



# GROWTH

2013/14

Night shelter opens again Autumn 2014

# TOWER HAMLETS CHURCHES CARING FOR THE HOMELESS

“My comment is a prayer; that God will continue to use such an organisation like GrowTH to help the poor (homeless) and give them the necessary spiritual support needed to walk in His light. I personally say thank you so much... May God continue to bless you and lead you!”

Joseph, GrowTH guest

## WELCOME!

In writing this report, it's hard to believe that GrowTH has come to the end of its fourth season. During this time it has been our privilege to see the excellent work that God has done as local churches in Tower Hamlets have come together to meet the needs of our neighbours and friends who are experiencing homelessness. GrowTH was founded in our desire to be good neighbours and show the compassion of God through Christian hospitality.

It has been amazing to see the way that the project has grown and developed. I'm very much reminded of the way in which Jesus took a small amount of bread and fish and fed thousands of people. We've experienced first-hand that a little in the hands of Jesus becomes a lot. My prayer is that as you read this report and hear the stories of some of our remarkable guests that you will be inspired to make a difference in your own context- placing what you have (be it a little or a lot) into the hands of Jesus and watching him multiply it to meet the needs of others.

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

## SNAPSHOT OF GROWTH IMPACT 2013-14

**3,075 BED SPACES  
MADE AVAILABLE**

**6,150 HOT MEALS  
PROVIDED**

**155 DIFFERENT  
HOMELESS  
PEOPLE GIVEN  
SHELTER**

**41 ASSISTED  
INTO PERMANENT  
ACCOMMODATION**

**32 ASSISTED INTO  
TEMPORARY  
ACCOMMODATION**

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Anthony relaxes with  
a coffee in the shelter

## WHAT IS GROWTH?

GrowTH is an initiative by churches in Tower Hamlets wanting to care for the homeless people in our communities. We are motivated to do this by the love that God has shown us and the example Jesus gave to us of caring for the poor.

### Our aims are:

1. To provide emergency accommodation and food to homeless people in Tower Hamlets without discrimination or favour.
2. To assist our guests in finding long-term permanent accommodation.
3. To offer our guests the opportunity to consider and explore the claims of Christianity.

GrowTH registered as a charity in 2010 and we have hosted a temporary night shelter each year since then. This season GrowTH's shelter was open 1st November 2013 - 1st June 2014. The shelter is spread across different church halls, with a different church providing hospitality each night of the week. Each venue has fifteen camping beds, providing our guests with a warm and safe place to sleep. Guests are hosted by volunteers from each church who welcome them and provide hot meals.

GrowTH is an evangelical Christian response to the needs of marginalised people in the borough. This means as well as offering practical help, we offer guests in our shelter the chance to understand and respond to the good news of Christianity; they know they are welcome in our local church communities.

Guests staying at GrowTH are given personalised support by our Advocate Workers. This assistance helps guests access the support services they need and try to secure permanent accommodation, bringing guests off the streets for good.



“I am very happy to be here. Place is warm. Food is hot.”

GrowTH guest

# WHY IS GROWTH NEEDED?

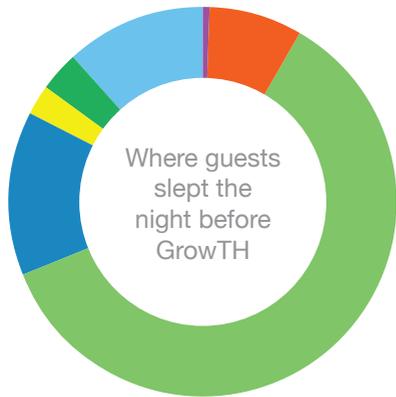
GrowTH started in 2010 in response to the high number of people sleeping rough in Tower Hamlets and current statistics show that this number continues to rise. According to research, 6,437 people slept rough at some point in London during 2012/13. This is an increase of 13% on the previous year's total of 5,678 and a 62% increase over two years.<sup>1</sup>

This research is gathered when an individual is contacted by outreach teams or other services working with rough sleepers in London. However, it is very difficult to get the exact numbers of people rough sleeping; many will sleep in stairwells or garages where they feel more secure and as a result are missed by outreach teams. Homelessness is also a larger issue than just those rough sleeping. There are many people who are not rough sleeping but technically homeless, they live in unstable accommodation; friends' sofas, night buses or in squats, they are highly vulnerable.

This year we received 387 phone calls trying to refer homeless people to GrowTH and we had to turn down 144 mainly because the shelter was full. Almost 40% of guests referred to our shelter were in some sort of unstable accommodation illustrating the issue of hidden homelessness.

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

As a shelter run by churches, we believe that guests' spiritual needs and sense of purpose are only fully met by a personal relationship with Jesus. Jesus has good plans for every individual regardless of their background or position in society. This relationship brings hope and stability, even in the most difficult and uncertain circumstances.



Own accommodation: 1  
 In another shelter: 12 On the street: 94  
 With friends: 21 In a squat: 4  
 On the bus: 5 Other: 18

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.broadwaylondon.org/CHAIN/Reports/StreettoHomeReports.html>



Shelter ready for guests at St Nick's

## PARTICIPATING CHURCHES

GrowTH is only able to run and flourish with the generous support of volunteers from a wide variety of churches across Tower Hamlets. In 2013-14, the number of volunteer hours given was 10,045 (a conservative estimate). If we were to pay these volunteers at the minimum wage it would cost us over £63,000!

### New churches involved

It was great this year to have new churches hosting the shelter. Volunteers from East End Church in Bow ran the shelter at a variety of venues for the first time as did the Lithuanian Church based in Newham. Bethnal Green Mission Church, St Paul's Bow Common, Christ Church Spitalfields and The Hurtado Centre based in Wapping opened their doors to GrowTH and also hosted our guests for the first time.

“Doing something I’ve never done before was fab. Not always easy to find volunteers, but God provided. It challenged my misconceptions of homelessness.”

