

Shelter Volunteer Handbook

Thank you so much for volunteering in the Robes Winter Night Shelters. Volunteers are absolutely vital to support the work that we do, and we appreciate your generosity greatly.

With your help, we will take those experiencing homelessness in Southwark and Lambeth from the streets to shelter, providing a safe and welcoming environment, where guests can have a decent night's sleep, hot dinners and breakfasts to help sustain them, whilst our advice workers support our guests to move on to more permanent accommodation.



[rob.es.org.uk](https://www.rob.es.org.uk)



[@rob.esproject](https://twitter.com/rob.esproject)



[@rob.esproject](https://www.instagram.com/rob.esproject)



[@rob.esproject](https://www.facebook.com/rob.esproject)





Introduction

Your team / shift leader will be on hand to support you and give advice & guidance. However, the volunteer handbook gives you some key points to get started, and things for you to bear in mind whilst you're volunteering.

GENERAL POINTS:

- Our volunteers help provide a warm, empathetic and welcoming atmosphere during our guests' stay.
- Teamwork is really important when supporting our guests. Make sure you listen to your team / shift leader, supporting them and your fellow volunteers.
- A link to submit a volunteer agreement will be emailed to you by your team leader. Please read the form and check the box to agree to terms of volunteering, ideally before your first shift. The agreement outlines what to expect from us and what we expect from you as a volunteer.
- Attend an induction or any training sessions your team leader organises, to ensure that you are well equipped to start your shifts.
- There are many resources on the Robes website you can also access to help you prepare – go to www.rob.es.org.uk/for-volunteers to find out more.
- If you sign up to a shift, try and attend it. If for some reason you can't please let your team leader know as soon as possible, as it can take some time to find a replacement.
- Be punctual for your shifts, and please let your team / shift leader know as soon as possible if you are running late.

KEEPING YOURSELF & OTHERS SAFE:

- The safety of our guests and our volunteers is of the utmost importance and is taken very seriously.
- At no point should you put yourself or others at **unnecessary risk**.
- **Please do not attend your shift if you feel unwell.** It is better for you that you rest, and important that our guests and other volunteers are not put at risk of also becoming poorly. Please call your team leader as early as possible to let them know if you are not able to attend your shift.



- Please don't go into any enclosed spaces with a guest alone (i.e. **no 'lone-working'**). People who have led traumatic lives can behave unpredictably at times – this is to protect you.
- If you are concerned about someone's safety or behaviour notify your Team Leader. There are also tools on our website that explain how to best calm a guest down if they are upset or confrontational.
- Chatting with guests is encouraged, but be sure to **not give out personal information**, especially phone number, address, email address, social media etc. This is also to protect you.



RESPECTING BOUNDARIES:

- It is important to maintain a professional volunteer – guest dynamic. You are there to be friendly and welcoming to guests and support them in a professional manner, but do not get overly involved.
- It's great when a volunteer builds rapport with our guests, but do remember that it is not your role to try and resolve any challenges a guest may be facing. Advice workers are in place to assist our guests access any support they may need, and often know more about a guests situation than what the guest has disclosed to you. If you feel a guest needs additional support, please talk to a Robes staff member, or ask your team leader to.
- **Do not give or lend money** to guests. If guests need financial support, please talk to a Robes Project staff member, or ask the guest to do so.
- **Respect the guest's privacy.** Keep what they share with you confidential but do report anything that suggests that either the guest or anyone else could be at risk of harm.
- Do not give guests lifts, take them home, share contact information / social media details, or meet them outside of activities arranged by Robes. **This is for your protection and to protect vulnerable adults we are working with.**

APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR:

- Volunteers should not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs during their shift, and should not display any discriminatory or aggressive behaviour.



Engaging with Guests

Informal chats with a guest will often help a guest feel welcome and will help to keep up their morale. Experiencing homelessness can be lonely at times, and your empathy and support can make a difference. Some guests may appear less social, either by nature or perhaps they have suffered a setback or had some bad news. It is good to use your empathetic skills and to tailor those skills to each individual guest.



There is no blueprint for topical conversation or interaction with guests in the shelter but if you are new to volunteering and wondered about this here are a few tips...

