

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**BECONTREE NIGHT SHELTER AND FOOD BANK NOT JUST FOR CHRISTMAS:  
BETHEL CENTRE MEETING NEEDS ALL YEAR ROUND**

Bethel, the London City Mission centre on Bennett's Castle Lane, Becontree, is operating as a night shelter on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday nights this winter.

It does so in partnership with Hope For Barking & Dagenham, a Christian-run charity which provides a winter night shelter in church halls around the borough seven nights a week.

Jeff Potter, team leader at the Bethel centre, says, 'The Hope For Barking & Dagenham night shelter has been up and running since early November, and in the first three weeks had over thirty-five referrals seeking help.'

Jeff continued, 'Bethel is providing the shelter for Thursday, Saturday and Sunday nights, as we did last winter – but in fact we kept running the weekend shelters until August! Rough sleeping is a year-round issue in Barking and Dagenham – we have the second-highest sleeping-rough population of all London Boroughs. A man died of hypothermia sleeping in a local park this autumn.'

Through last winter's night shelter, Hope For Barking & Dagenham provided 6,020 bedspaces to the homeless people of Barking and Dagenham; there were 512 referrals to the night shelter, and 122 people stayed at the night shelter.

Emma, the night shelter project manager, tells the story of one person helped through last year's night shelter: 'Dan (not his real name) was a 23-year-old man who joined the night shelter from the first night. Relationship breakdowns with his partner and family meant that he had nowhere to go, and he was deemed intentionally homeless by the local authority, meaning that they would not be providing him with any help. During his stay with us we supported Dan to seek help from his GP for an underlying condition, and encouraged and supported him to go to college and gain his CSCS card (a construction industry certification scheme). Whilst in the night shelter he became a father, and we encouraged him and supported him to restore his relationship with his family and partner. Dan gained sustainable employment through gaining his CSCS card, and was able to begin to provide for his family. Dan stayed with us for five months. One year later he is living in his own privately-rented flat with his partner and baby; he is still working, and very much looking forward to Christmas with his family. He has said that if it wasn't for the night shelter he would still be on the streets now – or not here at all.'

**Food bank**

London City Mission has had a centre on Bennett's Castle Lane since 1934, committed to helping the Becontree community in Jesus' name. Among Bethel's other activities are a weekly community lounge (open to all ages to give a safe place to chat and socialise as well



as study the Bible together), Community Tots for pre-school children, Community Kidz for primary-age children, and a food bank.

The food bank at Bethel runs all year round, helping local people who find themselves in short-term, urgent need. Jeff says, 'There has been a huge increase in need for this service in recent years, often with people who thought they would never be in such need having to rely on its services due to ill health or unexpected difficult circumstances suddenly arising. A typical example would be an urgent request I had recently from a local resident for food; he was down to having only a small amount of pasta and some baked beans in the cupboard after being made unemployed two weeks earlier.'

#### **Help needed**

Both night shelter and food bank projects are in need of help. Jeff says, 'These projects rely on volunteers and donations. People in the community, and beyond, have been very generous in the support they have given us to help those in need. But donations continue to be needed; Hope For Barking & Dagenham were close to not having the funds to run the night shelter at all this winter.'

For more information on the night shelter and food bank, and how you can help, visit [www.bethelcentre.com/contact](http://www.bethelcentre.com/contact).

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#### **Note to Editors:**

##### **London City Mission**

1. Bethel is a ministry of London City Mission, which exists to serve the church of London in sharing the love of God and the good news of Jesus Christ with the least reached of London. For our latest news, please visit [www.lcm.org.uk/blog](http://www.lcm.org.uk/blog).
2. We can be found partnering with churches on the toughest estates, talking to gang members about Jesus. We're going into prisons to run Bible groups. We're showing love and hospitality to immigrants. We're welcoming people who are homeless to our drop-in centre.
3. As well as doing evangelism ourselves, we are passionate about seeing the local church envisioned and equipped to reach out with the gospel in their own communities and to welcome those from other cultures into the church. We want to use the experience and insights God's given us to help train and empower churches across London to do just that.

For more information, go to [www.lcm.org.uk](http://www.lcm.org.uk)

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