

Preventing homelessness

Focus Ireland strongly believes that it is vital that no person is forced to sleep rough and that no family or individuals are trapped in emergency accommodation with no idea of when they will secure a place to call home.

Our organisation has recognised that if resources are focused too much on delivering emergency responses this leads to the crisis being ‘managed’ rather than ended. It is clear logic that in order to end this terrible crisis there must be more action to prevent the constant rise in the number of people becoming homeless. There must also be increased pathways out of homelessness through provision of social housing alongside affordable and secure rental accommodation.

This is why Focus Ireland’s strategy is very focused – not on the emergency response but on the two other main approaches to addressing homelessness:

1) Prevention

2) Providing housing with support

In recent years Focus Ireland has actively shifted our services more towards working to prevent homelessness. Focus Ireland has responded to the growing number of

people at risk through our ten Advice & Information centres across the country. The aim of these services is two-fold: to prevent people becoming homeless and to support people who are already homeless to sustain an exit out of homelessness. Our specially trained staff work closely with individuals and families at risk, trying to ensure that their personal housing problem does not become a homelessness crisis.

In 2017 our Advice & Information services informed **4,996** people about their rights, their options and the support services available to help them avoid becoming homeless. During the year the Advice & Information service introduced an intensive case management feature to those customers who required an extended period of engagement to prevent them from becoming homeless. The A&I case management work prevented **321** households from losing their homes in 2017. Meanwhile, advice and information staff helped **443** households who were homeless to find a home and a route out of homelessness. An external

evaluation of these services demonstrated their effectiveness and value (Finding a Home, Walsh and Harvey).

In 2017 Focus Ireland added extra impetus to our work to prevent youth homelessness. Teenagers can become homeless because they fall out with their families. This can often lead to long-term homelessness which seriously damages their adult life.

In response to this problem we provide a 'family mediation service', in collaboration with Tusla. This innovative service supported **22** teenagers at high risk of homelessness to stay in the family home during 2017. These successes are the result of intensive family mediation which can defuse a crisis and help families to rebuild relationships.

Focus Ireland also continued our proud track record of always being ready to challenge the underlying factors which are forcing people into homelessness. Focus Ireland carries out this work in a resolute manner that always puts forward solutions rather than simply criticising for the sake of it. We always acknowledge that we work successively with the State to deliver services and homes. However, Focus Ireland actively highlights when specific policies

are not working and campaigns to change legislation or introduce new laws if required to help end this terrible crisis. Focus Ireland spoke out strongly in the media to stress our belief that the continued deepening of the crisis in 2017 was due to the Government repeatedly failing to tackle the deeper issues that are driving more and more people into homelessness, such as rising rents, lack of social and affordable housing, vulture funds, underserved mental health and addiction services, and poverty.

We also challenged the Government's repeated claims that it is doing all it can to tackle homelessness. We criticised the Government for voting down the so-called Focus Ireland anti-homelessness amendment in December 2016 which called for an end to evictions of tenants who are respecting their tenancies in buy-to-let properties being sold or repossessed.

If this amendment had been passed in Dec 2016 it would have prevented at least 350 families and over 500 children from becoming homeless in 2017 alone. We continue our work to lobby this Government – or the next – to bring in this anti-homelessness amendment as it would be one of the most effective prevention measures.

