estates here in Tower Hamlets. It's going fine. I've got a good team, a good boss. I enjoy being outside and meeting people, you know? I'm happy where I am now, I like being there. I'm trying to save up some money because it's very expensive to live around here! I'm staying with a friend through the job at the moment until I get myself fully settled with a little bit more money but things are looking up!"

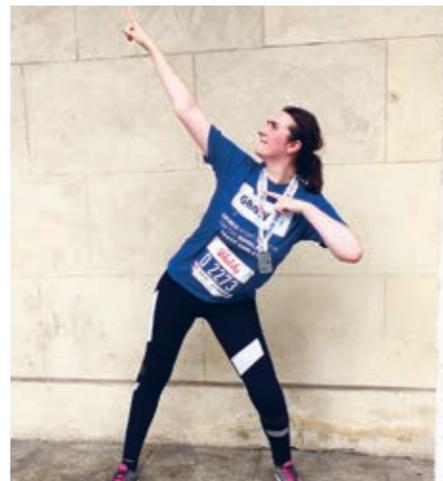


Thank you to our runners and riders!
Your hard work raised vital funds for GrowTH.

Photos: Volunteers running the British 10K (left) and cycling the London Nightrider (right) to raise sponsorship for GrowTH.



Three cheers for Sheila running the British 10K for GrowTH for the third year in a row.



GUEST STORY: ALEKSEJS

“If possible, I think August or September I go holiday for my country. See my mother, my father.”

Aleksejs in the night shelter with Rachel, a volunteer from a local church.

Since he arrived in the UK from Latvia in 2008, Aleksejs has had more than his fair share of difficulties. In between working and renting, Aleksejs has experienced alcohol addiction, rehab, prison and more than one period of homelessness. Indeed, Advocate Worker Ben knew Aleksejs from a previous homelessness project he was involved in.

Working without a home

“My situation before the shelter was not very bad, but not very good. I had a job, I had money.” Aleksejs had been working for an agency distributing free newspapers and magazines outside stations for nearly 2 months when he came to the night shelter. “Work is not bad... They pay me minimum for England: £7.20 for hour. Just I need more hours.” Aleksejs tries to work as many hours as are available each week, but the number of hours, along with the low wage, was not enough to enable him to save money for a deposit, or to sustain a tenancy.

“Big, big family”

Not only did staying at GrowTH help Aleksejs to continue working, but he also enjoyed building friendships with other guests and volunteers in the shelter. “When I started living at GrowTH, I had a big family.” He recalls with emotion, “I very like when I go GrowTH night shelter. Very help me. Very beautiful people. Staff very help for people.”

A home in Hackney

Aleksejs came to the shelter expecting to still be homeless afterwards. GrowTH worked alongside the Housing Team at Crisis Skylight to assist Aleksejs with searching for rooms and studio flats and ringing up landlords. Aleksejs took every opportunity he could, and was eventually able to get the keys to a studio flat in Hackney. Crisis Skylight were able to help him with the deposit, and his salary is topped up with some Housing Benefit each month to ensure he can pay the rent. “I like it,” he says. “It’s a very nice place. Easy travel for my job. This place is not cheap, but it’s a fine place for me.”

Hopes for the future

Aleksejs is determined to continue the amazing progress he’s made. His priorities being: “Working, save money.” He also wants to volunteer at the shelter in the future, and do what he can to help others, the way he was helped in his time of need. Now his situation is a lot more stable, he is able to do things that would have been impossible before. “If possible, I think August or September I go holiday for my country. See my mother, my father.”

RENEW EL

Under the banner of "RenewEL" (Renew East London) GrowTH is working with others across East London to develop training and employment opportunities for guests wanting to take steps towards mainstream employment. We are currently piloting a pallet furniture project in which homeless and formerly-homeless trainees take apart wooden pallets that would otherwise have been discarded. These pallets are then used to make quality furniture (some of which is featured on the right).

