Overnight Welcome Centre 2023/24

Approaching 200 years of Christian care in Glasgow

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Executive summary

- **1,091** unique guests
- **13%** of guests were NPRF; **87%** were eligible for support
- **86%** guests were male, **14%** were female; with an average age of **36** years
- a safe space to wait was provided for guests on **2,795** occasions
- **1,490** emergency bed-nights were provided for guests by GCM

Glasgow City Mission has been operating a winter project within Glasgow for 14 years; aiming to provide routes out of rough sleeping during the coldest months of the year.

As we approached the winter season, Glasgow City Council declared a housing emergency which had a major impact upon our Overnight Welcome Centre (OWC). During the four months of operation, the number of unique guests more than doubled to 1,091, comprising a staggering 4,810 presentations. Facing a housing crisis with limited accommodation solutions, the 2023/24 season saw lower positive outcome rates compared to last year.

The OWC acquired a small number of its own emergency beds primarily used for guests who had No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), which made up only 13% of total numbers. In response to the high demand, we were able to double our emergency rooms for the latter half of the season. In total, we provided 1,490 emergency bed spaces.

The remainder of our guests were supported to make a homeless presentation to Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and their Out of Hours (OOH) team. However, due to the lack of accommodation within the city only 13% of eligible guests were accommodated. Those without accommodation remained in our building throughout the night where they were at least warm and safe. This option was utilised on 2,795 occasions where guests were cared for by our trained staff night team.

Our Housing Settlement Officers (HSO) supported guests throughout the day to access appropriate routes out of rough sleeping, relying on the expertise of partner agencies. The day-team faced similar challenges of lack of accommodation options, services overrun, and a feeling of hopelessness for guests. The housing emergency is being felt across all services.

This model of operating a “triage-style” OWC worked reasonably well in 2022/23 as the HSCP had access to accommodation each evening. Last season the service saw 95% of guests achieve a positive outcome. This winter it dropped to 73% and many of those outcomes were only achieved after many days of waiting. In the midst of a housing emergency, this model does not serve guests well and will not be repeated in future years. We continue to work closely with partners to establish a better strategy to provide them with a route out of rough sleeping during the winter months. ■

Operational report

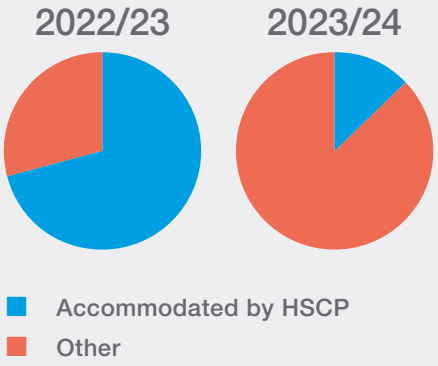
Operational report

Our winter project, which started as a basic night shelter, has grown every year since the winter of 2010/11 when we opened our doors in reaction to extremely cold weather.

Each year the service has adapted to the needs of our city. Last season we transitioned to take a new approach in hosting the OWC in our day centre building. Instead of having beds on site we accessed emergency beds across the city from a number of sources. Despite some initial apprehension from partners about taking this approach in 2022, it was a great success with over 90% of guests moving on to positive destinations. Most eligible guests were accommodated on the night by the OOH service from the HSCP. Last year's report can be read here.

However, as we prepared to open the OWC for the 2023/24 season, Glasgow City Council simultaneously declared a housing emergency on 30 November. As this report details, the consequences of the housing crisis were evident throughout the winter with an unprecedented number of guests accessing the service. The demand for emergency beds was exceptionally high, resulting in the majority of our guests not being accommodated. Instead, they were forced to wait inside the OWC where we were able to keep them warm and safe. The difference is well illustrated by Figure 1, which compares the numbers of eligible guests accommodated through OOH from last year to this year.

Figure 1: % of guests, eligible for accommodation, who were accommodated by the HSCP OOH service



The OWC opened on 1 December 2023 with initial opening hours of 9pm–6am. The earlier closing time of 6am had a more significant impact than expected on the service for guests, especially as many more guests stayed in the building all night due to a lack of accommodation options. We sought additional funding, and from 1 February 2024, we were able to extend the closing time to 7am through to the end of the project on 31 March 2024. ■

Our guests

> Our partnership is important as it allows us to give back to the community through supporting Glasgow City Mission with the outstanding work they do all year round and not just the winter shelter.
>
> —Lauren Kirkwood, Scotia Radio

Throughout the winter season, we welcomed 1,091 unique guests into our building.This is more than double last year's number of guests (534). Figure 2 shows the number of guests welcomed into variations of the winter project over the past 14 years.

