



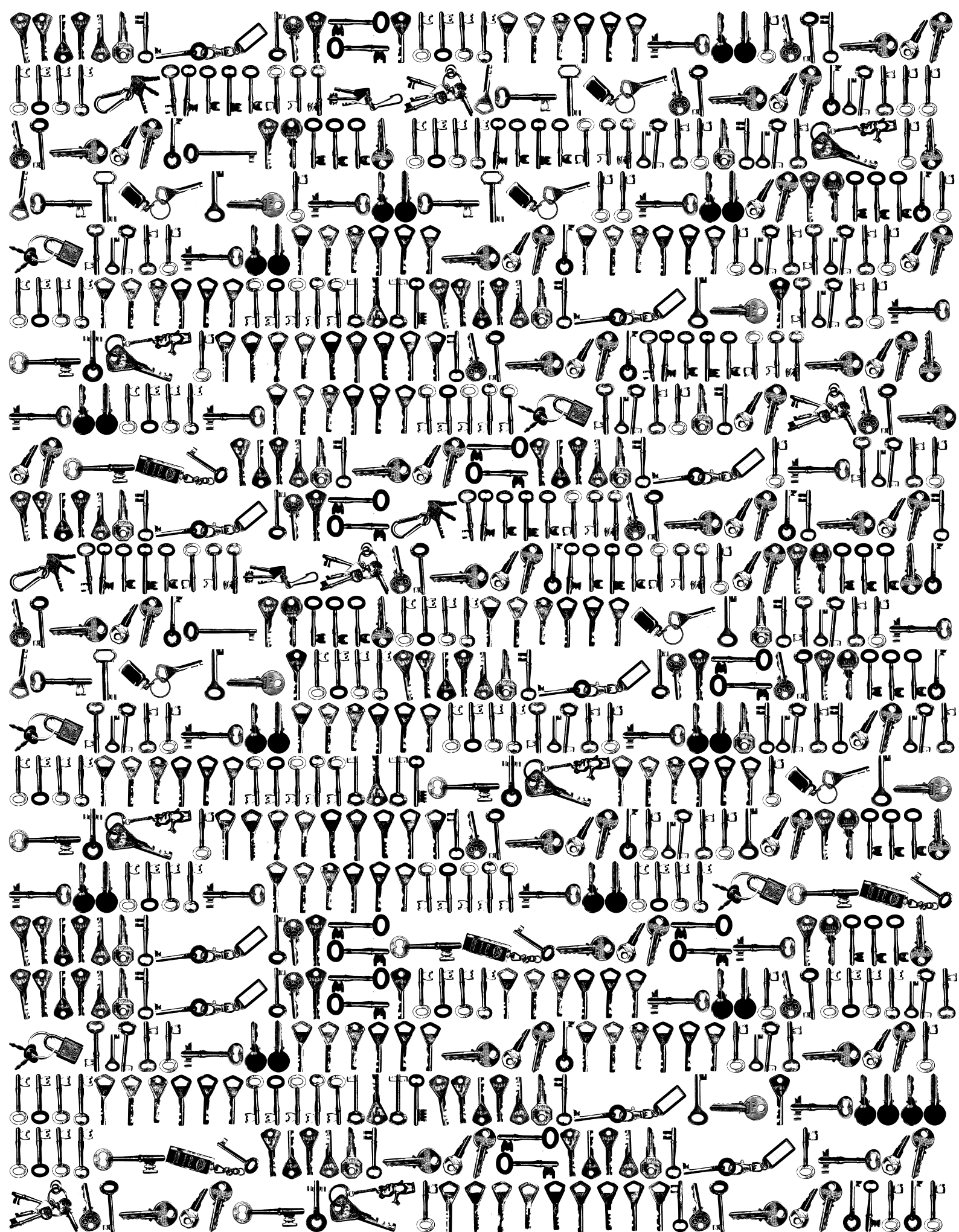
Homeless Pathways

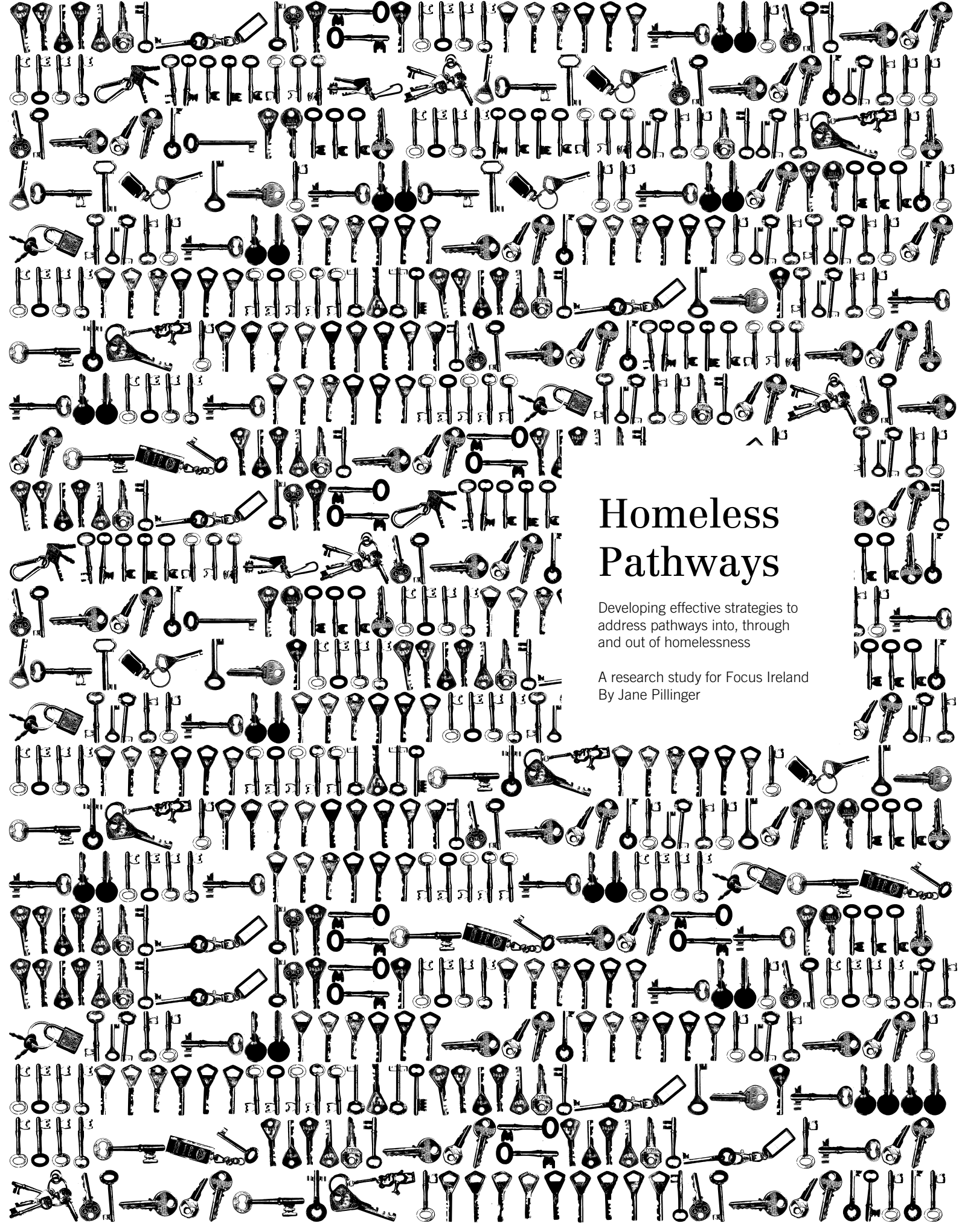
Developing effective strategies
to address pathways into, through
and out of homelessness



FOCUS
IRELAND

EVERYONE HAS A RIGHT TO A PLACE THEY CAN CALL HOME





Homeless Pathways

Developing effective strategies to address pathways into, through and out of homelessness

A research study for Focus Ireland
By Jane Pillinger

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To protect the identity and privacy of our customers, names have been changed in their biographies; otherwise all other details represent real life stories as told by our customers.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the twenty-two homeless people or former homeless people who participated in this research. Their contributions, integrity and willingness to provide insights from their personal experiences, and reflect on these, have been invaluable to the research.

I would also like to thank the staff at Focus Ireland who have worked with me on the research, and particularly the key workers and support workers who provided support to the homeless people and former homeless people participating in the interviews. They not only provided the contacts for the interviews and support for interviewees, but they also helped to set the context within which homeless people and former homeless people receive Focus Ireland services. Particular thanks go to Caroline McGrath, Joan O'Connor and Sinead McGinley, who managed the research, and to the members of the Pathways Advisory Group who helped to steer the research: Christina McTaggart, Kieran Stenson, Orla Barry, Neil Forsythe, Ger Tuohy, Audrey O'Connor and Seamus Roche.

Dr. Jane Pillinger,
Dublin

Foreword

Focus Ireland has been working for over twenty years to prevent people becoming, remaining or returning to homelessness through the provision of quality services, supported housing and advocacy. Focus Ireland's research programme has played a key role in highlighting some of the reasons people become homeless and in developing our understanding of these issues. We believe that it is essential to identify the reasons individuals and households become and remain out-of-home, in order to provide effective responses to tackle and prevent homelessness through the provision of housing, targeted services and policy.

Focus Ireland undertook the Homeless Pathways study to gain an improved understanding of individual pathways into, through and out of homelessness. Through the personal stories of Focus Ireland customers, the study highlights particular homeless circumstances, such as households living in precarious housing situations (e.g. squatting), those at risk of losing their home, those living in accommodation where family life is not possible, or people residing in accommodation where a risk of violence or harassment exists.

The homeless pathways approach to homelessness research provides for a more comprehensive perspective of the experience of being out-of-home by tracing peoples' individual experiences of homelessness. This research seeks to give an insight into people's experiences as they move through services, the barriers that impede progress, and the interventions that positively support people to overcome these barriers.

The report shows that an individual's homeless pathway may include times when they are officially recognised as homeless, along with other times where they are not. For example obtaining a tenancy in the private rented sector may ensure that they cease to be counted as 'homeless', regardless of how insecure their housing situation may be. For many individuals, their pathway through homelessness might actually include returning to an insecure or unsafe housing situation (such as domestic violence), which in turn may lead to repeat homelessness in the future.

Unsurprisingly the report finds that the longer an individual or household is homeless, the greater the likelihood that they will be exposed to additional risks and dangers in their lives.

They become even further excluded from mainstream society, family, friends and local communities, and it becomes harder for them to engage with services and to have a defined pathway out of homelessness.

It is clear from the report that homelessness strips people of their dignity, independence and autonomy. This fact alone should be enough to stimulate action to ensure that we do all we can to support people who are homeless. We must work to meet the needs of those out-of-home through more effective coordination of service provision - Focus Ireland believes that this needs to be as important a goal of policy as providing access to decent accommodation.

The research also clearly demonstrates that the most important factor contributing to an individual's or household's pathway out of homelessness is the provision of adequate, secure and affordable housing. Coupled with this is the provision of support services to sustain pathways out of homelessness in the long-term.

While access to adequate and affordable housing alone will meet the needs of some, there will continue to be a number of individuals and households who will require regular support, resettlement and care provision in order to sustain themselves in autonomous households. Greater understanding of the causes and complexities of homelessness needs to be centered in a preventative approach that makes it possible for people to be supported in tackling personal problems or life events that can lead to homelessness or repeat homelessness.

There are no simple answers to the issues raised in this research. However we believe that this study is another important step towards improving our understanding of homeless pathways and identifying how prevention can work to block pathways into homelessness. The report also provides us with a better understanding of 'what works' in practice and how organisations such as Focus Ireland can continue to contribute to making home a reality for those who are on this difficult life journey.

Yours sincerely,



Declan Jones
Chief Executive
Focus Ireland

Key messages from the research

There are **five key messages** from the pathway biographies of the participants:

- The provision of affordable, secure and good quality housing is at the heart of any policy to prevent and eliminate homelessness.
- Homelessness strips people of dignity, independence and autonomy. Enhancing the capabilities of homeless people, and meeting their needs through the more effective coordination of service provision, becomes as important a goal of policy as providing access to decent accommodation.
- The longer an individual or household is homeless, the greater the likelihood that they will be exposed to a second layer of risks and dangers in their lives, including social exclusion, additional social problems, mental health difficulties, alcohol and drug addiction, service exclusion and exclusion from mainstream society, family, friends and local communities.
- Services need to be more effectively coordinated, service provision targeted to meet needs, and gaps in service provision closed.
- There are generally higher levels of complex and problematic drug or alcohol use, and physical and mental ill health in the homeless population, compared to the general population.

The pathways research methodology

The report uses research methodologies which trace an individual's experiences of moving into, through and out of homelessness. By working with homeless people on their biographies it has been possible to analyse, from a customer-centred perspective, experiences of pathways into, through and out of homelessness.

This method has facilitated a more dynamic and comprehensive approach to understanding the causal and risk factors leading people into homelessness, provided more insights into people's experiences of homelessness, and their movement in and out of different housing and homeless situations.

In addition, the pathways approach focuses on the experiences, interactions, choices, constraints and behaviours of homeless people and how these experiences can inform appropriate pathways out of homelessness. This allows for a more effective understanding of what works in practice and contributes to the evidence base needed for policy and the development of appropriate service provision.

Pathways *into* homelessness

The seventeen homeless people's biographies point to a range of causal and risk factors that impact on homelessness. These are linked to structural, social and personal/individual factors, as well as life events and triggers that can result in homelessness becoming a reality.

The biographies show that key life course events, such as adulthood, divorce / separation, loss of employment, low income and traumatic or problematic life events, can impact on people's pathways into homelessness. Poverty, coupled with weak or broken family and social ties, is also a common underlying cause. Factored into these are life course events related to key youth, adult and later life age-related pathways into homelessness, as well as the differential pathways experienced by women and men.

A number of common themes run through people's homeless pathway biographies: poor access to the labour market and training, lack of educational qualifications, and low incomes. It is possible to categorise these as societal, individual/personal, institutional and market factors.

The risk factors outlined are influenced by the availability and affordability of housing, the security of housing and the choices available to people. There are important lessons for policy-makers on improving people's capacity to have control over and choice in their housing situation so that they are not at risk of homelessness, particularly where this can be triggered by a significant or traumatic life event. Tackling the causes and complexity of homelessness needs to be rooted in a preventative approach which makes it possible for people to be supported early on in addressing personal problems or life events which can lead to homelessness or repeat homelessness.

Pathways *through* homelessness

The research into people's pathways through homelessness focuses on the experience of living as a homeless person and the role that services play in enabling people to find ways out of homelessness, what works, and the blockages and barriers that exist. Pathways *through* homelessness are affected by the same range of structural, social and individual/personal factors that influence people's pathways *into* homelessness. These factors can facilitate a smooth journey through homelessness or they can be the cause and effect of enduring problems that lock people into homelessness. In some cases the experience of homelessness creates further exclusion and difficulties that make it harder to find a pathway out.

The report shows that pathways through homelessness are both diverse and complex. The biographies of homeless people identify a range of problems in moving out of homeless services. This brings with it associated risks of other more enduring social problems and marginalisation typified by low-self esteem, poor coping strategies, stress, complex addiction-related risks, as well as mental and physical health problems.