We would like to thank the Royal Foundation of St Katherine for letting this pilot take place on their premises.

To purchase or commission pieces find us at www.thisisgrowth.org/renewel

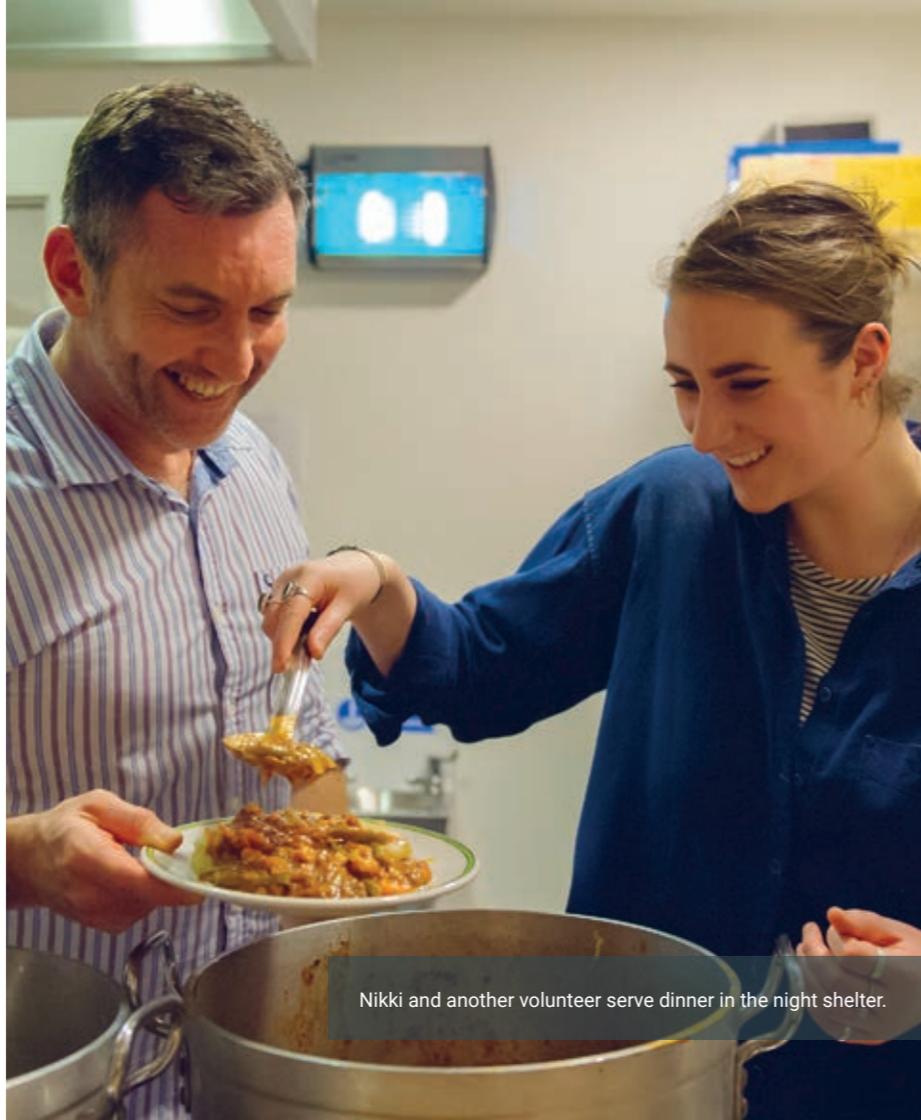
Right photo: Trainees take apart wooden pallets in preparation for creating furniture.



VOLUNTEER STORY: NIKKI

"I never imagined how easy it would be to talk about Jesus and how you could see such obvious transformation"

Nikki was one of the coordinators at Christ Church Spitalfields, which hosted the shelter for 7 months on Monday nights.



Nikki and another volunteer serve dinner in the night shelter.

Why did you decide to participate at the night shelter?