Tory, volunteer at Christ Church Spitalfields

### Continued thanks to the invaluable contributions from:

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

“Volunteering at GrowTH was a privilege. It has been eye-opening and enriching.”

GrowTH volunteer



## WHO DO WE SHELTER?

**GrowTH continues to provide emergency shelter for anyone who is at risk of rough sleeping in Tower Hamlets. This means the men and women who stay at the shelter have diverse backgrounds and experiences. The majority have not been homeless long-term and do not fit into any 'homeless' stereotype.**

The reasons for guests becoming homeless also vary dramatically, from being forced out of overcrowded accommodation and fleeing volatile family relationships, to being let down by fraudulent offers of study or work in the UK. However, the most common reason continues to be a loss of employment and therefore income, leading to rent arrears and eviction.

Many guests had previously been in influential work positions and had a variety of skills and qualifications. This year we have had a chef, hotel manager, teacher, a football-freestyler, tube driver, security guard and even an amateur wrestler to name but a few.

### Not eligible for council housing

Although rough sleeping in the coldest months makes many of our guests highly vulnerable, most are not eligible for housing assistance from their local council. Assistance can only be provided to those who are deemed to have a defined 'priority need'. At GrowTH we strongly believe that following Jesus' example to love the poor and marginalised means that we cannot ignore those who are sleeping rough, regardless of their being 'priority need' or not.

### Age of guests

The shelter is open to anyone over 18 and every year we have seen a mix of guests of different ages. The most common age group continues to be 31-40 year olds, in line with previous years. Often guests in this position have previously held down employment and stable accommodation but when faced with unemployment and a loss of income, many lacked the support structure they needed to keep them from going onto the streets.

The age group which has seen the greatest increase this season is those under 30. Last season, 18-30 year olds made up 20% of the shelter, however this year we have seen it increase to 30%. This increase follows an increase from the previous year and is a concerning trend. Many of the guests under 30 have struggled to find the stable employment needed for rent payments, and for this age-group landlords that will accept housing benefit are in short supply.

This year we have also seen an increase in the number of guests who are over 60. Thankfully it is still a small number and many of them have now been helped into permanent accommodation.



Guests loved the home cooking of the volunteers

## GUEST STORY: FERNANDO

### “When I came here it was difficult”

“I came alone, without a telephone number, with no-one I could call to ask for help. I knew nobody. It was a little hard to be honest.” Fernando came to the UK in 2013 to work and learn English. However, he soon fell on hard times as his savings ran out. Fortunately Fernando found his way to the homeless charity Crisis Skylight who referred him straight to GrowTH.

### “GrowTH was amazing”

Fernando says: “After sleeping on the street a bed is paradise! The volunteers were very nice and everything was perfect. I didn’t want to leave GrowTH.” The Advocate Workers spoke to Fernando about how he needed to secure a job to get an income to be able to live in the UK. GrowTH referred Fernando for the Pret a Manger Apprenticeship Scheme for those that are homeless and struggling to get into employment. Fernando was accepted and soon he was preparing food in an Islington branch of Pret!

### “I am very happy I am still working in Pret”

After his Pret apprenticeship Fernando impressed his manager so much that he was accepted as a full-time employee. “I am working in the kitchen, making sandwiches, making salads. I am very happy because I am learning more things.”

### “I need to say thank you every day”

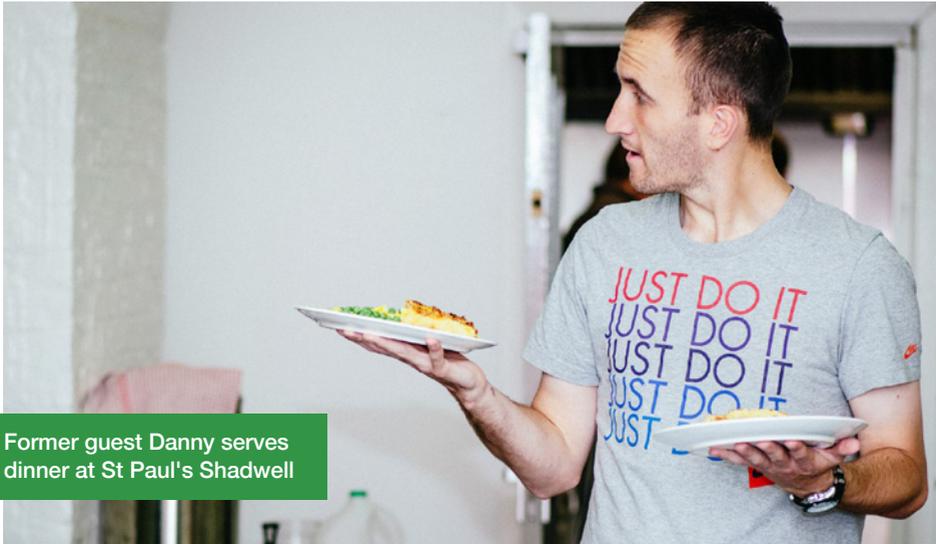
With his income from his new work, Crisis Skylight were able to assist Fernando in signing a contract for a room in East London. Sitting in his new living room we ask Fernando about his dreams for the future: “My dreams are simple. Stay here in London, I like this city very much... and listen to rock and roll music, it is the best music for me!”

“GrowTH helped me get this life in London. I can only say thank you a thousand times”

Fernando



Fernando outside his new home



Former guest Danny serves dinner at St Paul's Shadwell

## WHAT HAPPENED IN THE SHELTER?

The night shelter first met our guests' immediate basic needs. At 7.30pm every night guests were welcomed inside the venue where there would be a bed and a hot dinner for them. Worn out after walking outside all day in a variety of weathers, some guests would simply want to eat and sleep. In the morning guests received a hot cooked breakfast and were able to take away a packed lunch for the day donated by Pret a Manger.

