

Daughters of Charity Community Services:

**Report on emerging immediate and
acute needs of participants in relation
to housing exclusion and homelessness**



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November 2014

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Emergent Needs: Participants, Daughters of Charity Community Services

Introduction

The Daughters of Charity Community Services (DoCCS) is a non-profit organisation which provides a range of educational and social care services to children, young people and adults living in disadvantaged communities in Dublin's north inner city and beyond. These services include;

- An early years education and childcare service for children of low income families
- A high support school for children at risk.
- A community training centre for early school leavers
- An adult and community education service for people returning to learning
- A day care centre for socially vulnerable older persons
- A community outreach and development programme for local residents.

Since September 2014 there has been a significant increase in participants presenting to the organisation with acute and immediate needs. These needs manifest as a requirement for shelter, income, food, clothes or a combination of such. Within the social work support service there is a noted spike of participants presenting as homeless. This increase can hardly be surprising in light of the recent findings such as those of Focus Ireland demonstrating that in Dublin, this year alone, between 39 and 45 families per month are presenting as homeless; so far this year that is nearly 400 families. The breakdown of which in terms of adults and children brings a realisation that thousands of men, women and children have become homeless in Dublin this year. This social phenomenon is not isolated to Dublin; figures depict an increase in homelessness nationally, however Dublin is experiencing a particular concentration of this issue.

FEANTSA the European federation of organisations working with the people who are homeless have developed a typology of housing to include **four main concepts** with **thirteen operational categories** all of which can be taken to indicate the absence of a home (See Appendix 1). These are:

- 1. Rooflessness** e.g. people sleeping rough and people in emergency accommodation.
- 2. Houselessness** e.g. accommodation for the homeless, women's shelter, direct provision.
- 3. Insecure Housing** e.g. living temporarily with family/friends or under threat of eviction.
- 4. Inadequate Housing** e.g. living in a mobile home or unfit accommodation.

Seeking to explore the scale of these emerging issues within this organisation a brief pilot review, based on criteria of income and supports, was performed with one in-house service. This pilot

indicated that almost one in every three participants of this service requires support with basics such as food, household, and personal items and one in every six participants is homeless as defined by the FEANTSA Typology.

Further to this pilot review and internal feedback current emerging needs for participants of the Daughters of Charity Community Services are as follows:

- Unable to sustain and maintain tenancy due to insufficient financial income, and/or competitive rental market policies. In a small number of cases incomplete life skills/coping strategies were also a contributing factor.
- Increasing complications in accessing housing, thus a number of participants are residing in insecure/inadequate housing.
- Increased risk of becoming homeless.
- Having to access the homeless system, becoming homeless, serious risk of rough sleeping.
- Wide scale adversity and exclusion including going without food and social engagement.

Below is outlined some key contributing factors influencing the current trend of increased numbers of homelessness in Ireland and thus the increased numbers presenting to this organisation with acute and immediate needs. These contributing factors are diminished housing stock, a competitive private rental market, and insufficient income.

Diminished Housing Stock

Since 2008 the landscape of housing has significantly shifted in Ireland. Most notably is the disappearance on the Dublin skyline of the building cranes, a clear indication of the demise of the construction industry. Currently there are intensified demands on state assistance for the provision of housing and a decrease in the availability of housing stock. Almost 20,000 applications for housing have been made to Dublin City Council this year, an increase of 3,000 on last year. Bob Jordon, CEO of the charity Threshold outlines the impact of this issue: *“The supply of new social housing has come to a virtual standstill, with just 400 additional units built or acquired by local authorities and voluntary housing bodies so far this year (April 2014),”*. *“However, we know that – in order to make real inroads into waiting lists – approximately 10,000 new housing units need to be provided on an annual basis”*. In October 2014, Brendan Howlin, Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, announced that 2,500 units are due to be delivered next year, 2015. It is clear despite investment there will be considerable shortfall between the number of units required and the actual number available.

Competitive Private Rental Market

Growing demands for accommodation through the private rental market has created a highly competitive cash market which is driving the cost of accommodation ever higher. Consequently, this has placed those trying to secure accommodation on rent allowance at a significant disadvantage to a cash renter who can provide both rent and deposit upfront. In addition this has escalated the risk of loss of accommodation for those in private rental accommodation due to excess pressure to provide "top-ups" to landlords. These "top-ups" place a considerable strain on household budgets contributing to persons in this type of situation going without basic needs such as food, clothes and household items. Anecdotal evidence indicates that landlords are pushing out rental allowance/lower income tenants in favour of cash payers who can afford to pay higher rent as market prices inflate. This is reflected in the statement by Senator Aideen Hayden, Chairperson for Threshold in the following comment *“Welfare recipients are being pushed out of the market because landlords want cash payers. Where welfare tenants get accommodation, they are increasingly forking out top-up payments from their weekly allowances”*.

