

2019:

Focus Housing Association delivered

99 new homes

**for rent to people moving out of
or at risk of homelessness.**



Focus Housing Association

An adequate supply of social housing is vital if we are to provide sustained exits out of homelessness. The delivery of housing remains a core part of our strategy and is a cornerstone in our work of challenging homelessness and changing lives.

New homes

In 2019, Focus Housing Association – the Approved Housing Body which is the property arm of Focus Ireland – delivered an additional 99 new homes for rent to people moving out of or at risk of homelessness. Focus Ireland itself provided the necessary supports to these tenants to help them sustain the tenancy and move on with their lives.

The new housing was delivered through a mixture of acquisitions, long-term and short-term leases and rentals. This brings to **594** the number of homes that Focus Ireland has provided in the last four years.

Not all the new units become part of our own long-term housing stock, as one model we successfully use is to sub-let a property from a private landlord and then rent the property to a person moving out of homelessness. This **social rental model** reduces the risk to the landlord and to the tenant, and has proven highly effective, particularly in the South West.

After the tenant is settled, they take on the lease agreement directly with the landlord and the unit is then no longer counted as part of Housing Association's stock. Focus Ireland continues to provide support for as long as needed. The success of this model means that, over the years, our work in securing homes is not fully reflected in the overall growth of our stock. But since we are more concerned with ensuring people have homes of their own than building up a big portfolio ourselves, this fulfils our mission.

By the end of 2019, we were well on track to hitting our target of acquiring 750 homes by the end of 2020. Focus Housing Association stock comprised 1,042 homes. We owned, leased or managed homes in Dublin City Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, South Dublin County Council, Fingal County Council and in counties Kildare, Carlow, Wexford, Kilkenny, Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Clare, Sligo and Tipperary. Focus Ireland provides tenancy support and other services as required to the tenants of all these homes.

'For myself, the real feel-good moment has to be on move-in days, when I get to hand over the keys. When you see the joy in people's eyes and their smiles, it never fails to make my day!'

**Anthony Daly, Focus Housing Association
Property Management Officer, Dublin**

Improving housing quality

Focus Housing Association is committed to a rolling programme of upgrading its housing. In 2019 we continued to avail of the SEAI Community Fund. In addition to the Grange Cohan project in Waterford, energy efficiency retrofitting projects were undertaken in Dublin and in Douglas, Cork. As well as improving energy efficiency, these projects have had a very positive impact on our tenants' comfort in their homes and has reduced their utility costs.

Grange Cohan, Co. Waterford

Grange Cohan in Waterford has been Focus Ireland's flagship housing project in the South East for more than 20 years. It has provided high-quality homes to hundreds of vulnerable households over that time. In recent years, Focus Ireland developed a plan to bring the housing units up to contemporary standards of insulation and energy efficiency. In 2019, Minister of State for Training and Skills, John Halligan TD, formally launched the completed redevelopment. It involved a complete energy efficiency retrofitting of

Grange Cohan. The project was supported by the SEAI Community Fund, and Bord Gáis Energy, who were our energy partners during the redevelopment. The redevelopment includes new doors and windows, cavity insulation, new air-to-water heat pumps, LED lighting and new solid fuel stoves in 68 units. Lighting and heating upgrades were also carried out in the crèche and office areas of the Grange Cohan estate. It is hoped that the redevelopment will go a long way towards improving our residents' comfort, utility costs and energy efficiency, as well as reinforcing pride in the estate.

Focus Ireland's Grange Cohan estate in Waterford: before (inset) and after the complete energy efficiency retrofitting



What happens after people leave homelessness?

Providing a home is the first step in supporting families or individuals leaving homelessness. However, ongoing tenancy sustainment support can be vital to help people sustain their tenancy and avoid re-entering homelessness. Focus Ireland provides tenancy support services for Focus Housing Association around the country to support vulnerable people to live independently in their new homes. As well as tenancy sustainment support, we work with our tenants to address their specific needs and goals by connecting them with education, training and employment support services, including specialist services run by Focus Ireland.



Artworks by Seán*, Kildare Housing

‘This year is the start of my third year living in a property with Focus Housing Association. I first started painting at age 21, as I found it positively benefited my mental health. Focus took this into account when they were allocating a property for me. Now I can paint in my own home.’

Seán*, Kildare Housing

Paul's story

'Without Focus Ireland in my life, I would be in the gutter. Instead, I have a beautiful home, and my son and I can start planning for our future.'

My son always wanted to learn the piano and I surprised him with a small piano for his birthday. He is hoping to start taking lessons soon. We never would have had the space or peace for this in our last apartment.

Paul* (50) lives in a Focus Housing Association property in Dublin City Centre with his son James* (14) and receives visiting support from Focus Ireland's Dublin Offsite Housing Support team.

