

Pathways out of Homelessness - What needs to happen

Introduction

We in Simon believe that an end to homelessness in Ireland is possible

By an end to homelessness we mean:

- No one will have to sleep rough. because there are of a lack of services or lack of appropriate housing or accommodation.
- No one will have to live in emergency accommodation for long periods of time.
- No one will become homeless due to inadequate or insecure housing provision.

Simon tackles homelessness in a number of ways:

- The Simon Communities around Ireland offer support and accommodation to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- We challenge society to take responsibility for addressing the causes of homelessness and to work with us in providing the solutions.
- We work closely with the government, decision makers and policy makers to make sure that they are aware of the scale of homelessness in Ireland, as well as the causes and solutions. We campaign to have those solutions reflected in government policy on homelessness and related fields.
- Simon also campaigns for better policies, services and for effective Governmental responses to the causes of homelessness so that fewer people will become homeless in the future.

Solutions to Homelessness

The Simon Communities of Ireland are making a difference to many people who are homeless. The services offered in each Community mean that if a person does become homeless there is somewhere for them to turn for help, to get back to living independently or living with some ongoing support from Simon.

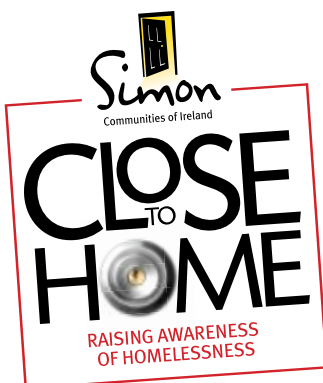
Some people will need help for a short time to assist them to settle into their home. For example, the Simon Communities can help people with budgeting, shopping for food and maintaining their home, looking after their health and well-being, managing medication and returning to education or work. Others will require longer-term support because of loneliness and isolation, physical or mental health needs or problem drug/alcohol use. In some cases this help and support is required on an ongoing basis.

Prevention of Homelessness

To prevent homelessness occurring in the first place Simon campaigns in a number of areas including:

- Tackling poverty and social exclusion¹.
- Early intervention and prevention.
- Proper discharge policies for those leaving residential childcare, prison, hospital etc.

¹ Social exclusion occurs when people experience disadvantage on a number of fronts for example when long term unemployment or poor educational attainment is combined with poverty or inadequate income. The result is an exclusion from many of the areas that make up civil society including the social, economic, political and cultural spheres and services such as health, housing and legal services. It can also mean the denial of access to decision-making and power.



Simon

Did You Know?

**Homelessness can be prevented ...
Simon believes homelessness can be solved.**

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Emergency Accommodation and Support

When a person first becomes homeless it may be necessary to offer them emergency accommodation and support so that they have a safe, secure, welcoming place to stay while their needs are assessed. In addition to the provision of accommodation, emergency support can also mean access to primary medical care, counselling, one-to-one support, a nourishing meal and referral to other services as appropriate e.g. drug and alcohol services, mental health services and hospital.

Some examples of emergency support and accommodation include:

- **Homeless hostels/shelters and emergency bed and breakfasts (B&B's)**
- **Outreach Teams/Rough Sleeper Teams** focus on people who are sleeping on the streets, in squats or in other unsuitable accommodation such as cars. They offer support, advice and are a point of contact into other emergency services.
- **The Soup Run** teams offer nourishment, befriending, blankets and sleeping bags to those sleeping rough every night of the year. They work very closely with Outreach/Rough Sleeper Teams.

Long Term Solutions To Homelessness

Ideally, emergency accommodation would only ever be used in case of emergency but this is often not the case. Due to a lack of suitable long-term accommodation options, people often spend long periods in such emergency accommodation. Once a person is ready to move on from an emergency hostel or B&B, it is important that there is a suitable and appropriate place for him/her to go and that the appropriate support is available.

Some examples of long term solutions to homelessness include:

- **Social housing**
This is housing provided directly by the State through local authorities and voluntary sector housing. It is essential that the Government builds the number of social houses it has promised and that a portion of these houses are available to people moving out of homelessness. We also urge all local authorities around the country to make local authority housing available to people who are moving out of homelessness.

- **Private Rental Accommodation**

This is also an option for some people who are ready to move out of homelessness. It is important that there are flats, apartments and houses with low rents available. If a person cannot pay the full amount of their rent each month because of unemployment, disability or illness they can apply for help under the *Rent Supplement Scheme*. However, sometimes the Rent Supplement amount is not enough to meet the full cost of renting and people have to top-up from their own scarce resources. This often results in people doing without basic necessities such as food to avoid the risk of eviction.

In addition, support is available through the *Rental Accommodation Scheme* – offering financial assistance to people in the private rented sector who have been receiving rent supplement for more than 18 months. This scheme aims give people some security in the longer-term. The *Long Term Leasing Scheme* - targets people who are homeless, many of whom are living in emergency accommodation, and are ready to move on to independent living with low to medium support.

For such schemes to succeed they must be targeted towards the specific needs of people who have experienced homelessness. The necessary social and care supports must be easy to access and must be available for as long as a person needs them in order to return to independent living.

- **Supported Housing**

For some, supported living may best suit their needs. In many cases this means offering people a home for life. These are often residential homes staffed by care staff and trained volunteers where access to medical and other services is facilitated. Services such as this must be planned for and resourced.

Conclusion

As you can see, there are 'pathways out of homelessness'. These pathways involve much more than accommodation and housing. These pathways must include the necessary social and care supports. We believe that all sections of society - the Government, state organisations such as the health service, prison and probation services, the business community, the general public and you, all have an important role to play in making this happen.

Visit your local Simon Community website or www.simon.ie to find out more about ending homelessness in Ireland.

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