

Frankston Winter Shelter

*A local church based initiative providing crisis accommodation
over the winter months*

June-August 2025



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1. Project Summary

“It’s been like having a family”

“It’s not just about us finding somewhere to stay- it’s about being able to start meeting some of our goals and making plans again for life”

(Guest comments from guests who stayed the whole Winter 2025)

Our fourth year of Winter Shelter has been one like no other. From the first week, we were at capacity, which led us to add an extra two beds each night. These were rapidly filled. Guests settled in quickly and built a tight knit community that extended outside of shelter and flowed into the days and weekends. As guests moved on to accommodation, they continued to meet ongoing and new guests at the bus in the mornings to spend the day together. This was the first year that we have seen community build to this extent and was a credit to some of the guests who took on the role of working with everyone to create this.

We had guests express the desire to come back and be involved as volunteers in some capacity next year, as well as sharing some positive ideas of ways that they could contribute to helping others on their journey with experiencing homelessness.

The relationship with Monash University was a real strength, with some excellent students completing their placements through the three months - thank you to the staff who worked closely with us to make this run smoothly.

Many of our volunteers benefitted from excellent training provided through Mental Health and Wellbeing, as well as through courses provided through Frankston Council. These were incredibly helpful in navigating some of the complex challenges faced at times with guests.

A big thank you to Community Support Frankston, Bolton Clarke, Salvo Care, St Vincent de Paul and Launch Housing who continued to be our referrers and who ensured that guests referred were best placed for the program. We also welcomed SECL Community Connectors as referrers this year. These organisations do amazing work and we are in awe of the way they care so tirelessly for the vulnerable in our community throughout the year.

Thank you also to Frankston Council, who provided funding to build a new shower and toilet for our guests at the end of last year, as well as providing a grant which allowed us to replace bedding and bring on some staff to support the program.

Frankston Winter Shelter is a local church initiative that was originally based on the model by Stable One. The concept is to provide crisis shelter over winter for people experiencing homelessness in the Frankston area. The winter shelter has several goals:

- To provide food and shelter for those in immediate need
- To provide a safe place for people in crisis
- To assist in creating a sense of community that will extend beyond the simple meeting of physical needs
- To mobilise the wider church community and raise awareness of the issues in their local area

The Frankston model has evolved along with the needs and constraints of our local community and currently offers five nights per week in two church buildings; Peninsula City Church and Holy Family Hall (St Anne's Catholic Church).

Volunteers combine across a range of churches and community groups, creating a diverse and passionate team across both venues.

This year saw 170 volunteers come together to operate the shelter. The majority of these were returning volunteers and we also welcomed new volunteers as some finished up due to health, travel or moving.

Guests arrive at 6 pm and stay until 8:30 am the next morning. A warm meal, shower, activities and bed are provided with breakfast the next morning. A bus collects guests from Young St carpark. Guests are also provided with essential clothing items, toiletries, reading material and a welcoming community environment.

47 guests registered to stay. Three guests returned from previous years. Of the 47 that registered, 39 were male and 8 were female; 33 actually attended. The Shelter was at capacity most nights, with capacity increasing from 10 to 12 per night after a few weeks due to the demand.

With Peninsula City Church and St Anne's being host venues and Gateway as a key partner, churches also providing volunteers included St Paul's Anglican church, St Luke's Anglican church, and the Seventh-day Adventist church - providing volunteers, laundering, food collection and preparation, donation of goods, baking, knitting, prayer,

financial support and promotion of needs to their congregations. Individuals from various other churches and community groups also volunteered.

2. Project objectives

The objectives of the project were:

1. To provide overnight shelter for people experiencing homelessness in the Frankston area for as many nights a week as possible through the winter months
2. To support local agencies working with people experiencing homelessness and to fill a gap in crisis accommodation in Frankston
3. To offer 'more than a place to stay' - welcome, care, rest, healthy meals
4. To build relationships with guests and provide community, encouraging and supporting those who wanted to move towards a more stable living condition
5. Facilitate and support local congregations to offer a coordinated approach and to work together across denominations
6. Increase awareness in the church and the community of the issues and challenges that people face when they don't have permanent and stable living conditions

As well as working towards these goals, we were approached by other organisations seeking support to work towards similar goals or raise awareness. This included communities outside of the Frankston area wanting to establish similar programs and schools looking for ways of educating students on the issue of homelessness.