Insufficient income

Simultaneously, changes have taken place in income sources which have had a crucial impact on the situation. Some examples include the elimination of the double welfare payment, the reduction of allowances for trainees, job loss and cuts to child benefit, and maternity grants. New childcare charges, increase in prescription charges, the commencement of household charges, the introduction of increasingly restrictive criteria for accessing supplementary payments such as fuel and back to school allowances and medical cards have all contributed to hardship experienced by many households. Thus, families and individuals are trying to survive by meeting their basic needs and at serious risk of homelessness due to economic factors solely. Aside from the reality that basic needs (food, shelter, heat, safety) are going unmet these regimes of survival seriously impact on the mental and physical wellbeing of the men, women and children who are exposed to this way of life. According to Bob Jordon, CEO, Threshold, *“There has been a 50 per cent increase in the numbers sleeping rough in Dublin since April 2014. Many people are becoming homeless because they cannot cover day-to-day living expenses, including paying their rent”*.

Case Examples of DoCCS Participants

The issues and needs are perhaps best demonstrated with examples of the families/participants that are accessing support from this organisation.

Participant 1

This young 19 year old presented with no income, no accommodation, no support network and her only possessions were her clothes. For the previous few months she had accessed commercial B & B accommodation, which consisted of paying €15 a night to sleep in a dorm with 14 strangers. When attempts were made to access accommodation with her through the Homeless Helpline, Homeless Persons Unit and some typical charities this organisation was informed that there was no shelter available and all that could be provided was a sleeping bag. Following three days of contact with the Homeless Persons Unit she was offered a bed for one night only and further to her attendance at the Homeless Persons Unit almost daily for two weeks she was not offered any further accommodation.

Family 1

This young 20 year old mother of two children has links with her family but they cannot offer her financial/accommodation support. She was doing well in a private rental tenancy until the landlord requested her to leave. Despite efforts by a charity to challenge the landlord she and her children were forced to leave that accommodation and became homeless. When she contacted the Homeless Persons Unit they provided her with a family room in a hotel. They also placed her on a waiting list for the New Presenters Team which is a specialised team within the Homeless Persons Unit assigned to call out to families who are new to homelessness. For a number of weeks she and her two children slept in the one bed while at night the music from the bar underneath filled the room. During this time she had no access to a fridge, cooking or washing facilities nor was there contact with the New Presenters Team. Through multiagency intervention the New Presenters Team agreed to consider this family a priority and it took a further three weeks before they could respond due to their overwhelming caseload. Unable to cope with the living circumstance this mother voluntarily placed her children into the care of the state to “save them” from homelessness. When the Homeless Persons Unit was made aware that her children no longer resided with her they withdrew the family accommodation and she was offered single persons accommodation. On the day of her transfer to single person accommodation there were no beds available and thus she was offered a sleeping bag.

Participant 2

This young 18 year old resided with his mother. Things at home have been difficult and have become unsafe due to his mother's mental health. Aside from this he and his mother are being evicted from their home by Dublin City Council as it is deemed to be an unfit dwelling. Dublin City Council are not providing them with alternative accommodation. With no availability of accommodation through Dublin City Council, or the private rental market he contacted the Homeless Persons Unit. He was offered one night in an emergency hostel where people are actively consuming illicit drugs and alcohol. As a last resort he is residing with a family member without the landlord's knowledge placing both himself and that family member at significant risk of losing that tenancy.

Family 2

This young woman is a first time mother. She managed to secure accommodation with a support service for young mothers like herself. This accommodation is based on a stay of six months. Prior to securing this accommodation her only concern was that her new baby would not have to live in homeless accommodation. She herself had experienced this type of accommodation as a child. During the six months she was unable to secure alternative accommodation and under pressure left the support accommodation to live with a relative in overcrowded conditions.

Participant 3

Following a very serious and life threatening incident of domestic violence this woman sought a place in a refuge. For the first few nights she had a small room to herself however as demand for space in the refuge increased she had to share this room with a stranger. After a week there she began to feel the pressure to leave and find alternative accommodation. Just short of two weeks she left the refuge and returned to live with the alleged perpetrator of domestic violence as she had no other option for accommodation.

