



2024/25 CROSSWAYS



WINTER EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION PROJECT REPORT

It Takes a City (Cambridge), c/o St Andrews Street Baptist Church, St Andrew's Street, Cambridge CB2 3 AR
Company Limited by Guarantee Registered in England and Wales (No. 12361870) Registered as a Charity in England (No. 1190676)

'I've got a bit of a bad history with hostels, but they (the staff at Crossways) were only interested in where I am now. They are just brilliant. They've helped me endlessly. The food here is amazing. I'm going to miss this place when I leave. It's touched me'. Crossways Guest.

With continued funding from Cambridge City Council (in the form of a 3-year contract) and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (formerly Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)), It Takes a City (ITAC) ran the 24/7 winter emergency accommodation project at Crossways for a fourth year, (04/11/24 to 31/03/25). This funding provides the basics of the service. Additional funding and donations in kind from corporates and grants provide the wrap around trauma informed support and enrichment activities.

The service provided 20 bedrooms with private facilities, most en-suite, every day throughout this five-month period, plus 3 emergency pop-up beds during SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) periods.

- **43 individuals provided with accommodation**
- **38 people in regular rooms**
- **5 people accommodated solely during SWEP periods**
- **5 other SWEP placements transferring to regular rooms**
- **26 people supported to move on to next stage accommodation**

The project was staffed Monday to Friday by a team of experienced ITAC support workers alongside a small team of Evolve Security guards who were on site 24/7.



Crossways team receiving 'Gold' Quality Mark for Excellence in Emergency Accommodation from Housing Justice.

As in previous years, many of our guests had complex needs, with physical and mental health challenges. The community came together, providing wraparound support to help them achieve lasting change.

'The staff are absolute diamonds. They bend over backwards to help you. I've got all my confidence back and feel like I want to live again'. **Crossways Guest.**

Working closely with partner agencies and over 100 amazing volunteers, our guests were able to access food and drinks throughout the day, a hot evening meal, laundry service and specialist support. Our aim was to create a safe, relaxed environment that felt like 'Home'.

Faith groups, schools, businesses, university students, and many others stepped up to donate food, warm clothing, footwear, personal items, and refurbished phones.

'I don't know what I would do without all the support you have provided. I feel so lucky to have been able to start my journey at Crossways'. **Crossways Guest.**

We are always looking for local businesses and organisations to support our work. If you can help us with donations, fundraising events, corporate/team volunteering, or in any other way, please contact info@itac.org.uk

Volunteers Change Lives

'Volunteering at Crossways is great fun and very rewarding. Meeting the residents, hearing their stories, having a laugh with them. I've learned a lot about life and about people. The staff do a fantastic job of making the house welcoming and friendly, and the other volunteers are a lovely bunch. Come and try it next winter!' **Rob**

We again partnered with the Cambridge Churches Homelessness Project (CCHP), St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, student societies and individuals to recruit and train a volunteer team to supplement the support offered by ITAC and Evolve Security staff. Volunteers assisted in a variety of tasks including:

- preparation and serving of cooked evening meals
- cleaning of communal areas and vacated bedrooms
- weekend daytime cover
- providing companionship for guests
- stock management of donated food, clothes, and other items.



Celebrating the work of our amazing volunteers.

2500+ hours given by volunteers in 2024/25

Many volunteers have been returning to support the project year on year, showing how much they value and enjoy the experience.

'We love coming to volunteer at the weekends. Crossways has a family feel to it and the staff take such good care of everyone on site'. Angie & Tracey.

Jenny's Story



'Jenny' is in her 50s and in 2023 had been living in specialist shared accommodation where she was receiving support for some mental health challenges. Her behaviour was adversely affecting the other residents and Jenny was asked to leave. She ended up sleeping rough.

Mistrust meant Jenny's engagement with support services was intermittent. She began occasionally accessing The Haven and, even though her behaviour could be challenging, Jenny started to communicate with ITAC staff and volunteers.

Shortly before Crossways reopened in November 2024, our team offered to show Jenny around the project to help build trust and confidence that we could provide for her needs. Jenny was able to choose her own room and was one of the first guests to move in.

During her stay, Jenny continued to face challenges with the shared nature of the accommodation but with support from our team was able to sustain her place until we could secure her a new tenancy in a female only setting within Cambridge, with an organisation that aligned with Jenny's faith.

Partnerships Are Key

'Crossways play a vital role in providing extra bed spaces over the winter period, when the rough sleepers we work with are more vulnerable to the elements. We stay in close contact to keep all 20 bed spaces full through quick and decisive action. Crossways take all referrals from Street Outreach, ensuring those accessing support are the most at-risk. All referrals are risk assessed by us to safeguard prospective and current residents. There is consistent and open dialogue between us, which is key to providing Cambridge's rough sleepers with safety and respite during an immensely difficult period' **Jamie Hilton, Team Leader, Street Outreach (Cambridge).**

Support from specialist agencies remained essential to our work at Crossways. We often accommodated people who had been disengaged from services for significant periods of time. While our partnership network continued to grow there were a core of agencies whose presence was paramount.

