

“So what is Nightstop?”

“I felt I hadn’t really had a home for years. But this time I didn’t even have a roof over my head. Homeless in every sense of the word.”

- a nightstop guest

Nightstop is a simple idea: *emergency* accommodation in the homes of approved volunteers for one night at a time, until the agencies have had time to work out something more permanent for the homeless young person. Nightstoppers have to be single, homeless and between 16 and 25. The scheme provides a breathing space for vulnerable young people to consider their options.

Since the first Nightstop was first set up in Leeds in 1987, another 46 or so Nightstops have sprung up in different parts of the country, including Stockport, Macclesfield, Preston and Carlisle in the North West. Together they have provided thousands of nights accommodation for homeless young people, many of whom stayed on the scheme for several nights. Up to the end of 2006 Nightstop in Stockport, which started in May 1994, has been asked for help on more than 11538 occasions.

The volunteer hosts are ordinary people with a spare room, willing to do their bit to keep a homeless young person off the street at night. They also offer an evening meal and breakfast, bath/shower, and possibly the use of the washing machine. The volunteers specify when and how often they host.

Other volunteers also take telephone referrals at their own phone, or offer to drive a nightstopper to the designated host.

“Sounds risky for the hosts. What if.....?”

Clearly such a scheme requires that a would-be host consider carefully the difficulties involved. However, the experience of hosts both ours and of other Nightstops has been almost entirely positive with rare annoyances.

For its part Nightstop:

- ◆ arranges basic training sessions at the start;
- ◆ supplies comprehensive reference material;
- ◆ offers support in case of emergency (very rare);
- ◆ arranges social and formal meetings so that experienced hosts can share experiences with others;
- ◆ does not accept as guests those who require specialist help (in the areas of drink, drugs, uncontrolled medical conditions, violence).

“She left here broken, and came back with her dignity”

a social worker about a first-time nightstop guest

And remember - the young person needs protection also, which is why we run thorough checks on volunteer applicants and insist on complete confidentiality from both staff and volunteers.

“ What’s involved in being a telephone volunteer?”

A telephone volunteer offers to stay by the phone for a 3 - 4 hour period as often as s/he wants per month. Some offer four sessions, some as many as eight.

During that period a referral agency such as Social Services may telephone asking if you can find a bed for someone. You have a list of hosts, a referral form, a list of questions to ask, and access to a member of the committee in doubtful cases. Training is given.

“.. And Driving?”

You simply say on which evenings in a month you are prepared to be called out to drive a nightstopper to a host’s address. It is, of course, expected that you have a roadworthy car and clean driving licence.

“I had begun to think ‘Why should I care about anyone? No one cares about me.’ Then I found that people - total strangers - did care. It was a turning point for me.”

- a nightstop guest

“Are there so many young homeless in this area?”

Family life is rather more complex than it used to be, with the result that parents or relatives are often less willing to house young people.

There are many reasons why young people have to *leave* their homes - family breakdown, abuse, mortgage or rent problems. Sometimes people are leaving prison or hospital. Then there are the **hidden homeless** - those who have a roof of sorts, but have to live with a violent relative, or in a mildewed bed-sit.

In places outside the big cities the homeless are less visible - many are known to sleep on a different floor each night, unknown to the Housing Department. They do exist, however, in uncomfortably large numbers.

There is only one reason for *homelessness* - the lack of suitable, affordable accommodation, especially for the young single homeless.

Local councils are not compelled by law to house single young people. They do have to help those considered “vulnerable” - likely to suffer more hardship than most, such as those under 18, those with medical problems, those who have left the care of the local authority.

Hostel accommodation is limited, and is often not suitable for young people. Most areas have a long waiting list for single accommodation, and are strapped for cash. Often a young, single person simply has nowhere to go.

Nightstop Stockport & Trafford

We have been helping young homeless people in **Stockport** since May 1994, and have been operating in **Trafford** since August 1998. We are very interested in hearing from volunteers in Trafford, South Manchester, Wilmslow and Handforth. We still need volunteers from the Stockport area also. We are a registered charity (no. 1057654) and are affiliated to Nightstop UK.

Obviously this single page cannot answer all the questions you may have. If you want more information, please do not hesitate to ask.

**If you have a spare room to offer now and then,
or a few hours a month to answer the telephone
or do a taxi run,
leave your name and address on our answerphone, or write, and we'll contact**

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**helps
homeless
young people**

**How YOU
can help
Nightstop**