



Midlands Simon Community's Housing First Pilot successfully shows that homelessness can be ended

Minister Eoghan Murphy, T.D (Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government), launched the findings of a successful pilot of a new Housing First service in the Midlands.

The launch took place on Wednesday the 13th of September in the Sheraton Hotel, Athlone. Co Westmeath. The pilot service, which is operated by the Midlands Simon Community, attained outcomes significantly above the national average.

Despite a minimum of resources, the Midlands Simon Community attained successful outcomes of housing stability for 85% of the people who were referred to the service. This compares to the Dublin Pilot, which attained results of 67%, a pilot with considerably more resources. The pilot proved that with the correct model, in this case Housing First, people can move out of homelessness.

Mark Cooney (Voluntary Chairperson of the Midlands Simon Community) outlined that *"these results are a major source of hope to the people we support, as well as our staff and volunteers. With the minimum of resources, an end to homelessness was found for people with a history of homelessness and for people that otherwise would be in shelters or sleeping rough"*.

The pilot supported people with a history of rough sleeping. 22 of the 28 people were rough sleeping in the 12 months prior to their referral, while 22 of the 28 cases referred had a mental health diagnosis, with 7 of the 28 having a diagnosis of schizophrenia.

Results of the pilot:

85% of the people who were supported to having a home of their own, remained out of homelessness and did not relapse back into homelessness. This is a considerable achievement and is at a level that has not been achieved anywhere else in the state.

Factors that contributed to success:

The model that Midlands Simon Community used was a Housing First model, and the Midlands Simon Community has invested time and energy to learn about and train their staff to implement this model. This included in 2015, the signing of a Memo of Agreement with Dr Sam Tsemberis (lead international expert in Housing First), with the staff and volunteers of Midlands Simon Community being the first front line workers in Europe to be trained by him.

Speaking at the launch, Dr Ronni Greenwood (University of Limerick and International expert in evaluating Housing First) outlined that *“over the years Midlands Simon Community had developed the knowledge and the expertise. These are complex issues and they need capable organisations with a high level of competency to be successful”*.

Mark Cooney also acknowledged the supportive role of Minister Murphy and his Department, the four Local Authorities in Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath and the HSE and in particular the Midlands Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force for funding the training of the Housing First model.

What is next?

The Midlands Simon Community would now hope that the model will be seen by the Department of Housing as a successful model and it will continue to be funded and expanded to help more people in the Midlands.