

The Guest House Project 2018—2019: Volunteers' Guide

#GuestHouseProject
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Thank you so much for volunteering to work on our project! The following is an introductory guide to what this will involve. For further details, please also consult the document, 'Guest House Project 2018-19: Policies and Procedures' ([html](#)). We ask all volunteers to take some moments to read and digest both of these documents before getting stuck in.

Background and ethos

The mission of the Guest House Project (GHP) is to offer shelter, hospitality and hope during the coldest winter months to people who would otherwise be sleeping rough. Many of you will be aware that the issue of homelessness could affect any one of us. It is certainly a very real issue in and around our town today.

The GHP is a collaboration between our local charity, Beacon House, and St Peter's Church—and a host of volunteers like you. Many churches, people in the local community and local organisations are also supporting us in various different ways. We neither require nor anticipate that all our volunteers will be professing Christians. However, the GHP organizers share the belief that God has called us to reach out to the poor and to serve our neighbours. The guiding rationale and ethos of the GHP lies in our own conviction that all humans are equal before God and equally in need of Him.

It is vital to this ethos that we treat our guests, not impersonally as clients of a service, but with dignity, decency and humanity. Our aim is to honour our guests as guests.

This year will be the fifth consecutive year of the GHP. We are still learning. Please do let us know if you spot potential ways we might improve.

Dates of the 2018-2019 GHP

We open this year on 18th Dec. 2018 at 6:30pm; we close on 1st Feb. 2019 at 9:00am

Our guests

We provide hospitality, including a meal, and a place to sleep for (up to) 12 guests. We are not a drop-in; not anybody can just turn up. We operate a booking system in liaison with Beacon House and the Night Shelter. Anybody wishing to book a bed needs to make contact via one of these two agencies. All guests are met at one of these agencies and complete a simple assessment and risk assessment. A guest agreement is then completed before anyone comes to the GHP shelter for their first night. This is for the health and safety of all of our guests and volunteers. After their first night the guest can book another night, and after 7 nights there will be a review. Through liaison with appropriate agencies, we hope guests can be supported to move on where possible.

Volunteers and shifts (or, A Night at the Guest House!)

GHP volunteers help in a wide variety of ways, including preparing and delivering meals (see guidelines below). Teams of volunteers help run each night of the GHP, organised into 3 shifts. One volunteer on each shift is designated 'Team Leader'.

Many of our volunteers cover 1 such shift on a given night. Others may cover 2 or even all 3 shifts. If you are able to cover an overnight shift please consider doing so: these tend to be the hardest for us to fill. But offer whichever shifts and as many as you feel able!

The times of these shifts, and an outline of what they involve, are as follows:

The Evening Shift (6:45pm – 9:30pm)

- 6:45-7:00pm. You'll arrive and be greeted by the Church host, who is there to open the building, welcome volunteers and help set up. Please don't arrive before 6:45pm, as there will either be no-one to let you in or else you may be disturbing a group in the Hall that is finishing up. But please do be on-site by 7:00pm.
- 6:45-7:30pm. Together with the host, the Team Leader and the other volunteers, you'll set up the beds, set the table for dinner, check the toilets etc., and make available the guests' bedding etc. The Church host will typically convene a short time of prayer for anyone who wishes to join.
- 7:30pm. Doors open. You'll greet the guests with the offer of a hot drink and biscuits and help get the pre-prepared meal ready. You'll then serve the meal and eat together with the guests. Having eaten, you'll help clear the table, tidy the kitchen etc. Depending on what the guests want to do, and when to sleep, you might then sit and chat with them or play a game or watch a film with them.
- 9:30pm. You'll either stay on for the night shift or hand over to incoming volunteers.

The Overnight Shift (9:30pm – 7:00am)

- 9:30pm. If you haven't been on the evening shift, find out who the guests are that night and if there's been any issues in the evening. Some guests are likely already to be asleep when you arrive. You may offer those still awake hot drinks, biscuits etc.
- 11:00pm. Lights out and close kitchen hatch. You'll typically sleep in the same room as the guests. Bring a sleeping bag, pillow and maybe earplugs! Note that there's a nightlight so it's not completely dark. **But please also be reassured: overnight volunteers are typically able to get a reasonable night's sleep!**

The Morning Shift (7:00am – 9:30 am)

- 7:00am. You'll either stay on for the morning shift or hand over to incoming volunteers. **Please do not arrive earlier so as to minimise noise for guests.** Switch on lights. Open kitchen hatch. Make tea and coffee and prepare breakfast (porridge / toast / cereal). Wash up. Help guests to clear away bedding and replace beds in the store cupboard.
- 8:30am. Check all guests have left. Clean toilets, floors and make sure the hall is ready for other users at 9am sharp.

