



GROWTH

A DECADE OF GROWTH

2010-2020

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BE ENCOURAGED!

To summarise the journey that GrowTH has been on over the past 10 years in one booklet is almost impossible. We could write thousands of pages of stories of answered prayers, unexpected provision, transformed lives, and God's incredible grace. Hopefully the pages here will give you a snapshot of how faithful God has been, and of what can be achieved when churches work together for the good of our neighbours.

A lot has changed since GrowTH first began. More and more churches and individuals have joined the mission. We have learned how to better care for our guests in the shelter. Our resettlement work has broadened. Our housing project has grown and celebrated its 5th birthday. All the while, the vision and mission of GrowTH has remained the same: we are still very much a partnership of churches in Tower Hamlets who want to see the lives of marginalised men and women transformed, in every way, for the glory of God. Thousands of lives have indeed been changed through GrowTH; not just the lives of our beloved guests (1,228, to be precise!), but also those of our volunteers, supporters, and staff.

As you read, we hope you will learn new things about our mission, celebrate all that God has done, and be inspired to continue partnering with us in the years ahead. Remember: your support has helped to make this all possible! There is so much more to do, and we trust that God has amazing plans in store for GrowTH as we strive, together, to show His love to those in need.



As I hand over leadership of GrowTH in summer 2020 to the brilliant Naomi Newman, I am filled with joy and excitement for the next chapter of this mission, and immense gratitude for having had the privilege of playing a role in it.

Matt Endersby,
GrowTH Operations Manager

"We love because he first loved us."

1 John 4:19





**CELEBRATING
10 YEARS**

WHY GROWTH?: THE NEED

10 years ago, Growth was set up by church leaders who saw a need. That need still exists today. They and countless others were meeting many people in need of help, in need of a home, and in need of hope. Growth was started as a way of addressing those needs through local churches.

Why are people becoming homeless in the first place? Perhaps we should begin by asking: "What is homelessness?". We all know that a home is more than just a roof over our head. It is a place of safety and refuge, a place of belonging, and often, a place where there is community or family. So to be homeless is not just about a lack of accommodation, but can also often be tied in with a lack of security and stability, a lack of close community, and a sense of exclusion.



A Crisis report has found that the level of 'core homelessness' (encompassing various types of homelessness) increased by 28% to 153,000 in England between 2010 and 2017. Within that, there was a 165% increase in those sleeping rough and a 260% increase in those in unsuitable temporary accommodation. The largest single category of core homelessness is sofa surfing.¹ The latest available data shows that 3,692 people were found rough sleeping in London in the period from January to March 2020, of which 137 were in Tower Hamlets. This is an increase of 58% in London compared to the same period in 2015, and an increase of 67% within Tower Hamlets.² Sadly, for those that remain homeless, the average life expectancy is just 44 years.³

¹https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/240421/the_homelessness_monitor_england_2019_es.pdf

²<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>

³https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/240421/the_homelessness_monitor_england_2019_es.pdf



These statistics are shocking, and show that initiatives like GrowTH are needed more than ever. They also prompt us to look more widely at what might be causing people to become homeless. The causes are often more complex than we might think. This is reflected in the statistics. In the referrals we receive from our referral agencies, we ask them to state the reason that person is homeless. The top answer is simply 'loss of income', however, it is often hard to pin it down to one thing. For example, our guests will often be experiencing more than one tragedy at a time, such as family/relationship breakdown, mental illness, physical illness, unemployment, addiction, debt, or poor decisions. One tragedy may have led to another and eventually caused that person to become homeless. When you unpack all the contributing factors, it can look complicated and messy. Unravelling the mess and moving towards a stable and fulfilling life requires help that goes beyond simply providing for someone's immediate material needs. Our GrowTH Housing project is one way in which we are seeking to help people on that journey and break the cycle of

homelessness (more on that later).

However, as Christians, our view of homelessness goes wider still. We know we live in a world that is broken at every level and we believe this all stems from a broken relationship between mankind and God himself. The Bible tells us about the origin of that brokenness (Genesis 3), but also points us to a Saviour, Jesus, the son of God, who lived a perfect life, yet paid the price for our brokenness and sin by dying on a cross. Thanks to Jesus' loving sacrifice for us, we can be restored to a right relationship with God, our Creator. This is mankind's greatest need. That does not mean that physical circumstances are not important - they are important, and we should do what we can to mend all kinds of brokenness here and now. However, only Jesus can offer the freedom, forgiveness, refuge, and belonging that we all need. Only He can offer a true home both now and for all eternity.

Read on to find out how GrowTH responds to the needs of those that are homeless...

WHY GROWTH?: THE RESPONSE

At GrowTH, our vision is to see transformation in the lives of marginalised men and women in Tower Hamlets, for God's glory. At our core, we are a partnership of churches. We love our homeless neighbours and we desperately want their lives to be healed. That is why we offer food, friendship, shelter, and support, and it's also why we offer an opportunity to know the one who forgives us, heals us, redeems our lives, crowns us with love and compassion, and satisfies our desires with good things (Psalm 103:3-5). What can be more life-changing than that!? This kind of love for our guests drives everything we do at GrowTH. Here's what that love looks like in practice:

SHELTER

Our flagship project provides for the immediate needs of those who have become homeless. Homelessness is an emergency, so we work with homeless services in the area that are the first port of call for people experiencing that crisis. Our referral process is fast, straightforward, and safe, and it's possible to get a place in our shelter on the same day, space-permitting.

The shelter is all about churches providing hospitality and care to those in crisis. Although the GrowTH staff team manage referrals and oversee the management of the shelter, everything else is done by the churches working in

partnership with one another. They open their doors, assemble teams of volunteers, and provide a warm welcome, hot meals and a bed for the night for our guests. It's a huge task, involving well over 1,000 people over the past decade, and close to 100,000 volunteer hours. We are so pleased that more churches have joined this mission each year since we began.

RESETTLEMENT

From the start we have wanted to help our guests out of homelessness and into homes. That is why every guest who stays in our shelter is given one-to-one support in finding a home and taking steps forward in life. Our advocate workers have an initial meeting with each guest to find out about their situation and plan next steps. In many cases, and by working closely with other services, our resettlement support leads to our guest getting the keys to a home. Every guest's situation is unique, so the pathway out of homelessness will look different for each person. At GrowTH, we work hard and pray constantly for our guests, and as a result we have seen countless lives changed.

HOUSING

Our newest project, which began in 2015, aims to fill a gap in the move-on options that we offer to guests. We saw a need for accessible, affordable, supported homes in the local area for those coming

out of homelessness. Through a partnership with Poplar HARCA, GrowTH began leasing 2 flats to operate as supported housing, and that has since grown to 7 flats for a total of 13 residents. We have learnt a lot over these first 5 years, and are hoping to continue expanding this project so we can help more people move towards greater independence, stability, and fulfilment.

...ALL MOTIVATED BY GOD'S LOVE

The love we show to our guests and residents is an overflow of the love that God has shown to us. Our strapline sums it up: 'we love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19). That is why loving our guests and residents involves not only practical action and support, but also offering opportunities to hear about the God who loves them too. We do that by sharing, discussing, praying, and inviting. Turn to page 28 (centrefold) to find out more about what this looks like in practice.

We are grateful to God for all He has done through GrowTH over the past ten years. He has answered so many prayers and done so much more than we can ask or imagine. We are grateful to everyone who has played a part in making our vision of transformed lives a reality throughout GrowTH's first decade, and we hope that you will join us in this mission for the decades ahead!

WE SHARE: Volunteers and staff will often, at the right time, share with guests about the incredible love that God has shown us through Jesus. We don't preach a sermon; we just share that good news in a simple and friendly way. Since God's love drives everything we do, it would be strange not to mention it!

WE DISCUSS: We often run informal Bible discussion groups in the shelter and housing projects. All are welcome to come and look at a short Bible passage, explore what it means, and ask questions without judgement. Other times we might show a short video.

WE PRAY: Prayer is central to what we do. Volunteer teams pray before each evening before the doors open, and the staff team pray together every day. We know that countless other supporters are praying regularly for our work. On top of that, we also offer prayer to our guests 'in the moment', when appropriate. Often guests will ask for prayer, too.

WE INVITE: All our guests are welcome to join us at one of our Sunday church services, and many accept the invitation. We also hand out Bibles,

New Testaments, and short booklets, in a variety of languages, to those that are interested.

These things are done in a sensitive way, as we know many of our guests will not share our beliefs. We love, accept, and support every guest equally, regardless of what they believe and how they respond to our offers. We do not pressure any guest to participate in any of these activities, conversations, or prayers. Nevertheless, we will always include sharing our faith as part of showing love to guests. We consistently receive positive feedback from guests about the role our faith plays in what we do. Many guests really appreciate taking a break from thinking about surviving and having a chance to explore deeper things, and the vast majority of guests are grateful for the fact that volunteers and staff are praying for them. As you'll see from the stories in these pages, some guests do choose to put their faith in Jesus. Sometimes it will be months or years after their time in the shelter, and some we may never hear about, but in every case, we are overjoyed that we were able to play a part in someone's journey of faith. Below is a list of all the churches that have partnered with us.



STORY: JAMES

James stayed at GrowTH in December 2019. Five months later, he shared his incredible story from his rehab with his Advocate Worker, Naomi.

In the beginning

"I was always around alcohol. [My parents] split up. Me and my sister, we went out drinking and people would come and drag me off the street as a young kid. I started drinking before my school exams. And then I started getting into cannabis, then ecstasy, then cocaine, and then it just got worse. I was always working... working for myself, to feed my own habits.

I started coming into crime because I was brought up by my friends. It became a sort of alpha male situation... a lot of violence going on. I ended up getting arrested a few times, one with a knife. I did my time; I think 4 years out of the 6-year sentence. I was young... jack-the-lad... I didn't realise I was wasting my life.

I came out and then I got arrested for something I didn't do and I done another two years straight after... I was 30 years of age when I come out and thought, 'I don't want to do no more prison'. I had a daughter, and then went back to prison..."

The accident

"I had an accident about six years ago. I found out what happened and hit the roof. I was thinking evil thoughts to kill the man that had

done that to me. I started smoking drugs, like crack. I was homeless, no one would put up with me... doing that all the time."

A glimmer of hope

"My nan was a full-blown Christian in All Saints Church in Poplar, she always used to take me there as a kid. I used to get excited for the biscuits on a Sunday. She taught me so much about Christianity but I never used to take no notice of it.

I went down[hill] and all of a sudden, I knew the only one that would help me... and I started going to church. I ended up making the teas in there... they started giving me advice: 'Go down to the Mission.' I went down Whitechapel (Mission) and Sonia, she phoned you up, lucky enough she did.