Impact on DoCCS Provision of Service

Services such as the Homeless Persons Unit, Simon/Focus Ireland/Peter McVerry etc. are overwhelmed with the numbers seeking emergency support from their services in relation to basic needs such as income, shelter, food, clothes and safety. Most critically this has resulted in an absence of the fundamental necessities such as food, shelter, heat, security, belonging, and income which underpin human survival. Subsequently this has impacted the access to support services creating long delays which at times has the ripple effect of causing an emergency as more and more resources are taken from prevention, maintenance or sustainment. The impact on professional services within the Daughters of Charity Community Services is the creation of a situation of “holding” participants while awaiting an appropriate response as typical avenues of professional support are no longer available. This holding may include emotional support or support such as food, clothes and/or shelter. It has also influenced the type of need presenting which is now more acute and immediate rather than preventative and sustainment.

The reconfiguration of the homeless system means that accommodation is allocated on availability rather than need. Thus, participants who are homeless for economic reasons can find themselves sharing accommodation with those who are actively consuming alcohol and illicit drugs. This is a significant factor in the decision of the participant to take up an emergency bed and participants experience this type of emergency accommodation as frightening. The homeless system has also become centralised meaning it is no longer possible to advocate directly for participants.

Responses by DoCCS to the emergent acute needs of participants

Below are some of the in-house responses to these emergent needs:

- As a social work initiative and in conjunction with YPAR and multiple local agencies/organisation the establishment of an 18+ Group to specifically address the issue of homelessness. Currently this group are surveying the local situation and have revived the YPAR 18+ protocol allowing agencies to work between the gaps in responding to arising needs of participants.
- Emergency Response Contact List and Protocol compiled by Social Work (See Appendix 2).
- In-house awareness presentations by social work with managers, support persons and staff on homelessness and housing exclusion and the introduction of a response framework **S.E.E** - **S**ustainability, **E**arly Detection, and **E**mergency Response. (See Appendix 3).

- Two critically reflective sessions with managers and support persons arose from the awareness presentation. Out of these sessions came a number of initiatives which include:
 1. Gathering of resources such as hats, scarfs, blankets, dry food stocks. Currently a small amount of these items have been sourced and are available to managers and support person to distribute in emergencies.
 2. Some consideration was given to identifying/targeting those who need such items as above. This has led to the inclusion of questions on income and accommodation onto referral forms and a proactive early detection process which could be implemented via the process outlined above.
 3. Information access for participants in the form of a display board in the front hall.
 4. Linking with external agencies who meet certain needs such as the exploration with Food Cloud for fresh food produce and with the Capuchin Centre for food parcels.

Conclusion

It is difficult to comprehend that the request for items such as hats, scarfs, blankets, dry food stocks such as soup and beans are not for sending overseas to a country suffering war or famine but is in fact the needs of thousands of people living in Ireland, in Dublin, passing through the doors of 8 and 9 Henrietta Street now, in 2014. Or that emergency accommodation, a last resort option, typically provided by the Irish State is now routinely unavailable thus leaving people with no option but to sleep on the streets for economic reason solely. Perhaps the most harrowing are the thousands more families and individuals who behind closed doors are going hungry, are utterly worn down, let down, alone and scared. For over 100 years the Daughters of Charity have been an enduring presence of hope and sustenance to the local community- from a soup kitchen, through responding to youth homelessness to the services today. The Daughters of Charity Community Services operates from an integrated model approach through which there is real opportunity, working together, to be creative in responding to these emerging issues.

Section 2 - Supporting Evidence for Dublin City

Who are the homeless?

Census 2011:

- ⊙ For Dublin a total of 2,375 persons were homeless 1,590 being male and 785 being female
- ⊙ 26% (Over one-third) of all homeless adults surveyed were young people aged 18-30 years
- ⊙ 12 % cent represent children aged 14
- ⊙ 296 family units enumerated as part of the homeless count, representing 905 people
- ⊙ Half of those aged 15 or over indicated that they were in the work force
- ⊙ 84 % of the group were looking for their first job
- ⊙ 42 % had a disability in sharp contrast to the general population of which the rate was 13 %
- ⊙ 1 in 5 indicating having a psychological or emotional condition

Dublin Region Homeless Executive Rough Sleeper Count:

- ⊙ In December 2013, 139 persons were recorded as sleeping rough across the Dublin region which is nearly a 60% increase on 2012's count (87).
- ⊙ The April 2013 count, confirmed a minimum of 94 persons to be sleeping rough which was nearly 30% up on April 2012 (73).

Focus Ireland:

- ⊙ By the end of 2012, 8 families a month were becoming homeless.
- ⊙ This figure rose to 16 by the end of 2013
- ⊙ 42 families presented as homeless in January 2014. This figure has fluctuated between 39 – 45 families per month presenting as homeless since January 2014.

They are the participants attending our services.

Who is at risk?