Leadership and oversight

The GHP has a number of leadership/oversight roles designed to help keep the shelter running smoothly and safely. The major roles are these:

The Beacon House Registrar

The Registrar is a Beacon House appointee, who is responsible for the overall smooth running of the project. This role ensures that each guest has been assessed at either Beacon House or the Night Shelter. The Registrar produces a list of guests for each night and texts the names to the GHP phone.

St Peter's Church hosts

Members of St Peter's serve as Church hosts. They need to arrive between 6pm and 6:30pm (at the latest) and will only leave once everything is settled and the team is prepared (usually about 7:15pm). They are responsible for:

- ensuring the hall is open and available for the GHP each evening, and that everything required is on-site before the guests arrive.
- liaising with whomever is providing the evening meal.
- liaising with Beacon House for dried and long-life products, and organising the purchase of fresh products.
- ensuring adequate stocks — of bread, cereals and breakfast goods.
- overseeing the stock of beds, bedding, toiletries etc., and liaising with Beacon House for fresh supplies and laundry
- ensuring that volunteers know how to use the equipment and understand storage and cleaning principles.
- communicating information to the Beacon House Registrar and Team Leaders.

Shift Team Leaders

If you are designated Team Leader, you will be responsible for:

- Taking key decisions when other volunteers are unsure of the best course of action.
- Allocating tasks and supporting other volunteers as needed in responding to guests.
- At the end of a shift 'checking in' with volunteers to see how they felt the shift went and any issues they need to discuss are dealt with.
- The safekeeping of the GHP phone and logbook*
- Ensuring all paperwork is completed and handover between Team Leaders takes place. You should complete the log sheet at the end of a shift and confirm in the morning if a guest wishes to stay the next night.
- If there are not enough volunteers or you otherwise deem it unsafe to open, you should delay opening time – ensuring this is explained to any waiting guests.
- Sometimes people turn up at the door who are not booked in. You should ensure that such people are not admitted to the shelter as this would be putting the other guests and volunteers at risk.

* The logbook is very important as our means of passing on information and recording any incidents. It can serve as important evidence of the GHP being run properly. It also allows us to collect statistics for future planning and development. Team Leaders should ensure entries into the logbook are signed legibly so that any incidents can be properly followed up. Please enter the full names of all volunteers.

Guidelines for GHP caterers

Thank you so much for cooking for the GHP! Here are a few guidelines:

How much food to cook

- Please cater for **16 people** (12 guests and around 4 volunteers).

Where to bring it

- **St Peter's Church, North Hill / High St, Colchester, Essex, CO1 1DW**
<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/St+Peters+Church/@51.8891406,0.8965113,16z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x0:0xfc466ccaf5a87bbd!8m2!3d51.8900279!4d0.8967044>
- We recommend that you liaise with the Church host to arrange a drop-off for the meal via the North Hill entrance (alleyway next to the Noodle Bar).

When & how to bring it

- If you drop off the food at night please come **between 6:30 and 7:30**. Our volunteers come in around 6:45, the guests and volunteers usually eat around 8:00pm.
- If you cook at home and bring the food to the Church Hall for reheating, please use containers that are easy for you to transport – and take care walking in the dark, especially if you are walking down the steps leading to the Hall!
- You can either stay and help warm up the food, or **the volunteers will be more than happy to reheat the food**, too – it would be great if you could give them instructions (temperature, timing etc.)
- **You can also bring the meal a day early** to be left in the fridge for the next day. If so, please put the date on the hall, and what the food is. There may be other volunteers the next night and the food will run the risk of being thrown away if no one knows how old it is or what food it is!
- If you leave your own dishes in the Hall for another day, please label them with your name or ask a staff to label them after they have been washed and arrange to pick them up another evening. Another option is to use disposable dishes.
- If you would like to drop it off in the morning please drop it off at Beacon House (24 Crouch St., Colchester) and they will bring it over to the church at night
- Please ask if you have questions about transport, delivery time, direction etc.

What to cook

- Anything you like! We have found that **casseroles, hotpots, lasagnes, beef crumble etc.** are great because they are relatively easy to transport, reheat and serve up.
- Our experience from previous years is that some guests are not so keen on fish so perhaps best to **avoid fish/seafood**.
- Whenever possible, please provide a **main meat dish** (with the option of a smaller vegetarian dish).
- There is no obligation to provide a pudding, but whenever provided in previous years, it has been particularly appreciated.

Sides

- If you would like rice to be served with the meal, please do not cook this at home but **bring uncooked rice** to the Hall for the staff to cook there.
- If you would like vegetables to be served on the side, but if it may be difficult to transport everything, this can be brought raw to the Hall kitchen and **the staff can cook the vegetables on the hob**.
- **Plain pasta can also be cooked in the Hall kitchen** and served warm.