Every evening there were different activities for the guests to get involved in. Each team of volunteers brought their own contribution. Sometimes this would be chatting with the volunteers and playing board games - guests often revealed their hidden talents by beating all the volunteers at chess! Other venues had pool and table tennis which were enjoyed. Guests

participated in some impromptu sing-alongs at one venue when a choir leader came to volunteer at the shelter and over a number of weeks some guests at another venue tried their hand at painting. One venue had a film projector, so that night quickly became movie night, with guests asking on arrival: "what film are we watching tonight?"

Conversations concerning faith and prayer were regularly heard in the shelter. As guests and volunteers got to know each other, conversations deepened and the subject of faith came up. A real sense of community was felt by many guests and it was not uncommon for guests that were helped into accommodation to come back to say thank you and let everyone know where they were going.



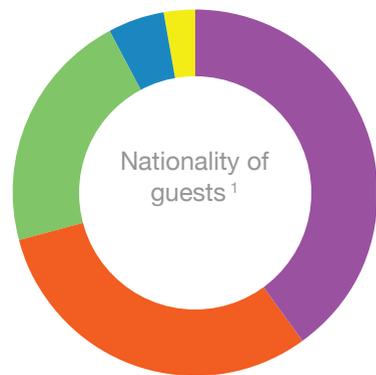
GrowTH guest Alex shows off his football-freestyle skills!



## A GLOBAL SHELTER

The GrowTH night shelter continues to be a global shelter with guests from countries all over the world:

GrowTH guests and volunteers representing four different countries



UK: 62  
Mainland Europe: 48 Africa: 33  
Asia: 8 N. America: 4

For the first year British nationals were the largest group in the shelter constituting 39% of guests. This is a considerable increase on last season where only 25% of guests were British nationals and also a high proportion considering the advantages they have in accessing statutory services. These advantages include stronger support networks, English as a first language and fewer restrictions when accessing benefits.

An even greater change in the nationality of shelter guests this year is regarding those from mainland Europe. Last season this was the largest group, making up over half of the total number of guests. However, this season we have seen this group drop to just less

than one third. This trend could be explained by the recent change in legislation which makes it more difficult for EU citizens to receive benefits on arrival to the UK. Another factor would be our referral criteria, which sometimes gave priority to those who have a stronger 'move-on' option. This was put in place to increase the number of guests we could help move into permanent accommodation, making a long-term sustainable impact on their lives.

This season we have also seen an increase in the number of guests from the continent of Africa. Last year they were just 13% of the total, increasing this year to 21%. This trend could be due to the increase in referrals

from Praxis Community Projects who support vulnerable migrants and refugees.

In January 2014 Romania and Bulgaria came into full membership of the EU. Some predicted that as a result there would be a huge increase in the number of Romanian and Bulgarian citizens coming to the UK. Our experience, however, is that we have seen a decrease in the number of Romanian and Bulgarian citizens compared last season.

<sup>1</sup>Note that these results record the nationality of guests in the shelter. This can be different to the country the guest was born in.

## GUEST STORY: PAUL

### What were things like before GrowTH?

“Absolutely desperate. I was facing my own destruction and a total collapse on my life. That is what it felt like.” Paul had been sleeping rough in London for about a year after leaving Cambridge. “It is not a nice feeling. People around you are getting on with their jobs, families and lives, but you are homeless. It feels disastrous.”

### In early 2014 Paul came to GrowTH

“I did feel that at last I had come to a chance to get help. I felt a bit more secure because I had somewhere to stay, meals, people to talk to and a good night’s sleep.” After a week of proper food cooked by volunteers Paul says: “I was shocked to see I had actually put on weight!” A volunteer who was cutting guests’ hair gave Paul a trim and Paul says, “It took seven years off my age. I thought, ‘crikey!’”

### Five months on

At GrowTH, Paul was able to secure a place in supported housing. After being homeless for so long he says the first few months of being in secure accommodation left him feeling “dazzled” and it took him a while to “come to terms with it.” “The mindset of being homeless is completely different” he says. Now more settled in his new place, Paul is planning for the future. He says he wants to start a business: “that is the main focus now.”

### Paul’s reflections

Sitting with a cup of coffee in his new local area, we asked Paul what he’d like to say to readers on the back of his experience. He responded, “Just the importance of not looking down on those that are homeless. Let them get on with things [and if you can], help them in some way through charities.”

“At GrowTH I did feel that at last I had a chance to get help.”

Paul



# RESETTLEMENT

The vision of GrowTH is not simply to help guests for twenty-eight nights only, but to use that time to assist guests in finding long-term accommodation. To do this our Advocate Workers first do an assessment of the guests' needs, covering four main areas:

## 1. Identification

This is essential for any move into permanent accommodation, so regularly we need to order new birth certificates and passports.

## 2. Immigration Status

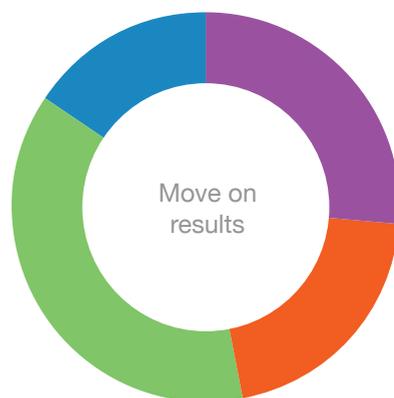
Guests need to have the right to be in the UK. If they do not, we either connect them with a solicitor to put in a new immigration application or we discuss the possibility of returning to their home country.

## 3. Income

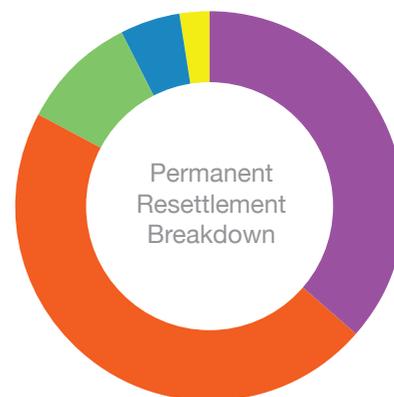
Guests need to be able to pay the rent for accommodation. This is usually done through housing benefit so we would look at the guest's eligibility for this benefit and go through the application process.