After staying in GrowTH in December 2018, James left, unwilling to face his addiction. He reflects, "I become rude and arrogant and moved on ungratefully after the first year."

At death's door and second chances

"Then I became worse and I was on death's door after that year. I had to quit work to come and meet you. I will never forget; you come and spoke to me and I was begging you

for another chance. You said, 'The only way I can help you, is if you go into rehab'. My reply was, 'I gotta go to work,' and you said, 'You've been working for 20 years and it's done nothing for you!'. Tail between my legs, we looked on the internet and applied for two. When I see the Christian one, that jumped out to me. I thought, 'Follow the light', and two days later they accepted me and I said goodbye to my family and GrowTH paid for the ticket for me to go from Victoria to Leicester and that was it, that was how it started."

The first few days

"It was hard. I was judging, moaning; negative thoughts going through my mind. You gave me a Bible; I began reading that. I met some great Christians there. I was beginning to see how bad I was, especially the judgment around other people. I was angry, horrible and realised I needed to change. So, I began to worship... singing and reading the Bible you gave me. I went to another church on a Sunday... all the churches I ever been before were like people with perms, and white hair and robes, but this one was like a modern one, like a soul concert. It was good. So, I became more hungry then."



Doubts and answered prayer

"It started again, my distractions and thoughts coming, questioning my faith. Every time I questioned my faith, He always answered me the next day, whether it was something in the Book or in another way. I just knew it was Him, talking to me, the exact answer of what I was thinking. It's funny isn't it? It's crazy. I've written it down; I've got a book of them all. I'll be loyal for the rest of my life with Him. It's good news. You polished up a little gem."

Dependant on God

"I couldn't take it no more, nothing I could do about it. He was the only one who could do something... A little passage is coming to me now, when He [Jesus] said, 'My burden put the burden on me'. I can't do it; more or less an impossibility. After I had my head injury [from

the accident], I could hardly walk. The doctors told me I couldn't walk no more; I had to learn to read and write again and stuff like that. My body has become immense. I've started to run, run backwards, forwards, I can run up walls! And they told me I couldn't walk again. He's working in mad ways. It's unreal."

Ezekiel 36:26: "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you."

"I met a really blinding man [in prison]. We used to have this argument 'cos he used to go and see paedophiles and stuff like that, and I used to go mad at him. I used to go, 'How can you do that?' and he said to me one day, 'James, do you think you're better than them?' and now it's sunk in what he meant. Because I wasn't. I was a horrible

man. I was in there for knife crime and stuff like that. I was a bully. And it makes sense now what he was saying to me. He was a very wise man and he taught me so much."

Plans for the future

"I'm going to preach hopefully. I would love to go to churches and explain my life story. Helping others, giving thanks in any way I can for my life. I'm just waiting on Him now. I'm asking Him, 'What do you want me to do?'"

All glory to God the Father for lifting James out of the darkness and into the light. We at GrowTH are so privileged to have been part of his journey and we are excited for James' future.

THE HISTORY OF GROWTH



Church leaders from Tower Hamlets Evangelical Fellowship agree to open a night shelter.



GrowTH hires its first employee.



GrowTH Night Shelter is launched, opening for 3 months.

2010



The night shelter season grows to 4 months.



GrowTH employs a second member of staff.

2011



The night shelter season grows to 7 months.

2012



GrowTH moves into its own office.

2013



GrowTH employs a third member of staff.

2014



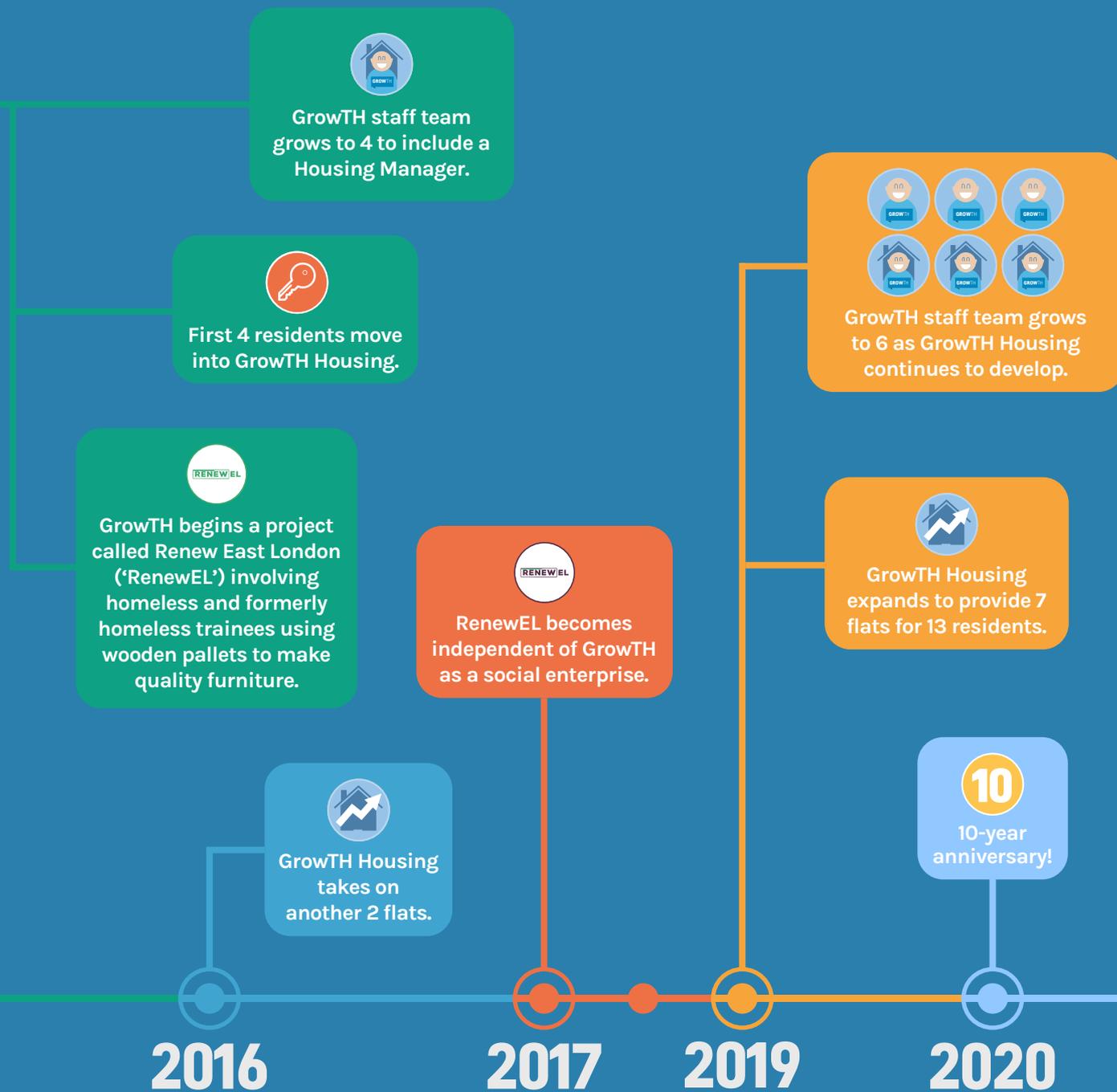
GrowTH helps set up the Newham Shelter: NEWway.

2015



GrowTH Housing is launched out of a partnership with Poplar HARCA, providing supported move-on housing for shelter guests.

5
5-year anniversary.



HOW WE STARTED

Rory Paget –Wilkes shares the story of GrowTH's beginnings.

Beginnings

10 years of GrowTH! What an amazing milestone for everybody who's been involved. There are too many to name all the volunteers that have given their time over the last decade, not to mention God's amazing provision of amazing employees with big hearts for Jesus! Whether it has been the advocate workers, operations managers, or housing workers, we have always had great Christian staff with a passion for those struggling, and a dedication for the long term.

At a prayer meeting in 2009 at Tower Hamlets Community Church, Pastor Tony Uddin led us in prayer for the needs of the community. During that prayer I felt the Holy Spirit saying: "Now is the time to start a church-run night shelter in Tower Hamlets". Having got involved

in running the Islington churches night shelter when I first arrived as a student in London in 2002 and then helping start the Camden churches night shelter, it had been a few years since I had been involved in a church run night shelter circuit. However, having prayed about it, I asked Tony if we could meet up for a coffee. I said, "I believe it's time to start approaching the churches in Tower Hamlets to launch a church-run night shelter". Tony said, "That's funny because I've just come from a meeting of leaders of evangelical churches in Tower Hamlets today", and I said at that meeting, "We need to provide a church-run night shelter and you all need to have a very good reason to opt out." That was all the confirmation we needed to start inviting churches to participate. Within just a few months, God provided all the venues

we needed in order to run the shelter from the start of December 2010 until the end of February 2011.

In September 2010 we took on Ollie Kendal as the first ever GrowTH employee; he was an advocate worker for our first ever season! I remember interviewing Ollie with Tony Uddin and Ryan Lynch (co-founders) on a rooftop garden in Shoreditch just a week before his wedding! As we interviewed this baby-faced injustice-assassin fresh out of university, it was clear that he had a real passion for the homeless, having organised regular food-runs for the homeless in Camden amongst his university friends. He really wanted to take a deviation from his degree to serve in pioneering this new role. Ollie was a larger-than-life character and set the tone for future years.



Rory (right) speaking at a shelter celebration in GrowTH's first season.

It's been breathtaking to see since those beginnings all the testimonies of lives changed in a decade. Recently I bumped into someone on the tube who was at the shelter around seven years ago and whom I fondly remembered. We were able to have a great catch up. They are often so thankful for their time at GrowTH. Of course, we say every year at GrowTH, amongst the staff and trustees, that we would love to see more people entering into



Volunteers prepare a dinner during the first year of the shelter

relationship with Jesus. This will continue to be an area of focus as we continue to grow.

When GrowTH was set up the emphasis was very much that we will provide support to move people onto more permanent accommodation and that we would show them the reality of Jesus through the lives of the volunteers and staff. Our dream has always been that every guest would come to faith, knowing the power of Jesus in their life, and that each guest would have the potential to bring transformation to their communities.

Every trustees meeting that I recall from those early days always involved trying to keep a 'blue

sky' vision of what is possible and what, in Christ, could be achieved for the benefit of those guests that we serve. At the same time, we wanted to consolidate our work and add an additional month to the night shelter calendar. We were always looking forward to what other needs we could meet, what other challenges we could face, and what other situations needed to be addressed for the sake of the most marginalised and those who are least able to help themselves.