‘High risk’ group for homelessness and housing instability. Research in Ireland and internationally, identify key pathways into homelessness as being:

- ⊙ Those experience housing and financial crises
- ⊙ Low income families, single parent families or families in poverty
- ⊙ Single persons living independently on welfare and in receipt of rent allowance
- ⊙ Institutional discharge. In place of stable housing, young men are at risk of embarking on an ‘institutional circuit’ of commuting between hostels and prison
- ⊙ Family breakdown, including domestic violence; family instability and family conflict
- ⊙ Substance abuse issues
- ⊙ Mental health issues
- ⊙ Those transitioning from youth to adulthood
- ⊙ Those previously homeless or homeless as young people
- ⊙ A history of State care
- ⊙ Problem behaviour and negative peer associations

The participants attending our services.

An Overview of Irish Housing Legislation

Nationally two main acts enshrine the rights of Irish citizens with regard to housing. They are as follows:

The Housing Act, 1988.

In this Act the local authorities carry out the governments statutory responsibilities to respond to homelessness in a number of ways by:

- ⊙ Housing people who are homeless directly
- ⊙ Funding voluntary and co-operative bodies to house them
- ⊙ Providing advice and information to them
- ⊙ Providing them with financial assistance to access private rented accommodation

The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009

- ⦿ Each housing authority adopt a homelessness action plan specifying the measures to be undertaken to address homelessness
- ⦿ Establishing homelessness consultative fora for each authority which must include voluntary homeless service providers
- ⦿ The Act also broadens the choices available to those in need of social housing supports by enacting a more developed framework for the provision of rented social housing by means of leasing or contract arrangements with private and not-for-profit accommodation providers

Internationally there are two main conventions that contribute to this issue. They are as follows:

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

- ⦿ Article 27 Children have a right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. The Government should help families who cannot afford to provide this.

The UN 16 Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses

- ⦿ The Special Rapporteur on adequate housing has highlighted that poverty is a common denominator in the experience of the homeless. Other causes or factors which make people more vulnerable to homelessness are unemployment, a lack of social security systems, a lack of affordable housing, forced evictions, non-availability of social housing, conflicts and natural disasters, as well as a lack of attention to the needs of the most vulnerable.
- ⦿ Besides the violation of their right to adequate housing, homeless persons may be deprived of a whole range of other human rights. Laws that criminalize homelessness, vagrancy or sleeping rough, along with street cleaning operations to remove homeless people from the streets, have a direct impact on their physical and psychological integrity. Merely by not having a secure place to live, nor any privacy, homeless persons are much more vulnerable to violence, threats and harassment. States' obligations towards the full realization of the right to adequate housing include taking measures to prevent homelessness. Among the steps to be taken immediately, general comment No. 4 (paras. 10–13) mentions determining the extent of homelessness, as well as adopting a national housing strategy which should reflect extensive genuine consultation with the homeless. General comment No. 7 (para. 17) also emphasizes that forced evictions should not result in individuals being made homeless.

Appendix 1 - Typology of Homelessness

FEANTSA developed a typology of homelessness and housing exclusion called ETHOS. This includes 4 main concepts, and 13 operational categories all of which can be taken to indicate the absence of a home. The four main concepts are:

1. Rooflessness, 2. Houselessness, 3. Insecure Housing 4. Inadequate Housing

13 Operational Category & Living Situation are:

ROOFLESS

(1) People Living Rough

Living Situation

- Public space or external space Living in the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters

(2) People in emergency accommodation

Living Situation

- Night shelter People with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelter, low threshold shelter

HOUSELESS

(3) People in accommodation for the homeless

Living Situation

- Homeless hostel
- Temporary Accommodation Where the period of stay is intended to be short term
- Transitional supported accommodation

(4) People in Women's Shelter

Living Situation

- Women's shelter accommodation

(5) People in accommodation for immigrants

Living Situation

- Temporary accommodation /reception centres Immigrants in reception or short term accommodation due to their immigrant status
- Migrant workers accommodation

(6) People due to be released from institutions

Living Situation

- Penal institutions No housing available prior to release
- Medical institutions (*) Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing
- Children's institutions / homes No housing identified (e.g by 18th birthday)

(7) People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)

Living Situation

- Residential care for older homeless people Long stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people (normally more than one year)
- Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people

INSECURE

(8) People living in insecure accommodation

Living Situation

- Temporarily with family/friends Living in conventional housing but not the usual or place of residence due to lack of housing
- No legal (sub)tenancy Occupation of dwelling with no legal tenancy illegal occupation of a dwelling
- Illegal occupation of land Occupation of land with no legal rights