## 4. Health

We try to assess what accommodation the guest is physically and mentally capable of managing, including substance abuse issues. Health issues do not need to be barriers to accommodation, but are support needs that should be catered for.



Permanent resettlement: 41  
Temporary resettlement: 32  
Disengaged: 58  
No option: 24



Private rented accommodation: 15  
Hostel: 19 Reconnection: 4  
Rehabilitation/Detox: 2  
National Asylum Support Service: 1

## Private Rented Accommodation

For many guests, renting their own flat independently is the dream. If it is agreed that the guest could manage a tenancy, we try and help them realise this. It is often hard for homeless people to find landlords that will accept housing benefit claimants. GrowTH has links with landlords and other housing charities that will take such claimants. For the deposit we obtain grants for the guest if we can, or we try to negotiate a lower deposit with the landlord.

## Hostels

In a hostel each resident typically has their own room, but they share washing and kitchen facilities. Residents claim housing benefit to cover rent, plus they pay a service charge each week. There are only a limited number of hostels in London and many have waiting lists and/or particular criteria referrals that must be met, such as a 'local connection'. However, GrowTH has been able to see a number of guests move into this accommodation, particularly guests not ready for the challenges of managing a flat tenancy alone.

## Reconnection

This is the process of re-connecting a guest with their home country. For those who were refused 'leave to remain' in the UK, they have the choice to return to their home country or remain in the UK illegally. This year we saw one guest choose to return to Nigeria after he was refused 'leave to remain'. The second example of reconnection is that of European guests that came to the UK for employment, but fell on hard times. Sometimes it is

better for them to return to their family in their home country where they can job search and plan for the future from a place of stability.

## Drug/alcohol rehabilitation

Those with recent substance misuse issues often need to address these issues before they can safely move into accommodation. A number of very good residential centres run rehabilitation programmes to help, however choosing to join one can be a very challenging decision for a guest to make. We are glad to say that one Eastender moved into a centre in December 2013 and is still taking positive steps to change his life.

## Accommodation for asylum seekers

Asylum seekers can be eligible for support, including accommodation, from either the National Asylum Support Service or under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. This year we helped a few guests secure this support and in one case it was the information provided by GrowTH that sped up the application process dramatically.

## Further temporary accommodation

For a number of guests securing permanent accommodation can take longer than 28 days. GrowTH will always continue to work with and support ex-guests as much as we can after their 28 days. In the meantime we try to help them secure further temporary accommodation.

## CHALLENGES TO RESETTLEMENT

### No Recourse to Public Funds

This season we have seen a large increase in the number of guests who have 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF). In particular we saw a 10% increase in the number of referrals from Praxis Community Projects, who specialise in support for those who often have NRPF. This group can include failed asylum seekers and those who have not successfully renewed a working or student visa. There seems to be an increasing number in this situation in the homeless sector. As well as having no recourse to public funds, individuals in this position are also not allowed to gain employment. Without an income, a move into permanent accommodation is impossible.

At GrowTH we aim to provide support to those who are homeless in Tower Hamlets without discrimination or favour. Despite being unable to move into permanent accommodation, we help individuals with NRPF connect with services that help them move forward in life. This can include linking with a solicitor in order to submit a new immigration application, help accessing medical services, or help accessing reconnection services to return to their home country.

### Changes to Housing Benefit

From the 1st April 2014 new laws were introduced that restricted the access EEA migrants had to Housing Benefit. Previously when these migrants had been eligible for this support, Housing Benefit has provided a vital 'lifeline' for many guests. It helped them access accommodation giving them the first stepping stone towards employment and independence.

As 31% of guests at the shelter are EEA migrants these changes had a direct impact on GrowTH's ability to help guests into permanent accommodation. A large number of guests could no longer access Housing Benefit at all. The removal of this lifeline meant the only route off the streets for these guests was to secure employment, something which is nearly impossible to do when homeless.

**"My immigration status is an obstacle, blocking me from achieving my goals. My goals are to get into a good school, have a good job and support people in need, that's it...."**

**GrowTH guest with NRPF**



Guests enjoy some pool at the shelter in Bethnal Green

## DISENGAGEMENT OF GUESTS

155 different homeless people stayed for at least one night at GrowTH in 2013-14. 58 of these guests disengaged with the resettlement assistance we offered them. This meant that for these guests we were unable to complete (or in some cases start) the process of helping them into permanent accommodation.

Disengagement could be sleeping for one night in our shelter, then not returning ever again; or it could be spending weeks in the shelter, but then one day dropping out of contact and not being seen again. The reasons for disengagement will vary from individual

to individual and are not all necessarily negative, another opportunity for a guest could have arisen elsewhere, for example. We do observe though that for some guests, the transition from rough sleeping with no set routine, to the structured routine of the night shelter is a challenging step. In addition some guests with addiction issues struggle to keep the shelter's rules against substance misuse. Others simply find the process of trying to find accommodation frustrating and leave, doubting that a viable option will appear for them. Please do pray for us as we try to help these guests as best we can, caring for their specific needs.

## GUEST STORY: FRANCIS

Francis had been in the UK for many years working as a chef. He never imagined the direction his life would take after he developed health problems. “I had two mini strokes due to drinking too much and a hectic lifestyle. I lost my balance and [now] suffer from severe vertigo”. The consequences for Francis were devastating. “I couldn’t do my job anymore as a chef, nobody would take a chef with a walking stick”. With no more work Francis received out-of-work benefit payments, however the friend he lived with would not accept Housing Benefit payments to cover the rent. “I never planned to have [the] health problems I have. [The friend] asked me, ‘where is my rent or can you please move out next week?’” Thankfully a referral was made to GrowTH, meaning Francis did not have to sleep outside.



“Something was missing... accepting God in my life was missing.”