There are various reasons for the rise in numbers, including the cost of living crisis, the cessation of local connection[1] criteria, the Home Office fast-tracking a huge backlog of cases, slow-down in move-ons from social to private rented sector, accommodation required for Ukrainian war refugees, and a slowdown in turning around void properties. The HSCP more than doubled their use of bed and breakfasts as a means of temporary accommodation over the past year, yet with individuals having reduced options for moving into tenancies there were bottlenecks right through the system.

People arrive at the OWC as a last resort, often distressed and confused or possibly fleeing a violent situation. The circumstances through which guests come to us are varied, including long-term rough sleepers, those newly released from prison, individuals who have just lost accommodation, guests fleeing traumatic experiences such as domestic abuse or exploitation, as well as those who just need a safe and warm space to wait until they can return home the following day. A crucial part of our service is to welcome guests compassionately and to comfort those deeply troubled by their predicament. We spend time listening to guests, valuing their story and reassuring them that they will be safe. Often we can signpost them to specialist support the following day. In all situations, our goal is to keep people safe and provide routes out of rough sleeping during the coldest months of the year.

Of the 1,091 guests, 945 were eligible for accommodation. However, OOH were only able to offer 13% of these guests a bed. This is an enormous decrease on the previous winter where 76% of eligible presentations were accommodated—see Figure 1. This stark decrease highlights how severe the housing emergency affected services, escalating risks for those forced to sleep rough. Our busiest night engaged with 61 individuals, over double the busiest night last year (25), and on that night, only 1 person was accommodated by statutory services.

These additional pressures resulted in large numbers of people choosing to stay inside our OWC throughout the night rather than sleeping outside. This happened on 2,795 occasions, over ten-times last year's figure. Sadly, there were even some occasions, 20 out of 122 nights, where we had to turn people away at the door because we had no capacity. Turning people away is always one of the hardest things staff have to do.

Similarly to the previous winter, the OWC funded supplementary emergency beds each night in a private hotel. Mid-season we were able to increase the number of rooms from 6 to 12 to help meet the high demand. All rooms were utilised every night, providing 1,490 emergency bed-nights, compared to 598 bed-nights last year. Guests who were particularly vulnerable were prioritised for these rooms.

The proportion of genders amongst guests has been roughly stable across all the years of the project, varying between 72–89% male. This year 86% of guests

[1]scotland.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/homeless/decisions/local_connection