It is clear from the research that the longer a person is homeless the harder it is to engage with services and accomplish a defined pathway out of homelessness. Other issues concern the needs of children living in unsuitable accommodation, poor living conditions, health problems, including poor mental health, which often result in low self-esteem and social stigma.

Pathways *out* of homelessness

The research illustrates that the most important factor contributing to an individual's or household's pathway out of homelessness is the provision of adequate, secure and affordable housing. Coupled with this is the provision of support services – including family support, tenancy support/sustainment and key worker support, mental health support and family support – which are all critical in sustaining pathways out of homelessness in the long-term.

The provision of adequate, affordable and appropriate housing is fundamental and, once this is in place, support and care needs that are often neglected or difficult to organise if a person is homeless, can be put in place and tailored to the situation faced by an individual or household.

The research shows that there is a need for a multifaceted approach to ensure that people can secure long-term pathways out of homelessness.

- Firstly, appropriate accommodation (transitional accommodation, long-term accommodation in the privately rented and local authority sectors, as well as that provided by Focus Ireland) must be provided.

- Secondly, the requisite services to meet the support needs of homeless people (through key workers, Tenancy Support and Settlement, crisis services and access to a range of public services) must be in place.
- Thirdly, access to employment and training must be available.
- Fourthly, effective methods to enable people to engage with public services and to receive appropriate, coordinated and integrated service provision must be employed.

A study of the biographies suggests that successful pathways out of homelessness must encompass prevention, crisis intervention, intensive and relevant targeted support, and assistance for people which will lead to autonomous and independent living situations in transitional and long-term accommodation, with appropriate support services. Regular contact with key workers/support workers is key, particularly in helping people to lead independent and autonomous lives.

Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations on improving access to long-term accommodation, with or without floating and flexible support; on the provision of appropriate key work and mental health support services; on providing wider access to education, training and employment; and on placing greater stress on preventative measures and early intervention. Specific recommendations are made concerning Focus Ireland services, national policy issues, and future Focus Ireland research and evaluation.

Focus Ireland services

It is recommended that preventative work should be a priority, with flexibility in the provision of support services so that they can be more effective in early intervention for those at risk of homelessness or recurring homelessness. Specific issues are raised about the need for services to address the implications of the homeless pathways of later-life/older people and minority ethnic groups, as well as greater analysis of specific gender-related pathways into homelessness, such as domestic violence.

National Policy Issues

There is an urgent need for more resources and a policy priority to improve access to, and the supply of, good quality temporary accommodation, as well as mainstream social rented housing and affordable privately rented accommodation of a good quality. A key issue is to ensure that there is sufficient move-on accommodation so that pathways through homelessness are not blocked. In the long-run this can reduce reliance on costly accommodation provision.

Focus Ireland research and evaluation

It is recommended that Focus Ireland consider undertaking longitudinal qualitative research which provides for a more systematic tracking of homeless people's pathways, in order to identify and learn from what works, to assess the effectiveness/impact of different policy interventions and to improve data and evidence of homelessness. There are specific areas where more detailed research needs to be carried out in order to identify the most effective method of preventing homelessness amongst particular groups, including people with mental health difficulties, gender pathways (particularly of women experiencing domestic violence), adult and later-life pathways, and pathways of minority ethnic groups.

An individual's homeless pathway may involve periods in which they are officially recognised as homeless, alongside periods where they are not, for example, obtaining a tenancy in the private rented sector may result in ceasing to be considered 'homeless', regardless of the precariousness of their housing situation. In terms of the individual and their pathway through homelessness, leaving the streets can simply mean a return to a risky housing situation, which in turn may lead to repeat homelessness in the future. The **homeless pathway** approach to homelessness research takes a more comprehensive perspective on the experience of being out of a home, tracing individuals' experiences into, through and out of homelessness. Clapham, writing in the UK context, has recognised that '*an understanding of homelessness needs to embrace the dynamics of this movement into and out of different situations*' (2004: 111).

The **homeless pathway** approach to homelessness research takes a more comprehensive perspective on the experience of being out of a home, tracing individuals' experiences into, through and out of homelessness.

The pathways approach offers a way of representing and reviewing the experience of different groups of homeless people by taking account of people's characteristics, life and homelessness experiences and the wider influences on these. Doherty et al. (2002) describe the aim of this approach:

Pathways studies – a variant on the life course, longitudinal approach – through detailed biographical work attempt to chart the movement individuals and groups make into, through and out of homelessness with the explicit intention of identifying key 'tipping' points, conjunctions of events that signal major changes leading to an improvement or deterioration in life chances.

In the Irish context, it has been recognised that better recording of homeless people's biographies linked to needs assessment and methods to identify repeat homelessness are integral to the prevention of homelessness (Pillinger, 2005).

Objectives of the research

Specifically, this research seeks to attain the following objectives:

- To enable Focus Ireland to develop a deeper understanding of the housing and homeless pathways of their client group as well as their phases of progression out of homelessness;
- To explore a broader definition of homelessness, one that incorporates the experiences of those who are at risk of homelessness, resident in inadequate accommodation or sofa surfing etc.;
- To improve understanding of the dynamics between visible and less visible forms of homelessness within individual client housing/homelessness experiences;
- To explore any relationships and patterns that arise between and at the different stages of individuals' housing and homelessness experiences;
- To develop more in-depth understanding of the causes of repeat homelessness as well as the barriers individuals face when seeking to find a pathway out of homelessness;
- To inform the development of supports and interventions which seek to prevent incidences of homelessness;
- To influence policy and stimulate a debate about housing pathways; and
- To advise on research gaps and follow-on work emerging from this study.

Using a life course approach to preventing homelessness within a framework of social inclusion can help to identify needs across a person's lifecycle. Graham and Power's (2004) framework for a life course approach to tackling child and adult ill-health is applied in this research to preventing homelessness, making it possible to break down the risks of homelessness into its constituent elements. These include parental disadvantage, poor childhood circumstances and child-to-adult pathways of disadvantage. Addressing these can help to identify the risks associated with homelessness and target preventative actions through early intervention.

The pathways approach also breaks new ground as it focuses on the experiences, interactions and behaviours of homeless people so that these experiences can be used to inform how appropriate pathways out of homelessness can be developed.

The pathways approach also breaks new ground as it focuses on the experiences, interactions and behaviours of homeless people (in areas such as household planning and decision-making), so that these experiences can be used to inform how appropriate pathways out of homelessness can be developed. It facilitates an analysis of the constraints and choices that people experience. By placing the meaning that individuals and households place on their experiences of housing pathways at the centre of the research process gives valuable insights into the extent to which individuals and households are in control of their housing pathways and how their experiences of services can enable them to live autonomously. This long-term and dynamic approach will lead to the development and consequent implementation of evidenced-based policy and practice.

Housing pathways can be defined as part of the life-time housing career of individuals or households. People's housing careers can be simple or complex, although in practice the majority of people encounter a range of different housing experiences throughout their life course. Research examining people's housing careers has tended to find that key life course events, such as adulthood, marriage, divorce/separation, employment and income, can impact on housing careers, whilst key factors impacting on housing choices are associated with location, quality, type, availability and cost of housing. In particular, social exclusion and traumatic or problematic life experiences can negatively affect a person's housing career during their life courses. As Anderson and Tulloch (2000) show, changes in housing are related to individual choice, which is affected by an individual's resources, and the availability of housing.

As a result there is a need for a more dynamic approach to enable policy-makers to see the impact of changes in housing circumstances as a key element in a person's housing pathway and, crucially, as Clapham argues, that housing is seen as a means rather than an end in itself. This raises important issues about the extent to which people have control of their housing pathways. For example, homeless people often have little or no control over their housing options, living from day to day with little certainty of a bed for the next night. The lesson for policy-makers, therefore, is the importance of measures to improve people's capacity to control and have a choice in their housing situation.

In order for preventative policies to work in practice, there needs to be an evidence base informed by both the structural causes and the personal histories that impact on homelessness. This can provide a better knowledge about pathways in to and out of homelessness and of what works in practice. For example, access to employment and family support networks are considered to be two of the most important areas for prevention and represent important aspects of social capital (Hagan and McCarthy 1997). A number of common elements of prevention include (FEANTSA 2004):

- sustaining tenancies
- having an adequate supply of affordable and social rented housing
- good housing management
- support services in establishing a suitable home, with help, advice and support in locating an appropriate home for independent living in the community
- support, advice and help with daily living skills needed for living independently
- support in accessing benefits, health services and other services
- recognition of the risk factors that trigger homelessness

By improving our understanding of the causes and complexity of homelessness through a preventative approach, it is possible to develop preventative actions and more innovative methods to enable people to tackle personal problems or life events that can lead to homelessness or repeat homelessness. This could include the provision of a wider range of new private and social housing, and arranging for housing education in schools.

Other measures could include tenancy support for young people and those with disabilities, family mediation and counselling services, resettlement programmes for those leaving prison or institutional care, improvements in front line services and programmes to prevent homelessness as a result of domestic violence.

Identifying pathways into homelessness: evidence from the literature

Age related pathways into homelessness

In the literature it is possible to identify three specific age-related pathways into homelessness (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000), although there is insufficient data to pinpoint the relative significance of the different age-related pathways. These are:

- Youth pathways (15-24 years old) typified by loss of settled home and barriers to re-housing, difficult backgrounds, chaotic homelessness and sleeping rough. Evidence shows that young people are at risk of homelessness when they have been in care as children, where they have encountered abuse or violence in the home, where they live in non-working households, where they have experienced disruption from school and early school leaving, and where family life has been disrupted.
- Adult pathways (20-50 years old) typified by new and/or expanded households, relationship breakdown; release from prison; alcohol, drug, mental health problems leading to loss of accommodation; and changes in household circumstances.
- Later life pathways (50+ years old) typified by life-long homelessness, redundancy, unemployment or retirement, linked to alcohol/depression and loss of accommodation; bereavement and inability to sustain a home; death or infirmity of adult carer; retirement from employment and no home to retire to; marital breakdown; homelessness following domestic violence; late onset of dementia or other mental illness.

Gender related pathways into homelessness

The other main factor which influences pathways into homelessness is gender. Although there is relatively limited research on the role played by gender in housing careers, different pathways are experienced by women and men. For example, young women are more likely to become homeless at a young age, whilst young men are likely to be 'invisibly homeless' and are the majority of those living in hostels and rough sleepers. The distinction between family and single homelessness may help explain the greater visibility of female homelessness, as many women who are visibly homeless also have children and are prioritised for homeless services. Many of these women experienced domestic violence prior to becoming homeless (Hague, 1999; O'Connor and Wilson, 2004).

Employment and training

Homeless people are marginalised in the labour market and there are few initiatives which promote access to employment for this marginalised group. It is possible to see this marginalisation as a result of societal factors, individual and personal factors, institutional factors and market factors.

Societal factors and attitudes to homeless people can engender prejudice and discrimination and, in turn, societal factors can impact on the perceptions and attitudes of policy-makers and employers, resulting in barriers to participation and inclusion.

In addition, many personal factors relate to social influences and inequalities. Personal attributes, skills and motivation that affect an individual's access to housing and employment include a lack of education, qualifications, vocational training and resources, as well as limited work experience. These significant obstacles faced by homeless people diminish their employment opportunities, particularly when combined with other risk factors such as a history of early school leaving and long-term unemployment, lack of personal stability owing to drug misuse, a criminal record and ex-offender status. Often these factors lead to or are related to low self-esteem, lack of social skills, health problems, and a lack of socio-family-community support.

Institutional factors such as the operation of the labour market can also impact on access to employment. Market factors which include the supply and availability of jobs and employer incentives add another dimension to the problem.

In recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on the social inclusion of marginalised groups into the labour market and supply-side measures, and on bolstering the capability of the marginalised to enter the labour market. This is coupled with preventative measures including early intervention, tackling barriers to employment, and the growth of intermediary labour markets resulting in local and community-based employment.

Two main policy regimes exist at the macro level to tackle marginalisation in employment. First, *demand side* approaches focus on increasing labour demand and the recruitment of the long-term unemployed or groups who experience discrimination or disadvantage. These include job creation measures and subsidies, placement services and incentives for employers to recruit marginalised people who may be at risk of exclusion and homelessness. Second, *supply side* approaches focus on improving the skills of people who are long-term unemployed or disadvantaged through measures to enhance motivation or access to jobs by providing training, guidance, advice and support. Recent developments in labour market policies have also resulted in much greater coordination of policy measures, including those that are demand and supply led.

Linking homeless pathways to prevention

Today homelessness is no longer viewed solely as a housing problem. Rather, explanations tend to recognise the complexity of homelessness and the need to locate these within 'social and economic' explanations, on the one hand, and 'individual' causal factors on the other hand (Fitzpatrick and Klinker, 2000). This approach is helpful in preventing and recognising the complex chain of risks that can lead to homelessness (Pillinger, 2004, Pillinger, 2005), and to a better understanding of how a lifecycle approach to prevention can be applied to homelessness (Graham and Power, 2004).

Although only a relatively small number of poor people become homeless, *all* homeless people live in poverty and the majority have no family or friends to help them.

Poverty and weak or broken family and social ties are common underlying risks of homelessness. Although only a relatively small number of poor people become homeless, *all* homeless people live in poverty and the majority have no family or friends to help them. There are three main triggers for homelessness:

- first, when parents, friends or relatives are unwilling or unable to provide accommodation;
- second, relationship break-up, particularly a violent relationship and breakdown of a relationship with a partner; and
- third, loss of tenancy in the private, local authority or social housing sector.

Early intervention can prevent further exclusion resulting from mental and physical ill health, drug addiction, criminal activity, low self-esteem and lack of personal coping strategies. In the study of children of homeless families by the Children's Research Centre at Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and the Royal College of Surgeons (RCSI) (Halpenny et al., 2001), the presence of behavioural problems, poor emotional and educational development, learning disabilities and ill health were not uncommon in children in temporary accommodation for the homeless. Women participating in the study stated that the main reasons for becoming homeless were lack of affordable housing, domestic violence, child sexual abuse and alcohol and drug addiction. In many cases living in homeless accommodation was safer than living in the family home, away from domestic violence and fears of sexual abuse of children. In addition, these families experience poverty and exclusion. A framework for responding to women out of home due to violence provides a useful model for preventing homelessness, i.e. maximising women's safety in their own homes through coordinated interventions and the development of supported transitional housing (O'Connor and Wilson, 2004).

Prevention may also be better targeted if homelessness is viewed as a *process* in people's lives. This has implications for service delivery, and particularly for early intervention. In their study of user-led services for homeless mothers, Walters and East (2002) found that interventions with children were crucial to determining whether families would become settled in the future, since the behaviour of children could be a cause rather than a consequence of homelessness. Putting in place social and family supports and childcare can be critical, therefore, to prevention.

Research shows that homeless people experience an exceptionally high number of stressful events throughout their life course, particularly in their transition to homelessness (Avraomov 2000). Better understanding of the causes of homelessness has also revealed a hidden homeless population who do not access homeless services and do not appear in the homeless statistics. These would typically include people staying temporarily with friends or relatives or who are street homeless. HSE research (2005) on hidden homelessness amongst young people has found that a significant number of those at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness do not access homeless services. Boys were three times more likely than girls to be living on the streets.