Francis

### Spiritual Journey

Prayer is offered to all guests who stay at the night shelter. Nearly all of guests welcome the prayer offered, Francis was one of the few who turned it down. However, whilst in the shelter Francis went on what he describes as a spiritual journey. “[There has] been a serious change in the way I approach things. Before I was cold, calculated and a bit selfish. Being in the shelter made me be in touch with God”.

“Something was missing and I was wondering what it was. It was a process [that] at the end, made me realise exactly what I missed. Now I know what it was and it started by going to St Paul’s [a local church]. Going to church was the ignition, but loads of things together made me realise accepting God in my life was missing”.

### Moving on

Through a combination of joint working between GrowTH, SHP Camden and Camden Council a place in a hostel was found for Francis. “[GrowTH] allowed me a few more days, which I appreciated. You have been really supportive right to the end. I remember the day I moved I was thinking, ‘Thank God’. I was looking outside at the rain and I realised I did not need to sleep under the rain”.

Francis explains further “I know that I kind of wanted to escape the situation. I had quite a good job before [the illness] and the money on benefits was abysmal. If I don’t get a roof over my head I won’t be able to study and get out of the situation I was in”. “It’s only temporary, but it’s given me an opportunity to better my situation and eventually find a job”. Francis is now looking to train as chef teacher and has already applied for a number of courses.

# REFERRAL AGENCIES

All guests who stay in the GrowTH night shelter are referred by one of our referral agencies, all based in Tower Hamlets. Whilst a guest stays in the shelter we work in partnership with their referral agency to help them secure permanent accommodation. Our five main referral agencies are:

## Whitechapel Mission

Whitechapel Mission is a day centre that provides assistance to hundreds of rough sleepers every day. They provide both practical help through the provision of showers and a cheap breakfast and they also give advice and assistance on moving into accommodation. Over a third of all referrals came from the Whitechapel Mission and as in previous years it continues to provide the largest number of referrals.

## Crisis Skylight

Crisis is a large national charity supporting those who are homeless. Their Skylight centre takes a holistic approach to support, running a wide variety of services, including 'progression' and resettlement advice and certified courses.

## Praxis Community Projects

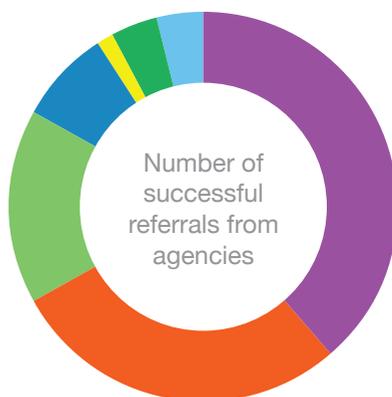
Praxis Community Projects works with vulnerable migrants and refugees, providing immigration advice for free. Praxis provided a wealth of support and advice to our guests who are asylum seekers or who have 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF). This year we have seen the greatest increase in referrals from Praxis.

## Spitalfields Crypt Trust

Spitalfields Crypt Trust is a drop-in that works with people recovering from homelessness, poverty and addictions on the border of Tower Hamlets and Hackney. Like most of our referral agencies, we have seen an increase in the number of referrals they have made to the shelter this season.

## Health E1

Health E1 is a NHS practice that provides medical care specifically for local homeless people. This season, as well as receiving referrals from Health E1, we also referred many other guests to access their vital service.



Whitechapel Mission: 60  
Crisis Skylight: 44 Praxis: 25  
Spitalfields Crypt Trust: 12 City Gateway: 2  
Health E1: 6 Other: 6

## Feedback from referral agencies

*“GrowTH remains a life-line for our rough-sleeping members. As other services have closed down and restricted their service in the face of the cuts and rising homelessness, GrowTH has continued its steady, welcoming and supportive night-shelter, giving its residents vital respite from the streets and enabling them to start afresh. Thank you!”*

Stephen Barnes, Progression Team, Crisis Skylight

*“The partnership between Praxis Community Projects and GrowTH has blossomed this year. I cannot praise enough the importance of the night shelter for the vulnerable and destitute migrants we work with, who have no access to any mainstream homelessness/housing services... I wished the shelter was open all year round and we will miss accessing the service for the next few months. I also look forward to working with GrowTH again in the Autumn/Winter.”*

Jean Demars, Housing Project Lead, Praxis Community Projects

*“WE LOVE GROWTH!!! GrowTH has been an absolute lifeline for us as an organisation, and even more so for the young adults we refer there... All the staff and volunteers we’ve made contact with have been warm and helpful, and the care they show to the guests is always extolled by those we’ve referred. Even after the night shelter closed for the summer, you’ve continued to support the young person we referred which has resulted in a hugely significant progression for him into accommodation. Thank you SO much.”*

John Barker, Safeguarding Manager at City Gateway



“GrowTH and East End Church help me... In my life [you are] very important.”

Sukiathan

## GUEST STORY: SUKIATHAN

### “No home, no sleeping, no food”

This is how Sukiathan summed up his situation in the autumn of 2013. Sukiathan is a refugee and had lived in East London for many years. However, suddenly Sukiathan lost his job and accommodation and did not have anyone to turn to. Thankfully, very soon he was referred into the night shelter NEWway that our friends in Newham run and then into GrowTH.

### “The shelter made me very, very happy”

By the time Sukiathan came to GrowTH it was mid-December and, during the coldest time of the year, one of Sukiathan’s main memories of the shelter was that it was a warm place he could go. “I was very, very hot and very, very happy there.” Once we had helped Sukiathan resolve his benefit claim, we began the process of helping him find a place he could call home again.

### “You help me get my house”

Wonderfully an opportunity came up in the East End! Sukiathan had an opportunity to take a studio flat in Bow and he said yes immediately. It is also really near the local church that Sukiathan had been attending whilst at GrowTH. At that time the shop Cargo had kindly donated a set of Egyptian cotton bed linen to GrowTH, so we were able to give Sukiathan a luxury starter pack to help him settle into his new place! Also a family from his local church had him over for dinner on his first night in his flat, a great welcome to the local area.