Looking forward

I'm encouraged so much to the point of tears to hear some of the initiatives that the staff have commenced in the last few years; some of the dreams that they have begun to pursue and that the Holy

Spirit has placed on their hearts. I'm thankful that when I sat in our office in Shoreditch in 2009 and asked God to show a name for this night shelter, that the word GrowTH came to mind. GrowTH, because it's all about people in Tower Hamlets finding refuge and finding life through experiencing the Kingdom of God through our amazing volunteers. As we continue to fix our attention on Jesus and our position in Christ, rather than the changing circumstances of the world, we will continue to thrive and the Kingdom of God will continue to grow. Thank you so much to everyone who has been involved in the last 10 years and we look forward now to the next decade!

VOLUNTEERS: RONA & WINSTON



Winston and Rona from ELT Baptist Church are veteran volunteers! They have served our guests in countless ways over the past decade. We asked them a few questions about their experiences.

Why have you continued to do this year after year?

10 years ago when GrowTH started, we were told as a fellowship group we would be taking part. Our Home Group had some older saints whose thoughts and concerns were in our ability to cope, coming up with a list of questions as long as my arm! We all attended the first training session (including at least four aged 70 to 90!) and our questions and fears were alleviated and thus began our relationship with GrowTH. One lasting memory that Rona has, is of Gordon (90 years old) playing chess with a young man in his 20s just enjoying each other's ability to play

without being able to speak a word of the same language.

For me (Winston), it was when we went to view our first session. God broke me down - we saw and talked to people who were "very normal", but who for a number of reasons had become homeless. Here we met men, women, young and not so young. People came from every part of the UK and from all over the world. Sometimes, we met people who knew team members from their childhood, who had been their school teachers.

Our motivation is always Jesus Christ, seeking to do as he did and is still doing, that is, telling people about God's love and seeking to bring hope where there is no hope. We wanted to offer the gifts God had given us: Rona's ability to cook nutritionally on a budget, and mine to capture photographically the work of GrowTH. Therefore, from the beginning we have had the privilege of meeting lots of guests and volunteers as we work in partnership with churches across Tower Hamlets.

What have been some of the greatest challenges and blessings?

Challenges are always fresh each week, respecting and understanding our cultural differences (especially in relationship to men and women); Rona has found herself having to

bite her tongue on more than one occasion. The breakdown of what we would have seen as very strong traditional multi-generational family units, and ensuring that each week we are able to find activities that can be offered to everyone.

We have seen many of our guests attend our services. This has been the natural follow-on from being able to share ourselves on a Friday evening. One very distinct blessing for many of the team was at this year's Christmas party. Our Sunday School children took part in buying small gifts and making cards. Some volunteers chose their favorite carol and talked about it. That evening I had prepared some notes to share on the true meaning of Christmas. Well, my paper was redundant, as each volunteer had shared my thoughts. Guests were all involved, joining the singing and simple games. A guest was very touched by the Christmas card made, which was of cardboard just like what he had been sleeping on in the street. One guest, having started work, returned one Friday night with a gift for our Sunday school children as a thank you to them. One real blessing to Rona and me is how the whole church family gets involved. Our duvets and pillows are made up by one of our older team members. As she works she prays for the guest who will take that bed!

What role has your faith in Jesus played in running the shelter?

Jesus Christ is central in everything we do. Our prayer briefing before each evening, praying for protection and the opportunities to share Jesus, that our guests would ask what motivates us and that they would see the love of Jesus flowing from us. We have seen guests come and take part in Bible studies, asking really relevant questions. Each week we have a short talk

which we then try to build on during the evening. We trust that God will work miracles during the evening. In the morning we have a debriefing where we can share and pray about things that have happened during the night and morning.

What have you learned over the past 10 years?

I have been photographing for GrowTH for the whole 10 years. It has been a challenge and a blessing

each year, capturing images which reflect each season and the stories of our guests in such a way to ensure their dignity and individuality. But over the years we have learnt that it is teamwork and seeking to use the gifts God has given to each person that makes each night go well. Our prayer is that each guest will see that GrowTH is so different from the other shelters and that they will, in God's timing, seek HIM.

"When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."
Leviticus 19: 33-34

VOLUNTEER: ALAN



Alan has been one of our most committed volunteers for the past 5 years, doing mainly overnight shifts. He shared his thoughts with us.

What motivates you to do this year after year?

It's rewarding being part of such a wide community, with hundreds and hundreds of volunteers, playing their part in providing shelter to our guests every night and enabling the GrowTH advocate team to work with guests to solve their longer-term housing, employment and other issues and needs.

You usually do the overnight shift. How do you find that?

It's fine, the main role is to make sure people are settled around bedtime (which the evening team

have invariably done already!), then to turn the lights out and set the alarm clock. Sleeping is fine, although slightly higher than normal. There are seldom any problems.

What would you say to someone thinking about volunteering?

It is a real privilege to be part of the GrowTH community, from wide and varied conversations with guests and like-minded volunteers through to the reward of being part of something that can really change lives.

HOW REFERRALS WORKS

Assisting over 400 guests into permanent accommodation hasn't happened on its own but in partnership! Growth partners with eight referral agencies across Tower Hamlets and anyone, whether they have a local connection or not, can be referred into the shelter by one of them.

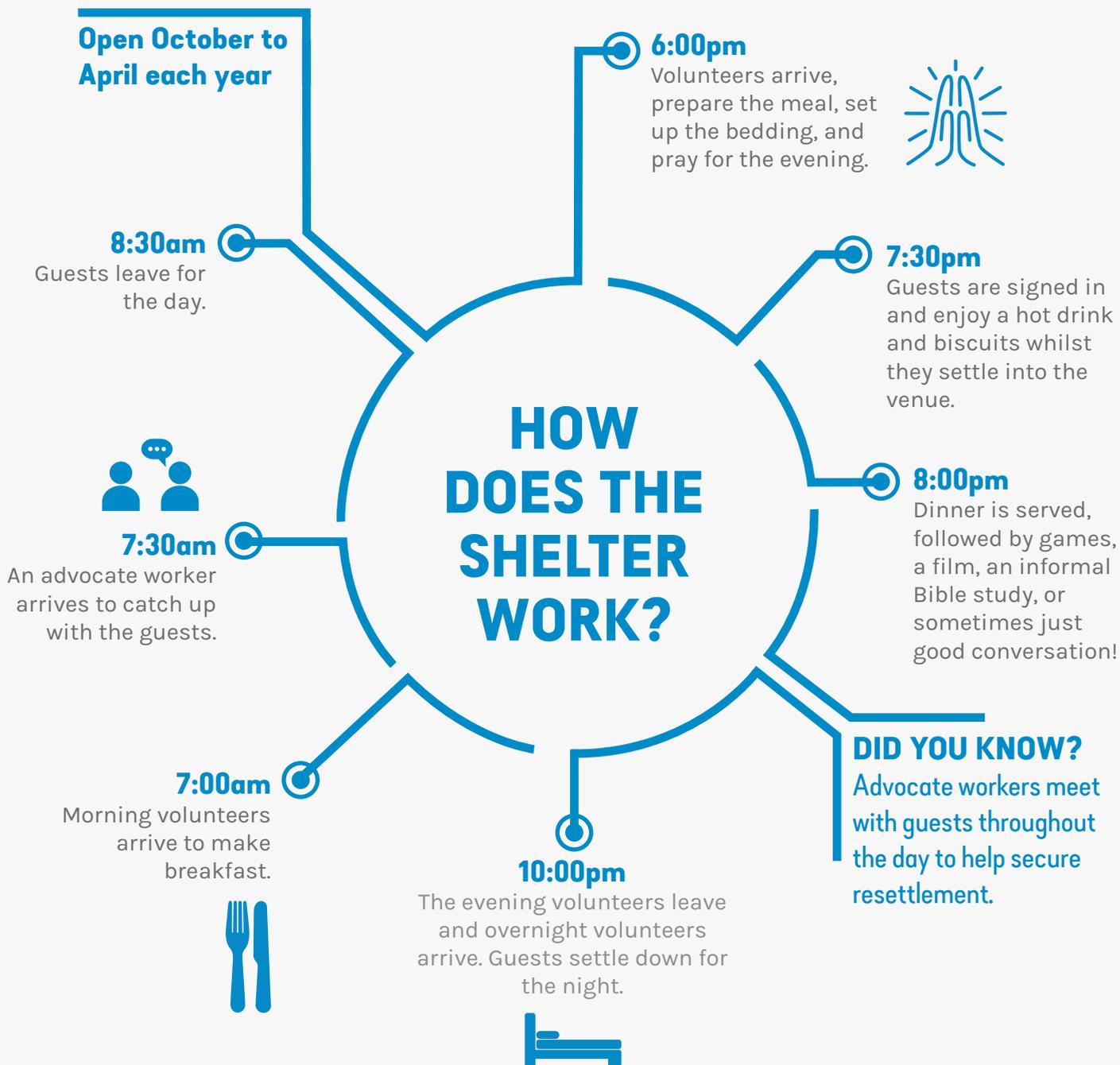
The infographic shows how someone can access the shelter:



"Thank you for partnering with us! You have, as always, been a real life line for many of our members."
Crisis Progression Coach - season 19/20

2019-20 REFERRAL AGENCIES:





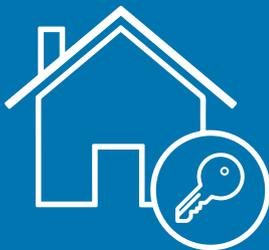
10 YEARS AT A GLANCE

1,228 guests in the shelter.*

27,165 bed spaces provided.

97,000 hours of volunteering.

*These figures do not include repeat stays.



We assisted **464**
moves into permanent
accommodation.



We assisted **338**
moves into temporary
accommodation.



Guests of at least **70**
different nationalities
have been hosted in the
shelter.



47 churches



2 community
centres involved

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Daniel (Season 10/11)

Initially moved into a flat in 2011 but was evicted and came back to GrowTH in 2012. He is now living in Bethnal Green, married to Christina and they have a 1 year old baby Eki. He is working full time at St Mungos.



Constantine (Season 12/13)

Tin stayed in GrowTH for 3 consecutive years. After connecting with a Good Shepherd Mission outreach worker and RenewEL he decided to move to Betel Rehab in September 2016. Tin has now been free from alcohol for over 3 years! He has met Jesus and was baptised in 2018. Jesus has indeed changed his life.



Sukiathan (Season 13/14)

Sukiathan moved into a studio flat in Bethnal Green after the shelter, and began attending East End church. Today he still lives in the same flat and continues to go to East End Church.



