

ASLAN

Best Practice Guide: The Visiting Scheme

Scope

The intention of the scheme is to send pairs of volunteers out to visit street homeless or recently rehoused people whom ASLAN has got to know well; to take them out for a meal; to provide social and spiritual support; to identify their needs and to link them into the professional individuals/organisations who can meet those needs.

Objectives

Short-Term

- To provide social contact and a good meal
- Working in conjunction with the Entertainment Events, to provide some fixed reference points in a life which might otherwise be full of aimlessness and a sense of drift
- To help our contacts to establish links with (*individuals within*) organisations who can provide a range of services/advice - e.g. day centres, street outreach teams, social workers, advice centres, and support groups.

To identify their specific needs and work towards finding the professional help which will meet those needs (see **Long-Term Objectives**)

Long-Term

- To build up trust **but simultaneously** to foster independence
- To work towards developing a thorough understanding of why/how they are on the streets; if they are unwilling to visit day centres and/or accept professional help, what is the basis of their reluctance; what would be the most appropriate route for them to be rehoused; what job opportunities might they be suited to; what are (or could be) their career ambitions; what advice and training might assist them to find employment; what needs do they have which cannot be met currently (either because existing facilities are working to full capacity or because no appropriate facilities exist)
- To provide spiritual support - Where appropriate, to invite them to join the ASLAN table at the next **Christianity Explored** course and/or to invite them to attend All Souls or Clubhouse services
- To facilitate rehabilitation, effecting introductions to: Detox schemes; mental care schemes and counselling; advice on benefits and other entitlements; housing advice and provision; employment training and advice; activities which can occupy those who are lonely and/or jobless

Co-ordination

Each team consists of three people: two "visitors" and a "prayer partner". The visitors take the homeless or recently rehoused contact for a meal from 7.00 - 9.00 p.m. every other Monday. Each "visitor" contacts their prayer partner when they return home (which means the prayer partner must be at home between 9.30 and 10.30 p.m. every other Monday) to:

- a) Indicate that they have returned home safely
- b) Give brief details of key developments in the contact's life (which the prayer partner **must write down**, so that if either or both team members leave, the replacement visitor(s) can be properly briefed)

- c) Give praise points and prayer requests to be prayed over during the next two weeks

In addition, there is a full team meeting every six weeks (on a Monday when no-one is visiting), when we meet to report back **in the strictest confidence** on every person we are currently visiting, to seek advice and prayer support from our colleagues, and to pray together about issues discussed. It is an absolute rule of team meetings that nothing discussed in the meeting will be divulged outside the meeting, even to other ASLAN members. We do, however, provide an edited and “sanitised” version of key prayer points for each contact to be prayed over anonymously during the ASLAN prayer meeting on the second Sunday of every month.

Whilst Monday is the preferred visiting day, if all three team members - **and particularly** the contact - wish to meet on another day of the week, this is acceptable - provided that you then meet **regularly** every two weeks on the **same** day of the week.

Team Structure

The ideal pairing would be a man and a woman (or two men for certain problem contacts). However, with relatively few men in ASLAN, we may need to establish one or more all-female teams, provided that both women feel comfortable and confident to go visiting together.

Support and Administration

In addition to prayer partners, we will also need people who can make daytime telephone calls to partner agencies and/or be able to accompany homeless contacts to their first vital meeting at a detox centre, mental clinic, housing advice centre, etc. Last, but by no means least, we will require people who can undertake information searches, correspondence, and record-keeping.

Finance

Suggested meal budget for 3 persons: around £15 - £20. One “visitor” in each team needs to accept responsibility for paying the bills and submitting receipts to the ASLAN Treasurer on a monthly or (preferably) quarterly basis. That person will then be given a month’s (or a quarter’s) “float” by the ASLAN Treasurer.

Relationship with the Person being Visited

Our relationship will be neither that of a **friend** nor that of a **professional**. However, it does contain aspects of both a friend and a professional. Just as we need a new word to describe our contacts (a word which is between **client** and **friend**), so we need a new word to describe ourselves (a word which is between **professional** and **friend**) - all suggestions gratefully received! However, for the moment, we will refer to ourselves as **visitors**.

Our Relationship SHOULD Be:	Our Relationship Should NOT Be:
An intermediary	An interventionist/controller (<i>interfering</i>)
Building trust	Building dependency
Caring	Affectionate
Friendly (<i>e.g. smiling, joking</i>)	Physical (<i>e.g. touching, embracing</i>)
Concerned, open and honest	Involved, close and intense
General in reference to ourselves	Personal in reference to ourselves
As a listener	As a judge (<i>or conversely, as a collaborator</i>)

Some warning signs that could indicate we have strayed from the relationship defined above: Feeling guilty (e.g. "I should be doing more" or "I should be sharing more in this person's predicament"); Feeling scared (e.g. "what am I getting myself into here"); If the person becomes demanding and/or over-affectionate. If any of these warning signs emerge on a visit, we should share them immediately with our prayer partner and our team leader.

Unless specifically sanctioned by the team leader, we never - repeat NEVER - meet with a contact on our own, we never - repeat NEVER - give our home address to a contact, and we never - repeat NEVER - ask our partner where they live or work in front of our contact.

Support and Training Needs

1. A "Link Map" to show the person where they can meet immediate needs in their area (e.g. *doctor, dentist, detox centre, day centre, housing advice, etc.*)
2. Available support for a newly-housed person
3. Basic information on the principal causes of homelessness; the roles of various charitable, state, and borough organisations dealing with the homeless; a homeless person's entitlements to: benefits payments, housing, job training, etc; the principal types of mental disorder which are likely to affect homeless people
4. Body language
5. How to control difficult situations (e.g. *anger management*)
6. Communication skills (esp. *sharing the Gospel*)

Links and Partnerships

A number of organisations have been identified as potential partners/advisors and/or as links to potential partners/advisors: **Mental Health:** S.A.N.E; M.I.N.D; RELEASE; **Day Centres:** St. Martin-in-the-Fields Day Centre; The Passage Day Centre; West London Day Centre; **Alcohol & Drugs:** Alcoholics Anonymous; Narcotics Anonymous; Samaritans; **Outreach Agencies:** Crisis; New Horizon; Oasis; St. Mungo's; Salvation Army; Shelter; ThamesReach-Bondway

S.W.O.T. Analysis (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats)

Strengths: God is in this work and leading this work; enthusiasm/commitment; numbers/funds; good (professional) contacts; homeless contacts; experience/reputation

Weaknesses: We are (mostly) amateurs; we are (mostly) very busy elsewhere; most of us have never done this before; Satan is against us

Opportunities: To make a *real* difference; to be a bridge between the "professionals" and the difficult-to-reach; to get people rehoused and *keep* them rehoused; to open up new areas of service for ASLAN/All Souls/other churches; to create a vision and a precedent for other organisations; to win souls for Christ; to show God's love in a practical, caring, and committed way

Threats: Trying to do too much too quickly; conflicting with and/or duplicating the efforts of existing professional helpers; not knowing the appropriate boundaries for these new relationships; inappropriate male/female relationships; creating over-dependency and/or unrealistic expectations of us

Author: Chris Peacock
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