### “I enjoy church and maybe work is coming”

Six months on, Sukiathan continues to enjoy church. He loves that it is a multi-cultural community and that they help those in need. “Somebody needs food, they help, somebody needs money, the help. They are very good people.” He is going to English classes and works hard trying to find retail work again.

## MEETING SPIRITUAL NEEDS



Volunteers leading SOUL in the shelter

### An evangelical response

GrowTH is an evangelical response to poverty in our borough. This means we are more than a social action project. We want all the homeless people in Tower Hamlets to be sheltered and supported, but also we believe that the good news of Christianity “is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Guests are welcomed into GrowTH without favour or discrimination. In our ‘global shelter’ our guests are a mix of those from faith backgrounds other than Christianity, no faith background and various Christian backgrounds. The service they receive from GrowTH in shelter and resettlement help is not affected by their faith or response to Christianity. In this safe and open context guests are then offered the chance to engage with the claims of Jesus.

### A soul course

Different host churches share their faith and engage guests in faith conversations in various ways. Some will give a short talk from the Bible after dinner and some will invite both guests and volunteers to share stories of how they feel God has helped them in their lives. Others will play music and sing worship songs, whilst others will simply encourage volunteers to engage guests in faith conversations informally.

All venues run a Christian discussion course called SOUL. Based on Bible passages and topics relating to faith, this course gives guests a chance to explore the claims of Christianity. These evenings are invariably popular and conversations can go on late into the night. When reflecting on the shelter one guest shared that: “Most of all, GrowTH tells you about God. For them to share that with other people was really good.”

### Guests in churches

This year we are excited to have seen a number of guests go from sleeping in the night shelter, to becoming members of local church communities. Some now regularly attend Bible studies and Sunday church services at local churches. A small team of ex-GrowTH guests are even part of a group from a local church doing evangelistic outreach to passers-by on the streets in Poplar and Stratford!

We trust that in church communities, guests that took spiritual steps at

GrowTH will grow in faith. We trust they will go on to use the gifts and talents God has given them to bless our churches and communities. Salfer, a GrowTH guest, shared that after you have hit “rock bottom” and found your way back into life, you are a better person and are better able to appreciate other people’s problems. One of our dreams at GrowTH is that ex-guests will become leaders in local churches, helping us care for marginalised people.



Alex reading the Bible in the shelter

## GUEST STORY: DANNY

### “It must be quick, I’ve got to run”

That is what I am told when I bump into Danny on Plumstead High Street and ask him if he would say a few words about his experience at GrowTH. He had been sorting out paperwork for some upcoming work and is off to do more training in the evening. I ask him about his experience of being homeless and being in GrowTH.

### “I’d never been in that situation”

Most guests in GrowTH are relatively new to being homeless and Danny was no exception. He simply lost his job and found himself without a place to go. Some local Christian leaders initially supported him, and then he came to GrowTH in January 2014. “The first night at GrowTH was quite scary... Then I made a new friend that night with a volunteer who was in a similar situation similar to mine and the first week was ok.”

### Salmon from Billingsgate

When asked what it is like to be in the GrowTH shelter, Danny’s immediate response is that: “the food was really good!” Danny enjoyed his time at GrowTH so much that once resettled he came back to volunteer. Then “there was even one night when Andrew, a volunteer cook, brought a load of salmon from Billingsgate Market, they were huge!”

### “Tom was great”

Tom was Danny’s Advocate Worker. “If it weren’t for Tom I wouldn’t have done a lot of things. He got me in a house. I needed a birth certificate, Tom got that for me. He got me a freedom pass as well.” Danny now has a secure room in south east London and he works part-time. It was great to have his help as a volunteer for the final few months of the shelter this season and in July he even ran the British 10K through central London to raise money for GrowTH!



“I felt the prayers helped. Every time Tom prayed, things kept happening!”

Danny

## EMPLOYMENT

**“The most important thing to know is that a guest wants to work.” These were the words of a GrowTH guest giving feedback on his time in the shelter.**

A necessary part of much resettlement work is helping guests claim out-of-work state benefits. Then often guests can move into accommodation where the rent can be covered by Housing Benefit. However, our hope for those we resettle is always that those that can work will soon make that transition back into employment. We believe all people have God-given gifts that they can use to contribute to society and our guests are no exception.

GrowTH is privileged to have a great relationship with the Pret Foundation Trust. This means we are able to refer guests onto an apprenticeship scheme based in a Pret a Manger shop. In 2013-14 five guests were successfully referred onto this scheme and four of these guests are still working in a Pret shop in London, either still as an apprentice or now as a regular employee!



Tom with GrowTH guest El Kouch as he graduates from the Pret Apprenticeship Scheme

## GUEST STORY: SALFER

**Through GrowTH, Salfer secured a room in south London and a place on the Pret a Manger apprenticeship scheme. We met up with him in Pret and over a smoothie Salfer reflected on his journey at GrowTH.**

### **“GrowTH gave me that opportunity”**

Before GrowTH, Salfer says he felt “very trapped.” He found it hard to move forward without stable accommodation. He slept mostly in friends’ houses and occasionally outside. He says: “I was always confident that if given a chance I would be able to grasp it with both hands. It was just getting that chance and for those doors to open. GrowTH gave me that opportunity. When someone believes in you, it helps you believe in yourself.”



### **“The guests are like brothers”**

The shelter quickly became “like family.” “The volunteers looked after us very well, the guests were like brothers.” Salfer went through his situation with his Advocate Worker and they both felt that Pret could be the break Salfer needed. Whilst waiting on the apprenticeship to start, Salfer was also able to secure a room in a hostel.

### **“I am proud to work for Pret”**

Salfer is now halfway through his apprenticeship and he has taken to the job so well that he has already been offered a contract permanently. He is at pains to tell me though that the job is not easy: “It is a hard job. If you are lazy you won’t last long.” After a tough start Salfer is settled in his shop, working both in the kitchen and serving customers on the tills. At Pret he feels part of something bigger than simply a job: “I am proud to work for a company like Pret. Pret help the community and help those that need feeding.”