Steven (Season 14/15)

A few months after the shelter, Steve moved into GrowTH Housing as our first resident. He has been in steady work since then and has been a self employed courier for 3 years. He now lives in Essex and he, his fiancée, and daughter are all doing well. He wanted to share how grateful he was for GrowTH's help in getting back on his feet.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



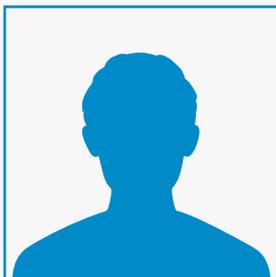
Christine (Season 15/16)

GrowTH helped her move into supported accommodation after the shelter. From there she moved into a studio flat, then to a shared house in Ilford. She has got a Teaching Assistant qualification and hopes to find work soon after the lockdown ends. She has been volunteering with the PDSA and hopes to move to Yorkshire one day.



Hasan (Season 16/17)

Hasan is a refugee from Sudan. He moved into supported accommodation after GrowTH. He's now in a shared house and is working full time for Ocado. He's working towards his driving licence and hopes to soon get permanent status in the UK and be reunited with his wife!



Audrone (Season 17/18)

After the shelter, Audrone moved into accommodation that supports victims of domestic violence. She will soon move into privately rented housing. She has also been volunteering in two churches every week which she enjoys. She says 'I am absolutely a different person.'



Edvaldo (Season 18/19)

Edvaldo moved into a shared house in Tower Hamlets after GrowTH, and is working as a cleaner at the Emirates Stadium. He's moved closer to his work in Manor House and has been promoted to supervisor.



Manuel (Season 19/20)

Manuel started the Pret Rising Stars program while in GrowTH. By the end of GrowTH he moved into the Pret House. He graduated from Rising Stars and is now a full time employee for Pret, particularly enjoying serving customers on the tills.

STORY: THIVAKAR

Thivakar's situation seemed utterly hopeless. As a teenager he fled civil war in Sri Lanka and in 2008 he sought asylum in the UK. However, his asylum applications were repeatedly rejected. With no regularised status in the UK, and no home to return to, it wasn't long before Thivakar became homeless. Months turned to years and homelessness led to hopelessness.

Thivakar stayed at the GrowTH shelter a number of times, and over the years his physical and mental health worsened and drinking became a problem. The GrowTH team prayed that God would completely transform Thivakar's life, trusting that 'what is impossible with man is possible with God.' (Luke 18:27).

Years later, in spring 2020, we heard from Thivakar and could not believe our ears. He explained that in 2018 an old friend contacted him and told him that he had become a Christian. Thivakar had experienced Christianity and churches while at GrowTH, but had struggled to understand due to the language barrier. Now finally he was hearing about the good news of Jesus in his own language. Thivakar began attending his friend's Tamil-speaking church in Harrow. He was delighted to tell us that he had decided to give his life to Jesus!

Amazingly, there was more good news. He had finally been granted refugee status from the Home Office, allowing him to work and access housing. He found a job in a sandwich factory near Harrow, and moved in with friends from his church.

Thivakar shared how he is also now free from addiction, depression, and other health problems, for which he gives all credit to Jesus. It was an incredible turn-around, and we know that these things are not guaranteed to everyone who believes! Nevertheless, this transformation in Thivakar's life is certainly an answer to many prayers, and a reminder that God is 'able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine' (Ephesians 3:20).

STORY: AYESHA



Ayesha's story starts in Sylhet, Bangladesh, where she worked as a tailor. In 2014, her family tried to force her into a marriage, so she fled to the UK, knowing she had relatives here who would give her a place to stay. For nearly two years, she stayed with relatives and family

friends, moving from place to place. As Ayesha's options started to run out, she ended up staying with people who subjected her to abuse and domestic slavery. As the situation worsened, she was left with no option other than to become homeless. The next day, the team from Praxis Immigration Advice referred her to GrowTH and she got a place in the shelter that same night.

When we met Ayesha, we could see that she was at rock bottom. Her physical and mental health were not good, and her application for asylum had just been rejected. We worked hard to make sure she had access to good immigration advice, as well as further accommodation. For over a year she stayed in different temporary hostels, until finally, we received the good news that Ayesha had been given official refugee status! This was life-changing news, as it meant she could finally access housing and income.

Lots happened in a short time after that! Ayesha moved into a council flat in Tower Hamlets, got married, and had a baby son! Ayesha and her husband kindly invited the GrowTH team to their civil ceremony at the town hall, and it has been a joy to meet their son on several occasions. Seeing her life now, and her happy family, we thank God for the way he has turned her situation around!

STORY: NELSON

A dark time

‘My background is alcohol, homeless, depression, anxiety, self-hurting.’

2015 was not a good year for Nelson. He lost his job and the accommodation that came with it. Having been paid only £800 for nine months’ work, Nelson became homeless. To make matters worse, within two weeks of becoming homeless, he needed heart surgery. The hospital later directed him to Whitechapel Mission, who then referred him to GrowTH.

Nelson started attending East End Church and joined their Alpha course. The GrowTH staff referred him to the Pret Rising Stars scheme, which provides full-time paid work and support. Sadly, soon after he started the role, his hidden drinking problem began to surface. Soon after, Nelson lost his job at Pret and, feeling ashamed, he cut all contact with GrowTH.

An unexpected encounter

Thankfully, God’s providence brought Nelson back into contact with GrowTH. Matt, an Advocate Worker at the time, bumped into Nelson in Shadwell. He explained to Matt that he had been sleeping rough for over a year but still felt too ashamed to approach GrowTH. Nelson eventually agreed to meet in the office the next day. That encounter in July 2017 was a turning

point in Nelson’s life. After a few meetings, Nelson finally agreed to go to rehab at Betel Hexham, in Northumberland.

Restoration

As soon as Nelson joined the Betel recovery community, he felt at home. Betel do not charge anything to their residents, but instead generate income through businesses such as furniture restoration, house clearances, gardening, and cafés. Nelson enjoyed getting involved and starting on his path to recovery.

You do not have to be a Christian to join Betel, but they invite residents to explore the Christian faith. Nelson told us about his journey:

‘I gave my life to Christ. I got baptised two years ago at Hexham Community Church. I had always been a believer, but my back was turned to Him, so my way of life wasn’t the best. I didn’t have any contact with my family. It was a broken relationship. Through these three years, through Betel with the grace of God, I have full restoration with my family. They trust me now. They don’t even question if I’m drunk or not.’

‘Through GrowTH and through doing the Alpha course at East End Church... all this process was guiding me back to God again. I found this ministry is more than a

rehab. I found people that I could identify with. They were never going to judge me.’

When Nelson returned to Portugal for a funeral, his family were amazed. ‘When they saw me, they saw a different person. I was shining. No drinking, no smoking, no swearing, smiling, happy, healthy.’ The road to recovery has not always been easy, but Nelson is grateful for what God has done in his life. ‘I never blame God for what happened in my life... God turns everything bad for good... I truly believe that I am free... That is my testimony... Glory to God.’

Nelson is looking forward to one day visiting London and coming to help at the shelter. He wants to share his story to encourage others. He left us with this message to GrowTH volunteers: ‘Never be discouraged, because the work that you guys do is amazing... I just have to thank God [for putting] GrowTH in my life.’



GROWTH: HOUSING

Since 2015, GrowTH Housing has been helping former shelter guests to transition from homelessness to independent living. It is a much-needed 'stepping stone' and 'helping hand' on what, for many, is a difficult journey.

Three key values underpin this project:

Accessible - Residents can move in without a penny in their pocket.

Affordable - Both those in work and those claiming benefits can afford to live in our flats.

Supportive - Our dedicated housing workers meet regularly with residents and work through a tailored support plan to help them move forward.

The stability of this accommodation, coupled with the support of our housing team, enables residents to take positive steps forward in life. Our support to residents primarily focuses on accessing employment, further education, or training. However, it also includes support around claiming benefits, money management, health and wellbeing, as well as considerably encouraging guests to interact with the Christian faith. Each resident typically stays for 12 months with the intention that with a stable income they are then able to move on into privately rented accommodation.

At Growth Housing we recognise a need to provide space for residents to grow physically, spiritually and emotionally in many areas of life. To that end, in the past year we have opened a communal flat in the same housing block to provide a safe space for the residents of all our flats. It's a place where they can connect with the team and other residents, have support meetings, and join courses, activities, and social events. We hope that this new initiative will help guests to find purpose and belonging.

Over the past 5 years, we have provided housing for 34 people, from all walks of life, and the project has grown to a total of 7 flats for 13 residents.

As we look to the future of GrowTH Housing, we aim to continue to improve the support and move-on options we provide to guests, as well as expanding the project as a whole, to ensure we can help more people on their journey from homelessness to stable homes where they can flourish.

VISION



Community

We want to encourage our residents to find connection and community in order to flourish in life and have support in difficult times.



Stability

We want to help our residents to achieve stable employment and learn life skills that will provide a firm foundation for the future.



Faith

We want our residents to have the opportunity to explore the Christian faith and become part of a church family.

WHAT NEXT FOR GROWTH...?

GrowTH's vision is to see transformation in the lives of those that are marginalised, all for God's glory. It's a big vision, and we will continue to dream big, work hard, and pray earnestly in order to see that vision come about.

Our shelter, resettlement, and housing projects are working well and have impacted so many lives. We want to continue improving and increasing our impact in those projects. We also recognise that the need and landscape can change, so we will strive to adapt what we do where necessary, and start new projects where new and growing needs are identified.

A key area for development and expansion will be GrowTH Housing. This project fills a real gap in housing options for shelter guests, and this need is unlikely to go away any time soon. We are already thinking creatively about what GrowTH Housing will look like over the next few years, and how we can make it sustainable for the long term.

At the time of print, the world is finding itself in a completely unexpected and fast-changing situation. This COVID-19 pandemic and its many repercussions will certainly have an impact on GrowTH. Our shelter in 2020-21 may have to look very different to previous years to comply with government guidance. Our resettlement work may have to adapt to the changing needs. In many ways, we may have to 'go back to the drawing board!'

Whatever lies ahead, GrowTH will always be about churches in Tower Hamlets sharing God's love, in word and deed, with those that are marginalised. As we seek to do this prayerfully and in partnership with one another, we trust that God will change hearts and transform lives in more ways than we can imagine. What a privilege it is to play a part in this!



CHRIST- CENTRED

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Proverbs 31:8-9

Then Jesus said to his host... When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.

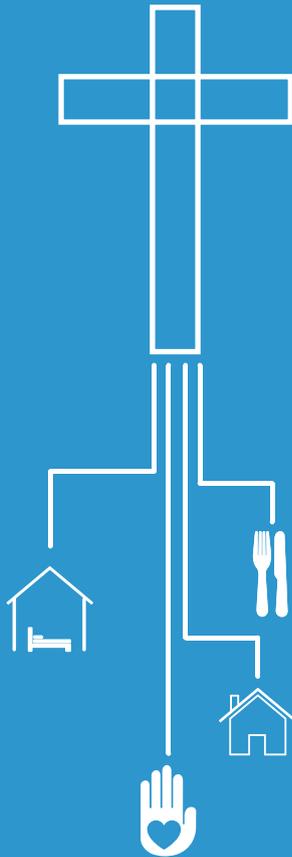
Luke 14:14

I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy.

