

Whitechapel Mission

The Whitechapel Mission is a Day Centre open from 6:00am to 11:00am, 365 days of the year, and is open for all without restrictions, primarily for people who are homeless or in need. Every day of the year a full English breakfast with a choice of cereals is available from 8:00am until 10:00am, with shower facilities available every day for ladies and weekdays for men.

But the working day at The Whitechapel Mission starts well before that, with the first member of staff arriving at 4:00am to open up and begin the preparations for the day, making sure that there are enough towels and fresh clothing in the showers and that there is a good supply of razors, soap, towels, toothbrushes and the like set out ready for when the doors open at 6:00am.

Kitchen staff begin arriving at 5:00am to fill the urns to have a ready supply of tea and coffee available for when people come in, and to switch on the ovens so that they are hot enough for when the sausages and bacon need to begin cooking. Then it is checking that the bread is set out ready to be toasted and buttered, and that sufficient tins of beans, mushrooms and tomatoes have been brought from the store to the kitchen to meet the anticipated demand, and there is a varied selection of cereals.

At around 5:45am the volunteers who will be undertaking a kitchen challenge will arrive, ready to be briefed as to their duties and don an apron in time to be ready to see to the client's needs when they arrive once the doors are open. Then there is the task of getting the cooking of the bacon and sausages under way, toasting and buttering of nine loaves of bread and buttering four more, and beginning the task of frying enough eggs for the anticipated numbers who will be in for breakfast. Next up the large pans of beans, tomatoes and mushrooms, as well as one of porridge, have to be heated up. Finally hash browns are cooked in the deep fat fryer, so that hopefully everything is ready to start serving at 8:00am, with breakfast continuing to be served until 10:00am.

The showers are also available between 8:00am and 10:00am, and all the time there will be people requesting a razor, soap, a towel, or a toothbrush and toothpaste, or asking for their mobile phone to be charged. They might also want a new bag to keep their belongings in, or a change of socks or a new sleeping bag. Some who have been given accommodation might need a food parcel to help out, or it might be that they need a tea or coffee without milk or sugar as the urns dispense both with milk and two sugars.

At 9:00am the other areas of The Whitechapel Mission commence work; the Advice Centre, which is open every weekday for housing and resettlement advice and help with job searches, and the Office which deals with all the administration required for an organisation as large and diverse as the Mission. Once the showers and the serving of breakfast cease at 10:00am, there follows the task of cleaning down the showers and the kitchen ready to do it all again the following day. The Day Centre remains open for a further hour, but at 11:00am it is time for everybody to leave, and the dining hall and toilets can then be cleaned down ready for tomorrow. There may still be jobs for the kitchen staff and volunteers

to do, such as sorting out deliveries that may have come, either equipment or donations of food, clothing or toiletries but, by around noon, another day in the kitchens has finished. The Advice Centre and Administration staff continue until the early afternoon but, once they have finished, quiet descends on the building until the cycle kicks off again.

Whilst the provision of the hot breakfast is available every day of the year, most of the other operations mentioned are available every week-day. There are, however, a whole range of activities that are provided less frequently by the Education and Lifeskills Centre, and these include:

Legal advice every other Monday morning

Maths classes every Tuesday lunchtime

Get Computing, the provision of basic computer skills, is available every Wednesday lunchtime

Get Cooking, a basic cookery course, takes place every Thursday afternoon

Women Together, a time set aside just for the ladies, is every Friday afternoon

The mobile dental van comes to The Whitechapel Mission every Wednesday

Finally there are teams of volunteers who come to take the Clothing

Challenge and sort out the bags of clothing donated at all times throughout the year. This activity can take place at any time, so often it can be late afternoon or early evening when a particular team finds it most convenient to come.

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Have a look at the latest review, and much more, on the Whitechapel Mission website.