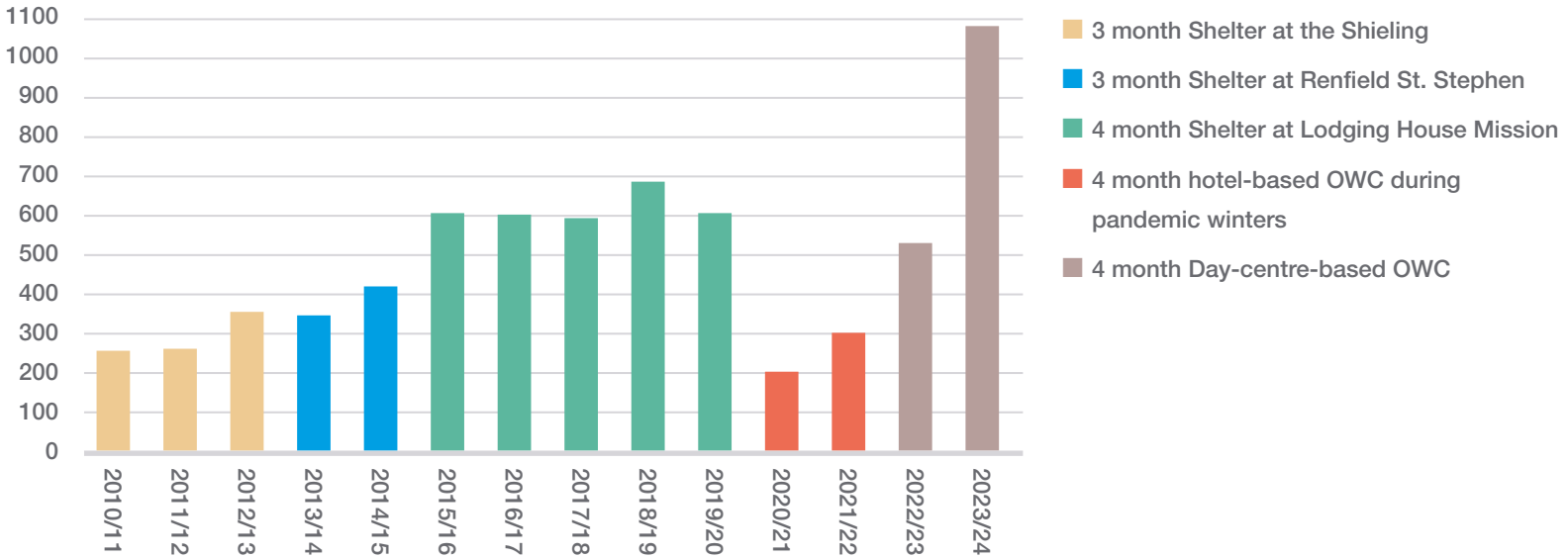
Our guests *cont.*

were male and 14% were female. The average age of guests was 36 years, which is a consistent figure over 14 years.

We track the numbers of guests who are NRPF. This season 13% of our guests were NRPF, which is half the previous season (27%). Guests who are NRPF are not eligible for accommodation and so many were supported through our funded emergency hotel spaces. One NRPF family consisting of elderly frail parents and an adult son with additional support needs, were supported jointly by OWC staff and the HSCP until the Home Office agreed to offer accommodation.

We saw a small number of families presenting with children. Although we cannot receive children into the main building, we were still able to work with partner organisations to source suitable accommodation. On two occasions, OOH and HSCP came to the OWC where they could interview the families on a separate floor. On another occasion, the Simon Community RSVP team collected the family from the OWC and arranged for the HSCP to interview them. Our priority is always to protect children and ensure that they and their parents have somewhere safe to sleep. ■

Figure 2: Number of unique guests welcomed into the project over 14 years of operation



Presentations

"Since 2010, it has been part of our community social responsibility at Salvas Conflict Training to ensure a safe and supportive environment for everyone involved in the Glasgow Overnight Welcome Centre by training staff and volunteers in leading personal safety and conflict management skills.

—Mike Greville, Salvas

Throughout the season, we had 4,810 presentations from 1,091 guests.

Five nights into the winter season, we witnessed 50 guests coming through the door. This set the tone for the full season, with an average of 40 guests presenting each evening. The lack of accommodation meant that the majority of our guests returned night after night. Over 60% of guests presented more than once (35% in 2022/23) with a quarter of those staying with us for longer than a week. These disheartening figures illustrate the reality that this OWC model cannot function properly when the HSCP do not have sufficient bed spaces to allocate.

Of the 4,810 presentations, 78% were from guests eligible for accommodation through the HSCP. The remainder were NRPF guests, who, although only comprising 13% of guest numbers, presented more frequently due to limited outcomes available for them.

The triage-style system of taking time to establish each guest's circumstances and eligibility enabled us to build trust with them. Guests reported feeling very safe within our service and were able to cope with returning each night despite not being offered accommodation.

With the criterion of local connection being dissolved in November 2022, individuals are now able to make a homelessness application in any local authority in Scotland. Glasgow has seen an increase in presentations from across Scotland as a result. We also witnessed an increase in people coming to Glasgow from across the UK seeking accommodation—a no local connection decision was given for these. It was challenging for these guests to understand the difference in laws with some expecting to be provided with a tenancy on arrival. On occasion a partner felt a legal challenge might be successful, for example on grounds of fleeing violence, additional vulnerabilities, or wrongful decisions being received.