Psalms 140:12

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Luke 19:10



To be Christ-centered is to say that Jesus himself determines absolutely everything we do. It is the foundation upon which we do everything and the heartbeat of the charity that moves, motivates, and energises us in our mission! To be Christ-centered is to hold back from doing what we think is needed and best, and instead, be led by what the Bible teaches.

Jesus loved the poor and the marginalised, he had compassion on those with physical ailments and fed the hungry crowds. Most importantly, he offered people a 'belonging' and a 'home' that is more permanent, secure and satisfying than anything found on Earth!

"Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." (Revelation 21:3-4)

At GrowTH being Christ-centred is to join God on His mission offering the guests and residents the same things that Jesus did.

But why must Jesus take such a central role in the charity? GrowTH's strap-line says 'we love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19). This verse answers the 'why'. Everything we do is in response to God who has first shown His love towards us by sending His own son into his world to willingly die so that we might have true life!



Night Shelter Volunteer

Volunteering at GrowTH, I have seen a demonstration of God's faithfulness. All of my pre-shelter fears proved foundless.



Night Shelter Guest

[I was] touched by their belief and faith... those people are truly God send. Their love for God fills the place.



Night Shelter Guest

GrowTH reinforced my opinion about Christianity. Very compassionate.



Night Shelter Guest

I'm a Christian before but have lost myself over the past couple of years. [I've] been going to church since and really loving it.



Night Shelter Volunteer

It's good to be part of a movement that is bringing God's love to Tower Hamlets.





**NIGHT
SHELTER**

WHO ARE OUR GUESTS?

Total number
of guests:

120



Males

105



Females

15

Oldest age:

76

Youngest age:

18

Average age:

40

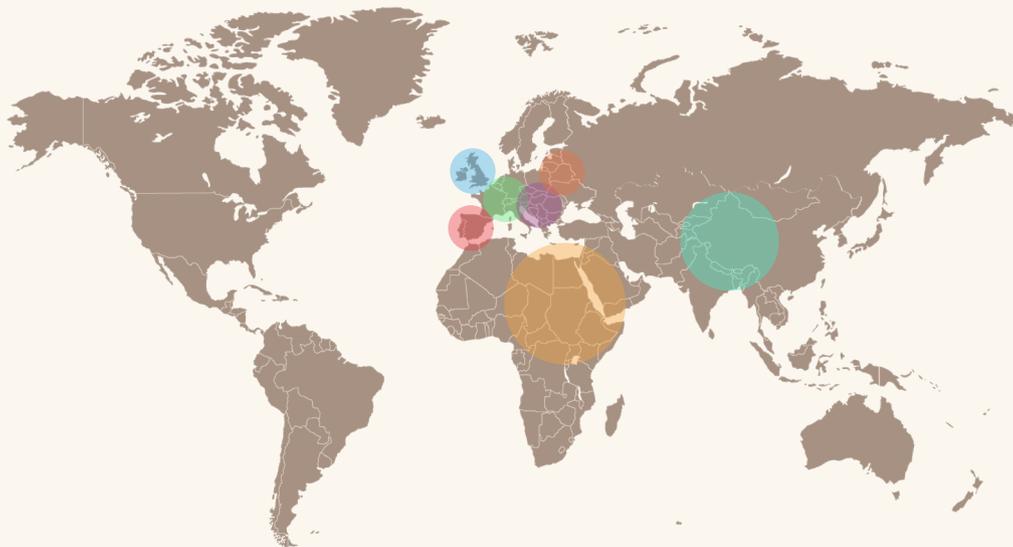
No Recourse to
Public Funds:

22

Refugees:

27

NATIONALITY OF OUR SHELTER GUESTS



32
40*

UK &
Ireland

3
40

Northern
Europe
(mainly
Lithuania)

20
24

Eastern
Europe
(mainly
Romania)

8
9

Southern
Europe
(mainly
Portugal)

3
6

Western
Europe

38
41

Africa
(mainly
Sudan &
Eritrea)

10
8

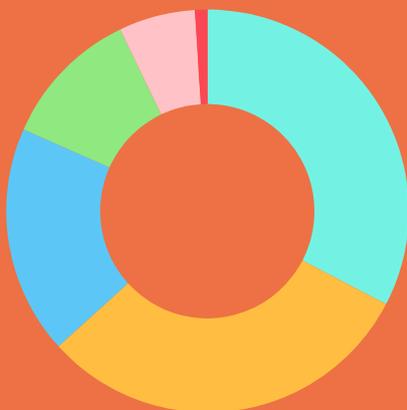
Asia
(mainly
Bangladesh)

6
5

Other

*The latter number shows last year's statistics, which have been included for comparison.

EMPLOYMENT:



- 32% were actively seeking employment
- 30% were unwilling or unable to seek employment (medical issues, addictions, studying)
- 18% had no entitlement to work
- 11% were in employment
- 6% disengaged before being registered with a case worker
- 1% pensioner

22 of the 34 EEA nationals (non-UK) were actively seeking employment. Two had medical problems, six were in employment. The remaining four disengaged from the service before even being registered with a case worker.

STORY: LI

This is the letter from a guest of this season, sharing his story of faith (translated from Mandarin). He has become a regular attendee at East London Tabernacle Baptist Church, connecting through the night shelter. We are so thankful for their love and care for this guest.

I had lost everything. I was like a ghost wandering on the streets in London and resisted to communicate with God for a period of time.

The situation changed on the day Crisis Skylight introduced me to GrowTH. During the 28 days living in the GrowTH shelter and studying the Bible, I started to realise that all of my previous

experience was part of God's plan. In particular, he was growing and helping me to find the purpose of my life. When I returned to a church again through Naomi's invitation, the people there greeted me with warmth. I felt that they were my family and the church was my second home. I experienced the love of God again and was encouraged to become a new person.

I really appreciate the help I received from GrowTH. It reignited my hope of life. Even though I once resisted to communicate with God, he still did not abandon me as a sinner. I now view that everything is part of God's bigger plan and happens as a result of his love.

STORY: SEAN

'I was extremely depressed'

A week after a gas leak in his building, Sean came home to a shock, 'I came home one night and found myself locked out.' This was not only a shock to Sean but all very strange. He was not warned about this and has no idea of the reasoning behind it. 'I had a couple of phone numbers and left messages but no one got back to me... I don't know how above board the landlord was', Sean stated. Sean's first instinct was to head to the police station. 'They said there had been a gas leak but they didn't have any details about it. I spent the rest of the night in the police station.' As sudden as that, Sean lost all his possessions and was homeless. 'Everything I had in the world was in that house... private papers, clothes... it wasn't a great deal but it was personal. I've got one or two friends in Penge. They helped me. My mother lives in sheltered accommodation so I couldn't stay

there. I was extremely depressed!' Sean was homeless for six nights which he spent largely on the buses. This was 'unpleasant to say the least', he said. Thankfully one night at Forest Hill train station, Sean noticed an advertisement for The Whitechapel Mission. He called the number and within two days he was accepted into Growth night shelter.

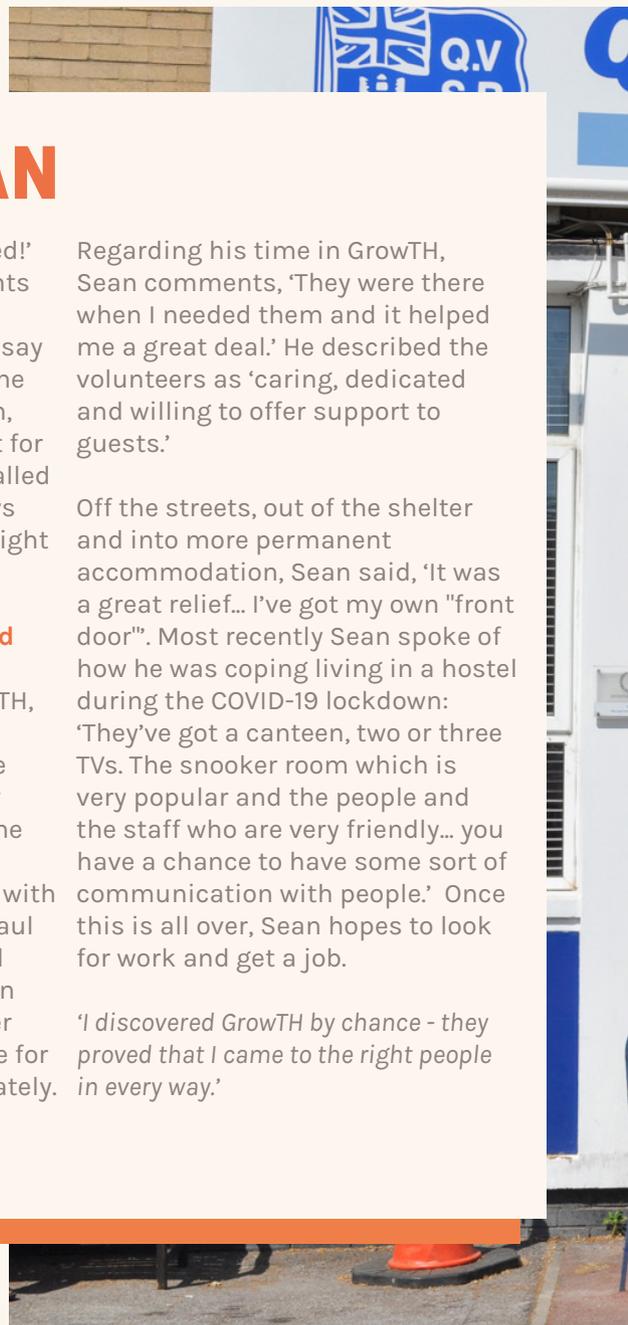
'They were there when I needed them'

Recalling his first time in Growth, Sean said, 'It was a great relief. I could have a shower and there was a hot meal... I wasn't on my own in this.' Sean was only in the shelter for nine nights. The day after Sean had been registered with Growth, his Advocate Worker Paul referred him to the QVSR hostel and four days later he was given an interview. Just two days after this, QVSR had a room available for Sean and he moved in immediately.

Regarding his time in Growth, Sean comments, 'They were there when I needed them and it helped me a great deal.' He described the volunteers as 'caring, dedicated and willing to offer support to guests.'