"Last year my friend from church was helping to coordinate it and asked me towards the end of the season if I'd like to volunteer." Nikki volunteered a couple of times and came to the end of season Thanksgiving Service, hearing stories of how some of our guests' lives had been transformed. "I thought 'I can't miss that next time!' And then I was asked if I'd be interested in coordinating and I didn't even think about it, I just said 'Yes! I'll fit everything else in around it!'"

What did you enjoy most about the shelter?

"It made me incredibly proud to be a part of something where so many volunteers were giving their time. It was a place where guests could talk about whatever they wanted; or they could come and escape and know that we were there to show them God's love. I never imagined how easy it would be to talk about Jesus and how you could see such obvious transformation. My faith went on a massive journey through GrowTH.

Before GrowTH I lived quite a naïve Christian existence. I was aware of the homelessness in one of the most deprived areas of London but when I got involved all of my ignorance was challenged and it opened my eyes. God put that on my heart. The fact that I started coordinating was something that I'd never envisaged but now my ideas on community have totally changed."

What do you think you've learned?

"I've learned that homelessness is a complicated issue and there's no one solution. The importance of companionship. Not to be ignorant as to why people are in the position they are. My instinct is to play saviour, to have answers and to console people with words, but I've learned humility in listening and not having answers, because so often there aren't any."

What would you say to anyone who might be considering volunteering for GrowTH?

"I would say do it! Don't overthink it. I can understand people feeling unsure if they've never done something like it before but there's something for everyone. It can be as involved as you want and every part of the team is so important. Don't overthink it and just do it."

How would you sum up your experience of volunteering at GrowTH?

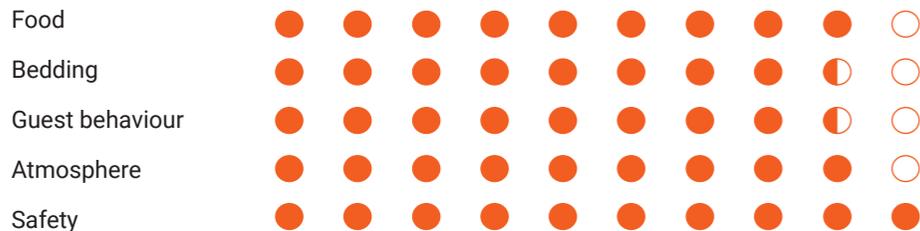
"It's been a journey in my faith. It's been a total privilege. It's overwhelming to sum up into words because I never thought I'd be given the opportunity to hang out with such a diverse group of people."

GUEST FEEDBACK

At GrowTH we value our guests' feedback. Their comments help us improve our shelter and services. This year 36 guests completed feedback forms.



Average guest rating for different aspects of the shelter (0-10):



How would you sum up your experience at the shelter?

The responses to this question were overwhelmingly positive. The most frequent responses involved the words 'good', 'nice', 'great' and 'excellent'.

Many also described the shelter as 'safe', 'friendly' and 'welcoming', while others used words such as 'relaxing', 'comfortable', 'blessed' and 'eye-opening'. Less positive comments included 'noisy' and 'short'.

Among the longer responses, we had, 'It's given me the opportunity to see and speak to different people, have dinner together and see many churches', 'It will be a great experience to teach my next generation' and 'Cannot think of a single negative thing... Perhaps the 'quadraphonic' snoring... I'm so pleased I was referred. Great people, great service.'

How would you describe the volunteers?

The answers guests gave to this question showed that they were hugely appreciative of the volunteers' friendliness and the interest they showed to guests. For example, 'They ensured I was alright and sat and spoke with me all night', 'I think the volunteers are all brilliant', and 'The volunteers were absolutely friendly and helpful. Sometimes I felt that they [were] a little bit nervous. They don't need to be'.

If GrowTH could arrange a special activity or outing for guests, what would you like to do?