Homelessness is neither a group characteristic nor a static condition, rather it is a process that can be viewed as part of a continuum of situations impacting on disadvantage and homelessness. This includes problems associated with poverty, breakdown of family and social networks, isolation and social detachment of individuals. Many of these are issues that need to be tackled across the lifecycle. If homelessness is the result of a continuum of situations, then the prevention of homelessness needs to be addressed through a continuum of services designed to meet needs along the continuum, from early intervention to crisis intervention. In practice it is the latter end of the continuum where services are provided.

Better understanding of the causes of homelessness has also revealed a hidden homeless population who do not access homeless services and do not appear in the homeless statistics.



Similarly, Anderson and Tulloch's (2000) review of homeless research found that homeless pathways research requires research methods that facilitate a dynamic, longitudinal approach to research design, data collection and analysis. As Clapham (2005) argues, the pathways approach focuses on the importance of the perceptions and attitudes of households by using research methods that bring the interviewees' experience to the centre of the research process in order to look at how a homeless person '*can take control of a housing pathway and can engage with issues such as people's identity and self-esteem*' (Clapham 2005: 112).

What is also important about the pathways approach is that it can help policy-makers to identify the impact and influence of housing policy on people's behaviour and their housing pathways, since housing policy can enable or prevent individuals and households from behaving in particular ways during their life cycle. Furthermore, the pathways approach facilitates the analysis of what are appropriate and dynamic evaluation methods. Clapham (2005) gives an example of this in referring to an intervention which enables a homeless person to move from rough sleeping to a hostel. Whilst this can be seen as a short-term success from a policy-making perspective, from the homeless person's life cycle perspective this may be one or more of different transitional supports that influence a pathway through homelessness. In this respect, the policy framework often fails to understand the uniqueness of individual pathways alongside the experiences of homeless people. Using a life course approach can, therefore, be an effective way of addressing a person's housing and other support needs in their pathways through homelessness.

The policy framework often fails to understand the uniqueness of individual pathways alongside the experiences of homeless people.

Research evidence on pathways through homelessness by the Scottish Executive's Homelessness Task Force (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000) found that the pathways approach is a long-term and dynamic one since it views the experience of homelessness as part of a person's own life course. Anderson and Tulloch's review of research evidence on homeless pathways found that there were readily identified pathways into homelessness. However, they concluded that, from existing data, pathways through and out of homelessness were both complex and diverse and therefore less easy to categorise. They recommend that a range of research methods be used to develop a more rigorous and dynamic approach to homeless pathways research including panel surveys, life history surveys, qualitative panels and biographies, improved collection and use of data, and improved rigour in qualitative and quantitative data collection. They also recommend high quality, scientifically robust studies, particularly where these are linked to policy evaluation and the need for a closer integration of housing research and homeless research so that homelessness is not viewed as 'a distinct phenomenon'. In particular, they recommend a reorientation of research towards a longitudinal and dynamic approach so that it becomes possible to monitor changes over time, and a greater emphasis on research on routes out of homelessness.

Biographical interviewing

One of the objectives of this research is to examine and develop appropriate research methods for carrying out and understanding a pathways approach to researching homelessness. The use of a biographical approach in the research has both advantages and disadvantages. One of the problems associated with biographical interviewing is that interviewees may use a combination of hindsight and selective memory to reconstruct their past. According to Clapham, '*The very act of recounting the past in a story gives order to a diverse set of experiences*'. He goes on to stress the importance of addressing knowledge gaps associated with and understanding of 'the meaning, attitudes and behaviour of households' (Clapham 2005: 115).

However, biographical interviewing also has advantages as a research method for homeless pathways research. It can help to provide insights into homeless people's experiences and the construction of their lives over their life course. Reflecting on the triggers and circumstances that led to a person becoming homeless can provide useful insights into what interviewees consider to have been the main causal factors leading to their homelessness, what could have prevented them from becoming homeless, and what were the main experiences of their pathways out of homelessness. This method of interviewing can be highly accurate. Giving personal meaning to specific events and triggers can be valuable in helping policy-makers to understand why some interventions and services fail and why some work.

Research methods used in this research

Particular emphasis was placed on the ethical framework for the research. This is important not only for homeless pathways research, but for all research involving homeless people to ensure that interviewees are fully informed about the outcomes of an interview, that they are aware that they can influence how data is to be used, and are given the opportunity to comment on the interviewer's 'interpretation' of their biography, whilst also enabling them to interpret life events themselves. This process brings the interviewee into the centre of the research process and ensures that they are comfortable with the way that their 'story' is presented in the final research report.

An ethical framework

An ethical framework was developed for the research which has resulted in a participatory customer-centered method of research. This involves users directly in the research process (with opportunities for interviewees to review what has been collected in the interview and to change the content through a second interview).

Steps taken in the research methodology

Meetings were initially held with a number of staff teams as a way of informing Focus Ireland managers and key workers about the research and of identifying customers to interview (Aylward Green, Spokes Education Programme, and the Crisis Team). Meetings were also held with managers of St John's Lane West services, George's Hill, Limerick and Waterford services, Eustace Street Tenancy Support Scheme, and the Young Women's Project. A one-page outline of the project was circulated to managers and front line staff and a short outline of the research setting out issues of confidentiality was provided for potential interviewees.

Interviewees were informed by their key workers about the purpose of the research and the broad scope of the interview. An important objective was to ensure that interviewees were comfortable with, and consented to the interview. The interviewer explained the research objectives and re-emphasised the confidentiality of information provided, and offered interviewees a chance to ask any questions or to discuss different elements of the research. In the information given to interviewees, emphasis was placed on the importance of people's own perceptions and understandings of their housing pathways and, in particular, their experiences of the services that work and those that do not work. It was stressed that the information was confidential and that anything to be published about the individual's experience would be agreed first between the interviewee and the interviewer.

The interviews were used to describe some of the most important aspects of the homelessness process of the participants, including the risk factors, triggers and areas where homelessness could be prevented.

The interviews were used to describe some of the most important aspects of the homelessness process of the participants, including the risk factors, triggers and areas where homelessness could be prevented. The biographical method was used to compile people's life stories and experiences of critical life events, thereby constructing their homelessness pathways. The interviews were carried out in a semi-structured, informal way through dialogue which gave interviewees an opportunity to make sense of their own pathways. Specific questions were asked and prompts used in the interviews to guide interviewees on their experiences of critical life events, as well as schooling, employment, family life, housing and homelessness, where this was necessary. At critical stages of the life story the interviewer asked interviewees to look back and, based on their lived experiences, to highlight what they thought would have worked to prevent their homelessness and what could have prevented the risk factors arising, which in turn would have prevented homelessness in the longer term.

Interviewees were also asked to identify, through their personal biographies and experiences, what they perceived worked in their transition through and out of homelessness. The interviews aimed to take a life course approach based on childhood and family history, education, work record, leaving home, social networks and relationships, offending backgrounds, experiences of housing and homelessness, addiction or health problems, contact with support agencies and services, and pathways in and out of homelessness.

In order to provide a chronological and accurate account of the interviews, as well as consent to the use of the information to be published in the research report, the interviewer wrote up each interview in the form of a biography. A second interview was held one month to six weeks later in order to verify the account given by the interviewee and to fill in any gaps, correct any inaccuracies and to include further questions about routes into and out of homelessness. A copy of the biography was given to the interviewee and this was read out to the interviewee by the interviewer. A discussion followed and interviewees were given a chance to change key issues and other identifying information.

All interviews were digitally recorded, with the agreement of the interviewees. They were then transcribed and, where there was repetition in the interview, some parts were summarised. The voice files were deleted once the interview was written up. The first interview lasted between one and two hours, and the second approximately one hour. In some cases a brief initial meeting, over a cup of coffee or tea, was held with a potential interviewee in order to inform them about the research and what was expected of them. There was close collaboration with key workers/ support workers during the research process to gain background information on the services that interviewees had received, to ensure contact was maintained with them and to guarantee that any support needs were met during this time. Each interviewee received a €25 Dunnes Stores voucher to recompense them for their time, contribution and participation in the research.

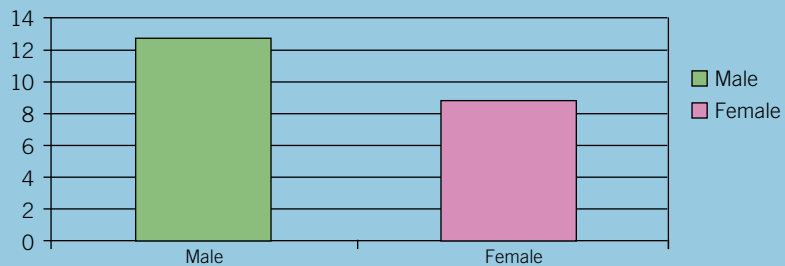
The analysis of the interviews took place through a coding system divided into four main stages. The first stage included key variables such as age, gender, nationality and current housing status. The second concerned pathways into homelessness. The third stage examined pathways through homelessness and the fourth, pathways out of homelessness.

4. Overview of homeless people's pathways

Profile of interviewees

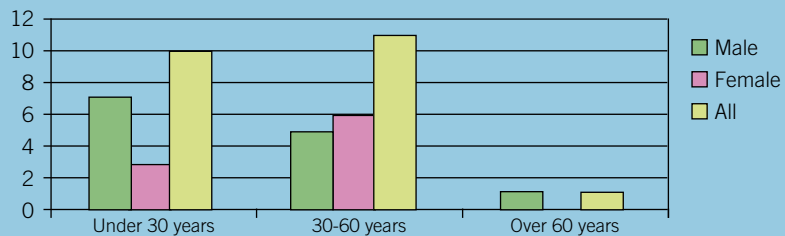
The research aimed to achieve a balance of interviewees, reflecting different homeless pathways and experiences and the customer base of Focus Ireland. A total of 22 interviews were held (with 13 men and 9 women). The breakdown can be seen in Chart 1.

Chart 1: Gender balance of interviewees



Ten people were under the age of 30 years, eleven between the ages of 30 and 60, and one person over the age of 60 years. The age breakdown by gender can be seen in Chart 2 below.

Chart 2: Age profile of interviewees, by gender

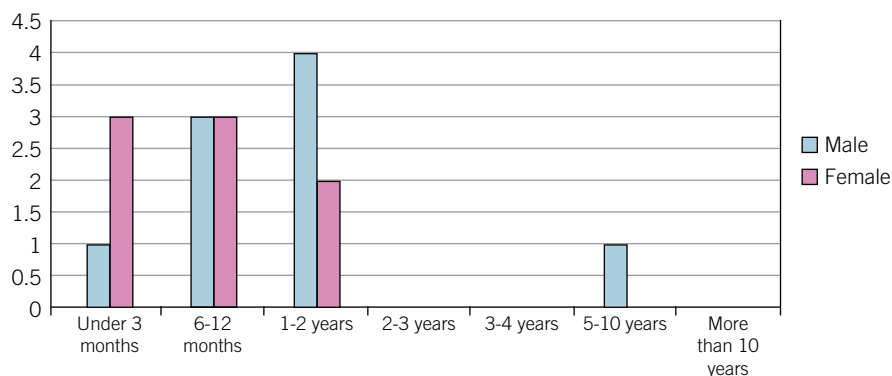


The interviewees comprised people who have become homeless due to a range of interlinking factors: addiction; family breakdown; marital breakdown; mental health difficulties; anti-social behavior; adults who have been in institutional care (formerly in child care, psychiatric hospital or prison) and people who became homeless owing to preventable crises in their lives. The detailed biographies of seventeen customers were used in the research, following on from the original twenty-two interviews conducted with two, two-parent families and four single-parent families who had one or more of their children living with them; three single women, two of whom are mothers of children not living with them; nine men, three of whom are fathers; and one minority ethnic service user.

The detailed biographies of seventeen customers were used in the research.

Chart 3 below illustrates the time that people were in homelessness before they engaged with Focus Ireland services. The majority of women were homeless for less than one year, whereas the majority of men were homeless between one to two years before they engaged with services.

Chart 3: Length of time homeless before engaging with services by gender

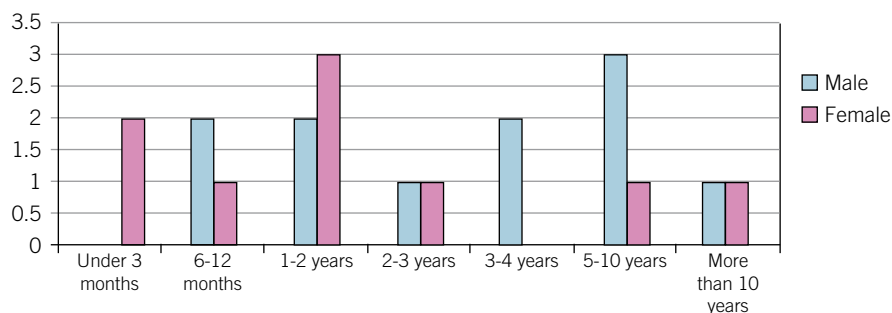


There is no one clear pattern concerning the stage at which people engage with homeless services. A large number of individuals and households do not immediately engage with services once they become homeless. One of the reasons cited for this is that there is a lack of awareness and information about homeless services or entitlements. Another is that people often feel very low when they first become homeless and at this stage it is difficult to engage with services.

Homelessness is not a single episode in a person's life; rather it is one of many different housing experiences.

Chart 4 shows the total length of time that people were homeless or in housing pathways where there was an experience of repeated and enduring homelessness. Homelessness is not a single episode in a person's life; rather it is one of many different housing experiences.

Chart 4: Length of time in homelessness, including repeat homelessness by gender

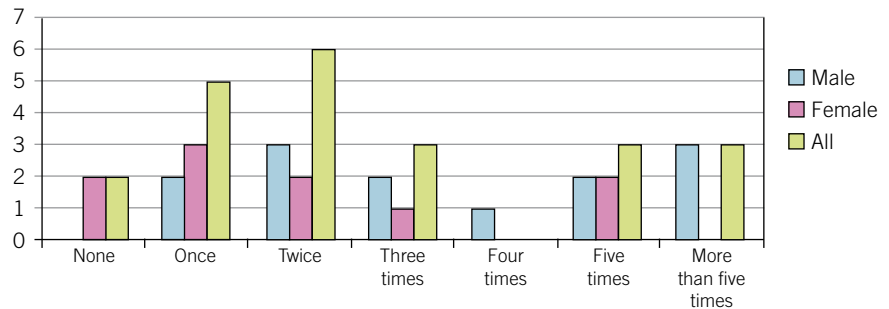


Overall women experienced shorter times in homelessness than men, with the highest numbers in homelessness for between one and two years.

The experiences of homelessness ranged from those who had been homeless for the majority of their adult lives to people whose homelessness' experiences had been relatively short. The majority of those interviewed had been homeless for between six months and three years. Two men and one woman had been homeless for more than ten years, whilst three women had been homeless for between 5 and 10 years. Two young women who had left the care system were housed at the age of 18 years in specific Focus Ireland projects which had prevented them becoming homeless. Overall women experienced shorter times in homelessness than men, with the highest numbers in homelessness for between one and two years. The average length of time spent in homelessness for women was three years, whereas for men the average length of homelessness was eight years.

