

This blog is written by a member of the independent Commission. These views do not necessarily represent the views of the Archbishops' or the Church of England.

Everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory.

*Roman 11:36*

Our houses are more than just financial assets. They're more even than just our homes. The Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Housing, Church and Community believes that they're valuable tools given to us by God. They should be used for His glory. The Commission wants to start a discussion on how we do just that.



Right now, one of the most pressing issues is homelessness. Those who experience homelessness are three times more likely to experience a chronic health condition than the average member of the population, partly due to malnutrition and exposure to the elements. This means that getting COVID-19 could lead to serious issues for them. If we're going to meet the need, we all need to play our part. Luckily, if we have a spare room, we can do just that, through a scheme called Nightstop.

Homelessness is complicated. There are many reasons someone might be left with nowhere to stay. For young people, relationship breakdown is a key reason people end up on the street. This means that they have a lot more to deal with than finding shelter – they may be dealing with an argument with their parents or partner, the effects of addiction, fear of violence, or tension over their sexuality.

Knowing how to respond to this as a Christian can seem difficult. You might have the space to take someone in, but where would you start? *Who would you take in? How do you protect yourself and the young person from harm? How long would it be for?* That's where Nightstop comes in.

Started by local churches in Leeds in the 1980s, Nightstop provides short-term emergency accommodation to those in need, by using volunteer ‘hosts’ – people who open their homes to young people at risk of homelessness. It’s not a light undertaking – they call it ‘extreme volunteering’ – but the support is there to help make it work. Nightstop is run by paid staff, who co-ordinate access for those in need, and support both hosts and guests. This empowers individuals to use their home for good.

You just need a spare room. Every host is given a full day’s training on dos and don’ts, practical tips, advice on maintaining boundaries and how to access support. You don’t have to be a therapist, but having a listening ear makes this accommodation more personal than a hostel. Other than that, a place to wash, a hot meal and a packed lunch is all that’s required – and expenses are reimbursed. The accommodation is for one night at a time – so that people do not have to make a long commitment at once. If a host is unable to take the guest for a second night, they can be transferred to someone else in their network. Typically, guests will only stay for a few nights until the young person is able to return home, or Nightstop is able to find them alternative accommodation.

Depaul UK, who oversee Nightstop, made the very conscious decision to continue to operate throughout the lockdown period, as they found there was both a need and hosts available, whilst putting in appropriate protection and measures for all parties in line with the trusted government guidance.

Nightstop’s volunteers come from all walks of life, but churches are still the first port of call for recruiting new volunteers. Helping those most in need in this way is a great way to put your Christian faith into action. As Revd Rachel Parkinson says of her experience hosting, ‘this was something which we could do which clearly put flesh on the bones of our Sunday worship!’ But there’s another reason to do this, as Christians. We understand that everything that we own is ultimately a gift from God. For those lucky enough to have a spare room, opening it up to others may be the best way to show our gratitude.

You can also gain a lot out of this personally. Pauline Beattie, another Nightstop host, learned a lot about how homelessness affects people: ‘Each of our guests has come in different circumstances and, once they feel comfortable, generally want to talk a lot.’ Pauline has also been lucky enough to see the young people grow – whether celebrating a birthday while staying with them, mending relationships or moving into permanent accommodation.

Since its beginnings in local churches, Nightstop has grown considerably. Now, the Nightstop Network is run by Depaul UK, a national homelessness charity which supports a network of 31 regional Nightstop services across the UK, ensuring a consistently high-quality experience for guests and hosts alike. They have around 600 hosts, another 400 volunteers, and offer as many as 13,000 bed nights a year.

With hostels overloaded, an alternative is badly needed, so we need as many people as possible to play their part. Nightstop allows us to have a

greater impact with what God's given us than if we acted alone. Could you take in a stranger?

As lockdown measures continue to ease, an increased need for hosting households is anticipated. If you want to become a Nightstop volunteer, you can find out more [here](#). [Want to receive occasional updates from the Commission on our work and stories from around the country?](#)

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**Notes:**

1. Nightstop was started by churches in Leeds in 1987, as a response to Faith in the City, a report from the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, which called on churches to respond to poverty in their local area.
2. In 1999, a national leadership body was set up to ensure standards across the various Nightstop regional services. In 2008, this became part of Depaul UK.
3. Nightstop now has 31 regional services across the UK, providing 13,000 bed nights a year. This covers the breadth of England, but half of local authorities are not covered by a service, as setting up a service is expensive. Nightstop are calling on the Government to provide funding for further services to be set up.
4. The model is so successful that it has now been replicated internationally.
5. Regional Nightstops are run in a variety of different ways. Some are commissioned by local authorities, while others are accessed directly through the Nightstop service. Most are run as part of other local services, by charities such as Barnados or YMCA. This means that it supplements and is supplemented by the other services offered.
6. Nightstop offers a private spare room, a hot meal, a shower, laundry facilities and a listening ear to their guests.
7. Nightstop have 600 hosts, and around 1000 volunteers.
8. Volunteers apply to become a host, and are visited, supported and trained to become a Nightstop host. Training covering a variety of topics including information about clients, do's and don'ts, practical tips, advice on maintaining boundaries and how to access support.
9. All volunteers sign up to a rota and choose which evenings they would like to host, on a completely flexible basis. You can do one day a month, or sign up for every night - it's up to you.
10. All young people staying with you are assessed and checked before we arrange any placements. Staff are responsible for supporting young people on their long term needs, including finding them permanent accommodation.
11. Hosts are reimbursed for the expenses they incur, and are provided with toiletries to offer to any Nightstop guests staying.
12. Many young people who stay with Nightstop have to travel across town to get to their host's home for the evening. This can be a daunting

experience, so Nightstop relies on volunteer drivers and chaperones to help us. In areas with better public transport, volunteer chaperones can travel with the young person on public transport to accompany them to their home for the evening.

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**Source URL:** <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/archbishops-commissions/housing-church-and-community/church-blogs/would-you-take-stranger>