- A smiley face is always more appealing than a worried one! Be aware of your body language, don't be afraid to smile.
- As you meet new guests ask if they are comfortable in the shelter and with the facilities available to them.
- If the shelter has any board games, reading material, or extra resources which are available to guests see if they'd like to try them or if they would like to join any of the planned activities that sometimes happen e.g. singing workshops.
- You can chat about what is going on around you and if the person is willing to talk you may find a common topic of interest such as football, fashion or fishing, you never know.
- Keep sensitive topics such as religion, sexuality and politics as general as possible or be prepared to steer them onto safer ground if need be. **No attempt should be made to persuade a guest to join your own religious or political groups.**
- Avoid an interrogative style of questioning or asking overly personal questions. If a guest is not interested in talking do respect their choice. Some guests may prefer to be left alone and will appreciate this as part of being accepted in the shelter.
- Remember that the shelter can engender a sense of community and belonging. For many this is all important.

What To Do in Your Role



WELCOMERS:

You are the guests' first impression! When a guest first arrives, do introduce yourself and give them a warm welcome.

If taking the register, you ask the guest's name (don't say 'Are you John?', but say 'What's your name, please?'). Check their special requirements (including dietary), get them to sign in and offer them a name badge. Be sure they know mealtimes, where the toilets & fire exits are and where to make tea/coffee.

EVENING HOSTS:

Help guests, settle in their home for the night and make sure everyone is welcomed and comfortable. Do chat with guests and encourage inclusion. However, if a guest would rather not be social, this should be accepted as part of the shelter. Do remember that this may be one night of many spent in the shelter, after long days in the cold.

Make sure they know:

- That they are welcome!
- That they can put their belongings on one of the camp beds.
- Where the toilets / fire exits are.
- Where they can make tea/coffee.
- If they have stayed at the venue before, please make sure they have the laundry bag with their name on for their bedding.
- What to do with their used bedding.
- If they have not stayed before, please make sure they have new bedding and a towel.



To reduce the likelihood of Covid-19 and flu transmission, please ventilate the space as much as possible while keeping the temperature reasonable and encourage spacing of beds (preferably 2m apart) and while eating (1m).



EVENING COOKS:

Aim to cook for guests + volunteers + extra servings. Please check with the Team Leader how many guests with dietary requirements we are expecting (eg, vegetarian, no port, halal etc).

Please prepare:

- **Main Course:** a vegetarian option and a meat option for 15 people (Nov-Dec circuit) or 20 people (Jan-March circuit).
The food should be tasty, and not too spicy, e.g. lasagna, shepherd's pie, casseroles, stews, pies, mild curries, pasta dishes, rice dishes or roasts. Please ensure there is enough of the vegetarian options so that even guests who are not vegetarian can choose it if they don't like the meat option.
If you are worried about leftovers, it is advisable to opt for high protein options that also work as an accompaniment to the meat dish such as bean chilli, veggie/chickpea/lentil curry, couscous/bulgur wheat/rice with vegetables/pulses etc.
Remember that guests are usually happy to take away leftovers in disposable containers the following morning.
- **Pudding:** a hot pudding is especially appreciated, for example cake with hot custard, crumble, pie, etc., but ice cream, yoghurts and fruit are always an option.

Please do eat at the table with everyone, if possible. When finished, please wash up and clean kitchen ready for breakfast. If you purchased any ingredients, please keep receipts to reclaim the expenses.

OVERNIGHT SHIFT:

Your job is simply to make sure everything is okay overnight. You will be provided with a camp bed and sleeping mat and a pillow, duvet and covers reserved for volunteers but you are welcome to bring your own sleeping bag or linen (whether the linen is washed every week will depend on your venue's laundry policy).



If a guest needs assistance during the night, be sure you are not left alone. If you need to go to a quieter space with the guest, make sure the other volunteer is aware of this.

Remember, in case of emergency, Robes staff are operating an on-call emergency system.

In the morning, wake up before the guests and handover with the morning volunteers. Do record any incidents that happened overnight. **Open doors and windows to increase ventilation where possible.**

Wake up guests for breakfast, by turning on lights. Do not wake guests by touching them.