Off the streets, out of the shelter and into more permanent accommodation, Sean said, 'It was a great relief... I've got my own "front door"'. Most recently Sean spoke of how he was coping living in a hostel during the COVID-19 lockdown: 'They've got a canteen, two or three TVs. The snooker room which is very popular and the people and the staff who are very friendly... you have a chance to have some sort of communication with people.' Once this is all over, Sean hopes to look for work and get a job.

'I discovered Growth by chance - they proved that I came to the right people in every way.'





121

131

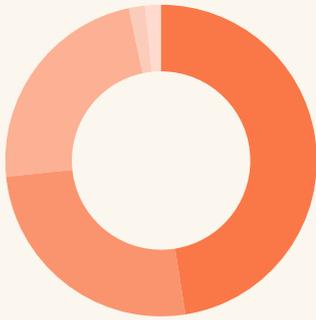
CAR PARKING AREAS
ARE RESERVED FOR
VISITORS & CONTRACTORS
OF QVSR
VEHICLES AND CONTENTS
ARE LEFT ENTIRELY
AT OWNER'S RISK



RESETTLEMENT

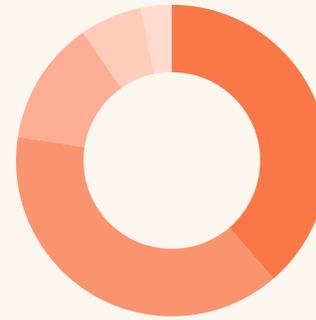
WHERE DO GUESTS GO AFTER LEAVING THE SHELTER?

RESETTLEMENT OUTCOMES



- Further temporary accommodation - 57
- More permanent accommodation - 31
- Disengaged - 28
- No option - 2
- No success - 2

BREAKDOWN OF MORE PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION



- Permanent hostels - 12
- Private rented sector - 12
- Supported housing - 4
- Rehab - 2
- Local authority - 1

REALITY CHECK

In 2018/19, 33 guests moved into either a permanent hostel or supported housing. In 2019/20 it has been only half that number (16).

Possible reasons:

- A change in attitude towards accommodation offers. This season shared houses were more desirable to some guests rather than the more readily available hostels.
- Often, housing applications will come to fruition after the shelter has closed. Coronavirus changed that as accommodation options closed their doors.
- Last season, GrowTH Housing had acquired new flats that residents could move into. Due to coronavirus, there were very few available rooms this year.

Most nights at the shelter we operate a **waiting list**, in case those from the main list are absent. We want to minimise empty bed spaces when there are still men and women on the streets.

This season, 45% of the guests placed on the waiting list for the shelter turned up and secured their place in the shelter on the same night.



6 guests were asked to leave the shelter this season.

WHY DO GUESTS RETURN TO THE SHELTER?

It is often said that many of us are only a pay-cheque away from homelessness and some guests coming through the doors of GrowTH would not have envisaged it ever happening to them. While some of these men and women will successfully be resettled, there are still many who are not and who return to the shelter. 21 of the 120 guests this season had already stayed in the GrowTH night shelter in previous years. We thought it would be interesting to try and identify why this was the case and to understand how this statistic may contribute towards the discussion around the eradication of homelessness.

The largest cohort within these 21 guests were job seekers from the European Union. Having spent time with each guest, what cannot be questioned is their eagerness to find work and their first-rate skill sets. However, there are many other factors to consider when trying to build a settled life in the UK. Here are just a few that we have experienced from our guests this season:

Low levels of English can seriously hamper a worker's efforts to find permanent employment. Even if spoken English is sufficient, a low ability to read or write in English can restrict the job application process.

Cash-in-hand jobs are still too prevalent, and can have long-term implications which are rarely understood at the time. Receiving

Settled Status (introduced through Brexit) can bring real security to a guest who has lived in the UK for over 5 years, but the 5 years is generally proven through a working history. This history does not exist if the work has been cash-in-hand. Coupled with this is a lack of understanding of the tax system. A guest may be told to register as self-employed with HMRC (for example, if entering the construction industry) but may not be shown how to complete the necessary online filing requirements. This can lead to penalties of well over £1000 per return and brings further financial woes.

Guests desperate for work in order to leave the streets are much more likely to take **unstable jobs** on zero-hour contracts etc. The low pay combined with high London rent means guests live hand-to-mouth with little savings to see them through an inevitable job change.

Six of the 21 guests reported having substance misuse issues. A stint on the streets can often lead to a guest turning to **alcohol or drugs** to combat the stress of daily living and the dangers faced. This is then another hurdle to overcome when navigating the path out of homelessness. One guest this season had been in rehab 15 different times, entwined with bouts of homelessness. However, we are thrilled to report of another guest who returned to GrowTH this season for the second time but who has now

turned his back on a long history of substance abuse, with the help of a Christian rehab. Read James' story on page 10.

The third identifiable category of returning guests is those who are subject to immigration control and therefore have no recourse to public funds and no entitlement to work. Unfortunately, often these guests return to the winter shelter circuit year after year. Immigration processes can be extremely lengthy, especially where appeals are involved, and many guests fall outside the remit of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) which provides accommodation during the asylum-seeking process. Rather than return to their home countries, guests would rather stay in the UK and rely on the winter shelter circuit to see them through the cold season. Some may see this as a questionable decision but others, as indicative of circumstances in their home country.

Does the return of our guests mean that the work of GrowTH is futile? Not at all. Like James (mentioned above), returning for a second time can be just what they need to finally get off the streets and we gladly want to enable that to happen. Secondly, we must not underestimate the transformative power that God's love has on them while in the shelter, even if, for many, their circumstances do not change.



STORY: MOHAMED

After Mohamed and his partner married and had a baby girl, their relationship nosedived, leading to their separation and Mohamed facing criminal charges. To Mohamed, it felt a great injustice. 'She would physically and mentally abuse me. After numerous incidents, I became angry at how unfair it was for me. I lashed out and retaliated.' That night, for the first time in his life, Mohamed spent it in a police cell.

For the next three weeks Mohamed was homeless, as his partner had locked the family home and a restraining order prevented him accessing his belongings. Mohamed says, 'I have never been so low in my life. Homeless and alone.'

Thankfully, a friend asked him to house sit, rent free. His cousin also lent him a scooter for a month. Mohamed went straight to work and managed to save enough to buy his dream motorbike. He also managed to replace all the documents that had been lost during the separation. But Mohamed was soon to find himself on the streets again.

His house sitting ended and his motorbike was stolen. 'I was back at square one.'

Thankfully, though, only one day later, in February 2020, Mohamed entered the GrowTH shelter. Mohamed found the shelter a 'struggle' but also a 'blessed month'. The Sunday night team from The Liberty Church prayed over his bike situation; less than 48 hours later, the bike was found! Mohamed was able to start work again.

One night short of his 28 night stay, Mohamed was holding the keys to his new flat in Poplar, found by his Advocate Worker, Naomi and up-front costs funded through a grant application. A fresh start!

Mohamed looks forward with a grateful heart. 'I now have my own place, a good paying job and a dream motorcycle and en route to purchasing my filming gear.' Sometimes you think you have nothing and can't do anything in life. But you forget your breath is something and with that something you can use every



breath to get where you want to be. Sometimes you think you have nothing but you forget that you have something. Look around you and count your blessings and always reach for an extended hand that comes your way. Don't be blinded by ignorance by thinking you can do it on your own. Once you have accepted that extended hand, offer your extended hand to the man/woman behind you.'



**GROWTH
HOUSING**

GROWTH: HOUSING

The past year has been a whirlwind of activity for GrowTH housing. One of the most exciting updates has been receiving the keys for three additional 1-bed flats from Poplar HARCA and converting them and some of our existing large 1-beds into 2-bed apartments. This decision meant that we could:

- **Provide accommodation for more people, from 6 to 13 residents.**
- **Make the flats more affordable for those on low incomes.**
- **Offer them to those under 35.**

Another wonderful blessing from this year has been transforming our ground floor flat into a communal flat to create a space that enables the residents to spend time with one another and have community. Residents can participate in a variety of activities ranging from

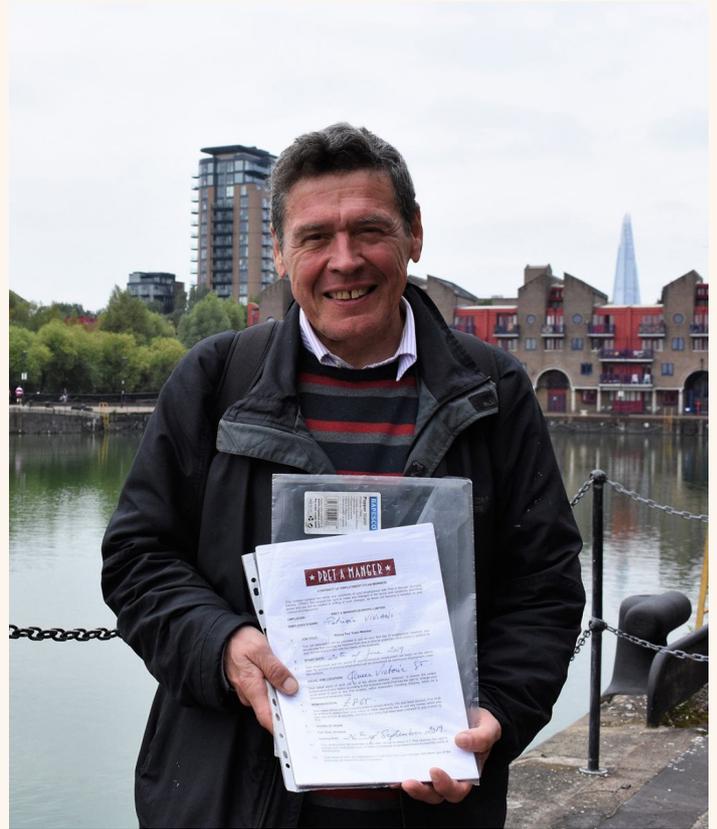
support meetings and life skills training, to simply having a chat or just to hang out and watch TV.

If you have skills and would like to volunteer your time to run a set of workshops for the residents, such as guitar lessons, cooking lessons, or gardening, we would love to hear from you!

In September 2019 GrowTH was able to appoint two additional members of staff: Jeremy and Denzel. Together they worked alongside Rachel to provide support for residents, develop the strategy for the housing and put in place long term planning. Both have been an asset to the wider GrowTH team this year.

This year really has been a year of provision, growth, and development.