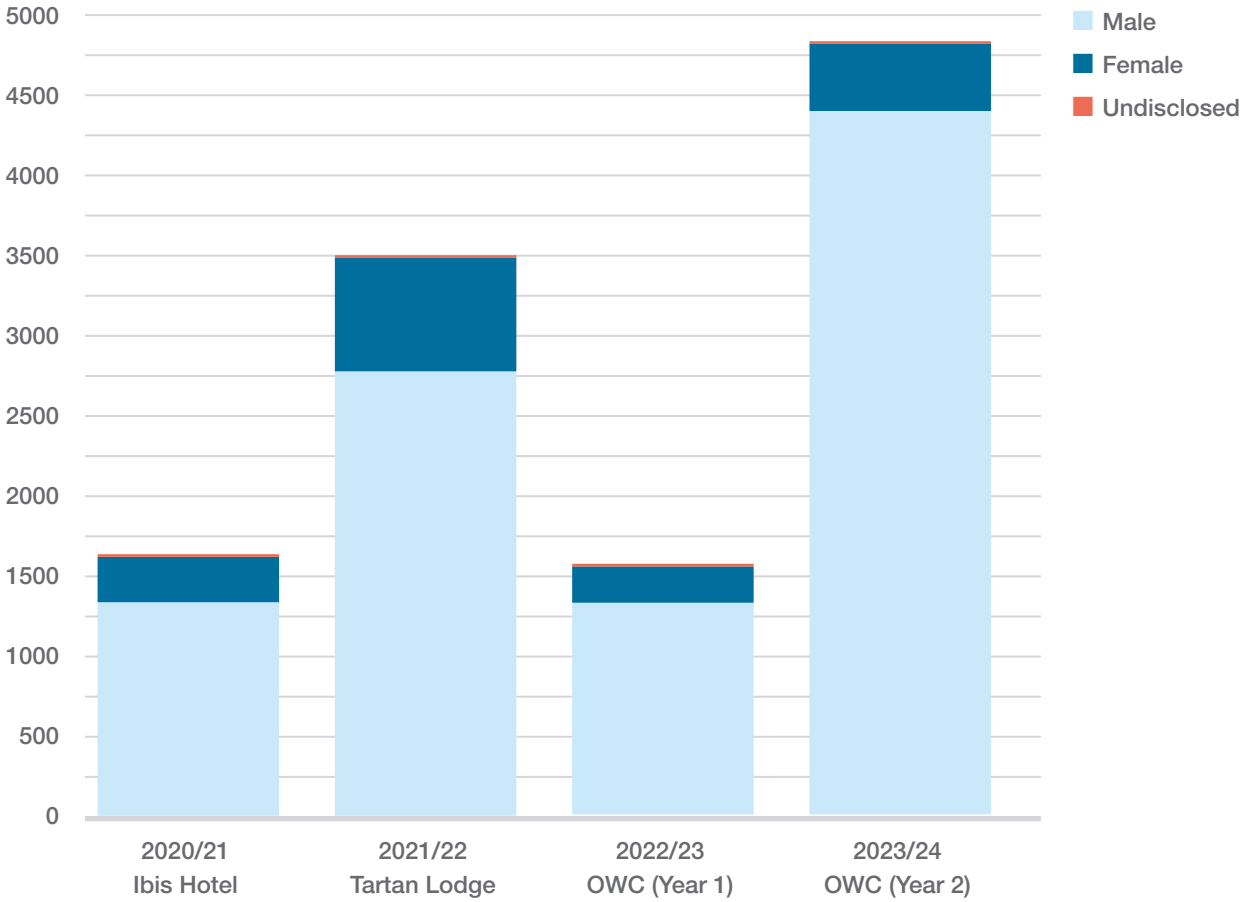
The OWC is open to anyone irrespective of nationality, ethnicity or eligibility status. Asylum seeker cases are often complex and challenging, requiring support from more than one agency. We worked with those who were pre-asylum waiting for a screening appointment, guests who had absconded from home office accommodation, those who have been refused asylum, and others who had been exploited or trafficked on arrival. A few guests who are currently appealing their asylum decision were able to move in with host families via partners including Govan Community Project, British Red Cross, and Fairway.

We encountered 39 guests who were pre-asylum. Most were placed in Home Office accommodation across the UK. We also met guests who had absconded from Home Office accommodation, believing that there was a different asylum process in Scotland. We impressed upon guests that if they were offered accommodation by the Home Office, this was their route out of rough sleeping.