I am the youngest child from a large Midlands family. Growing up as the youngest, I was spoiled by my siblings and parents. I had a very happy childhood; however, when I was 16, my mother died and my life was never the same again. Three weeks after my mother died, I took the boat to England and worked on building sites and drank in the evening, which eventually led to an addiction. Within a few months, I was back home and in the first of many detox admissions.

Eventually, I returned to Dublin and was working on sites around the city and also battling my alcoholism. I ended up losing my job and home and finally ended up in emergency homeless accommodation. I entered detox for the last time and, after going through this programme, I was offered a place in Focus Ireland temporary supported accommodation in George's Hill. I then got my own long-term one-bedroom home with visiting support from Focus Ireland.

During this period, I had a son but the relationship with his mother was volatile because of her ongoing drug issues. Eventually, we split up – and I lost access to my son. When my son was 11, he contacted me because his home life was very chaotic and he wanted to come live with me. I was eventually granted full custody of my son, but my home was unsuitable and too small for the two of us. I gave up my bedroom for my son and started sleeping on the sofa in the sitting room.

When my son came to live with me, he was very withdrawn and was displaying signs of the emotional trauma and chaos he had experienced during his life. My Focus Ireland support worker referred my son to counselling and play therapy, and I was able to offer my son the stable life he needed. During this time, I was feeling overwhelmed and stopped caring for myself, as my housing situation was affecting

both my mental health and physical health. I continued to maintain a good routine for my son, but it was clear to me that the unsuitability of the accommodation was impacting on the wellbeing of both of us.

In November 2019, I finally got the call that Focus Ireland could offer us a two-bedroom apartment in a small, quiet block near where we lived. We moved in here just before Christmas.

The changes in our lives have been so massively positive since moving here. For the first time in years, I feel at peace. My whole demeanour has changed and I don't lose my temper as much. My son has completed counselling and is thriving in his transition to secondary school. He has had friends come to visit with us and has been able to have sleepovers for the first time in his life.

Now we are settled in our new home, I feel ready to start looking for work. My physical health is not great, so I know I can't return to building sites. I've been referred to Focus Ireland PETE (Preparation for Education, Training and Employment) service, and will work with them to prepare a CV, do some training courses and apply for jobs. The future is looking much brighter.

I want to share my story – not just as a warning, but also to give hope to others who may be battling an addiction or may be in despair. I am now in my own family home and, for the first time, I am at peace. Thirty years ago, I never would have imagined that I could have ended up homeless. I came from a good family with a strong work ethic, but my mother's death sent me into a spiral of self-destruction. I credit Focus Ireland for doing Trojan work and for helping people up when they've fallen down with their struggles. Focus Ireland have always been there to support me and have pushed for the best for me. Without Focus Ireland in my life, I would be in the gutter. Instead, I have a beautiful home, and my son and I can start planning for our future.

Thank you to Focus Ireland and everyone who supports them.

John's Lane West

In May 2019 the Minister for Housing, Eoghan Murphy TD, officially launched our brand-new housing development at John's Lane West, Dublin 8. This development is the most tangible manifestation of **our long-term vision and strategy**, which is focused on **prevention and providing people with a sustained exit from homeless**.

The site, which was purchased by Focus Ireland over 20 years ago, had previously provided youth services, food services and, for a few years, emergency hostel beds. But it had always been the intention that it would deliver permanent homes for people who had experienced homelessness or were at risk.

The development now provides 31 permanent homes for families and individuals.

John's Lane West is a 'bricks and mortar' manifestation of our belief that it is better to provide homes than emergency beds. The apartment building was designed to ensure that each home has its own front door. This is not only a great design: it also means so much to people who have been homeless – or moving from place to place for many years at risk of becoming homeless – to have a place that is truly their own. The people living in our new development are supported to live independently by Focus Ireland tenancy sustainment support workers.

John's Lane West was built with the support of the Department of Housing and Dublin City Council, as well as financial support from the Housing Finance Agency and assistance from generous donors to Focus Ireland.

Pat Dennigan, Sr Stan and the Minister for Housing, Eoghan Murphy TD, at the launch of John's Lane West in May 2019





John's Lane West: Winner of Best Social Housing 2019

The Community Housing Awards is a biennial competition run by the Irish Council of Social Housing. The competition celebrates excellence within the social housing sector and highlights exceptional housing quality, innovation and partnership.

At the 2019 Community Housing Awards, Focus Housing Association won two awards – Best Homeless Housing Award and Overall Winner – for our innovative John's Lane West development. It was wonderful that our efforts were recognised, and that our vision for John's Lane West was independently evaluated and awarded.

The most important thing is that our new development has ended homelessness for 31 households who now have a place to call home.