2019/20 STATS



16
residents have
stayed
our housing



11
residents have
been in
employment



1
resident in
further
education



34
have lived in the
flats since 2015



STORY: SAKIB

In 2010 Sakib and his parents came to the UK from Bangladesh. However, due to personal reasons, within 6 months, Sakib left his home and being only 13 years old he was placed in the care of social services. For the next 8 years Sakib was placed in different foster homes. In 2019, being over 18, he tried to get his own place through Tower Hamlets Council and even had a flat viewing in Canary Wharf but he was unsuccessful. 'They didn't tell me why', Sakib said. Later that same year Sakib was sadly told he had to leave his foster home due to limited space. 'There was 3 bedrooms and 6 people', he told us. In October 2019 Sakib left with no other options!

'I feel lost'

Initially Sakib's social worker was able to provide him with a temporary hotel for a couple of weeks, 'but after this', his Social Worker told him, 'you have to look for yourself.' Indeed, after his time in the hotel ended, this is what Sakib did. 'I tried everywhere I could', he said. The council told him that as he was single they could not help, and then signposted him to other places. 'It was a wasting of time', he said. While on occasions he was able to get some help from friends, he also had to sleep in parks and at train stations. 'At that time', he said, 'it was so cold. It was

a little bit stressful. [I was] scared, I feel lost.' Things took a turn for the worse for Sakib when he fell asleep one morning in a coffee shop only to wake up with his bag gone. All his important documents including his Biometric Residence Permit were taken!

Sakib was advised to go to Centre Point. Although they could not help him directly, they pointed him in the direction of the Whitechapel Mission and it was from here that Sakib was referred into GrowTH.

'I was so excited'

Sakib described his first night at the shelter as 'feeling safe'. He particularly recalls his conversation with one volunteer who shared his journey going from being a guest in GrowTH to getting into accommodation, working as a barista, and now volunteering with GrowTH. In a time of uncertainty, this was a welcome encouragement!

Sakib's main barrier to accessing more permanent accommodation was his lack of ID. No hostel or shared house would accept him without seeing physical proof of his ID and although the process of obtaining his new ID was underway, receiving the replacement card would take much more than his 28-night stay. It seemed most likely that Sakib would have to go to

another shelter.

However, at that time a room at GrowTH Housing was due to become available. After a successful interview with the GrowTH Housing team, it was agreed that Sakib could stay on at the shelter until the room was ready. Sharing about the day he moved in, Sakib said, 'I was so excited. I feel safe, and I got somewhere I can relax. Thank you. You guys helped me a lot.'

Now in settled accommodation, Sakib can finally focus on his future. He is looking for any job right now but is particularly interested in going on a barber course and eventually having his own barber shop. It was a real joy seeing Sakib's smile on the day he came into the flats! It is a pleasure to have him with us and to support him to achieve new goals and gain the independence to one day live in a place of his own.



Sakib at the shelter

REFLECTION: GROWTH HOUSING WORKER



‘It is incredibly easy to see a selfless, proactive attitude at the heart of the team.’

My first year as a GrowTH Housing worker has indeed been a great one. Though there are apprehensions and challenges in any new role, there is much to be thankful for. I am firstly thankful for being able to work with a team that cares so deeply about God and His word, and as a direct byproduct, they care deeply about people in need. It is incredibly easy to see a selfless, proactive attitude at the heart of the team. This gives me so much to learn from and emulate.

I am also very thankful for the opportunity to support the residents. It is not only amazing to hear their stories, but it is a privilege to witness the progress they make over time - whether it be in employment, a change in attitude, or even the ability to healthily express and share emotions when things get hard. It is always a joy to be a help when they are in need, pray continuously for them and with them, share the Gospel with them and give helpful resources for their own journey of faith.

God has evidenced His faithfulness through answering many prayers this year, providing constantly, and challenging us in order that we might grow. There have been a few hiccups along the way (which is always expected) and I have a lot to learn, but I am excited for what God has in store for GrowTH in the coming years.

**Denzel Gaisie,
GrowTH Housing Worker**

REFLECTION: ADVOCATE WORKER

This year marks 10 years for GrowTH! 10 years of churches opening their doors. 10 years of hundreds of volunteers giving up their time, comfort and convenience for the sake of others. 10 years of supporting guests into more permanent accommodation, and most importantly, 10 years of showing and telling guests how much God loves them!

Reflecting back, what continues to amaze and encourage me is how our mission, values and vision have never changed. We have not drifted! We have kept the main thing, the main thing, and the churches together all agree: Jesus is at the centre of GrowTH!

This is not without its challenges and trials of course. This season, we have gone through a couple of significant challenges that we knew may impact the running of the shelter. It can be very easy in the midst of trial to doubt God's provision and faithfulness. It can be easy to cave in and settle for what you know would be a far easier alternative. Did these challenges impact the shelter? Yes! Was it hard? Yes. But through this, we have seen God's kindness, love and faithfulness shine through. Through this, we have been reminded of the reason we do this, and that this task is much bigger than we think - it effects change both now and forever!

Though I wasn't around in the early days, it is easy to see the impact that faithful men and women have made in laying this foundation from the start. In 2010 Jesus dictated how we ran, how we looked, what we said and did, and today this remains the same. To these men and women, I want to say thank you, trustees, past and present, for keeping us steady! Thank you, managers, for leading with grace and wisdom. Thank you, local churches, for praying for GrowTH, loving the guests, and offering Jesus!

Paul Tebb,
Advocate Worker



'We have kept the main thing, the main thing, and the churches together all agree: Jesus is at the centre of GrowTH!'

SLEEPOUT 2019

Over the last four years, GrowTH has run annual Sleepout events to raise money for the work that we do. These events have not only supported us financially but continue to help us identify, even in the smallest of ways, with those experiencing homelessness. The idea is not to try to replicate the many factors involved in homelessness, but rather to stop our routines and take this step to consider what it is like to not have a home.

This season's event was a massive success! 29 people slept in the grounds of St Anne's Limehouse on a cold and damp night in mid November and raised a total of £14,760.97! This is by far our highest total ever! We would like to thank all those who took part and those who sponsored them!



Here's what two participants, Melissa and Victoria said about the Sleepout:

Why did you decide to participate in the sleepout?

Melissa: I do a lot of running and try to help raise money for charities when I can. I saw this event and thought 'Wow, how exciting! Something I've never done before and for a great cause!'

Victoria: It was simply the thought of there is literally no reason not to do this. Even if I can just raise a small amount of money and raise awareness it can help make a difference. If I get cold or wet, it's just one night and I still have a warm and safe home to go back to the next day.

What were your thoughts and feelings leading up to the sleepout?

Melissa: I was really excited, maybe a little nervous on Friday afternoon.

Victoria: Having worked with the homeless, I knew a few tips to help keep warm and made sure I thought in advance about the clothes & layers I would have. What I found more surprising was the reactions and worries of others - friends and family who were very worried about my health sleeping outside or for my safety when I told them about the sleep-out. I think the thought of someone they cared for being outside made the reality of what rough sleepers might experience hit home a bit more for them.

How did you find the experience?

Melissa: I found the experience amazing. It was sad to see it come to an end - the feeling it gave you to be doing something so rewarding.

Victoria: In reality, I wore way too many layers and got too warm during the night! Luckily I am a good sleeper so didn't find I was too affected by the light or noise

from being outside. I was surprised at the effect on my joints though - I had to wake every hour or two to move due to the weight on my hips or back from being on the hard surface. Whilst I got enough sleep, I don't think my back and joints could have taken a second night without quite a bit of discomfort which I wasn't really expecting.

We were also lucky we had a safe place to keep our valuables inside or we could sleep with our bag next to us without fear. I recognised that as a young woman, I had a lot more safety not only for my valuables but also for me, that many women rough sleeping do not have.

What impact has it made on you personally in your life or about those who are homeless?

Melissa: I have a friend who helps with the homeless in our area and I've helped by collecting coats and shoes etc., but now I feel I want to do more. It really does make you think when we complain that it's cold how these people feel who don't have the shelter or warm clothes and food. It's definitely an eye opener for me.

Victoria: It's hard to fully grasp from one night the full psychological side of what someone rough sleeping will experience - the uncertainty of what might happen and the fear and risk also. Whilst you can empathise with the physical aspects more, this is just one side to rough sleeping. Whilst it's easier to meet this need practically with donated sleeping bags or clothes, this experience made me think more about the psychological and mental wellbeing effects of rough sleeping.

**To find out about future
fundraising events, visit:
www.thisisgrowth.org/fundraising.**

RESPONDING TO COVID-19



Guest helping to cook lunch.

23rd March 2020. This was the day when we received the news that significant new measures were put in place to combat COVID-19. We had already put in strict new hygiene and social distancing rules in the shelter to reduce the risk of infection, but when lockdown started, things got more serious. While the country was told to stay at home, this was not possible for the homeless! With 15 guests in one shelter, we knew our set-up was far from ideal, and with almost everything closed, our guests needed our help more than ever to protect themselves and abide by the new rules as best they could.

So from the moment lockdown was announced, our night shelter became a day-and-night shelter! This was a significant step-up, and involved our staff and a 'slimmed down' team of very dedicated volunteers going the extra mile to make it work. Guests received three meals a day, mostly cooked off site by volunteers and delivered to keep outside contact to a minimum. Thank you to Lighthouse Baptist Church, Bethnal Green Mission

Church and Bow Baptist Church who kindly allowed GrowTH to use their buildings day and night, and a huge thank you to everyone who was involved in running the shelter and caring for our guests. It was not easy, but it worked out!

While the logistics were being worked out, three big worries loomed over us. Firstly, what would we do if someone in the shelter started showing symptoms of coronavirus? Secondly, our resettlement work with guests became limited. Referrals were put on hold and landlords were no longer doing viewings. Thirdly, with the mandatory closure of the shelter becoming more and more likely, where would the guests go? Even once it was announced that the Greater London Authority were working to get all homeless people into hotels, there were many moments when it seemed extremely unlikely that our guests would get a place. Each morning guests eagerly awaited positive news and for many mornings there was no such news to give. While there was certainly stress and anxiety in the shelter, we thank God that the atmosphere in the shelter was largely calm. Guests even got involved and helped out with cooking and cleaning!

Positives in the pandemic!

Thankfully the day finally arrived and on the evening of 28th March all the guests were moved into

hotels. Through it all God was at work extending his grace and answering our prayers. A doctor checked every one of our guests and none had any symptoms! Another answer to prayer was regarding a mother and her 19-year-old son who were staying in the shelter. Both were new to the UK and the mother relies on her son to interpret for her. We found out that one hotel only had enough spaces for the women in our shelter. The mother was upset at the prospect of being separated from her son for an unknown length of time. Thankfully, we later got a call saying that one extra room had become available in that hotel for a man from our shelter. The mother jumped and shouted for joy!

We even had some moves-ons! Three guests moved into rented housing in the first week of lockdown and another four found homes whilst staying in the hotels!

Thank you to all who played a part in loving the guest at this time. Most importantly we thank God who answered our prayers and reminded us that He is lovingly in control.