Ideas included: 'Museums and historical trips', 'Climbing, zip-line rides', 'Camping', 'Bowling, cinema', 'Gym', 'Tate Modern, Science Museum, St Paul's Cathedral', 'Canoeing on the Thames' and 'Dancing and singing'. One guest simply answered the question with the reply: 'Attend!'

What could GrowTH assist guests better at finding permanent, long-term accommodation after the shelter?

This section largely contained positive feedback, and many guests were unsure what to suggest. Among the suggestions were the following: 'Finding something to rent at reasonable price', 'Try to work closer with other charities and organisations', and 'I want GrowTH to improve more in this area so that guests, especially the vulnerable and jobless will be able to get alternative accommodation so they get off the streets.'

A few suggested giving more information to guests to enable them to do more to help themselves. For example, 'By giving them as much information concerning what financial help they will get for deposit, where they can look for accommodation for themselves', and

"I will be forever grateful to GrowTH"

'Tell them about websites'. A few also suggested following up with guests who had moved into accommodation. One comment read, 'It took two (2)!! weeks to find me a nice place to live. That's pretty good going!'

Other comments included:

'I'm a Muslim and they welcome me wholeheartedly, they never treat me differently because of my religion. I will forever be grateful to GrowTH. More grease to your elbow.'
 'It is a little cold in the rooms.'
 'Set up a schedule for shower and laundry facilities.'
 'Everything is perfect.'

Photo: Ed, volunteer, and Antonio, guest, in the night shelter in Poplar.

GUESTS STILL WAITING

As a charity that tries to communicate its activities honestly, we feel it is only right to acknowledge that some guests are still waiting on their housing or employment breakthrough.

We have seen tremendous stories this year of guests moving into accommodation, securing jobs, getting refugee status, graduating from a college course and more. Yet right now as we write there are former guests who are homeless. We want you to know about this for your prayers and your awareness of what is happening in our community.

Some guests are struggling with alcohol or drug addiction. In the past six months we know of two former guests that were in residential alcohol rehabilitation, yet each, for their own reasons, did not complete their respective programmes and left.

Some of our European guests are in the UK entirely legally, yet do not have access to Housing Benefit. This is the key benefit that helps guests pay rent in accommodation. Many of these

"... we also need to acknowledge that a number of guests are still waiting for a material change in their circumstances. Please pray for these guests."

guests feel they cannot, or do not want to, return to their home country. Therefore for a future in the UK they must secure employment before housing.

Some of our guests are waiting on immigration decisions. Particularly in complex cases, these decisions can take significant amounts of time and not all guests qualify for housing whilst waiting on a decision.

In addition to these scenarios, there are many case-specific issues which made resettlement challenging. As an initiative of the local church, GrowTH is committed to our guests for the long-term and we will always go after the best for our guests. Yet just as there is space for songs of lament in the book of Psalms in the Bible, in a report like this we also need to acknowledge that a number of guests are still waiting for a material change in their circumstances. Please pray for these guests.



GROWTH SLEEPOUT

Would you sleep outside for one night for our guests?

Raise money for the GrowTH night shelter and identify with the homelessness that some of our neighbours face this winter.

Friday 7th October 7pm to Saturday 8th October 9am

The Sleepout will take place in the grounds of All Saints Church, Poplar, and safety marshals will be on hand through the night.

For full details and sign up: www.thisisgrowth.org/sleepout

FINANCE

GrowTH is funded entirely by the donations of supportive individuals, churches and trusts. We receive no funding from the council or government. We would like to thank all those that donated to GrowTH and enabled our guests to receive the support written about in these pages.

We would like to thank local churches that host our night shelter. These churches give their premises and utilities to our work and cover the costs of providing clean bedding and hot food each week. We are grateful to partner with churches who are so generous towards those in need.

We would like to thank all those that have taken part in sponsorship events for GrowTH in the past year. Whether you ran for GrowTH, cycled for GrowTH or sang for GrowTH, we appreciate your hard work and commitment.