BREAKFAST COOKS & HOSTS:

Come in before guests wake up to prepare and cook breakfast, ready to serve, when guests are waking up. Serve with tea/coffee/juice. Join guests for breakfast if you like!

Guests should know where the next night's shelter will be held, before saying goodbye, and advice workers will be in attendance.

After guests leave, breakfast and the set up should be cleared away. Be sure each guest's bedding is put away in their own labelled laundry bag. Guests should do this for themselves. If they do not, please use gloves, aprons and masks when handling bedding and other laundry, and wash hands afterwards.

The venue should be cleaned, including toilets and any laundry needed to be done should be collected to be washed during the week at 60°C. Again, please use gloves and masks.

Incidents and concerns should be handed over to the Team Leader who fills in a daily log sheet. The daily log is completed and emailed to Robes and team leaders by 12 noon, all other paperwork is either emailed or handed over to a Robes staff member.

If you test positive for Covid-19 in the 14 days after attending your shift, please report this to your Team Leader.

Key Shelter Operating Times



6pm	Volunteers arrive to prepare for the evening and to receive a handover
7pm	Guests begin to arrive and are welcomed and signed in.
8pm	Dinner is served. Volunteers should join guests in a communal meal. Guests who have not arrived should be contacted via the Venue Phone
9.45pm	Night Shift Volunteers arrive. There is a handover period when the new team are briefed by the evening shift leader. When the evening team leave, the building is secured for the night.
10pm	Lights out. All guests and volunteers should adhere to this. Late arrivals are only admitted if agreed in advance. Other late arrivals may be admitted at the discretion of overnight volunteers, however, safety and disturbance to other guests should be considered.
6am - 6.30am	Volunteers wake up and handover to morning volunteers. Breakfast is prepared
7am - 7.30am	Guests are woken and breakfast is served. Encourage guests to help tidy away their own bedding. Robes Advice Worker(s) arrives to shelter (not weekends) and focus on guest support.
8.30am	Guests leave premises and hall is tidied up for the day ahead. Team Leaders should email the attendance sheet, volunteer sign in and log to all venues by 12 noon. Incidents or concerns are reported back to Robes Shelter Coordinator.

Shelter Rules

We keep the rules to a minimum, but for everyone's comfort and safety, we ask the following:

- No alcohol or drugs are allowed in or around the premises.
- No violent, threatening, racist or other anti-social behaviour / language.
- No offensive weapons.
- In accordance with the law, there is no smoking inside the buildings. Provision will be made outside, close to the premises, but this may be on the basis of periodic controlled sessions.
- Robes services are for those aged 18 years and above.
- Guests should engage with the additional support services available.
- Guests should arrive by 8pm and leave by 8.30am, the following day.
- Lights out at 10pm.
- No entry for anyone who is not on the list.

Please ensure you have contact details for the team / shift leaders and let them know as soon as possible if you have any problems with your agreed shifts

Robes Project

Robes Project was set up by a handful of concerned churches in 2007, motivated by a strong sense that something had to be done to assist those facing homelessness. Besides offering a warm meal and an overnight stay during the coldest time of the year, through our advice work we also support our guests in finding a way out of homelessness and related issues.

We rely on the support and hospitality of volunteers like yourselves to help some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

During your volunteering, **your team leader(s) will be your first point of contact** for support, but if you feel that you would like to talk to someone else, you can contact the Robes Shelter Coordinator Macey Osei-Kissi directly - mobile: 07594 511 800, email: macey.osei-kissi@robes.org.uk. There are also additional resources on our website to support you: www.robes.org.uk/for-volunteers.

ANNEX: SYMPTOMS OF RESPIRATORY ILLNESS INCLUDING COVID-19

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/people-with-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#symptoms-of-respiratory-infections-including-covid-19>

Symptoms of COVID-19, flu and common respiratory infections include:

- continuous cough
- high temperature, fever or chills
- loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell
- shortness of breath
- unexplained tiredness, lack of energy
- muscle aches or pains that are not due to exercise
- not wanting to eat or not feeling hungry
- headache that is unusual or longer lasting than usual
- sore throat, stuffy or runny nose
- diarrhoea, feeling sick or being sick