3. Partnerships

Monash University:

First year Occupational Therapy students completed their placements as part of their studies. Students assisted on a range of shifts and provided great support for other volunteers and guests.

Bayside Christian College:

Year 11 and 12 VM students from the College came to Peninsula City Church each week to set up all the beds on Mondays and then pack up the Shelter on Thursdays. This provided well needed help in the physical set up of the shelter.

Health Care Connections:

Staff from Melbourne City Mission / Health Care Connections / Detour / Rough Sleeper Program attended some Wednesday evenings providing health support for our guests

Referral agencies:

- Frankston Community Support, Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, Salvo Care, Launch Housing, St Vincent de Paul and Community Connectors (SECL) acted as referrers for guests.
- Referral agencies were extremely helpful in providing information about guests and checking in to see how they were doing as well as updating us when guests had accommodation to go to

4. Project Outcomes:

- 33 different guests stayed at the shelter. The maximum on any given night was 12
- 47 guests registered to stay, with 14 never attending
- 5 guests stayed at the shelter for the duration of winter
- Of the guests referred, 8 were female and 39 were male
- 3 guests were returning guests from 2024 and 1 from 2022, 2023 and 2024
- Unsafe rooming houses, increasing rental costs, lack of affordable housing, family or relationship breakdown, job loss, mental health issues, domestic violence and costs of living were cited by guests as the main reasons for homelessness.
- During their time at shelter, 1 person gained employment, 12 are known to have found accommodation, 3 expressed the desire to continue to live in their current conditions after shelter, 1 planned to travel in a van, 2 were reconnecting with family and 3 expressed the desire to volunteer next year. Outcomes for our other guests are unknown
- Feedback from guests was extremely positive. They reported a sense of belonging and feeling that they were genuinely part of a community. They felt a sense of family and were able to make plans for the future. One guest was particularly pleased to be able to quit smoking during his time and put this down to having a community around him to support him. Guests enjoyed having home cooked meals as well as being able to play instruments in the evening

- Guests enjoyed sharing their ideas and thoughts about ways that the broader community could work together to make the experience of being homeless in Frankston less challenging
- Some guests had cars and were able to make their own way to the shelter

5. Challenges:

- Covering nights continued to be a constant challenge and we continue to look for ways to manage this more sustainably
- Some guests presented with complex mental health issues, leading to some volatile situations. Response times from emergency services were slow and in one case did not attend. This was concerning given the environment and the nature of volunteer staff. In the absence of adequate response times, tighter screening will need to take place for referrals.
- Guests have difficulty in storing their possessions. Whilst we were able to provide them with wheelie bags to transport their belongings, the challenge for keeping these things safe throughout the day is real. We are looking at storage options for next year during shelter, however a more permanent solution is needed in Frankston

6. Staffing:

Frankston Winter Shelter does not employ any staff and relies on a combination of volunteer hours and local churches donating work hours by their ministry teams. However, due to a grant received this year, we were able to put on three staff for a total of 2.5 days per week during the Shelter. We also had a committee of 7 volunteers representing Peninsula City Church, Gateway Church, St Luke Anglican Church and St Anne Catholic Church overseeing the ongoing coordination of the program.

- 170 volunteers staffed set up, cooking, driving, evening, night and morning shifts, washed laundry, and gathered food donations
- A day and multiple evenings of training was provided for all volunteers before the commencement of the program
- Multiple tailored training sessions in Conflict Management and Mental Health were provided by Council as well as Mental Health and Wellbeing Frankston

7. 'In kind' donations received

A range of churches and individuals provided donations of goods, food and funds throughout the program - too many to be listed here, but every one gratefully received and appreciated.