We would like to thank the individuals that gave to GrowTH, a number anonymously and some giving so generously that we were astounded.

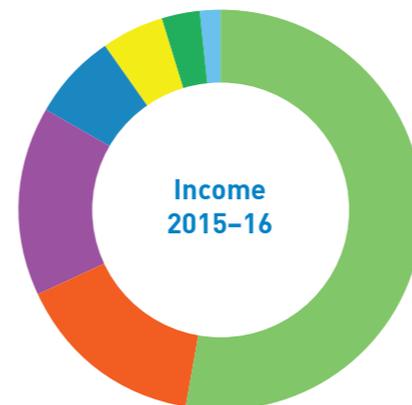
Some individuals give regularly and this is particularly helpful as we can financially plan for new initiatives knowing that we have the regular support of individuals. We would like to pay tribute to the eleven givers that gave on a monthly basis towards GrowTH in 2015-16 and between them gave over £3,500.



We appreciate the continued support of the Pret Foundation Trust. In 2016 the Trust donated funds for GrowTH to purchase a new vehicle.

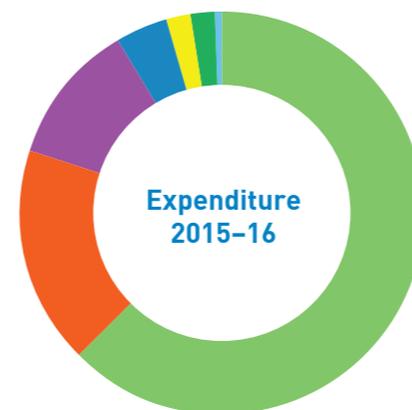


A huge thank you goes to the Sing Tower Hamlets choir who raised money for GrowTH at their Christmas Carol Concert.



Grants	62,232
Housing rent	18,155
Sponsorship events	17,827
Individual donations	8,271
Church donations	6,044
Regular giving	3,558
Other	1,715

Total income: 117,801



Staff costs (x4)	69,419
Housing costs	19,210
Charity costs	12,735
Shower installation	4,387
Guest costs	2,345
Shelter costs	2,123
RenewEL	440

Total expenditure: 110,660

A number of charitable trusts and firms gave towards GrowTH in 2015-16 and we would like to publicly thank the following:

- › East London Nursing Society Trust
- › Garfield Weston Foundation
- › Isla Foundation
- › London Catalyst
- › Marsh Christian Trust
- › Mrs Smith & Mount Trust
- › Oliver Borthwick Memorial Trust
- › Porters' Trust
- › Pyne Charitable Trust
- › Rothschild
- › Souter Charitable Trust
- › The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
- › The Albert Hunt Trust
- › The Alexandra Trust
- › The Charity of Mary Baker
- › The Foyle Foundation
- › The Hilden Charitable Fund
- › W O Street Charitable Foundation
- › Wyseliot Rose Charitable Trust

WOULD YOU PRAY?

We believe God hears and acts when we pray. Please would you pray for our guests. Sign up to our newsletter for updates to inform your prayers.

WOULD YOU VOLUNTEER?

Our night shelter is only made possible by the hard work of local volunteers who welcome guests, prepare the beds and cook and serve dinner. We especially need those willing to sleep overnight.

WOULD YOU GIVE?

GrowTH only runs through donations and gifts of all sizes make a difference. Would you commit to donate regularly to the work of GrowTH?

WOULD YOU SLEEP OUTSIDE?

October sees the launch of our first GrowTH sleepout to raise awareness and funds for our homeless night shelter. Would you sleep outside for one night for our guests?

WOULD YOU RUN OR CYCLE?

Sponsored events are a fun way to both support GrowTH as a community and raise funds to support our guests. This year we have done a 10km run and an overnight 100km bike ride for GrowTH. Are you up for taking on a challenge for GrowTH?

TO ACT:

**Contact action@thisisgrowth.org
or visit www.thisisgrowth.org**