In January 2024, Glasgow experienced a cold-snap, with temperatures dropping to -8°C. The OWC service quickly responded by staying open right through the day, serving breakfast and drinks. Guests were able to remain in the warmth and received support to access services online or supported to make phone-calls rather than facing the cold. ■

Presentations *cont.*

Figure 3: **Total number of presentations**



Partnerships

> We were pleased to welcome guests coming from OWC for breakfast each morning; even in their desperate situation they never failed to tell us how thankful they were to have a warm, safe, space to sleep during winter nights. Even though the number of presentations were extremely high this year, you still managed to offer comfort and hope. Your hard work didn't go unnoticed; we are very proud to be part of the process.
>
> —Angela Vance, Lodging House Mission

Over the years, the Winter Project has grown a successful and dynamic network of partner agencies (see appendix).

These organisations are crucial to our day-time operations, providing expertise and additional support that surpass the capacity of any single organisation. We respect and value these partnerships, recognising they will lead to improved outcomes for our guests in both the short and longer term.

Regular bi-weekly partnership meetings facilitated the sharing of knowledge and advice. It became apparent that all partners were operating at full capacity amid the housing crisis, particularly legal services. Regular and transparent communication helped to forge unity, share pertinent information and help coalesce efforts around guest outcomes. Partners had access to our online database system, allowing for actions to be logged and people's cases to be progressed, avoiding duplication of effort.

Since 2020, the night-time winter project has employed a day team who follow-up and support guests who have presented at night. Our team of three supported up to 40 guests per day, mostly referring to agencies such as Shelter Scotland, Scottish Refugee Council, the British Red Cross, as well as continuing to phone into Social Care Connect to check the status of their application for accommodation. Additionally, day-staff would direct guests to other partner venues in the city where they could receive support, such as Simon Community Scotland, Marie Trust, and Lodging House Mission. Guests also utilised our own day services including art classes, IT skills, singing and music groups, or using our gym.

Long-term rough sleepers were still present within Glasgow throughout the winter months. Across the partnership it was possible to ensure regular connect with these individuals, most notably by the RSVP team. We made sure they were aware of the availability of the OWC should they wish to access the service.

Simon Community Scotland, Street Pastors and Police Scotland each physically brought people to access the service. For example, Police Scotland brought a vulnerable woman to our centre who was on a tourist visa from Japan but ended up stranded with no means to return home. We placed her in one of our emergency rooms. Using translation services to unpack her circumstances our day team engaged the Japanese Embassy, advocating for the woman and her desire to return home. Within 24 hours, arrangements were made and staff accompanied her to the airport. The Embassy staff expressed profound gratitude for our compassionate care of a Japanese citizen. As a gesture of appreciation, members of our team were invited to commemorate the Emperor's birthday at the official reception at the Consulate General of Japan in Edinburgh.

The Scottish Refugee Council, Govan Community Project, and British Red Cross were able to provide long-term support for 37 guests who were refused asylum or who were 'appeal rights exhausted'. Guests who fall within this category have nowhere else to go, they have exhausted their support networks and the appeals process is long and complicated. ■

Personnel

All OWC staff undertake an intense training programme in preparation for the season.

We employed nine staff of which five were returning from last year. They were supplemented by a bank team of five staff who took a small number of shifts covering holiday and sick leave.

The team was supplemented by some amazing volunteers, all whom are PVG vetted and Safeguarding trained. Every evening, a pair of volunteers would be on shift from 8:30pm–11:30pm. Their main role was to provide hospitality to our guests, something we value highly in our service. More than just serving a hot drink, volunteers could sit with guests giving them undivided attention—making guests feel genuinely welcomed and valued. On occasion, and where appropriate, volunteers would offer to pray for guests. ■

Incidents

Overnight Welcome Centre staff prepare for a variety of incidents that may occur throughout the season.

The HSCP Alcohol and Drug Recovery Services provided staff with training in administering naloxone to guests who are experiencing an overdose. Naloxone has the ability to save a life and allow paramedics time to arrive and continue emergency care. The team administered naloxone on seven occasions. In addition, there was one occasion where staff administered CPR to a guest who was unresponsive. Thankfully, due to our training and quick thinking, this guest survived. We required 30 ambulance visits during the four months of the season and we also supported 19 guests with a taxi to attend A&E as their health was of significant concern.

Police Scotland dropped-off 61 individuals who they had picked up and had nowhere else to go. We only called 999 on 7 occasions although there were other occasions where 101 was called to report concerns regarding suicide, human trafficking, missing persons, or thefts. We recorded three incidents where an assault took place either inside or just outside our building. Police Scotland responded appropriately to our calls and we are thankful for the continued support we receive from them. Five of our guests were missing persons and were successfully identified by our database.