The CGL HEaRT team, that works with those in recovery from alcohol and substance use were regular visitors, as were the mental health nurses from the Dual Diagnosis Street Project. Nurses and GPs attended from the Cambridge Access Surgery (CAS), a practice that specialises in supporting those who are currently experiencing or have recently experienced homelessness.



Mohammed from First Vision Eyecare visited to provide guests with much needed support.

'We have built up a partnership with Crossways which allowed us to work together more efficiently. We would regularly communicate week to week about service users and their needs. Working together allowed us to look at housing, welfare, move plans and share the job. Staff from Crossways would come to my Frontline meeting at Wintercomfort every month, which helped us keep in touch.' **Alex Horton, Service Supervisor, Wintercomfort.**

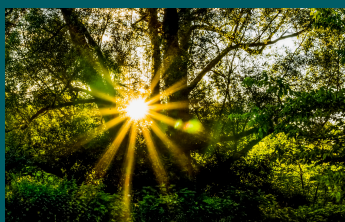
Staff from Wintercomfort assisted with access to more specialist support, both at their day centre and Crossways, while the CGL Street Outreach Team identified rough sleepers in the city and ensured they were fully assessed for risk and support needs.

Those guests needing to attend external appointments were supported by our staff, avoiding missed appointments that may have frequently occurred when people were rough sleeping.

We had our first visit from an optician, eyecare being another vital service that eludes many rough sleepers. Demand was high, with over a dozen pairs of glasses fitted and supplied.

Other agencies, such as those providing debt advice, were called upon on an ad hoc basis. Christians Against Poverty being one such agency. A solicitor from a practice specialising in immigration advice and applications also provided onsite support.

Michael's Story



'Michael', an armed forces veteran in his mid-30s, had served a long prison sentence for a serious assault. Upon release he returned to Cambridge and began rough sleeping.

Michael was eventually offered a place in a project for people who had recently been through the criminal justice system. His time in the forces had left Michael with mental health challenges. He was worried that the accommodation, which was not staffed 24/7, might leave him feeling vulnerable and cause him to lash out.

Usually, if someone had already declined an offer of accommodation, they would not be eligible for Crossways. But Michael was able to articulate his concerns and, working with staff at Wintercomfort, our Support Services Manager agreed he should be accepted.

In Crossways, Michael began to relax, reassured by the 24/7 presence of our professional security team. He engaged fully with our support staff and partner agencies, addressing his mental health and looking for next stage accommodation where he could continue to make progress.

Our resettlement coordinator helped Michael make an application to Cambridge City Council's Town Hall Lettings service, who agreed that he would be suitable for a place in a small, shared property.

Michael moved into a property close to a family member with whom he has a good relationship. He continues to receive support from our Survive & Thrive service, helping him maintain the stability gained at Crossways.

Community Support

Many community groups, businesses and individuals held events or made financial donations to support the project.

For a second year, Mawson Road Community Orchestra organised an evening of classical music. Cambridge Chorale held two carol concerts in one day, attended by hundreds at St Andrew's Street Baptist Church and Downing Place URC. Sing! Community Choir supported us at their Christmas Concert, and Rustat Road Neighbourhood Association donated proceeds from their door-to-door carolling. Beth Shalom Synagogue continued their support both financially and with donations of items to provide comfort.

The congregations of All Saints Church in Melbourn, Bluntisham and Burwell Baptist Churches donated their Christmas collections. Local artist, Sarah Middleton, donated proceeds from her exhibition at Galeria Moderna. Tesco in Station Square gave a donation from their Community Fund.

We thank them all for their fundraising efforts.



Sing! Community Choir collected for Crossways at their Christmas Concert.

Much of the food used at Crossways was donated by organisations like Cambridge Sustainable Food, Cambridge Foodbank and directly from supermarkets. Buckingham Emergency Food Appeal (BEFA) have been stalwart supporters over many years, providing regular deliveries of fresh food and other items. Partnerships like this help in cutting food waste by using short shelf-life products.

For three evenings a week, the professional chefs at Cambridge Dining Co (CDC) prepared a hot main course and dessert that could be collected by our volunteer drivers and served for guests to enjoy. CDC ensured that options were available for vegans and those with other dietary needs. The desserts were a particular hit! They also provided a traditional Christmas dinner and their staff put together gift bags for our female guests.

