

## Being a host for Nightstop

I saw a poster in our church porch; it had a picture of a young man sitting on a doorstep looking lost, alone and hopeless. Below were details of the agency Nightstop which stated it was an agency for young homeless people. It made me think of our spare room which is often not used, family and friends only staying from time to time. After deciding with my husband about finding out more, Sue Roberts, the co-ordinator, came to visit us. It was a helpful and reassuring visit as we were told we wouldn't be expected to be available all the time and that the young people were always so grateful for a bed for the night with a hot meal and shower and their own bedroom. So we agreed to be hosts.

After a few sessions of training about issues of homelessness, meeting other hosts and hearing about their experiences, how the system worked including being CRB checked and being assured that the guests would be drug, alcohol and criminal offences free we prepared ourselves to be on call for a young guest, a few nights every month.

Our first guest was a young girl who had to leave home because of family breakdown and over crowding. She was nervous about coming to a strangers' home. I sat her down in our kitchen with a cup of tea and while I was preparing the meal and listened to her story (not all want to share theirs and we are advised to be sensitive and not probing). She was tearful but over supper she became more positive, especially when she said my crumble reminded her of her grandmother's cooking who she did still see.

After talking about the agencies that were there to help her she became more hopeful and went to bed a little bit happier and relaxed about the future. We weren't able to have her to stay over the next few days but later we heard that accommodation had been found for her. So, we had the encouragement that our hospitality and sympathy had been part of the process of her getting her life together.

We've had many different young people since then, some with extremely sad stories, one had slept in a car for several nights in the winter time. Another was forced to sleep in his mother's car because her land lord wouldn't allow him to sleep on the sofa indefinitely. Another had severe specific learning difficulties who had evidently tried his mother beyond her endurance and Nightstop was a stop gap until his father found him a flat live in.

The guests weren't always from economically poor homes and many were well dressed, one with his own lap top who could stay with his girl friend's family at weekends. Another, young woman had fallen out with her boyfriend with whom she had been living and found herself homeless in an area that was new to her. One young college student had left home, frightened because her step father had physically abused her. She did her college work faithfully both nights that she stayed with us.

Only once have we seen a guest from time to time in the town (Lymington) library and once at an event at Brockenhurst. He has accommodation, goes to a church youth group and has signed up for a college course. We can only offer the minimum of help to these vulnerable and needy young people but as our Co-ordinator tells we can offer them help to put one foot on the first step to a better future.