## GUEST STORY: KENSI

As a qualified nurse in her home country Kensi came to the UK on a work visa. However, complications meant the visa could not be extended and she was left homeless. With no visa, she was unable to work or claim benefits.

### “I had no place to go”

Moving between temporary accommodation and nights on the street, Kensi describes her experience before coming to GrowTH. “I was thrown out, there was no other options. I was [staying] in Liverpool Street underground. Then Anna [from Crisis Skylight] called the shelter... I was relieved.”

### “It was a safe place”

Kensi describes her experience in the shelter: “Food was very nice, I was happy when I was there. I really appreciate the hospitality, [I have] a lot of respect for the volunteers and want to say a big thank you to all.” At the shelter GrowTH provides a separate room for the women guests, trying to provide a safe and private space. Kensi explains “everything was well organised. We were respected. I didn’t see anything unusual, I was happy. It was a safe place.”

### GrowTH Support

Due to Kensi’s immigration situation, a move into permanent accommodation was not possible. However, we were able to help her secure further temporary accommodation, giving her more time to wait on a response from the Home Office. She explains “[It was] the first time people took my case seriously. It was a great help, more than before, even more than my own community. [GrowTH was] the only place that found me somewhere.”

### After GrowTH

The accommodation is a small hostel with 15 other women provided by St Mungo’s and funded by the National Zakat Foundation. Kensi can stay there till she gets a response to her application. She is also keeping busy doing numerous classes with Crisis Skylight. Finally, she has decided that “If [my] case doesn’t progress, I don’t want to be street homeless again. I will look at returning to my home country”.



“It was a great help, more than before, even more than my own community.”

Kensi



Volunteers ready for the shelter at St Paul's Shadwell

## VOLUNTEER FEEDBACK

“It was wonderful being part of a team of enthusiastic volunteers and being able to get to know the guests, who were very friendly... I feel I will be more confident in talking to homeless people in the street.” **Chloe**

“Rewarding, hard work, worthwhile... Just looking forward to next year!” **Rona, Kathy and Barbara**

“Volunteering has changed my perspective of homelessness.” **Simon**

“I am amazed at how happy the guests are. They have nothing but they still smile. I remember that when I feel like moaning about stupid things.” **Sharon**

“I enjoyed meeting with and having fun with the guests.” **Jon**

“Volunteering gives me a sense of purpose. It fulfils a need in me to help others and give back in the community and society.” **Ann**

“It has inspired me to have a deeper understanding of people who are homeless.” **Maria**

“It’s made me appreciate what I have.” **Steve**

## EX-GUESTS BECOME VOLUNTEERS

**It was great this year to see a number of ex-guests come back to GrowTH and help run the shelter as volunteers. Two of these ex-guests shared their experience.**

“Volunteering changed my life. It was a good time for God.” When asked what could be improved about GrowTH he replied: “Prayer and Bible studies. Save lives for God [and help with] health, jobs, school, housing and for Jesus.” **Daniel**

“It was a really good experience... I found out needs of homeless people [and] to understand their problems.” **Audrius**

## GUEST STORY: DANIEL

### Sitting in the sun

I sit with Daniel on the patio at his new hostel in the bright summer sun. This meeting is a world away from when we first met him in February. He was homeless then, when the mornings were still dark and the nights bitterly cold.

### “My money finished and I had no job”

Daniel came to the UK to try and find work after a friend promised him a place to stay in London. Unfortunately the reality was much more complicated. Finding work can be very hard for new migrants in the UK. When Daniel's money ran out, his friend said he must leave and he had to go onto the streets.

### The reality of the situation

When Daniel came to GrowTH we sat down with him to discuss the reality of his situation. He wanted to work in the UK, but sadly it is very hard to find employment when homeless. Also, the new Housing Benefit rules regarding EEA migrants were about to come into force. Under these new rules Daniel would not have been eligible for Housing Benefit without getting work first.

### “Now is good because I live in a house”

Amazingly, during the last week of March, a hostel place came up for Daniel! He was able to complete his Housing Benefit form on the very last day before these new rules came into effect. With the stability of this hostel place he has now been able to secure catering work. Daniel says, “Now I plan for work, studying, church, my relationship with Jesus Christ and to move to a beautiful place.” What about his dreams for the future, we ask? “Maybe Bible school. Maybe move to Australia for Bible school.”

A portrait of Daniel, a young man with dark hair and a light complexion, wearing a grey polo shirt with a dark collar and shoulder accents. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a white door frame and a brick wall.

“My God help me...  
every day my God  
help me.”

Daniel

# GUEST FEEDBACK

Guests staying at GrowTH were invited to fill out a feedback form to comment on their experience of staying in shelter. 65 guests gave their feedback.

Average guest rating from 0–10 of different aspects of the shelter



## How would you sum up your experience at the shelter?

42 guests simply summed up their experience in a couple of positive words, including: good, nice, wonderful, excellent, helpful, very enjoyable, amazing, new experience, good experience, very well done, grateful, fantastic, fulfilling, comfortable, 9 out of 10, safe, less tired, no problems, welcoming and very warm. One guest said “I would recommend this shelter to anyone else.” Three described how the experience was “educational” and one said they are now “more enlightened about homelessness.”

Four guests commented on how enjoyable it was to meet new people and one said they were sad to leave.

One described how guests were good at “looking after each other”, another how “I feel like we are all a big family” and another how it “made me feel comfortable and at home.” Some guests commented on the spiritual aspects of GrowTH, “It is so good that you like to pray!” One said it was a “New experience [to] put... every problem before God”. One guest summed up the shelter as “the love of Christ.”

Other guests found the experience more difficult. “Unsure, unsettled and confused” were the words of one guest and another began by saying “I must stress the pity situation I am in...” One guest felt there should be more space at some venues and more washing facilities.