Mental health concerns continue to be an area of intense need within the OWC. Services across the city are extremely stretched and it is near impossible to access support for individuals unless they are at risk of causing extreme harm to themselves. Staff are trained to remain calm, diffuse situations when necessary and care for guests who may be experiencing heightened emotions and frustrations at their lowest moment in life. ■

> "The Overnight Welcome Centre has again delivered a valuable and much needed service to the vulnerable in Glasgow. The Police frequently use the service to drop off persons who are in need of a safe space freeing up Police time and resources. The staff are always very welcoming and we really appreciate the strong partnership relationships that have been formed.
>
> —Jonathan Watters, Community Policing Inspector

Guest outcomes

The housing emergency meant that accommodation solutions for our guests were few and far between.

The OWC saw 2,795 presentations having to wait through the night in a space not designed for overnight accommodation. We were able provide 1,490 emergency bed nights in a local hotel.

The OOH service offered accommodation to 124 guests. During the day, our HSOs worked tirelessly to support all remaining guests without accommodation. We worked closely with the HSCP to seek positive outcomes and are grateful for solutions that were found. Since closing, we have confirmed that 49% of guests are now in temporary accommodation provided by the HSCP or Home Office (see figure 4) and 14% of our guests returned home or went to stay with friends/family. This is lower than the previous year of 26% indicating that the vast majority of presentations genuinely required emergency accommodation. Incredibly, 50 guests are now in some form of tenancy. Although this is only 5% it is an encouraging figure and instils hope that people are still moving through the system.

Although the condition of local connection no longer applies in Scotland, it does to those arriving from the rest of the UK. As mentioned previously, a no local connection decision can be given to those guests, which often resulted in confusion and frustration. This was particularly challenging for guests who had received their leave to remain decision over six months ago, meaning they had no entitlement for accommodation within Scotland if they had already had an open homelessness case elsewhere in the UK. On a few occasions, Shelter Scotland successfully challenged decisions allowing individuals to put roots down in Scotland.

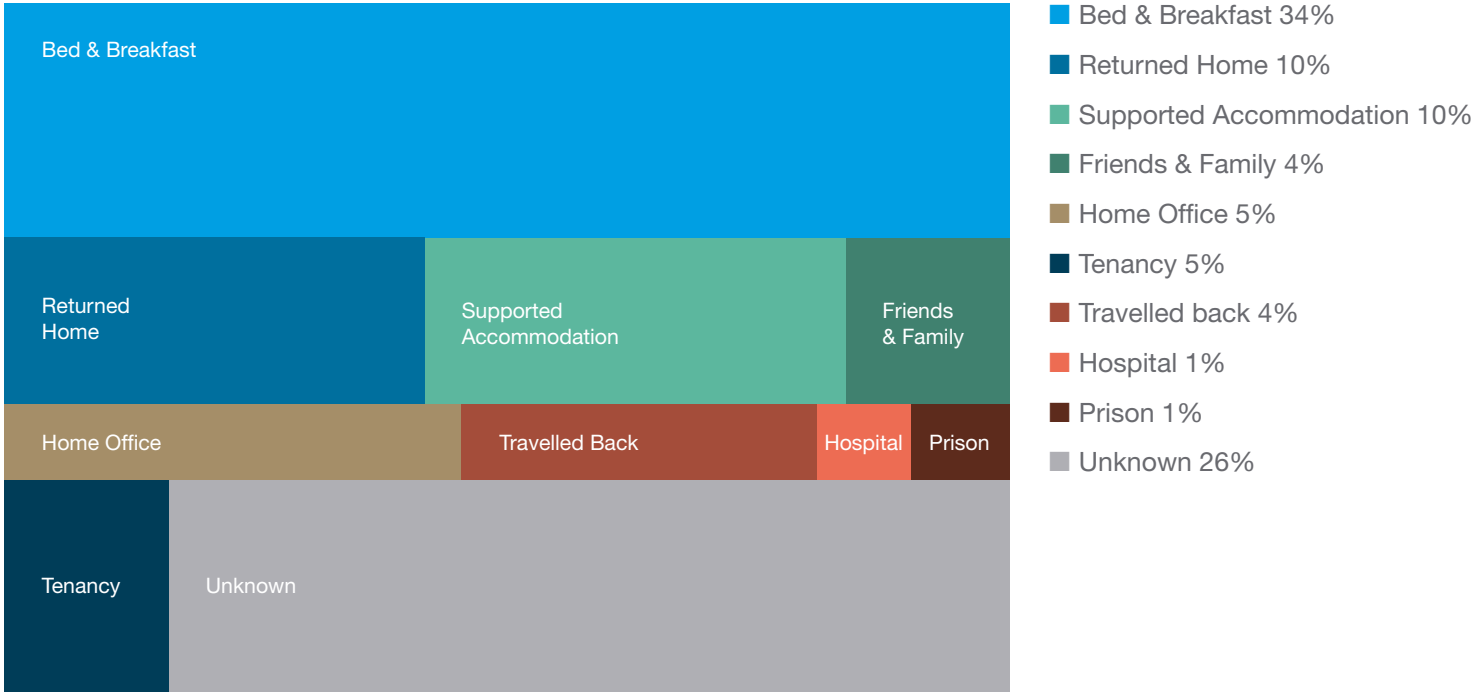
Restore Glasgow provided invaluable staff training in spotting the signs of Human Trafficking. We did encounter guests who had been trafficked and supported them into accommodation through Migrant Help.