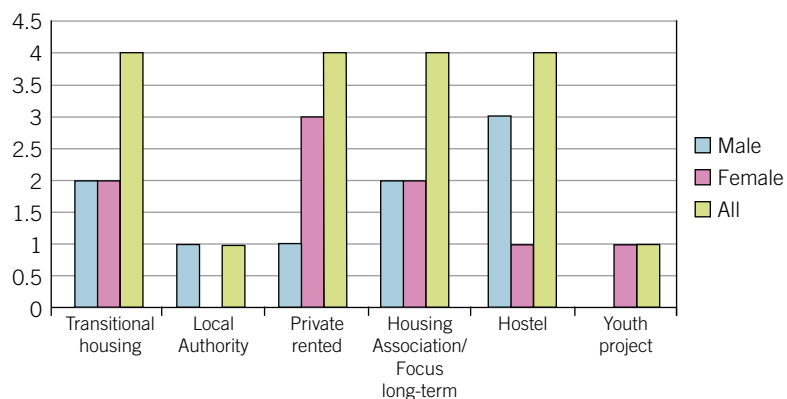
There are many different experiences of homelessness based on the number of times a person has been homeless. Often it is assumed that homelessness is a once-off experience quickly solved with appropriate services; whilst those who remain in homelessness are often stigmatized, seen as undeserving and unable to help themselves. The biographies reveal that the majority of interviewees had been homeless on more than one occasion, showing that homelessness is not always a one off experience, but a multiple experience. Women tended to have fewer episodes of homelessness than men, with three men typically having more than five episodes of homelessness. Chart 5 shows the number of times people had been homeless.

Chart 5: Number of times people had been homeless by gender



The interviews also represented a spread of people who have been through a variety of Focus Ireland services e.g. crisis and emergency services; temporary accommodation; transitional accommodation; long-term accommodation; people who have been settled in local authority and private rented accommodation; people who have found housing through the access housing unit; people who have received tenancy support and intensive family support; and people attending the Spokes education programme. Chart 6 illustrates the housing type where interviewees were living at the time of interview.

Chart 6: Housing type of interviewees at time of interview by gender



Summary of the biographies

The following is a summary of seventeen biographies of people with whom two in-depth interviews were carried out. Additional people participated in a first interview but were unable for various reasons to participate in the second interview. For ethical reasons, their specific experiences are not summarised below, although their interviews are used to inform some of the broad conclusions from the research. In the following sections, more details of the various elements of the biographies of the homeless people are discussed in a thematic way.

Pathways through homelessness: summary of the pathways of interviewees

Irene

Irene has four children, three of whom are currently in foster care. After six years of homelessness she is now living in privately rented accommodation and has her youngest son with her and is hoping soon to have another one of her sons come and live with her. Irene became homeless after she and her partner were given one week's notice from their landlord to leave the accommodation they were renting. At that time they had a four-month old baby. Finding affordable accommodation was a problem at the time and Irene and her partner did not know where to turn for help and advice. Irene's story shows how easy it is to fall into homelessness and drug addiction. But her story also shows how providing a home with the right kind of support at the right time can help someone to stay out of homelessness in the long term. Focus Ireland's services provided her with a pathway out of homelessness, by providing her with long-term accommodation and intensive family support.

Samantha

Samantha became homeless after years of struggling with depression and mental health difficulties, which also led to drug and alcohol addiction. She has five children with whom she is rebuilding a relationship after twelve years of homelessness. She now has long-term accommodation provided through Focus Ireland and has a key worker who has supported her into independence. Samantha acknowledges that her problems go back to her early childhood experiences. Today she is living independently and has rebuilt her life. She believes that her pathway out of homelessness was facilitated by a combination of appropriately tailored support, confidence and self-esteem building and the provision of long-term, affordable and secure accommodation.

Frank

Frank was homeless on and off for many years before he came into contact with homeless services. His first experience of homelessness was when he was twelve years of age, and since then has lived in a combination of privately rented accommodation, squats, staying with friends and living on the streets. He describes himself as not being a typical homeless person in that he came from a middle class family in Dublin. However, his early childhood experiences led him to being very vulnerable and he experienced loss of confidence, depression and isolation from his family. One of Frank's main problems in the years that he was homeless was finding safe, good quality and affordable accommodation. Since being in touch with Focus Ireland services he has been supported by a key worker and recently found long-term local authority accommodation. Frank attributes his pathway out of homelessness to a combination of secure, long-term and affordable accommodation with support from his key worker.

Chloe

Chloe is living in privately rented accommodation that was organised through the Rent Assistance Scheme (RAS) pilot scheme run by the local authorities. This has provided her with affordable, good quality accommodation. Focus Ireland provided her with long-term transitional accommodation when she left care at the age of 18 years. Focus Ireland helped to organise her current accommodation and provide a key worker service to Chloe, with regular support and weekly meetings. Along with the support she received, she has been able to build her trust in others, and her confidence and practical skills in her daily living. Chloe was in foster care from the age of 13 years after her mother died and she had also experienced abuse from her mother's boyfriend. Chloe believes that the services provided by Focus Ireland have been crucial to her achieving independence, particularly after she left care at the age of 18 years. She sees her key worker as a huge source of support to help her to live independently.

Ryan

Ryan first became homeless after the break up of his marriage when he was living in England. He became unwell after the marriage break up, having worked very hard and experienced a lot of stress. Eventually he left his job as a result of the stress. He travelled for a while and stayed with friends but was unable to find anywhere to live. He did not know where to turn for help and ended up invisibly homeless for several years before he found out about hostel accommodation and later Focus Ireland services. Today he lives in long-term accommodation provided by Focus Ireland and has rebuilt his life and his relationship with his grown up children. Ryan says that his pathway out of homelessness has been a combination of support with long-term and affordable accommodation. He believes that, if there had been an organisation like Focus Ireland to turn to when he first became homeless, his homelessness could have been prevented.

Eoin

Eoin became homeless three years ago when he split up with his wife and left the family home. Before that he had been working and had also played hurling for Waterford when he was younger. He experienced some mental health difficulties during his life and that, combined with heavy drinking, made it difficult to find a place to live. He lived in sheds, on friend's floors and in temporary accommodation before he came in contact with Focus Ireland services. Eoin's story is an example of how the coordination of services between the local authority, the HSE mental health services and Focus Ireland has worked well together. He has been given long-term accommodation through the local authority and, through his Focus Ireland tenancy support worker, Eoin has gained independence and autonomy.

Natalie

Natalie has six children and was homeless for six years as a result of an anti-social behaviour order. She says that at the time she would get angry and annoyed and was unable to handle difficult situations. Reflecting back she realises that, if she had had some support and a key worker, she could have been prevented from becoming homeless. She attributes her pathway out of homelessness to her key worker who has helped her to be autonomous, find privately rented accommodation, deal effectively with public services and, crucially, to be treated with respect. A key issue for Natalie was that she and her children were accommodated in B&B accommodation for several years. She says this was not good for their development or for family and social networks. Today she is in privately rented accommodation and continues to be supported by her key worker. She has learnt to budget her money and organise her life effectively.

Mary Jane

Mary Jane is a single parent with a young daughter. Because she became voluntarily homeless by leaving her local authority accommodation she found it difficult to be re-housed in accommodation that she found acceptable. She became homeless after she was harassed on the estate where she lived. Because of a difficult relationship with her parents she moved from her hometown and came to Dublin in 1998. Life got worse for Mary Jane when she got into debt and became homeless; she then slipped into drug addiction and later was imprisoned in Mountjoy for debt. Today she is living in long-term accommodation provided by Focus Ireland and is supported by her key worker. She believes that secure accommodation and the support of her key worker have been critical to her pathway out of homelessness. She says that she is now a better parent and can more effectively budget and organise her life. She knew that when she entered Focus Ireland services that she would no longer be able to use drugs and this was a big incentive for her to break the habit.

Liam

Liam's homelessness was the result of his marriage breakdown and the subsequent death of his father, which led to him becoming very depressed and isolated. At the time he had no one to turn to and he hit rock bottom and was living on the streets. He lived in a hostel for a while before coming into contact with Focus Ireland services.

Liam says he believed that, if there had been a Focus Ireland key worker to work with at the time that he first became homeless, this could have made life easier for him and he could have learnt to stand on his own two feet more quickly. Today he is living in long-term accommodation provided by Focus Ireland. Prior to this he was in transitional accommodation where he was supported in becoming independent in practical areas such as how to budget and cook for himself. He believes that his pathway out of homelessness was facilitated through the transitional accommodation and support from his key worker, and the security of long-term accommodation.

Ciara

Ciara is from Angola and now lives in Dublin in the Young Women's Project. Before she was 18 years of age, she was in foster care. She believes that the project has prevented her from becoming homeless as it provides supported housing for a period of one year for young women leaving the care system. She realises that without this it would have been hard to survive. Ciara is working and wants to further her education, however, she would be unable to claim rent allowance as a student and she sees this as a barrier to her moving into higher education. She believes that the Young Women's Project has been important in giving her support to live independently and she now looks forward to finding her own accommodation in the privately rented sector in the long term.

James and Laura

James and Laura are a married couple and have been using the Focus Ireland key worker services for approximately a year. The family have been separated due to homelessness. They have six children, Laura has one daughter living with her in hostel accommodation, two of their daughters are in foster care and James and their three older sons are in hostels for the homeless. The family became homeless after they were harassed and victimised on their estate; James had also experienced stress and depression following the death of his father. When they first became homeless they did not have information on, or an understanding of how the system worked. The family are homeless simply because there is a lack of accommodation for them to move into. They see their pathway out of homelessness as linked to housing supply and they are currently waiting for transitional accommodation to become available. With the support of their key worker, they have been able to get back on to the housing list and apply for transitional accommodation.

Seán

Sean's pathway into and through homelessness started as a result of difficulties in coping with life, and depression that led him to drink heavily from time to time. He has been homeless for a large part of his adult life. He was first homeless in 1976 and lived between night shelters and hostels, sometimes living on the streets in Ireland, Scotland and England. He is currently living in Salvation Army accommodation and hopes to gain transitional accommodation for a second time. He was harassed when he was given local authority accommodation and voluntarily gave up his tenancy after he felt unsafe and insecure. He believes that his key worker has been important in advocating for him. On reflection he realises that he could have had more stability in his life if he had been given some support through a key worker at an earlier stage. He has never worked and believes that employers would be prejudiced against him. He would like to live independently, to find work outdoors as a gardener and would like to have some support in this.

Michael

Michael became homeless after being discharged from St Ita's hospital in Portrane. He was homeless for six months before going into St Ita's after hitting rock bottom and following a number of suicide attempts. He had been living in his car for about six months and was not getting any support. He describes the lack of coordination between the hospital and community-based services, where there was no information or provision of temporary accommodation for him when he left the hospital. The lack of information and preparation for life outside meant that Michael had nowhere to go, as it was too late to contact any services for the weekend. Michael can now see a pathway out of homelessness before him; he lived in B&B and hostel accommodation before gaining transitional accommodation. He is now looking at the possibility of finding housing in the privately rented sector and getting his life back on track, although the accommodation he has looked at so far has been of very poor quality. He attributes his pathway out of homelessness to the fact that he began engaging with services and through his key worker has been able to see the possibility of finding accommodation and getting back into a routine of work.

Christopher

Christopher is 64 years of age and has been availing of a number of Focus Ireland services. He describes his life as difficult having been brought up in various orphanages and later by the Christian Brothers in an Industrial School. During these early years he experienced abuse and, when he finally left the school at the age of 18 years, he had no support or help in learning to be independent. During his life he has experienced mental health problems, marital and family break up and has been imprisoned several times. His experience of homelessness began after he was imprisoned. Today he can see a pathway out of homelessness through counselling and support from his Focus Ireland key worker. Having lived in various homeless hostels he is settled and happy in his current privately rented accommodation and is hoping to gain local authority accommodation in the future.

Lily

Lily has two daughters and became homeless after she was evicted from her local authority accommodation as a result of the anti-social behaviour of her eldest daughter, who was then a drug addict. At the time the family received no support or mediation and Lily did not know to whom she could turn to for help. She experienced many difficulties during this time and also suffered from poor health. She has been supported in finding temporary accommodation and she is living now in long-term accommodation provided by Focus Ireland. She is very happy in her new accommodation and feels secure and safe. This has also helped her to build a relationship with her eldest daughter. She has found a part-time job, which she enjoys.

Padraig

Padraig has been homeless for several years and is currently living in transitional accommodation in George's Hill. He is supported by his key worker and is learning to be independent and look after himself. He is hoping to control his addiction to alcohol and find employment in the future. He describes his drinking problem as the main cause of his homelessness. It led to him being thrown out of home and getting into trouble with the Gardai. Padraig has lived on the streets and in temporary homeless accommodation, as well as attending detox and rehab on a number of occasions. He is currently attending the Spokes programme and would like to undertake a college course in the future. He is concerned that his criminal record and his experience of homelessness will make it difficult for him to find work. He believes that employers need to be better aware of the struggles that people go through and the changes that they can make in their lives.

Eamonn

Eamonn is a young man who became homeless after falling out with his sister who he had been living with at the time. He lived on the streets and in temporary homeless accommodation before getting transitional accommodation with Focus Ireland, where he now lives with his partner and child. One of the problems that Eamonn faced when he was living on the streets was that he was unable to claim benefit; he also had nowhere to go for information about support services. He eventually found out about the hostel in another town and from there was informed about Focus Ireland services. Before that he tried to get into privately rented accommodation but the costs were prohibitive. He looks forward to finding a permanent place to live. He believes that the transitional accommodation has helped him to turn his life around and support from his key worker has enabled him to build his confidence and learn how to manage money and deal with public services. He is hoping to get back into employment in the future.

5. Pathways into homelessness: the risk factors and triggers

This section examines homeless people's pathways into homelessness. The findings from this research mirror those of other research studies (Mayock and Vekic, 2006; Pillinger, 2005; Anderson and Tulloch, 2000). Anderson and Tulloch's (2000) review of homeless pathways research concludes that people's life chances are affected by a range of structural factors such as income, employment and access to housing, whilst poverty is found to be the major underpinning factor influencing people's pathways into homelessness. In addition, they suggest that there is a number of individual characteristics and life experiences that affect people's homeless pathways, including age, gender and difficult life course experiences such as early childhood abuse, institutional care, alcohol and drug abuse. As well as the risk factors, there are a range of 'triggers', i.e. events that can trigger homelessness.

Mayock and Vekic's (2006) first phase of a longitudinal study of youth homelessness in Dublin found a diversity of homeless careers that were influenced by three main routes into homelessness: young people's experiences of state care, household instability and family conflict, and negative peer associations and problem behaviour. They found that early intervention was important to prevent a crisis that triggered homelessness. Once young people moved into a residential setting or where there was a longer history of homelessness, their engagement with services became reduced. Often this resulted in a culture of youth-based homelessness that negatively affected their wellbeing and security.

Pillinger's (2005) study for the Homeless Agency on a comprehensive strategy to prevent homelessness found that an understanding of pathways into homelessness can provide understanding of and insights into the social context within which homelessness occurs and consequently how it can be prevented. It is argued that:

In the policy discourse homelessness is often perceived as a marginal situation which affects small numbers of people with complex personal problems. This can work against prevention since the effect is to disassociate homelessness from the social processes that generate it. In response tackling homelessness through costly emergency services for homeless people causes the continued social marginalisation of homeless people. (Pillinger, 2005)

It is possible also to show that marginalisation in the labour market, unemployment and lack of employment opportunities are also closely connected to homeless people's pathways into homelessness. Homeless people experience a range of interacting problems including access to social rights in general, as well as difficulties in finding employment, and discrimination in access to employment and vocational training (Pillinger 2004, European Foundation 2002a and 2000b). It is evident that good quality employment is a primary tool for social inclusion. Many people who are marginalised are forced into low paid, insecure and exploitative forms of employment, which perpetuate their exclusion from society and the risks of homelessness. The pathways approach is important in relation to this because employment opportunities are also affected by different life course events such as access to education in early years, family support in middle years and services to support older people and their employment in later years (Lilja and Hämäläinen, 2001). The risk factors, as well as the barriers and obstacles faced by homeless people in accessing the labour market, can also be explained by social, personal, institutional and market factors, as discussed earlier in Section 2.