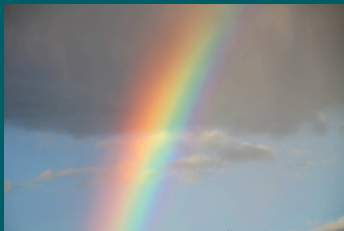
For a third year, Companions of the Order of Malta Cambridge delivered Christmas bags for each of our guests. Staff at Mills & Reeve once again set up a 'giving tree', collecting warm clothing and other items, and Cambridge City Foodbank came through with bags of goodies at what can be a difficult time for our guests. Student group Embrace Cambridge coordinated another donations drive at several university colleges.

Other donors included pupils at Holme Court School giving us their Harvest collection, Sealskinz (hats and socks), Sunshine Action UK (80 gift bags), St Andrew's Church, Girton (warm clothing), Penningtons Manche (Christmas food/items) and Lush (toiletries).



BEFA continued to support our guests with regular donations.

Helen's Story



'Helen', now in her mid-30s, had grown up in a dysfunctional family. Her parents had introduced Helen to drugs whilst in her teens, and she was often in mutually exploitative relationships with older men as a way of surviving.

Helen had been reluctant to engage with support services when she first came into Crossways in Winter 2023. After some time to adjust, she slowly began to accept help from our team, who were able to find her next stage accommodation before the project closed.

Our Survive & Thrive service continued to provide Helen with help in her new accommodation, but it couldn't be as intensive as at Crossways. She lost that place after a few months and returned to sleeping rough.

Helen began accessing The Haven as a safe place away from the streets, where she could have a shower, get a change of clothes and something to eat. She maintained her positive relationships with ITAC staff and was one of the first guests to arrive when Crossways reopened in November 2024.

Helen would sometimes 'disappear' for a few days but always returned to Crossways and was more motivated to work with our team and partner agencies than in the past. We were able to find Helen a place in alternative emergency accommodation where she will be able to access help with her substance misuse and longer-term accommodation options. She continues to be supported by our Survive & Thrive team on occasions.

Fun Not Formality

'Thanks for all the amazing work you do and how well you treat us volunteers' **Laurie, Music Therapist.**

Many of our guests appreciated the provision of activities that were more about fun than formality. Earth and Mind returned to run an herb planter workshop, while music therapy sessions again formed part of our programme, courtesy of a student from Anglia Ruskin University. Fortnightly art therapy sessions were a popular feature over the winter, with a volunteer from CCHP running the activity.



Emily and Paul from Earth And Mind returned to run an herb planter workshop.

Another volunteer that came to us via CCHP provided haircuts for our guests, boosting the confidence of those that could rarely access such services whilst on the streets.

We hope to continue growing our activities offer in the coming Winter.

Nathan's Story



'Nathan' is in his late 30s and had grown up in a difficult home situation. Other family members had experienced homelessness and Nathan found himself sleeping in a tent as Winter approached.

Finding Nathan suitable accommodation in Cambridge was proving difficult as he would not give up his dog, who provided Nathan with emotional support and a sense of safety.

We recognise the importance of canine companions at Crossways and have accreditation from Dogs Trust, giving them free access to veterinary care. Nathan was offered a room, and his dog quickly became a much-loved presence around the project.

With support from our team, Nathan began to address issues around anger and developing some practical skills that would help him to live independently.

As a place that would allow Nathan and his dog to stay together was unavailable in Cambridge, our Support Worker worked hard to find private rented accommodation outside the city that was closer to his young son and friends who could provide support. The deposit and initial rent payment came via Cambridge City Council's Rough Sleeper Initiative.

When there was an issue with his benefits after moving in, he reached out to us and we were able to help ensure his rent would be covered for up to 12 months, hopefully allowing ample time for him to get into employment.

After The Doors Close

'I just want to say thank you for not giving up on me over the years. I would not have blamed you if you had done. You are one in a million'. **Crossways Guest supported by S&T Service.**

Our support does not end when we close the doors at Crossways. Many guests have spent years on the streets and might struggle if left to cope on their own in next stage accommodation.

Our Survive & Thrive (S&T) service continued to support guests who had stayed at Crossways, drawing upon our extensive network of community groups.



Former Crossways resident received continued support at new modular home site.

At the end of the last winter (2024-25), as moves to longer-term or alternative emergency accommodation were secured for 26 individuals staying at Crossways, S&T continued supporting 15 of them. Examples included:

- accommodating three individuals without public funds in a shared house while their applications for indefinite leave to remain were processed.
- supporting a former Crossways resident, and three others who moved from other supported accommodation, at a new modular home site.
- assisting with furnishing a Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme flat.

Contact Us

It takes a city to end homelessness. If you are a local business, community, student, faith group or an individual who would like to support our work with donations, fundraising events, volunteering, or in any other way, please get in touch.



www.ittakesacity.org.uk



info@itac.org.uk



[it-takes-a-city-cambridge](https://www.linkedin.com/company/it-takes-a-city-cambridge)



[ittakesacitycambridge](https://www.facebook.com/ittakesacitycambridge)