At the end of the season, 73% of guests had achieved positive outcomes, which marks a decline from the previous season's impressive 95% positive outcome rate.

Although disappointing, it underlines the issues facing Glasgow. The OWC worked well last year because the whole system was working. However, in the context of a housing emergency, this model of operation is no longer acceptable. ■

Guest outcomes *cont.*

Figure 4: **Outcomes for guests of the Overnight Welcome Centre**



Conclusions

The OWC triage-style model, based from the Crimea Street day centre cannot work when the city is in a housing crisis. It can only function when emergency accommodation can be offered to all eligible guests on the same night of presentation.

Our service is open to anyone who finds themselves in a moment of crisis, offering a low-threshold, safe space to present. There will always be guests whose eligibility is uncertain, or perhaps restricted, who require additional support. With the fast-tracking in Home Office decisions, we may also see an increase of guests who receive negative decisions over the coming months. The city will still need a service to support both eligible and eligibility-restricted individuals during the coldest months of the year as an alternative to rough-sleeping.

As we begin to prepare for the upcoming 2024/25 winter season, we are diligently re-evaluating our winter project to ensure that it can best serve those at risk of rough sleeping. We seek counsel and partnership from all the agencies within Glasgow, including the Scottish Government and HSCP, to strive together effectively to deliver a professionally run, safe, and compassionate service for those who fear that the street may be their only other available option. ■

"We have an enviable reputation for placing humanity and dignity at the heart of all we do. This season we were stretched like never before due to a steep rise in demand. We remained professional, discreet and upbeat throughout.

The 2024/25 Welcome Centre will require a fresh approach with homeless numbers at record levels; we believe that the Welcome Centre model is needed more than ever, so planning has begun in anticipation of what next season will bring.

—Charles Maasz, Chief Executive

Appendix

"We are very grateful for the support of our partners and funders. We would not be able to do this without them.

—Elyse MacKinnon,
Winter Project Manager

PARTNERS

Alcohol and Drug Recovery Services (HSCP)

BAM Properties Ltd

British Red Cross

Citizens Rights Project

Glasgow City HSCP

Glasgow Street Pastors

Govan Community Project

Green Cross Global

Hunter Street Homeless Services

ITRS Group (Database services)

Lodging House Mission

Marie Trust

Migrant Help

Police Scotland

Restore Glasgow

Safe in Scotland

Salvas, Conflict Management Training

Scottish Drugs Forum

Scotia Radio Services

Scottish Refugee Council

Shelter Scotland

Simon Community Scotland

Turning Point Scotland

FUNDERS

Scottish Government

Social Bite

Rangers Charity Foundation

Urban Potential

The Souter Charitable Trust

Turning Point Scotland

Mary Cuthbertson and Cathcart Bowling Club

Springboard Charitable Trust

Partick Housing Association

The Blue Triangle Glasgow Housing Association

Spire View Housing Association

Kingsridge Cleddans Housing Association

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