The main pathways into homelessness identified by interviewees

The biographies demonstrate that there is a diversity of pathways into homelessness.

The biographies demonstrate that there is a diversity of pathways into homelessness. Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the main and interlinking identified causes of homelessness for the first and subsequent times that people are out of a home. These include a range of risk factors. The three most commonly cited in people's biographies are lack of resources, unemployment and poverty (100% of interviewees); lack of suitable and affordable accommodation at the time of a crisis (100% of interviewees), and no social and family networks to turn to (88% of interviewees).

Chart 7 below shows that loss of tenancy is the most significant factor triggering homelessness for women, whereas ill health is a more common cause identified by men who experienced homelessness. Risk factors and triggers that people experienced which led to their homelessness include: loss of a tenancy and insecure housing (66% of interviewees), marital breakdown (28% of interviewees), family breakdown (44% of interviewees), alcohol and/or drug addiction (61% of interviewees), mental ill health and stress (33% of interviewees), voluntarily giving up a tenancy because of victimization/harassment (33% of interviewees), leaving a mental institution or prison (17% of interviewees), loss of tenancy because of anti-social behaviour (11% of interviewees), and young people leaving the care system (11% of interviewees). In the case of the young care leavers it is important to note that they were not homeless nor had they experienced homelessness, rather the services they received from Focus Ireland prevented them from becoming homeless on leaving the care system.

Chart 7: The main triggers identified for first or repeated homelessness by gender

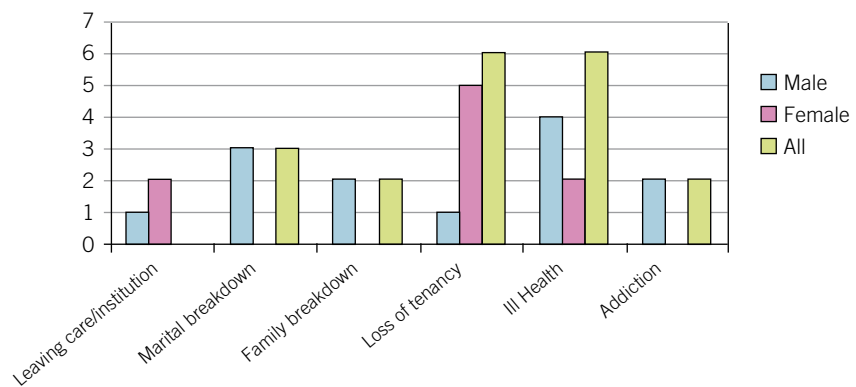


Table 1: Main causes identified as leading to homelessness (first and subsequent times)

	Marital breakdown	Family breakdown	Lack of resources/poverty/loss of job	Lack of access to suitable housing when at risk of homelessness	Loss of tenancy /insecure housing	Mental ill health	No social/family networks to turn to/or exhausted	Anti-social behaviour	Voluntarily became homeless because of victimisation / harassment	Alcohol/drug addiction	Leaving the care system	Coming out of mental hospital / prison
Irene	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		
Samantha			✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓
Frank		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		
Chloe		✓	✓	✓			✓				✓	
Ciara		✓	✓	✓							✓	
Ryan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Eoin	✓		✓	✓				✓		✓		
Natalie			✓	✓			✓					
Mary Jane			✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓
Liam	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
James			✓	✓	✓		✓		✓			
Laura			✓	✓	✓		✓		✓			
Sean			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Michael			✓	✓		✓	✓					✓
Christopher	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			
Lily		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				
Padraig		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		
Eamonn		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		

The seventeen biographies show that it is difficult to categorise people's pathways into homelessness as due to a single causal factor. Rather, there is a range of factors that impact on a person's pathway into homelessness. In some cases there are multiple routes into homelessness; several of the biographies reveal that people move in and out of homelessness on two or more occasions.

The biographies highlight how pathways into homelessness result from individuals and households being exposed to a range of interlinking risks related to structural and individual factors, with unemployment and poverty as common underlying reasons. For example, addiction or mental ill health can trigger family and marriage breakdown or loss of a tenancy. These circumstances are also affected by a lack of social and family networks. As **Padraig** says:

I think the main reasons people become homeless is because of alcohol abuse, drugs or breakdown in relationships at home, the husband gets kicked out or the woman is being abused, or people coming out of prison, many families turn their backs on people leaving prison.

A large number of homeless people are not visibly homeless in the initial stages of their homelessness, often because they are staying with friends or family members, sleeping rough or living in various forms of temporary accommodation.

A large number of homeless people are not visibly homeless in the initial stages of their homelessness, often because they are staying with friends or family members, sleeping rough or living in various forms of temporary accommodation. Staying with family and friends is often temporary and goodwill can be quickly exhausted. One of the most difficult areas for prevention is in tackling homelessness at these invisible and early stages, as often this is the hardest stage for homeless people to engage with service providers.

Extracts from the pathways biographies are presented below to exemplify some of the life course risks and triggers that resulted in homelessness for these people and their families. In all of the biographies it is possible to see how early intervention, along with access to appropriate services and accommodation, could have prevented homelessness.

These life course risks and triggers are discussed under the following nine headings:

- Structural factors: housing supply and poverty
- Unemployment and poor access to the labour market
- Marital and family breakdown
- Leaving care
- Addiction problems
- Mental health difficulty and problems coping
- Family abuse/institutional abuse
- Discharge from an institution
- Loss of tenancy through anti-social behaviour/victimisation in housing

a) Structural factors: housing supply and poverty

The supply and availability of affordable housing along with poverty are the two critical factors underpinning people's pathways into homelessness. All interviewees stated that a shortage of affordable housing, low income and poverty were key factors in their homeless pathways. The lack of adequate and affordable accommodation resulted in additional risks that led to other social problems.

Irene's story exemplifies this well. In Irene's case the insecurity experienced in the privately rented sector and a lack of affordable accommodation precipitated a series of difficult and tragic life events. Irene believes that her pathway into homelessness could have been avoided if she and her family had had access to affordable and secure accommodation after they lost their tenancy. Irene had been living in a privately rented house with her partner in Carlow but was given one week's notice to leave by her landlord:

Me and my partner we had to get out in a week. The stress was terrible and we had young children. It was a terrible feeling. We had nowhere to go and ended up living in a tent for about six months and then we decided to go to Dublin.

Her children were living with her partner's parents and she says that if there had been a place for them to live at the time and somewhere that they could afford then all of their later problems and homelessness could have been prevented:

Even somewhere temporary to keep us going would have helped, but there was no one to turn to and no information.

According to **Padraig**, a single young man, lack of access to affordable and secure accommodation made his situation worse:

There should be more accommodation. Being a single man on the housing list it will take ages to get a local authority place. There needs to be more done to build places for people. Some people don't know how to fend for themselves and have drink and drug problems. If you went to an addict on the streets and said to them if you go into rehab we will give you a place to live...it's a way of breaking the vicious cycle.

b) Unemployment and poor access to the labour market

Access to the labour market and unemployment is closely connected to people becoming marginalised. Several homeless people said their experiences of losing their jobs – often at a time of distress in their lives – was a linked factor in their homelessness.

Before his marriage split up **Ryan** was successful in his job and earned a good income. He says:

When my marriage broke up I became homeless and jobless...I got very stressed and I got sick and ended up having to leave my job...later when I was homeless I got a job but that company went bankrupt...at this stage I had no money left and I was going downhill quickly.

Christopher had a successful career in the catering industry before he became homeless, but heavy drinking and dealing with his past quickly caught up with him:

I enjoyed my work and worked in some of the top hotels. I had a good career. But things went very wrong...there was a big culture of drinking outside of work and this did me no good. Eventually I lost my job and ended up in prison.

c) Marital and family breakdown

Marital and family breakdown are major triggers for homelessness. The homeless pathways identified in the biographies of five people were attributed to marital or family breakdown.

Marital breakdown

Marital breakdown triggered the homelessness of three of the men interviewed. In the case of Ryan, Liam and Eoin marital break-up resulted in significant levels of stress and depression, and a sense of helplessness of having nowhere to turn for help or information. In the case of Eoin, mental health difficulty and heavy drinking were the factors leading to the break-up of his marriage, which in turn led to him becoming homeless. All three men had few social and family supports and limited financial resources to help them through the crisis that they faced in their lives.

Liam's homelessness was the result of his marriage breakdown and the subsequent death of his father. He had been living with his father for four years and after his father died he became homeless.

I had no one to turn to, my family was all in England. I was broken, I was rock bottom and sleeping on the streets...it was Christmas and I stood on the bridge and I wanted to throw myself off it. That's how bad I had got.

He was taken to a local hostel by the Gardai. He believes that if there had been a Focus Ireland key worker to work with at the time this could have made life easier for him and he could have learnt to stand on his own two feet more quickly.

Ryan first became homeless after the break-up of his marriage when he was living in England. He became unwell and stressed after the marriage break-up and he subsequently lost his job. He travelled for a while and stayed with friends.

I felt a burden on my friends, there was nowhere to turn to and it was stressful and I felt badly treated when I tried to get help. I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, I was devastated by the marriage break-up. I had little support and I felt that the bottom fell out of my life.

At this point in his life he did not have anyone to turn to for help, there were no services that he knew of and he says that:

If there has been an organisation like Focus to help me out things may have worked out differently. I was in psychiatric care for a short time and I went to the AA and then to the Citizen's Advice Bureau. But no one told me about any homeless services or gave me information about what I could do.

Family breakdown

In the case of young people a breakdown of family relationships and family conflict is often a cause of homelessness. This is often coupled with a range of other factors that contribute to their exclusion from society, including early school leaving, a lack of contact with services such as schools, youth services or other statutory services, and addiction problems. In Pdraig's case his alcoholism led to him being thrown out of home, whereas in Eamonn's case a fall-out with his sister and no other family members to turn to led him to become homeless.

Young people are more likely to return home on a number of occasions before they make the final break.

The biographies also show that young people are more likely to return home on a number of occasions before they make the final break. It is at this time that preventative work could be carried out, particularly because longer periods of time in homelessness often result in a break with family ties and entrenchment in homelessness. This was certainly the case for Eamonn, Frank and Pdraig who returned home on several occasions but, because the cause of their leaving home was not resolved, they quickly returned to homelessness.

As a teenager **Eamonn** became homeless because he had nowhere to live and could not afford privately rented accommodation. He had been living with his sister but they had a bad relationship and it became difficult for him to stay there. At the time he did not know where to turn and became homeless. He recalls this as a very difficult time in his life:

I'd been sleeping rough for three months...the Guards move you on regularly. One problem was that I couldn't get any benefit because of not having an address. For six months I had nothing. And sometimes I'd go up to my sister's during the day but couldn't stay with her as she lived in a place for mothers and children.

He tried to get into privately rented accommodation but the costs were prohibitive.

When I was sleeping rough there was no help. I told the social about my position but they didn't give me any help. They told me to go to the Council. If there had been someone to tell me about the hostel in Waterford then I would have been off the streets in two days. At the time there was not any help and no one to turn to. I didn't know about any services. My sister helped me to find out about the hostel.

d) Leaving care

The two people interviewed who had left care had been supported into independence through the provision of after-care services by Focus Ireland.

Ciara came to Ireland from Angola when she was 15 years old with her mother and younger sister. She ended up in foster care for one year as a result of:

Differences between myself and my mother. One day I just decided to leave. First of all I didn't want to be in foster care and I wanted to take care of myself. I wanted to go on and do my leaving cert and get a job...But now I realise that it would have been hard to survive.

She lived with various foster care families for one year. Most of her foster care was temporary. There was little help given to Ciara in moving forward towards independent living and she found foster care isolating:

In foster care I felt like I was staying with somebody, it didn't feel like home. In foster care it might have been good to have been with another young person going through the same situation as you and same age; the main thing was to get my status sorted, they didn't really do very much for me. It would have been good to have had a project for under-age children as it's a bit isolating in foster care.

Ciara subsequently moved into supported accommodation through Focus Ireland's Young Women's Project.

Chloe was in foster care from the age of 13 years. She entered foster care when her mother died and prior to that she had been sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend. Supported by her social workers she took a case against him and he was prosecuted and sent to prison for six years. This was a very difficult and stressful time for Chloe. She says that:

The social worker was very good and I had some counselling to help me cope but at the age of 18 years I had to fend for myself. Even though there was an aftercare programme, there was little that the programme could do in finding me good quality accommodation and support.

e) Addiction problems

Several of the people interviewed experienced addiction problems. In a number of cases, addiction caused homelessness, whereas for others addiction came about because of homelessness through living in accommodation where drink and drugs were in regular use. In **Padraig's** case, alcohol addiction led to his homelessness:

I was living at home with my mother and brothers but my drinking was getting out of control and there were arguments. I basically got thrown out. I knew a few people who had been homeless and I found some information and got hold of the free phone number to get accommodation.

During his homelessness he returned home on one occasion:

At one time I went home but the arguments were too much. I would have ended up snapping. I had a good enough upbringing, but it was because of my drinking that I had to leave, I realise that now.

f) Mental health difficulty and problems coping

A large number of homeless people experience mental ill-health, stress, anxiety and depression. This is both the cause of homelessness and the result of homelessness. The biography of Samantha exemplifies how her struggle with depression following her mother's suicide led to her marital breakdown, addiction and subsequent homelessness. In Eoin's biography mental health difficulties were linked to alcohol addiction and marital break-up, which resulted in him becoming homeless.

Samantha became homeless after years of struggling with depression, as well as drug and alcohol addiction. She has five children who have either remained with her former partner or are in care. She attributes a lot of her later problems in life to her upbringing:

A lot was to do with my growing up...he [her father] hit my mother...I used to dread reading in class I had been made to feel stupid by my father...I got married when I was 18 years old. He had a good job and financially we were very comfortable. I still don't know if I loved him or was it just that I was trying to get out of the family home. We were married for 18 years.

However, things started to go wrong when her mother committed suicide. From then on she found it very hard to cope and often felt anxious. Her marriage broke up, she lost a lot of weight. She became suicidal and very depressed. She had little support and became addicted to prescribed drugs and alcohol.

One night I blew up and went into the Spar and a girl and man came over to me to see if I wanted to go to their place for a drink. I did go down in the end...one day led to another day...I stayed with this man for a few days...I was still getting my tablets...as the days went on it was harder to go back to the family home. I went into a second hand shop to get a change of clothes several times. As time went on it was harder to go home. At times I had no one to talk to.

Samantha did not know what services were available or that she had entitlements to take up services:

If the services were advertised more then it might have helped me when I needed some help; I didn't know what was out there...more information about services that are available would be a good thing.