Facilities available on site

If you have not been in the Hall kitchen before, this is just a brief description of what is there:

- Oven (for reheating), hob, two small fridges (*no freezer*), a microwave, dishwasher, crockery and utensils, chopping boards, pots and pans, serving dishes, two slow cookers.
- Some basic food products should be available in the kitchen cupboards, such as tinned vegetables, bread, butter, spreads, table sauces, pasta, coffee & tea, sugar, salt, pepper, cereal, porridge oats etc.

Food Hygiene

Most is common sense, but particularly:

- Do not use a washing machine while cooking, if it is in the same room as where you cook (just turn the washing machine off) and keep pets out of the kitchen.
- Please remember to wash your hands, and to use clean utensils and anti-bacterial spray on the surfaces you will be working on.
- Please keep raw and cooked foods apart. Clean any chopping boards and knives thoroughly between use. Make sure high-risk foods such as chicken are defrosted and cooked thoroughly.
- Hot food must be either kept hot or chilled quickly and put in the fridge at 5 ° or less. It should not be kept in room temperature more than 1.5 hours.

Guidelines for GHP shift volunteers

Volunteers on any given shift will in general be expected to:

- extend hospitality and honour our guests as guests.
- have attended one of our volunteer training sessions.
- be familiar with our policies and procedures.
- be prepared to respond calmly but quickly in an emergency.
- know where the fire exits are—if you don't, please let us know the first time you are around (we will be happy to show you!).
- work as part of a team and support designated Team Leaders

It is also desirable (but not strictly required) to have some basic knowledge of first aid.

Please note: there should be **at least two** volunteers on-site in any given shift.

Further guidelines for shift volunteers

Know your limits!

It is important to recognise that some of our guests will have very complex problems that lie beyond your expertise and the scope of this project to address. Often the most valuable thing we can do is simply to be there and listen.

Where possible, guests will be helped to get in touch with the agencies that can help them to sort out their problems on a longer-term basis. So please do not try to take on too much. If you feel that you are getting into conversations that you cannot deal with, please let the Team Leader know. Under no circumstances should you feel obligated to do anything asked of you by a guest, nor should you put yourself in a situation where you are agreeing to keep secrets. You should avoid being alone with a guest, and you should not arrange to meet with a guest outside of the guest house. When speaking with guests try not to make any promises. We are trying to build trust with our guests and broken promises can undermine this work.

Respect confidentiality

When talking to guests, it is important not to push for information. Please acknowledge that some guests may feel hurt or let down by some experiences and may not wish to talk about them. Others may feel happy to share their story. Please respect guest's confidentiality and do not allow the information to become public knowledge amongst other guests or volunteers. Confidentiality is important for building trust; however it is not about keeping secrets and this should be made clear to the guests. If a conversation feels like it is becoming a burden or uncomfortable, tell the guest that you may have to tell your Team Leader what is being said. It is then up to the guest as to whether they continue. **If you feel the safety of a guest or volunteer is at risk, you should tell your Team Leader immediately.**

Please ensure that you have read the [confidentiality and safeguarding policy here](#).

Be careful about receiving/offering gifts

From time to time guests may wish to give gifts to volunteers. Small gifts may be accepted particularly if they can be shared. The general rule is that gifts should be shared with the team and guests should be told that this is the policy. Gifts should be reported to the Team Leader and recorded in the log book. Any gift deemed to be too expensive or in some way inappropriate, should be gently returned to the guest. You should not encourage guests to give gifts. Volunteers should not give money or gifts to guests.

Maintain standards of hygiene

A camp bed, blanket and pillow will be provided for each guest during their stay. Beds should be made before the guests arrive. A towel for each guest should also be available. Laundry will be taken to Beacon House after the morning shift and should be collected a day or two later. If any larger items – e.g. blankets or duvets – need laundering, please check with the Beacon House Registrar. Any bedding heavily soiled may need to be disposed of. Please inform the Registrar if more bedding is needed. **Always use gloves provided when handling dirty laundry.**

A few key ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’:

- DO seek help when you need it, please ask!
- DO make sure you’re on time for your shift.
- DO be friendly and make guests feel welcome.
- DO address guests and volunteers by their first names.
- DON’T give out personal information to guests.
- DON’T arrange to meet with guests off-site.
- DON’T allow yourself to be left alone with a guest or leave a colleague alone.
- DON’T bring or wear any valuables on-site.

Further tips and advice on working with homeless people will be made available during the GHP training sessions.

Above all, we trust that you will find it inspiring to work with us on this project. In one perspective, it is a drop in the ocean—on the other hand, our past experience of the GHP shows that it can make a real difference in individual’s lives, sometimes even making the difference between life and death. Thank you again very much for your support.