- Individuals sponsored the purchase of new beds, mattresses, and wheelie bags, donated clothing items and food items
- Peninsula City Church supported staff to coordinate the project and provide admin and other support for venues from Monday - Sunday
- Gateway Church supported staff to coordinate as well as collect food donations throughout the week from Monday - Sunday
- St Anne's provided a venue for Thursdays and Fridays as well as collecting food and other donations
- Mental Health and Wellbeing provided warm puffer jackets and swags
- Seventh day adventist church provided breakfast foods and snack items
- Baxter Village provided knitted items and jackets
- EMC provided food and sent students to help in the final pack up
- St Luke's raised funds, donations of snack food, baking and toiletry packs
- Orange Sky laundry services meant guests could do regular washing on Thursdays
- Bayside Christian College provided lockers for guests to store belongings, as well as meals made by students and students to help pack up beds
- Local businesses donated food required (Aldi, Temptation pies, Somerville Egg Farm, Henry's Mercato Frankston)
- Nandos provided fortnightly meals one night a week
- Avis provided reduced price bus hire
- Flinders Christian Community College ELC provided breakfast foods
- St Paul's Frankston provided weekly soups and laundering of bedding

8. Finances

This is a general indication of finances only and is not a financial report - amounts have been rounded for ease of reading. Approximate figures are provided from January 2025. It is important to note that, as a program, we have not had staff costs before. This has been an addition this year due to a grant received by council and will not be an ongoing resource once funding ceases. Similarly, the provision of wheelie bags was only possible due to the generous donation from a private donor.

Expenses directly related to the project amounted to approximately \$32,880.

Expenses included:

- Sign up fee to Stable One - \$500
- Transport for guests - \$5000
- Food purchases - \$5500
- Food vouchers for guests - \$360
- New Bedding - \$2500
- Utilities - \$2000
- Laundry - \$400
- Phone - \$400
- Salaries - \$8320 (due to a specific grant from council - available for 3 years)
- Wheelie bags - \$6000 (thanks to a donation from anonymous donor)
- Trailer costs - \$350
- Incidentals - \$1000

Total costs: \$32 380

Grants:

One grant was received from Frankston City Council - a Triennial grant to allow adding some staff hours to support the program, replacement of bedding, transport costs and some utilities. This was \$16520 for 2025. Another grant for \$10,000 as part of the Local Support Package has not yet been received and will contribute to Shelter for 2026.

The Frankston City Council also provided training for volunteers in Conflict management and Mental health as well as waiving permit application fees and reimbursing the fee for the access consultant.

Total donations received- \$25,820

Remaining funds will be carried over for 2026.

8. Conclusion

As we end this year of Shelter, it is again with both joy and sadness that we reflect on the winter months just gone. It has been a joy to witness the way in which so many people in the Frankston community rally together to help and support those who are facing significant life challenges. From support agencies, churches, schools, local businesses, retirement villages and individuals, there is little doubt that Frankston is a community that cares and is willing to put in the hard work needed to improve the lives of those who are vulnerable.

Nonetheless, the issues remain significant with apparently growing numbers of people experiencing homelessness and less available accommodation options. The need for crisis accommodation continues, with more options desperately needed.

A clear need also exists for people experiencing homelessness to have a place to store their belongings during the day - the physical constraints created by transporting possessions isolates people and prevents them from accessing opportunities available to others. For people struggling with physical health conditions, the added difficulty of carrying bags is concerning. As a basic issue of dignity, it would be wonderful to see Frankston work together to provide storage options for people during the day - something in existence across other communities.

We were deeply moved by the stories of our guests - their incredible strength, courage and resilience in the face of extreme adversity was humbling. Their ability to connect together and with our volunteers was a great privilege to be a part of. Many laughs were shared, as well as tears, and it is this that remains the most impactful component of the shelter. Healthy community is able to grow when some of the burdens of daily existence can be shared.

We thank everyone who has been a part of this year's shelter and particularly those who continue to work in this area every day. We look forward to returning in 2026.