Eoin became homeless in 2003 when he split up with his wife and left the family home. He had been drinking heavily before that and he says that 'life had been quite difficult'. When he became homeless he had nowhere to go and no one to turn to and he described this time as a real low point in his life – he was living rough and sleeping on a friend's floor:

For one year I slept in sheds, on the streets and sometimes with friends. I became very depressed. There was no one that I could turn to – I wouldn't have known anyone – I ended up depressed. I was drinking heavily when we separated...It would have made a big difference if I had had some support and help then. It would have been good to have met Seamus (key worker) then...things would have been different.

He ended up in the local psychiatric unit and later moved to live in a community hostel for people with mental health difficulties where he lived for one year. During this time Eoin says that:

My drinking got out of control when I was in the hostel, I was depressed and life was difficult.

g) Family abuse / institutional abuse

Several people interviewed attributed their homelessness to their early childhood experiences of abuse and family difficulty. This underlines the importance of early intervention to prevent problems in later life. In Frank's case an abusive father led him into homelessness for short periods of time as a child and later as an adult. In Christopher's case abuse experienced in the Industrial School where he grew up and a lack of care and support led him to become homeless in later life.

Frank was homeless on and off for several years before he came into contact with the homeless services. He describes his childhood years as being very difficult and a reason for his later problems in his life:

My father was always stressed and there was a lot of tension and violence... he was unable to draw a line between discipline and abuse. This affected relationships with school teachers and friends at school, and led to bad behaviour and aggression. I learnt very quickly that passiveness is more fruitful than violence.

Frank realises on reflection that someone should have picked up on the violence at home, particularly because his behaviour signalled that his problems were related to abuse. He believes that there should be a safe house for young people who had experienced violence and abuse at home and also that at the community level there should be a sense of responsibility in looking out for any problems in local communities. Similarly, if attention had been given to families experiencing difficulties this too would have helped. Frank suggested that there should be programmes of family mediation and family counselling, as well as programmes for anger management, as part of a broad approach to personal wellness.

Christopher had a difficult upbringing and grew up in several orphanages and then went to the Industrial School in Tralee. The Christian Brothers were responsible for him up to the age of 18 years. When he was 16 years he was sent to work in the kitchen of the training college:

It was very rough, it was a training school for the Christian Brothers and very long hours. I found it very stressful and started getting fits and that was when they sent me down to the mental hospital in Killarney. When I came out of the mental hospital they then got me another job in Killarney in a hotel as a kitchen porter.

Christopher believes his later homelessness was closely connected to a combination of the abuse and isolation he experienced as a child, and the lack of preparation he received for adulthood:

For me the prevention has to happen at an early age. I got nothing and no help when I left the Christian Brothers. They left me in the wild having been confined in four walls. I had no family and no money and everything was strange and confusing...if I could have had someone to talk to about how to open a post office account, how to live in a normal way then it would not have been so lonely and difficult...I didn't know what was right and what was wrong...When I was in school I believed that the abuse was the norm. It's very painful. When I look back I can see how my later problems were related to what happened when I was younger. Later I lost my job, my marriage broke up, I ended up in prison several times and I had no one to turn to.

Christopher's story shows how the services need to be tackling problems at an early age and addressing these issues when people are children, on the basis that homelessness can be related to early childhood insecurity and isolation. As Christopher says:

There was no support for families in those days; they didn't know how to support the family and children ended up being taken into the care of the State. The family was neglected and then the children were let down by the State. I would say support the family so that children can stay with their parents and we could prevent the homelessness later on...All of this should have been tackled at an early stage in your life.

h) Discharge from an institution

Michael became homeless after being discharged from St Ita's hospital. He had been homeless for six months before coming into St Ita's after hitting rock bottom and a number of suicide attempts. He had been living in his car for about six months and was not getting any support:

I was existing, now I know that it was no way to be but I didn't know that there was anyone to turn to and I wasn't in a frame of mind to get help. Things got so bad that I ended up in St Ita's.

He describes the lack of coordination between the hospital and community-based services, which resulted in there being no information available to him or provision of temporary accommodation when he left the hospital.

On the Wednesday they came and told me that [they] would sort something else that they wouldn't release me into the 'wild', and that they would sort out the medication and other things. On the Friday the consultant told me that it was time to go and that 'they were not a refuge' and that they were discharging me. He told me to get a number and ring before 12.00 – at this stage it was 1.30. It was a real shock. He told me that they needed the beds and that I would have to find somewhere and it wasn't his issue.

Michael stated that the lack of information and preparation meant that he was left with no accommodation as it was too late to contact any services for the weekend:

There was no information and it was very frustrating...I could have been arrested for refusing to leave a mental hospital – it could only happen in this country...The long and the short of it was that I had to leave and they had to threaten the police to ask me to leave. They are passing the buck so that they won't be responsible. A week before I was trying to commit suicide and then they were trying to throw me out...They just push you off onto someone else.... There was no coordination between the doctors. They could have got onto Focus Ireland or sorted out some temporary accommodation...there is a basic pattern people are being discharged all of the time...but you just get passed on. It's bad enough with what is going on in your life.

i) Loss of tenancy through anti-social behaviour / victimisation in housing

Several people's biographies attribute homelessness to loss of tenancy coupled with low levels of resources and poverty, difficulties in sustaining tenancies or finding alternative accommodation. Although there are now policies and procedures in place in most local authorities to prevent homelessness arising from anti-social behaviour or rent arrears and debt, blockages in the system and a lack of supply of alternative accommodation can render people homeless. Natalie's biography shows how it might have been possible to prevent homelessness and further problems arising for families in finding a home after eviction for anti-social behaviour. In the case of James and Laura, the difficulties they experienced on the estate where they lived led to them giving up their tenancy; these difficulties were exacerbated by James's depression following the death of his father. In Mary Jane's case victimisation and harassment led her to give up her tenancy and was the trigger for her homelessness and other corresponding social problems.

Natalie became homeless six years ago. At that time she had four children who were ten, eight, three and one. She was living in her parent's council house. She says that:

I had a number of problems that I handled wrong at the time, I did things without thinking, that didn't help and I would get angry and annoyed. Don't get me wrong I did handle things wrong. They put an eviction notice on my parents and put an anti-social order on me.

After the eviction notice had been issued she stayed in the house not knowing where she could move to:

I stayed in the house – I think that they [the Council] didn't listen to me and they didn't help me. The Council had a terrible attitude towards me and that made me more angry and upset – but the Sheriffs were very helpful and sympathetic and helped me to pack. They were very apologetic.

On reflection Natalie believes that there could have been more done to help her and prevent her from being evicted. Natalie found it very hard to find a place to live; particularly she found that landlords did not want to take on children. She says that it is now good to see that the Council is working with landlords to check properties out for rent in advance.

James and Laura are a married couple with six children and have been using the Focus Ireland key worker services for around a year. The family became homeless after they had been harassed and victimised on their estate and they found this very hard to cope with. James had also experienced stress and depression following the death of his father and had already left the family home before Laura and the children left. Laura says:

It was better to be homeless than put up with the stress...I was very scared and my children were too. It was really terrible and I couldn't cope...I had a lot of trouble with young teenagers, drinking, smoking, getting the windows broken and kicking the door in. I became homeless and my children had to go homeless...that was better than what we were having to put up with. There was no one to turn to or to complain to...you just worried that if you did complain that it would make things worse...so it was easier to leave.

As James says:

When we were first homeless we didn't know what was out there and we didn't know who to turn to for help...didn't know how the system worked. We are homeless today because there is no accommodation for us to move into.

The family have been homeless – living separately in hostel accommodation – for a year simply because there is a lack of accommodation for them to move into. They see their pathway out of homelessness as being linked to housing supply and they are currently waiting for transitional accommodation to become available. With the support of their key worker, they have been able to get back onto the housing list and apply for transitional accommodation.

Although there are now policies and procedures in place in most local authorities to prevent homelessness arising from anti-social behaviour or rent arrears and debt, blockages in the system and a lack of supply of alternative accommodation can render people homeless.

Sean had been homeless for many years and had been through transitional housing before he took up a local authority tenancy. But later he became voluntarily homeless and surrendered his keys. At the time he says that:

I made it clear to the local authority that I didn't want to be housed in the inner city; I wanted to be as far out of the city as possible. I moved into that place under duress...there was no choice at the time. I made an effort to transfer to another local authority which wasn't successful...But I had problems on the estate, there was an incident where the Guards smashed my door in...it was a very traumatic experience...they wouldn't say what they were looking for and there was no apology, but later I found out it was a mistake. I picked up hostility from the neighbours and in the community. This made me all the more determined to get out of there. There were times when I didn't sleep in the flat and slept rough sometimes as I felt very at risk and anxious if anyone came to the door.

Mary Jane is a single parent with a young daughter. As she became voluntarily homeless from her local authority accommodation, she found it difficult to be re-housed in accommodation that she found acceptable. Due to a difficult relationship with her parents she moved from her hometown and came to Dublin in 1998. She was housed by the Council on what she describes as a very rough estate, because she experienced harassment by her neighbours. After her house was broken into and her windows were smashed she left the property. She describes this as a time when she experienced a lot of fear:

We were outsiders and they wanted us out, we were terrorised and the house was robbed so I packed up the house and left – because I voluntarily became homeless I was unable to claim housing allowance.

Despite Garda reports confirming the violence and harassment she continued to be refused housing allowance:

After three appeals I managed to get my allowance back...this took 18 months...I was staying with friends in really bad accommodation, it was a privately rented house and there were lots of drug addicts around. It was no good for me. Life had gotten really bad.

Conclusion

The extracts from homeless people's biographies show that pathways into homelessness result from a range of risks that can be linked to structural, social and personal/individual factors, as well as a wide spectrum of triggers that can culminate in homelessness.

The extracts from homeless people's biographies show that pathways into homelessness result from a range of risks that can be linked to structural, social and personal/individual factors, as well as a wide spectrum of triggers that can culminate in homelessness. From the biographies it is possible to summarise the main factors as follows:

Structural factors

- Lack of access to and supply of affordable housing
- Poverty and lack of resources
- Poor access to the labour market
- Poor access to services and service exclusion

Social factors

- Barriers to inclusion and participation in society
- Marginalisation from society and from social networks, including negative attitudes to homeless people resulting in stigma, prejudice and discrimination

Individual/personal factors

- Poor mental health or a deterioration in mental health or increase in alcohol or drug misuse resulting from stressful life course events
- Alcohol/drug addiction which result in social marginalisation and exclusion
- Lack of qualifications and work experience
- Difficulties in money management and debt problems
- Offending behaviour and/or experience of prison
- Loss of self-esteem and/or a lack of personal stability and coping skills owing to difficult life course events
- Loss or lack of social, family and community supports

There is also a range of interlinking personal circumstances and housing insecurities that trigger people's pathways into homelessness:

- Marital breakdown resulting in loss of home
- Family breakdown, particularly affecting young people who leave the parental home in a crisis
- Friends or relatives no longer willing or able to accommodate a sharing household
- Leaving care or breakdown of after-care arrangements
- No family or social networks to turn to/support networks are exhausted
- Leaving mental health institution or prison
- Loss of home owing to loss of tenancy in privately rented accommodation and insecure housing
- Loss of home owing to lost tenancy in local authority accommodation through anti-social behaviour, arrears or debt
- Loss of home by voluntarily giving up a tenancy because of inappropriate accommodation, victimization/harassment, arrears or debt

Table 2: Homeless experiences (c = current accommodation at time of interview)

	Length of time in and out of homelessness before accessing services	Total length of time homeless	Slept rough (at least once)	Temporary stay with friends or family members	Squat	Private rented housing	Temporary housing through night bus/OHS/emergency	Hostel	B&B	Supported or transitional housing	Local authority long-term housing	Privately rented long-term housing	Focus Ireland long-term housing	Focus Ireland group project
Irene	2 years	3 years	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓c		
Samantha	1 year	11 years	✓	✓		✓		✓					✓c	
Frank	5 years	8 years	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓c			
Chloe	0	1 year							✓		✓c	✓c		
Ciara	0	0												✓c
Ryan	2 years	3 years	✓	✓		✓		✓					✓c	
Eoin	2 years	3 years	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓c				
Natalie	2 months	6 years		✓					✓			✓c		
Mary Jane	1 year	2 years		✓		✓		✓		✓c			✓c	
Liam	6 months	2 years	✓			✓		✓		✓			✓c	
James	6 months	1 year						✓c						
Laura	0	1 year		✓				✓c						
Sean	2 years	20 years	✓			✓	✓	✓c	✓		✓			
Michael	3 months	6 months	✓	✓		✓		✓c						
Christopher	1 year	5 years	✓			✓	✓	✓				✓c		
Lily	1 year	2 years				✓		✓					✓c	
Padraig	2 years	6 years	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓						
Eamonn	1 year	1 year	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓c				

Ryan says that when you are homeless your self-esteem is very low and it becomes hard to ask for help. He also did not know where to turn for help:

When you are homeless it is hard you feel that everyone is looking down on you. Sometimes I went for days without any food. It makes you feel rock bottom and you get sick.

Barriers to pathways through homelessness

Much of the research on homelessness finds that large numbers of homeless people get stuck in homelessness and a sub-culture of homelessness, which is frequently typified by low-self esteem, addiction-related risks, as well as mental and physical health problems. Several people's biographies revealed the impact that homelessness had on their levels of stress and coping strategies. Many people's biographies also revealed how drugs helped them to cope with the risks, fear, anxiety, depression, stress and low-esteem associated with being out of a home.

Large numbers of homeless people get stuck in homelessness and a sub-culture of homelessness, which is frequently typified by low-self esteem, addiction-related risks, as well as mental and physical health problems.

There are different stages in people's pathways through homelessness. For some people this is temporary and is resolved quickly whilst for others there are multiple living situations. Some people have moved between emergency and short-term accommodation for long periods of time. During this time there was often a loss of family and other social networks. In Mayock and Veki's (2006) research it was found that the longer young people were caught into a scenario of rough sleeping and temporary homeless hostel accommodation, the more likely they were to develop a street-base youth homeless 'scene' focus to their lives, typified by risk, addiction and criminal activity, and a break with their communities, homes and families. The crucial factor is that the longer young people are in homeless services the harder it is for them to manage a quick and easy transition out of homelessness (Mayock and Veki, 2006; Hutson and Liddiard, 1994).

Michael identified two major barriers: finding accommodation and the lack of coordination between services.

The big gap was finding accommodation – you need a place to stay, but there's more than that as the hostels don't really help someone, to wake up on Christmas morning and to have to be out of the door is not pleasant; it's degrading and humiliating. Having to plod around for the day and have to be back for six on Christmas day. It's all wrong... It's the luck of the draw; you are powerless at someone else's mercy. You are often reminded of your place. The whole thing is catch 22. You are caught up in this environment and it's so hard to get out of it.

The biographies of several homeless people show how the impact of the experience of homelessness on people's lives affects their self-esteem and contributes to social exclusion.

In **Irene's** case, exclusion brought about by homelessness led to drug addiction as a way of coping. Irene talks about the impact this has on self-esteem and then on the difficulties in getting her life back on track. **Sean** has experienced homelessness most of his life and his vulnerability and support needs have made it difficult for him to remain out of homelessness. His biography shows the difficulties experienced by some people in finding effective and permanent pathways out of homelessness. Homelessness can be a regular and recurrent experience for some. In Ryan's case the lack of information about services and not knowing where to turn led him to living on the streets. Homelessness made him feel very low and depressed. He had exhausted all possibilities of staying with friends and had spent all of his money. It was a while before Ryan found out about the homeless services that were available.