(9) People living under threat of eviction

Living Situation

- Legal orders enforced (rented) Where orders for eviction are operative
- Re-possession orders (owned) Where mortgage has legal order to re-possess

(10) People living under threat of violence

Living Situation

- Police recorded incidents Where police action is taken to ensure place of safety for victims of domestic violence

INADEQUATE

(11) People living in temporary / non-conventional structures

Living Situation

- Mobile homes Not intended as place of usual residence
- Non-conventional building Makeshift shelter, shack or shanty
- Temporary structure Semi-permanent structure hut or cabin

(12) People living in unfit housing

- Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation Defined as unfit for habitation by national legislation or building regulations

(13) People living in extreme overcrowding

Living Situation

- Highest national norm of overcrowding; defined as exceeding national density standard for floor-space or useable rooms

Appendix 2 - Emergency Responses to Homelessness

In line with best practice all responses to homelessness should be carried out in collaboration with social work. This information is a guide and is intended for use in emergency situations which require an immediate response. This information is for use by managers and support persons only in partnership with social work. Please notify social work immediately of any participant at risk of homelessness or presents as homeless.

Access to Emergency Accommodation/Shelter

If the person is newly homeless it is best to present to as soon as possible to Parkgate Hall, 6-9 Conygham Road Dublin 8, (at the gate to Phoenix Park near Heuston Station) between 10am-12noon or 2pm-4pm to register for accommodation. Ask participant to bring I.D. and proof of last address if possible.

If you become aware of an issue after 3pm please call the Central Placement Service Freephone Number at: 1 800 707 707. This number can be phoned by participant daily after 2 pm. Please be aware this is for emergency shelter only and in some cases the participant may be offered sleeping bag only.

If there is an issue of domestic violence please contact Women's Aid at 1800 341 900 (10am-10pm)

Access to Welfare Payments (Emergency & Weekly Income)

Prior to 2pm please ask participant to present to Homeless Community Welfare Officer

Men - Oisín House, 212-213 Pearse Street, Dublin 2 Monday to Friday 10am – 12noon

Women and families - 41 Castle Street, Dublin 2 Monday to Friday 10am - 12 noon

New Communities (includes Asylum Seekers, Refugees and persons from EU Accession countries). Please call 8585100 or access the service directly on 77 Upper Gardiner Street, Dublin 1 from 10am-11.30am, 2pm to 3.30pm.

If participant presents after 2pm in need of income please call the Homeless Persons Unit at: 1800 724 724

Access to Clothing/Food Vouchers/Assistance with bills

- Call into Vincent de Paul – 91-92 Sean McDermot Street, 9am-5pm
- Free evening meals available at Merchants Quay Ireland, Riverbank Centre, 13 Merchants Quay, Dublin 8 Monday - Friday: 4.30 pm - 8.30 pm
- Capuchin Centre, Bow St, Mon – Sat: Meals/Food Parcels/Clothes/Showers

If someone presents with no shelter or in need of food please contact the Rough Sleeper Team at 086 813 9015, 9am – 11pm, 7 days a week.

Appendix 3 - In-house Response Framework - **S.E.E.**

Sustainment, **E**arly Detection and **E**mergency Response.

S.E.E. is the in-house response framework designed by our in-house social worker, Elizabeth Watson, and shared with managers, support persons and staff via awareness presentations. This framework was explored more fully with managers and support persons through critically reflective sessions. The framework includes:

Sustainment:

- Supporting people/families to keep their accommodation
- Creating opportunities for people/families to have the skills and strategies to cope with life

How?

- ⊙ Information & Guidance – Sign posting.
- ⊙ Linking with services.
- ⊙ Support – 1 significant person, taking the time to chat.
- ⊙ Life Skills – budgeting, cooking, etc.

Early Detection

- ⊙ Threshold said it concurred with the message from the Homeless Executive that families should contact appropriate services before their accommodation problems get too bad.
- ⊙ Timeframes can make the difference between someone becoming homeless or securing accommodation.

How?

- ⊙ Letting people/families know this is a place they can talk, will be heard and responded to.
- ⊙ Asking questions at the intake or referral stages.
- ⊙ Creating a welcoming, open and caring environment.
- ⊙ Offering hope.

Emergency Response

- Learning to RESPOND rather than react

How?

- ⊙ Having contacts and emergency numbers e.g. rough sleepers team
- ⊙ Knowing about external services, knowing who to contact in-house.
- ⊙ Emergency packs – such as non-perishable (cupboard) foods to take away, hot food on site, cloths such hats, scarves, gloves, and blankets.
- ⊙ Heat sources – If safe hot water bottle/ snuggle safe heat pad

What can you do? What can we do?