



Royal Agricultural Society of England

Sleep safe not rough

An article from Country Way magazine

By Francesca Tolond, Gloucestershire

On 30th January my church in conjunction with many other churches took part in Homelessness Sunday. Here I learned the shocking fact that in 2003/4 10,910 young people were recognised as homeless and of those it was estimated that about 15% were from rural areas.

To try to help make a small difference My husband and I have signed up to an organisation known as Gloucestershire Nightstop which offers young homeless people aged 16 – 25, an emergency bed for up to three nights. We are not brave, for the organisation has a project co-ordinator who takes the young person's history from the referral agency and ensures that the young person is not under the influence of drugs or drink or has a severe illness. He also makes sure that the young person is not going to be violent and that he or she would be suitable for us. The young person is also picked up by the co-ordinator and taken to our house.

We have a spare bedroom that our grown-up children use when they return, so that is the bed that gets used. The young person gets settled in, they usually have very little with them, and they join the family in the evening meal. Here we usually find out a lot more about their circumstances. They unwind and tell us of what has happened to put them in this situation. We have heard of landlords throwing them out because the house is for sale, parents and step-parents telling them to get out, all sorts of reasons. We hope we can get them to relax in the knowledge that they are safe and secure for the night. After breakfast the young person is returned to the referral centre to try to find more permanent accommodation. They can stay with the same host for up to three nights, but at the discretion of the host.

Nightstop gave us training to be Nightstop hosts which included listening skills, information on current drug and alcohol culture and involved CRB clearance. As a host I can choose when I offer accommodation. I do not get paid to take this young person although expenses can be claimed for providing meals. As the young person rarely has any toiletries, local churches collect toothpaste, toothbrushes, soaps etc. and bags are made up to be give to the young person by the host.

The young person is often initially very nervous about coming into a stranger's home but once there, they are often overwhelmed by the experience and recommend it to others in the same circumstances. Nightstop is just one part of a service for homeless young people and many still end up in night shelters of bed and breakfast establishments. These young people are looked after and listened to by non-judgemental adults, something these young people have rarely had.

Why do I do it? Because small acts can make a difference and even change lives. After all that is what Jesus would have done.

Nightstops operate in many different areas across the UK, to find out more
Nightstop, 45A Otley Road, Shipley, BD18 3PY
01274 533004
www.nightstop-uk.org