Sean has been homeless for a large part of his adult life. He was first homeless in 1976 and lived between the streets and hostels in Ireland, Scotland and England. He had attended a number of residential treatment centres for detoxification, although he found the contact with a religious regime difficult. He wanted to work outdoors but he had no choice and had to work indoors.

In the early days of his homelessness he did not look for support and moved from one hostel to another. On reflection he realises that he could have acquired more stability in his life if he had been given some support through a key worker. In 2001 he was housed in transitional housing and was put on the list for long-term housing in Waterford through Focus Ireland.

After that Sean lived in various types of accommodation, including Focus Ireland's long-term accommodation, but he was socially isolated in Waterford and came back to Dublin:

I didn't think it through and I didn't look at the bigger picture. I just wanted to get out of the place in Dublin. I went to Waterford and felt very isolated; I also find it hard to meet people. My supports were in Dublin, like my sponsor for the AA.

He came back to Dublin and went to the Homeless Person's Unit.

I wanted to get some information in advance of me presenting myself as homeless again. I wrote to them and I faxed them and I didn't hear back from them. I ended up packing my bags and turned up to the Homeless Person's Unit. I was referred to a B&B in Manor Street, it was a tiny room with bunk bed. I felt very restricted and it was infested with mice. I went back to the HPU and they referred me to another B&B in Swords, where I stayed for four months. All the rooms are single and en-suite. The accommodation was a big improvement but there were no cooking facilities. I had to travel to Dublin every day, which adds a drain on your income. I applied to the CWO for financial assistance for a bus pass but this was not possible...At Christmas we were given a meal in the hostel – it was such poor quality meal that I couldn't eat it – it felt [like a] very half hearted attempt to do something for us.

Sean now lives in a Salvation Army hostel and is hoping to gain access to transitional accommodation in the future, although he is worried that this will not be available to him as he had availed of transitional accommodation in the past.

When **Ryan** became homeless after his marriage break-up, he stayed in a hotel and then a bed and breakfast for a few nights and gradually the remainder of his money ran out. He managed to get supplementary welfare benefits and then got a job. The company he worked for went bankrupt and after various other jobs he found himself homeless and jobless. It was a taxi driver who first told him about the men's hostel in Limerick, which largely provided detox and rehabilitation services, otherwise he would have stayed living on the streets.

He's the one that got me into the rehab place and it was a place to stay and to eat...it built my strength up and I got well again. But you are still homeless as you still don't have freedom.

At this time there was no information available and Ryan did not know where he could turn to for help. The taxi driver had been homeless himself in the past and knew where the services were. Ryan believes that if there had been more information available at this time his homelessness could have been prevented or could have been temporary. He moved between Dublin and Limerick for several years, where he lived in various hostels. He used the Coffee Shop and got clothes from Saint Vincent de Paul. He knew nothing about Focus Ireland's transitional programme or long-term housing.

Frank's homeless pathway is characterised by several experiences of homelessness from a young age. As a boy he often lived on the streets, usually due to episodes of violence inflicted on him by his father, and eventually he was thrown out of the house. Even though Frank had periods of employment and did well in his job he fell in and out of homelessness. Frank says that his social life revolved around work and at this time he was drinking heavily and spending most of his wages on drink. After that Frank's life fell apart and he suffered mental distress. Frank ended up on the streets again and eventually he was put in touch with mental health services by his father:

Everything fell apart, I had no support, I stopped eating and lost weight seriously. I then went into rent arrears and because I had stopped working I got into serious difficulty. I was not functioning at all.

James and Laura have had a difficult few years and became homeless a year ago. Since giving up their tenancy, they have been trying to find alternative accommodation. They believe that you have to go through the system before you get transitional accommodation:

There are people out there that have been using the night bus and the hostels for years...you have to wait your turn. In an ideal world you shouldn't have to wait for housing. You do have to have patience. If there was more accommodation you wouldn't have to wait too long.

According to Laura:

It has been a difficult time and we hope to get a place back together and to get the kids back with us. One of the problems is that if you give up a council house you lose your place to get another house. All of our lives we have been together, we had our own place. We had never been homeless and we found things out the hard way of where to go and how to get things sorted. It's been hard. But we see this as a temporary time of homelessness.

The experiences of homeless people's housing and homeless experiences are discussed under the following five headings:

- Sleeping rough
- Staying with friends or relatives
- Living in temporary privately rented accommodation
- Living in homeless accommodation
- B&B accommodation

a) Sleeping rough

At an early stage in people's homeless pathways there is a high instance of sleeping rough and/or staying with friends or family members.

The biographies show that at an early stage in people's homeless pathways there is a high instance of sleeping rough and/or staying with friends or family members. Eleven out of 18 people (61% of interviewees) had slept rough at least once during their homeless pathway; all had slept rough when they first became homeless, whereas five people had periodically slept rough when other housing arrangements had not worked out. One person had lived periodically in a squat.

Irene and her partner lived on the streets after they had been evicted from their flat. Through a combination of lack of money and drug addiction they ended up on the streets and in a round of temporary and hostel accommodation.

This was a really difficult time and I felt so low and dirty, you can't look anyone in the eye as you know that they know that you are homeless...On the streets you feel very low and have a low opinion of yourself.

As **Sean** says, during his pathway through homelessness:

On the whole I was staying in night shelters and hostels...I only slept rough a few times... It was only when I became homeless that my drinking problem started and then it just got progressively worse and worse.

The first time **Frank** was thrown out of the home he was eleven years old:

My first experience of living on the streets was after my father had been violent and [I was] then thrown out...I would then have to come home like a stray cat. I was too young to understand the criminality of his actions. One time he snapped on Christmas day and I was only thrown out...it was Christmas.

Although at one stage Frank was working, he still had no home to go to, and spent some nights in a hotel and some nights on the streets:

One night there was nowhere to go and I ended up sleeping in a phone box to keep out of the wind.

As an adult Frank lived in a number of different temporary and rented places, as well as periods of living on the streets and in a squat. He says about the squat:

This was an unpleasant experience, you learnt to keep to your space on the floor, there were a lot of drug users. I was there because I had nowhere else to go and I had no work.

b) Staying with friends or relatives

Eleven people (61% of interviewees) stayed with friends or family in the early stages of their homelessness, all of whom stated that the arrangements were short term and that eventually the length of stay was exhausted owing to the difficulties that this presented to the people they were staying with. It is also worth noting that many people who stayed with friends or relatives slept on the floor or on a settee 'sofa surfing' and that their hosts were living in relatively small houses or flats with limited living space. Time spent staying with friends was invariably short-term, lasting from between a few days to two months.

Many people who stayed with friends or relatives slept on the floor or on a settee 'sofa surfing' and that their hosts were living in relatively small houses or flats with limited living space.

When **Ryan** first became homeless after his marriage break-up he had nowhere to go:

I stayed with some friends for a while, but you soon outstay your welcome and the last thing I wanted was to do this...it's a terrible feeling having nowhere to go and it's terrible to feel like you are a burden.

Laura didn't know where she would be living after she and her family became homeless:

First of all I stayed with my sister and then my mother but it was hard with six kids. You can't put that burden on them. After that I went to the Homeless Person's Unit and ended up in various different B&Bs....At the time I never knew about key workers or anything like that, I never knew they existed.

c) Living in temporary privately rented accommodation

During their pathways through homelessness, thirteen people (72% of interviewees) lived in temporary privately rented accommodation, often sharing with others. Those who experienced homelessness over the longest period of time had the most frequent and negative experiences of living in poor quality temporary privately rented accommodation. Several people highlighted problems in accessing good quality accommodation, and particularly the reluctance of landlords to take on tenants with rent allowance.

Frank's biography shows how his living situation was never stable and his accommodation was invariably temporary and of poor quality:

This included a bed-sit, which had no windows and no fresh air in a cramped space...it was very substandard accommodation, it was a place shared with a friend that was not suitable....Another time I was in shared rented accommodation with friends but when the landlord decided to put the house on the market I was again left with nowhere to live. After that I found it impossible then to find rented accommodation. So few places would take you with rent allowance, and in most places there were 15-20 people going for each room.

d) Living in homeless accommodation

Six people (33% of interviewees) lived at some point during their pathway through homelessness in temporary/emergency homeless accommodation. Of these four had lived for significant amounts of time in temporary and emergency accommodation, which was normally arranged on a daily basis and was taken up in between periods of living rough.

Fifteen people (83% of interviewees) had lived in hostel accommodation (non-emergency) during their homeless pathways. At the time of interview, four people were still living in hostel accommodation and were waiting for other accommodation to be made available.

Samantha lived in a hostel for eleven years. She had experienced addiction problems and mental health difficulties. On reflection she says that:

The hostel was not a place to get your life together... There was no privacy in the hostel and it was difficult to stay in touch with my children, although I got on very well with the other residents. I don't think that at the time I could have been helped – I was stuck on the tablets – I was not even ready myself, I just wanted to get the tablets – I was offered counselling but was not ready for that either.

Eoin's biography describes the problems in dealing with addiction when in homeless accommodation, in his own experience. He also describes a more recent problem in accessing emergency accommodation:

When I stayed in the hostels it was the same thing over and over again. In the hostels it's very hard to stay sober, you lose a lot of your self-worth and that, you have nowhere proper to stay, you have no job or no course. The only thing that matters each day is if you have a bed for that night. They weren't great places but at least there was a bed. But this year and last year ringing the freephone and the night bus and you would have nowhere to stay as they would be booked out and you would have to stay out and sleep rough. I always tried to access the hostels...some people rather stay out because of the trouble they are in or the trouble in the hostels.

Ryan had little option but to live in hostels for several years:

I just moved between Dublin and Limerick like for a few years and lived in different hostels. It was no life really but that's all I knew. I went to the Coffee Shop sometimes for something to eat and I got clothes from the SVP. No one really told me anything, because I was in a hostel that was seen as enough. It is such a loss of dignity being in a hostel as you have to leave during the day and you just have the streets to wander that's all and there's nothing to do.

After living on the streets for a year **Eamonn** found a place in a hostel. He describes life in the hostel for a young person as not very easy. Although it gave him a roof over his head after he had been sleeping rough, he was not happy there:

The hostel was OK I suppose, at least I had a roof over my head and compared to living on the streets it was OK, but there was a lot of drinking and drugs and I couldn't wait to get out.

Liam's experience of homelessness led to him living in a hostel for homeless men run by Saint Vincent de Paul for seven months. There were many men who were down and out and it was very difficult:

I felt that this wasn't me, it was very stressful...but it opened my eyes to reality...sometimes you have to hit rock bottom to know how to come out the other end...I was so down and out...it was a big reality check for me...You had your dignity taken away from you in the hostel. You are ashamed of yourself and you don't want your children to see you like this.

Christopher's experience of homelessness began after he came out of prison. Arrangements were made to find accommodation for him in a men's hostel. But he was not happy in the place where he was living:

It felt very unsafe, someone was robbing the meter and I hated being there. Eventually I went back to the Homeless Persons Unit and they found me somewhere else. It was a very bad experience.

After **Michael** was discharged from a mental institution he became homeless and was found emergency hostel accommodation:

It's been really important to have somewhere stable to live otherwise you are whistling in the wind. Knowing you have a roof over your head is really good...it's not surprising that people take drugs and drink to cope with it. In the winter it's so bleak and miserable and it's so horrible. It's terrible if you are in hostel and you have to be out at eight in the morning and then you can't go back until ten at night...it's not surprising people go off their heads...it's so terrible there's nowhere to go. It's not that easy to get out of it, it's a real catch 22. You are bottom of the pile and you have no power; you are at the mercy of the council or whoever.

There are loads of people around Dublin walking around the streets who are homeless who have come out of institutions and I remember them in hospital. They were just discharged and that was it. It's disgraceful.

James is waiting for transitional accommodation and says that:

It's hard in the hostels as there's too many drugs and addictions. That's not a life for me. It's a bit of a vicious circle. You have to phone every day to get a bed for the next night and then there is a different number for the night bus. It was really hard to find a bed each night...you are walking around the streets all day...it's awful I was doing this for seven months. I'm now in York House which is like a palace compared to some of the other places you get to stay.

Padraig describes the difficulties faced by many people who are caught up in the cycle of homelessness and addiction:

...Many people have been homeless for a number of years and some have been sleeping rough or accessing the emergency hostels – you are thrown out in the morning and then back at night; there's a lot of drinking and drugs and nowhere to hang your things; if you have a drink and drug problem it's very hard to get out of it.

e) B&B accommodation

Three people had been accommodated in B&Bs at various times during their housing pathways. One woman had been living in a B&B with her three children for three years.

In **Natalie's** case she had no other alternative but to go to the Homeless Person's Unit to find housing. She was given little help or support after she was evicted from her local authority home. A social worker from the HSE visited her and told her that if she packed up her things she would be found somewhere to stay. Although she did this all that she was given was the phone number of the Homeless Persons Unit. She says:

I was given no help, I felt that I had been misled by the social worker as she just wanted me gone. I did pack up and go but then I was told that I had to go down to the Homeless Persons Unit...they don't do anything for you and they hope that you will just go away and then they can wash their hands of you...If they get an anti-social ban on you they just pass you on to someone else...I felt very humiliated about having to go to the HPU, it was very scary...there was a needle on the floor, drug addicts and other unsavoury characters...it was an awful experience, I had my kids with me and there were drug addicts there.

She lived in B&B accommodation altogether for three years. Initially she and her children lived in a B&B on Mountjoy Street in Dublin for 18 months. She described the place as:

Very small, not in good condition, damp and diabolical. My biggest concern was for the children, it really wasn't on that the children regularly saw drug addicts...at one time there was a drug addict in the next room. This was really hard and it wasn't good for the kids.

The impact on her children was very negative and it was particularly difficult to get her children to school every day from the north side to the south side of Dublin:

The experience was hard for the children who had nowhere to play and lived in cramped and poor conditions. One of my sons was six at the time and really needed to be able to go and play, you know what kids are like at that age. You were on the main road and the kids couldn't go out and play; it was difficult for a while; that seems to have affected him. And I was trying to get them to school every day – it was important to me to keep them in a routine and to keep them in their school so that they kept their friends. I wanted to keep one bit of stability so I kept my kids in the same school which was very difficult when we were living in a B&B in town.

Conclusion

Pathways through homelessness are diverse and complex. For some people homelessness is resolved quickly, whilst for others there are experiences of multiple living situations and unmet support needs. The biographies of homeless people see many people stuck in homelessness, which brings with it associated risks of other more enduring social problems and marginalisation typified by low-self esteem, poor coping strategies, stress, complex addiction-related risks, as well as mental and physical health problems. It is clear also that the longer a person is homeless the harder it is to engage with services and to have a defined pathway out of homelessness. Other issues concern the needs of children who are enduring unsuitable accommodation and poor living conditions, and health problems, including poor mental health, which often results in low self-esteem and social stigma.