## Were the volunteers friendly and helpful?

All those that responded answered in the affirmative, though two guests qualified their answer saying “most of the volunteers.” Descriptions of volunteers included: “They showed a real interest in me” and “going the extra mile to make us feel comfortable.” One guest said “you couldn’t ask for better volunteers” and another summed the volunteers up as: “selfless, friendly, supportive, generous, good humoured and caring.”

## Were there any food dishes that were served too often?

Over half of those who answered said no, with comments that the dishes were good (34 guests). Comments included: “any meal will do when hungry” and “the food was exceptionally varied and generally healthy and sufficient.” 23 guests did feel like some dishes were served too often, primarily English breakfasts, but also rice, potatoes, chicken and curry. Suggestions were made for more fruit and vegetables and a roast dinner.

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

The most popular suggestion from 10 different guests was to work closer with other organisations. Organisations like other housing charities, outreach teams, landlords, the council and

other night shelters. Others suggested increasing the resources we have available for guests, such as computers to do job searches, more employment and housing advisors, greater financial help for deposits and longer stays in GrowTH beyond 28 nights. Two guests felt GrowTH should do more campaigning for the council to provide more services and two others suggested building more housing links outside of London for guests willing to move.

## Other improvements suggested by guests were:

1. Install more showering and laundry facilities
2. “Hire [GrowTH employees] from the homeless. They know real problems we all have.”
3. GrowTH should own houses to resettle guests
4. “Open [the shelter] all through the year to help more homeless people like me.”
5. GrowTH should have somewhere to store guests’ belongings



Guests enjoying a day in the countryside in September 2013

## RESETTLEMENT IS JUST THE BEGINNING

**As a charity GrowTH continues to develop. The night shelter is currently our main project, but we also see that there is a real need for support which goes further than temporary shelter and further than placing people into permanent accommodation. In fact, moving into accommodation can be a hard transition for many guests.**

**At GrowTH we would like to provide ongoing support to stop guests falling back onto the street and last summer for the first time GrowTH was able to employ two workers to do this.**

### Community

Due to the shortage of accommodation options in Tower Hamlets many guests have to take accommodation in areas further away from Tower Hamlets, like Plumstead or Enfield. Instantly any support network that was built whilst in the shelter is now far away. In the shelter there is a strong sense of community between guests, they face adversity together and relationships are built between guests and volunteers.

### Floating Support

Our Advocate Workers aim to visit all guests after their stay at the night shelter. They assess the current

situation and provide relevant support and advice to help them continue to move forward in life. This could include help finding employment, contacting local services, finding a local church or just having someone they can turn to if an issue arises.

### Continued Resettlement Support

For some guests whilst they were at the GrowTH shelter we were not able to find permanent accommodation. This is often due to delays on receiving documents or housing waiting lists. After a guests leaves the shelter we continue to assist them and we expect to resettle more guests through the summer months.

## REFLECTIONS FROM THE ADVOCATE WORKERS

Two years into doing this work and four years into GrowTH running a night shelter, we continue to be amazed at God. At how He provides for the marginalised in our communities and how He always does more than we ask or imagine in the lives of guests.



"The resilience and character of the guests we serve regularly teaches us. It reminds us that God is doing great things in the lives of guests"

Every night for seven months we have had enough volunteers, venues and resources to host 15 homeless people and have given them the shelter and support they need. At times problems were only resolved at the last minute, but a solution always came through for our guests. Repeatedly we are reminded that reaching out to the marginalised is God's idea and His plan and therefore, as long as we keep 'reaching the marginalised' as our mission, God will give us what we need.

The resilience and character of the guests we serve regularly teaches us. It reminds us that God is doing great things in the lives of guests. For example, recently I sat down with a guest who had spent much of the past few years in prison and, since release, had been mostly homeless and had struggled with mental health issues. GrowTH was soon to close for the end of the season and his permanent accommodation was not yet secured, he would probably go back to the street.

This guest told me that he felt like the figure Job from the Bible. Job lost everything, his wealth, health and children, yet he still trusted in God. This guest too said he trusted God, even

though he felt like everything had been taken from him. There is a phrase in the middle of Psalm 63 that says "your love is better than life." I felt like this guest was teaching me that in fact the psalmist writing that line is correct. It is possible to lose all and honestly still be thankful to have the help and love of God.

Finally, to those guests reading this that are not yet in accommodation, to those that do not yet have that successful end to their 'guest story.' We continue to pray for you. We observe that one of the hardest things about resettlement is waiting on those things you have limited control over, such as immigration decisions, hostel waiting lists or housing opportunities. Choosing to wait is a challenging active choice. At GrowTH we are committed to waiting with you. We are here for the long-term. Our door is always open to ex-guests, as are the doors of all our partner churches in Tower Hamlets. Much more importantly we believe that God is always here for you, whether you are in GrowTH's shelter or on the other side of the world. He is only too ready to respond to a cry of help.

Tom & Martin

# FINANCE

As an independent charity Growth relies solely on donations to operate. We are grateful to God that he has provided enough funds for Growth through the generosity of individuals, churches and organisations. This year saw our first sponsored run: 36 runners ran the British 10K through central London and raised over £9000 between them!



**SIGN UP TO RUN THE BRITISH 10K FOR GROWTH IN JULY 2015!**  
**[WWW.THISISGROWTH.ORG/10K](http://WWW.THISISGROWTH.ORG/10K)**

We would like to publicly thank those organisations that have made donations to Growth in 2013-14:

Albert Hunt Fund

Alexandra Trust

Church Urban Fund: Mustard Seed Fund

Foyle Foundation

Garfield Weston Foundation

Hilden Charitable Trust

Leeds Building Society Charitable Foundation

Marsh Christian Trust

Maurice and Hilda Laing

Mary Baker Fund

Mrs Smith and Mount Trust

Potters Trust

Pyne Charitable Fund

Rothschild

SMB Charitable Trust

Souter Charitable Trust

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