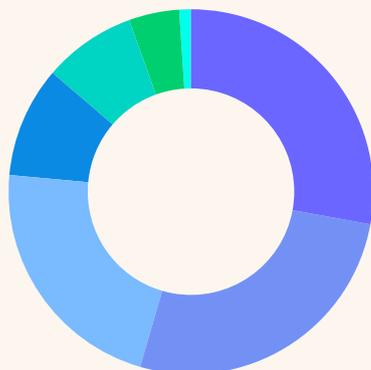
Hotel guest outside her new accommodation.

THANK YOU!

Whether you cooked, cleaned, ran a Bible study, set up beds, befriended guests, slept over or whether you gave financially, we are so grateful to all of you for your hard work and for playing your part in caring for our guests.

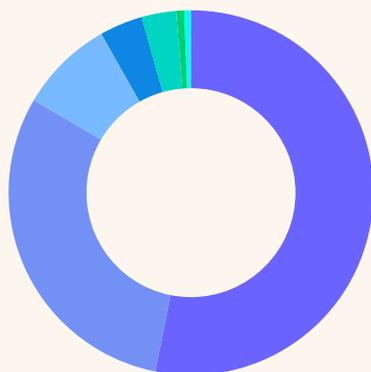


FINANCES



- Housing income: **£74,128**
- Grants: **£70,417**
- Individual donations: **£58,081**
- Fundraising events: **£25,967**
- Regular giving: **£21,722**
- Church donations **£2,737**
- Other: **£11,828***

Total income: £264,879



- Staff costs: **£109,299**
- Housing rent and costs: **£62,496**
- Charity costs: **£17,081**
- Guest support and resettlement: **£7,872**
- Shelter costs: **£6,337**
- Van costs: **£1,414**
- ShelterPlus system: **£1,240**

Total expenditure: £205,739

Net transfer into reserves: £24,345

Net transfer into savings: £30,000

The accounts above cover the period from April 2019 to March 2020. As with any charity our formal accounts are sent annually to the Charity Commission and these are available publicly online.

*This amount includes an insurance payout of £11,100 following the theft of GrowTH's van.

As well as receiving support from churches and individuals, GrowTH has also been supported by a number of trusts, foundations and companies in 2019-20. We would like to publicly thank the following:

- East London Nursing Society Trust
- Golden Stable
- Housing Justice
- Isla Foundation
- Kingdom Bank
- Kusuma Trust
- Linklaters Foundation
- Lockton Charitable Association
- London Catalyst
- Methodist Church Fund
- Northwick Trust
- Nuveen Global
- St Martin in the Fields Charity
- The Alexandra Trust
- The Charity of Mary Baker

plus the many other organisations and individuals that have given towards our work.

DONATE

Giving financially to Growth is an opportunity to partner with us and play a role in providing shelter, housing, and hope to our homeless guests. Donations are vital to enable us to continue and improve what we do.

 thisisgrowth.org/donate



WAYS TO GIVE

DONATE ONLINE VIA [give.net](https://www.give.net)

Make a donation or give regularly online by visiting www.give.net/growth. If you are a UK taxpayer, there is an option to add Gift Aid.

STANDING ORDER OR BANK TRANSFER

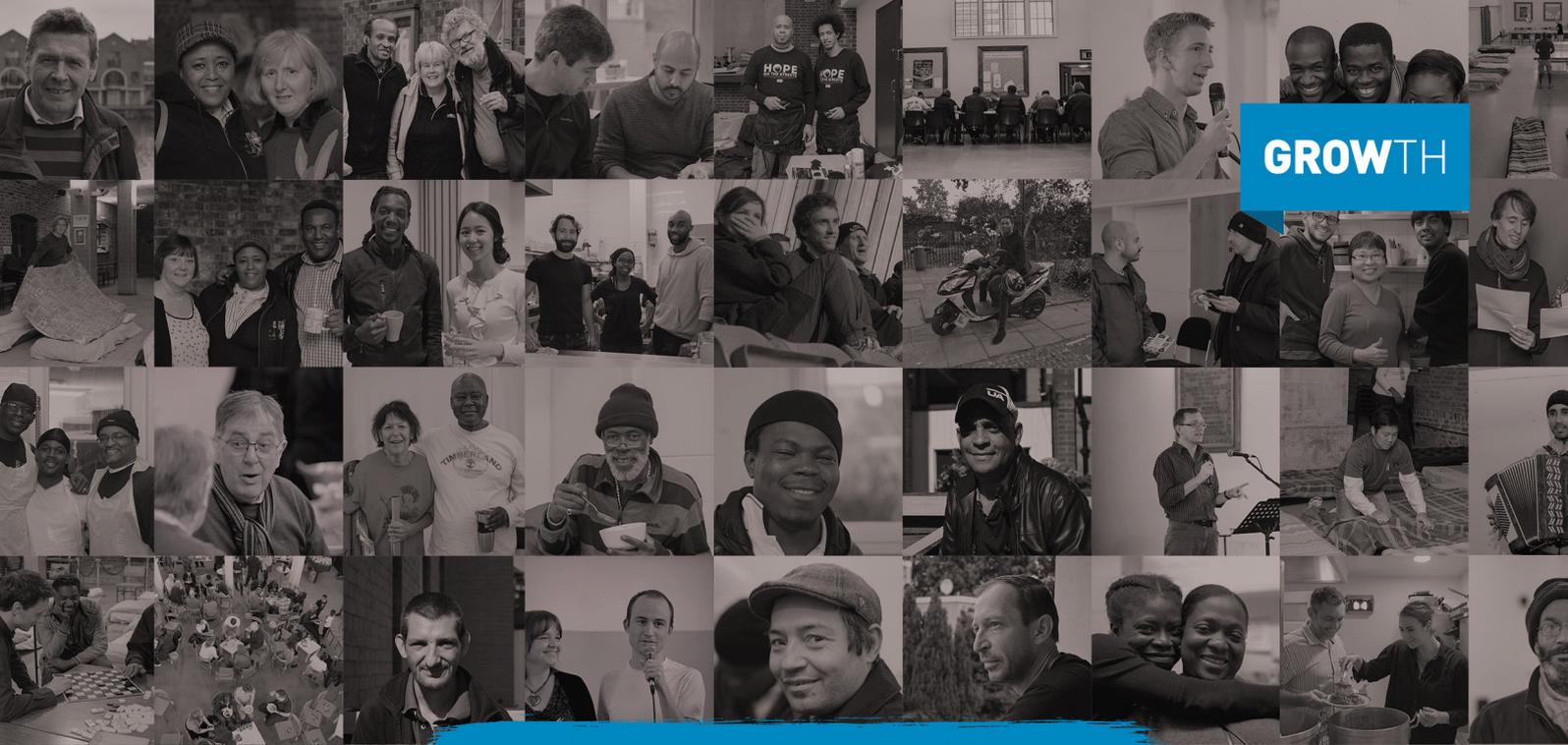
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Account Number: 00024575 | Sort Code: 40 52 40
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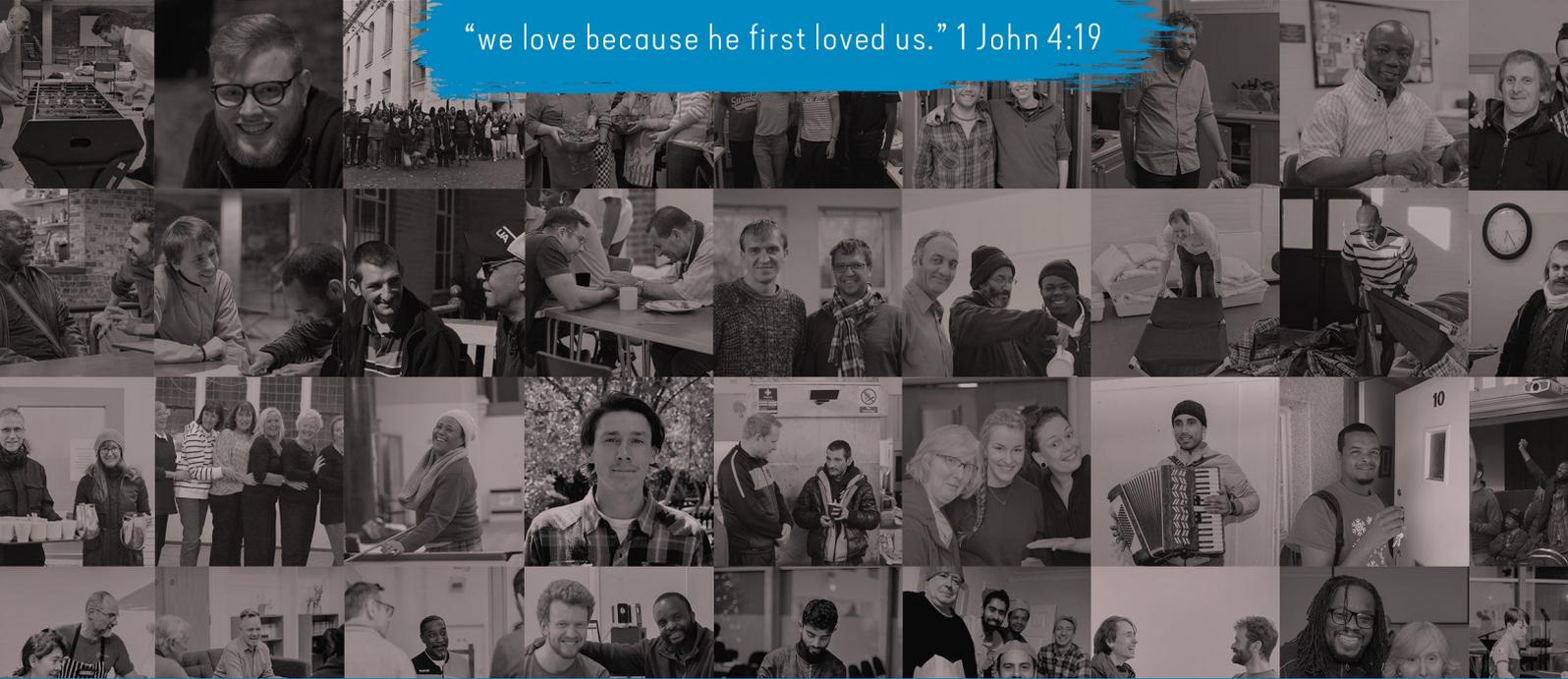
[easyfundraising](https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/growth/)

You can raise funds for Growth at no cost to you by downloading the [easyfundraising](https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/growth/) app to your computer or smartphone. Every time you shop online, Growth will receive a donation from the retailer. Visit: www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/growth/



GROWTH

“we love because he first loved us.” 1 John 4:19



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