

# NIGHTSTOP

Preventing homelessness through community hosting

## More than bednights:

An evaluation of the Nightstop Service

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nightstop is a same-night emergency accommodation service that links young people in crisis with trained volunteer hosts who accommodate them in their own home. Depaul UK oversees the network of Nightstop services, which by the end of 2017 included 31 Nightstops across the UK.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, the Nightstop network in the UK covered 129 local authorities, placing 1,388 young people with a host for a total of 10,892 nights.

This report details the findings of an evaluation of the Nightstop service, conducted by Depaul UK in conjunction with Envoy Partnership in the second half of 2017. The evaluation aimed to understand how the Nightstop model is applied in practice, to understand the difference that Nightstop makes to young people and hosts involved in the project, and to examine the social value created by the project. It drew on qualitative interviews and online surveys with young people who use the service, volunteer hosts, Nightstop staff, and referring agencies.

The main evaluation findings are detailed below:

- 1 The impact on young people who use the service is significant. In the short term, Nightstop leads to the following outcomes for service users:
  - **Reduced risk of harm:** Many young people using the service had previously been rough-sleeping and/or at risk of domestic abuse
  - **Improved sleep:** Young people using Nightstop have the opportunity to get significantly improved sleep, as the host's accommodation is safe and secure. This can give them the energy and mental capacity to make positive changes to their lives, and to have the resilience to cope with the difficulties they face
  - **Improved personal care:** Young people are given an opportunity to shower and to wash their clothes. Some had previously been staying in volatile environments where binge-drinking and drug-taking were common
  - **Ability to eat healthily:** Young people are often better fed at the hosts' houses than they would otherwise be, and the Nightstop services often provide food as well. For some young people, eating a meal together as a family was a new experience
  - **Ability to stay warm and dry:** For those who had been sleeping rough or on public transport, having somewhere warm and dry to sleep was considered hugely important.
- 2 Nightstop also leads to changes in service users' feelings and attitudes:
  - **Increased sense of choice and control:** Many young people were trapped in difficult situations before accessing Nightstop, for example relying on friends or in a potentially violent relationship. Nightstop gives people an alternative – a way to escape their circumstances and take more control of their lives

<sup>1</sup> Nightstop also includes a service in Ontario, Canada. However, this service is not included in this evaluation.

### Acknowledgements

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- **Being treated with respect and dignity:** Nightstop can make young people feel a part of society, rather than being defined by their living situation
  - **Increased self-esteem and sense of self-worth:** Many young people's experiences had led them to have quite negative attitudes towards themselves by the time they accessed Nightstop. The experience of being well treated through the Nightstop service made them feel more valued, and led to them valuing themselves more
  - **Increased faith in others:** Being treated well gave many young people a more positive feeling about the world and the people in it
  - **Increased optimism about the future, and motivation to make positive changes:** The increase in self-esteem and faith in others experienced by young people using Nightstop can also lead to them feeling more positive about the future, and may lead them to consider options that they would not have done previously
- 3 The interviews with young people who had used Nightstop some time in the past highlighted a number of potential longer-term outcomes for users of the service:
- **Social and emotional capabilities:** The experience of staying with different people, adapting to different social situations, travelling to different areas and generally having to leave their comfort zone can increase the social and emotional capabilities of many Nightstop users
  - **Practical skills and knowledge:** Many young people gain skill such as budgeting, cooking, and basic domestic skills through Nightstop
  - **Engagement with education, employment and training:** Often Nightstop helps young people with their education or work, for example if having a stable place to stay enabled them to focus better on work or continue with their studies
  - **Relationships:** Often, those who use Nightstop see their relationships with family members (particularly parents) improve, as the service gives them "time out" to help diffuse arguments
  - **Health (physical and mental):** Those who used Nightstop for a prolonged length of time felt the benefits of eating healthily and resting well on their physical health, particularly reduced fatigue and stabilised body weight. The service can also lead to reduced anxiety and depression.
  - **Improved access to secure accommodation:** The longer-term impact of Nightstop on young people's housing situation is difficult to judge. However, the qualitative research showed that, at least in some instances, the work of Nightstop can help young people access more secure accommodation.
- 4 The evaluation also looked at the social value created by Nightstop. A full Social Return on Investment model was not possible due to the challenges of collecting data from those who have used Nightstop, particularly those who had used Nightstop some time in the past. However, three hypothetical case studies were developed for the report, that look in more depth at the Social Value created when Nightstop: 1) supports a Nightstop user to improve their mental health, 2) supports a Nightstop user into employment, and 3) helps improve a Nightstop user's physical safety.

The case studies show that:

- If Nightstop can help an individual avoid depression and/or anxiety, then Nightstop can claim credit for resource savings of £530 per year for the NHS and £50 per year to local authorities, and social value to the young person of more than £1,700.
- If Nightstop supports a client into long-term employment, it creates social value of more than £700 per year for the young person, and resource savings of around £4,700 for the Government
- For each person that Nightstop supports to improve their physical safety, Nightstop can take credit for resource savings of nearly £1,500 for the Government and social value for the individual of £4,600.<sup>2</sup>

Using data collected from the surveys and looking specifically at the outcomes "mental health" and "physical safety", the evaluation suggests that around £4million of social value was directly attributable to the Nightstop Network in 2017.

- 5 While Nightstop hosts vary in age, gender, and household situation, the typical Nightstop host is an older woman living with their partner or alone. Volunteer hosts typically chose to take part because they wanted to "feel useful" or because they felt guilty about having a spare room sitting empty. There were also smaller numbers who had experience of working in the homeless sector or who had had personal experience of homelessness. Hosts also gain some benefits from Nightstop, particularly knowing more about the challenges facing young people, and feeling more part of their community.
- 6 Users of the Nightstop service had come from a range of housing situations. Some were living with family but were at risk of domestic abuse. Some had been staying with friends, often on a night-by-night basis. Others had been sleeping on the streets, in a park, or on public transport or public buildings. Around one third of Nightstop users use the service for just one night, around a third between one and 15 nights, and the final third are longer-term users, using the service for more than 15 nights.
- 7 There is significant variation between the Nightstop services
  - The newest service involved in the evaluation was under one year old, whereas several had been running for over a decade
  - While most services receive between one and two referrals a week, the largest receives between 11 and 20
  - Some Nightstops limited the time a young person could stay with a host to three weeks; others placed no limit on this
  - Most services provided additional support alongside placing young people with a host; the most common were signposting, advice and information, and a chaperone service to help young people find their way to hosts' houses

<sup>2</sup> The actual value created is significantly higher, but Nightstop cannot take all of the "credit" for the changes that take place as other factors will also contribute to the creation of value.



## Recommendations

Finally, the report makes a number of recommendations for both service delivery, and for data collection and evaluation:

- Recommendations for service delivery
  - Increasing the number and variety of hosts
  - Making some adjustments to the host application process
  - Ensuring accurate information is shared between referring agencies, hosts, and young people
- Recommendations for data collection and evaluation
  - Improved central monitoring of data
  - Improved consent for information sharing





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