The biographies also demonstrate that the cause, nature and length of a person's homelessness can vary. For this reason it is helpful to view homelessness as a dynamic and complex process, and to recognise the diversity of homeless experiences and whether homelessness is temporary, transitional, episodic or chronic. This can be categorised as follows:

- **Temporary homelessness:** homelessness is resolved quickly through the provision of accommodation and appropriate supports.
- **Transitional homelessness:** where an individual or household is provided with temporary transitional accommodation and supports for independent living.
- **Episodic homelessness:** where an individual or household moves in and out of homelessness, and where homelessness is a regular and recurrent experience of their life course biographies.
- **Chronic homelessness:** homelessness is long-term and is typified by moving from one service to another, sleeping rough, living in squats and temporary rented accommodation, and periods living in transitional and long-term housing provided by voluntary organisations. People in chronic homelessness often have significant support needs.

The biographies also illustrate that there are a number of factors working for and against people's pathways through homelessness. One of the most enduring problems for homeless services is that too many homeless people are locked into homeless services or emergency accommodation, either because of inadequate long-term housing for them to move into or because the problems that they present – addiction, mental health difficulties, behavioural difficulties – keep them away from mainstream services. Many people live for long periods of time in emergency homeless services, hostel and B&B accommodation simply because there is no suitable accommodation for them to move on to. These services themselves can exacerbate exclusion.

It is clear, nevertheless, that some people's pathways through homelessness can enable them to make the journey out of homelessness. The next section discusses pathways out of homelessness and 'what works' in practice.

It is helpful to view homelessness as a dynamic and complex process, and to recognise the diversity of homeless experiences and whether homelessness is temporary, transitional, episodic or chronic.

Whilst the categorisation of these routes out of homelessness provide an extremely useful analytical framework, it is important that they are not seen as fixed routes. In practice homelessness is dynamic and complex, with many homeless people moving through and across different routes at different stages in their housing and homeless pathways. In Rosengard et al.'s (2001) study it was found that single parent families were more likely to follow routes 4 and 5, principally because they receive a priority need in being settled by local authorities. Those with housing histories were more likely to find a pathway out of homelessness through routes 3 and 6.

Service provision

In the work of Focus Ireland particular importance is given to the provision of appropriate services and accommodation to facilitate people's pathways out of homelessness within an overall context of prevention.

In the work of Focus Ireland particular importance is given to the provision of appropriate services and accommodation to facilitate people's pathways out of homelessness within an overall context of prevention. Prevention requires an emphasis on reducing the risks of homelessness and repeat homelessness across the life cycle. This includes preventing homelessness by resolving accommodation problems when they arise, for example, through family mediation, tenancy sustainment schemes, support with debt management etc. However, a shortage in long-term housing for homeless people to move on to limits the effectiveness of these services. At the same time, problems continue in the coordination of services and in moving forward from crisis intervention to prevention. This is despite the policy emphasis on prevention as seen in various strategies on homelessness¹ and the more strategic approach to service delivery that has been developed through the coordination mechanisms afforded by the Homeless Agency.

Services that facilitate moving out of homelessness include resettlement by voluntary or statutory agencies into temporary, transitional or long-term accommodation, with or without support. However, many agencies deal with crisis interventions and are constrained by the supply and allocation of long-term housing. Similarly, many services on the ground face a range of institutional and resource constraints that make it difficult for them to play a greater role in prevention.

The experiences of homeless people are used here to exemplify what has impacted on their pathways out of homelessness. The biographies show that there are some key services that are helping people to take successful pathways out of homelessness. Former homeless people were asked, in their biographies, to identify what had worked and what were the main barriers in their pathway out of homelessness. In some cases a pathway out of homelessness begins when there is a willingness to make change and take up services, sometimes this happens when a person reaches rock bottom or when something triggers a realisation of the need to make a change. In other cases the pathway begins when there is engagement with services.

In **Samantha's** experience living in a hostel for eleven years and having limited contact with her children eventually led her to realise that something had to change. After that she engaged with Focus Ireland's services:

Eventually I realised that I had to change, it came from myself. It was only then that I was willing and ready to be helped.

In **Irene's** experience it was after her new-born baby was taken into care that she realised something had to change. Irene and her partner became homeless through a combination of lack of money and drug addiction. They ended up on the streets and in a round of temporary and hostel accommodation. From there life got very difficult:

I was quite bad and we got into drugs. We were living in temporary B& B accommodation. The worst thing was having my baby taken off me the day he was born. They came and told me the day before I gave birth in the hospital and then took him away. I knew then that something had to change and I had to get off the drugs.

¹ A Key to the Door: The Homeless Agency Partnership Action Plan on Homelessness, 2007-2010 (Homeless Agency, 2007); Making it Home: An Action Plan for Dublin 2004-2006 (Homeless Agency, 2004); Homelessness - An Integrated Strategy (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2000); The Youth Homeless Strategy covering young people under the age of 18 years (Department of Health and Children, 2001); The Homeless Prevention Strategy (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2002) covering people leaving state care (hospital, prison and childcare)

The following is a discussion of the main factors leading to people's pathways out of homelessness that are identified in the biographies. They are grouped under the following four headings:

1. Appropriate accommodation

- a) Transitional accommodation
- b) Long-term accommodation: privately rented
- c) Long-term accommodation: local authority
- d) Long-term accommodation: Focus Ireland

2. Meeting the support needs of homeless people

- a) Key workers
- b) Tenancy support and settlement
- c) Crisis Team and the Coffee Shop
- d) Accessing services

3. Employment and training

4. Engaging with public services

1. Appropriate accommodation

a) Transitional accommodation

Ten people (55% of those interviewed) had been through transitional accommodation. The period of time spent in transitional accommodation was normally between nine months and one year, although several had to stay for up to 15 months or more due to a lack of alternative long-term accommodation for them to move on to.

At the time of interview, four people were living in transitional accommodation and were waiting to be moved into long-term accommodation. An additional ten people who were living in long-term accommodation at the time of interview had also been through transitional accommodation. They regarded this as being a very important pathway out of homelessness into long-term local authority and privately rented housing.

Only one person who had been through transitional accommodation had subsequently become homeless and was living in hostel accommodation at the time of interview. He was interested in gaining a place in transitional accommodation again and hoped that the system would allow this to happen as he realised that this would be the only possibility (because of the support available) of getting out of homelessness in the long-term.

Mary Jane lived in Focus Ireland's transitional accommodation and has eventually been supported in finding privately rented accommodation, although the shortage of accommodation has made it difficult:

It's very hard to get housed here. This was supposed to be a 12 month programme, but it has taken 19 months because of difficulties in finding permanent long-term accommodation.

Mary Jane believes that the support she received from Focus Ireland enabled her to stand on her own two feet and gain some independence:

I stayed off the drink and drugs and the Health Board paid for the various things I needed – it's great they make it possible for you to get all your stuff so that you can then move on. I have bought tables, chairs, fridge, washing machine and all of that; I go with my kid into school; I got off the drugs. It has been great here [in transitional accommodation] as there were kids for my son to play with and it was a great weight off my shoulders. I plan to move into a new house in the future.

Her key worker has provided her with a lot of support and helped her to become independent: In addition to that the support provided by Focus Ireland has helped her to budget effectively:

I was put in touch with MABS to sort out my finances – it was a big relief as I was terrified to go anywhere before that – I was so afraid. There is a group meeting once a week to sort out your bills and keep on top of your money.

She also stated that having a place of her own was really important:

Having a house that is my own in a quiet estate and good housing has given me a real feeling of security. Each week I have gradually been reaching my goal. I had a lot of fear and loss of confidence before that – I didn't want to go out. It was a terrible time – every morning I woke up with guilt and fear – now everything is getting sorted out, my life back on the tracks. I'm now very independent and I can look after myself – they [Focus Ireland] will continue to keep contact, but I'm ok now and can cope...My daughter is now much more stable. On the old estate she had a really hard time and was bullied by other children. She's much happier now.

I was very depressed and used lots of drugs and drink to block it all out. They make you find ways to help yourself and help your daughter. They made me realise that if I was not to blow this chance that I would have to stay off the drugs and drink. I'm so much more confident than I was.

After living rough and then in a hostel, **Eamonn** engaged with Focus Ireland services through the transitional housing scheme. He sees this provision as being crucial to his long-term pathway out of homelessness. When he got the house his partner and child moved in with him. He has another child from a previous relationship who is in foster care and who he sees weekly. Having a permanent home is also important in gaining custody of his daughter:

The key worker is really good, she helps with lots of things and gives support. Every two weeks we meet and she helps with money and helps with reading letters as I can't read very well. I can stand on my own two feet now and feel much more confident; before I couldn't manage my money at all; I did stupid things when I was homeless. Now I can manage OK...Focus Ireland help you, they make you see sense. In the hostel you can get away with things. Having a family also makes a big difference as I have to provide for the family...it's made me responsible.

After being discharged from a mental hospital **Michael** approached Focus Ireland through the Crisis Team. They helped him to find transitional accommodation and he is now hoping to move into long-term accommodation:

The crisis team sorted out temporary accommodation for me and quite quickly they had a bed for me...Now I have my own room [transitional accommodation] and I have a key worker in Focus [Ireland]. I see her every few weeks. The transitional accommodation is for nine months but the Salvation Army have their own regime, it's a lovely little place, it's clean and warm, you can cook for yourself and you have your own space. I don't spend a lot of time there, there are a lot of people with a mental or physical disability. I have a key worker there too and they can give help in moving you on. After nine months they help you to help yourself but there is no guarantee of anything.

Padraig is living in Focus Ireland transitional accommodation. He applied for the place through the settlement worker assigned to him while he was in rehabilitation to deal with his alcoholism. He says of transitional accommodation:

It's there to get you back into independent living again, it's a stepping stone to that, it just prepares you to do things for yourself and look after yourself, all the things that you need to do like budgeting and cooking. It's one of the best transitional accommodation places as you get key workers here and they help you to move on. It could defeat the whole purpose of the transitional programme if you don't move on.

Transitional accommodation gives you a proper place with a bit of security around you... knowing that you have a place for nine months and you have no worries on your shoulders and you don't get stressed out. When you are in hostels you don't have that. In transitional accommodation you can make steps to going back to work or education if you want.

Focus Ireland has really helped me to get my life together [in a] big way. If I didn't have this here now I would be out on the streets. I had been in a hostel on a week to week basis, I got drunk and would have been thrown out of it anyway. You are living on the edge all the time in those places. Here you have your own place and your own hall door.

He says that his key worker has helped him with his budgeting and other issues:

I see her twice a week and then there are weekly meetings. There are a lot of things that I will be going through with her over the next few months. They help me with going to AA and going to a counsellor. They then help you move on. You are in transition to independent living.

He thinks that there is not enough transitional accommodation in Dublin. Another problem that he identifies is that: *'if you are drinking you have no choice but to be in the hostels and that is a catch 22'*.

b) Long-term accommodation: privately rented

Four former homeless people were living in long-term privately rented accommodation at the time of interview. One woman had gained her housing through the RAS scheme in Limerick, one single man and one woman and her child had found their accommodation through the Access Housing Unit, and a third woman and her children had been helped by a Focus Ireland key worker to find suitable accommodation.

Irene's pathway out of homelessness began when she engaged with homeless services. Prior to that she had been living on the streets and had experienced drug addiction, her partner had committed suicide and her new-born baby had been taken into care. She is currently living in privately rented accommodation that Focus Ireland helped her to source through the Access Housing Unit, and she receives intensive family support from Focus Ireland. For Irene getting rent allowance for a two-bedroom apartment has been important to provide a base where she can live with her son and also provide the opportunity for her other son to come and live with her. Irene says she has found it difficult to put this in place as:

You can't get the rent allowance until you have evidence of my other son living here; but for him to be here I need the rent allowance.

Irene received intensive family support from Focus Ireland – this includes having a key worker who visits her once or twice a week, building confidence and assertiveness to argue the case with social workers and the local authority, helping her with budgeting and general support. She now feels confident enough to do this herself. A childcare worker also visits her once a week to help her with child development and play – this has been really good and valuable to enhance her parenting skills.

It is great to have my own place. The Access Housing Unit in Threshold has been an absolute godsend. The accommodation is really good quality...It's so simple the solution... When I got this place I was jumping up and down. I was in the right place to accept the help – before that I was in a bad place it would have been really difficult to get help.

Christopher's pathway out of homelessness is a combination of support services and finding acceptable accommodation. Christopher has also been dealing with early years' childhood abuse and receives weekly counselling funded by the Christian Brothers. These supports have helped him to get his life back on track. Christopher was homeless for around two years before he found his current privately rented accommodation, and is very happy there:

As soon as I saw it I knew it was the place, I took it. It is peace and tranquillity. I am very lucky as the rent is affordable. I am lucky to have the morning sun and the birds singing. I am very happy and content...Having a nice place to live in is very important to me. It means that I can get on with my life.

Christopher has been on the housing list with Dublin City Council and hopes soon to get local authority accommodation. Finding privately rented accommodation was made easier because of the flat list from Centre Care, which provides housing information and advice in Dublin, and from the flat list provided by Focus Ireland.

Michael is hoping to get privately rented accommodation when he leaves his transitional accommodation. He says that the availability of housing is a problem and he has looked at some properties through Threshold, Access Housing and other letting agencies:

It is shocking some of the places I have seen, the quality is terrible, they are damp and infested, some places have to be seen to be believed.

He has also seen that there are problems with rent allowance on many lettings.

c) Long-term accommodation: local authority

Two former homeless people were living in local authority accommodation at the time of interview, whereas a former third homeless person had given up his tenancy following victimisation and had slipped back into homelessness.

Frank attributes his route out of homelessness to a combination of support from his key worker and finding long-term local authority accommodation. After many years of homelessness and living on the streets, in squats and in poor quality accommodation, Frank got to know about Focus Ireland through the Coffee Shop. He had got to know a few people on the streets and was told about it.

I went down there to get something to eat and at that time I had only one blanket and they got me a sleeping bag. [When he came in contact with Focus Ireland he says that] I got lucky with Focus Ireland. I have an excellent key worker and they can help you to communicate with different services. They found me temporary accommodation and they advocate for me when dealing with Dublin City Council or the HSE. There has been a big building of trust as a result of Focus Ireland.

Frank now has local authority accommodation and is getting his life organised:

I know now that I won't be homeless again as I have security for the first time in my life and I know that I won't be evicted.

He has also been working as a researcher for a peer-led research project organised by Focus Ireland, is enjoying his music and is performing and sees himself as being independent in the future.

d) Long-term accommodation: Focus Ireland

As a response to a crisis in the supply of long-term accommodation, Focus Ireland provides this service in a number of locations. Five people who were interviewed were living in long-term accommodation provided by Focus Ireland in Dublin, Waterford and Limerick.

The long-term accommodation provided by Focus Ireland has given **Samantha** a pathway out of long-term homelessness and a sense of stability and security in her life:

What I like about here is that I get privacy and there is security in the building which helps. It's hard some days...there's a lot going on with social workers and sorting things out.

One of the worst things about homelessness for Samantha was a loss of contact with her children; rebuilding these relationships has been very important:

As a response to a crisis in the supply of long-term accommodation, Focus Ireland provides this service in a number of locations.

Thanks to the help of my key worker...I went to the solicitor and the court gave me supervised visits to my children. The difficulty was that the social worker was not able to supervise the visits as the children were not in care.

Samantha wanted to get a two-bed apartment so that she could have her children to come and stay. At this time her two youngest children were in foster care and her three older children were living with their father. She managed to stay in touch with all but one of her children, but she says that living in a hostel, coupled with her shame of being homeless, made it difficult to stay in touch with them.

In long-term accommodation Samantha has been able to build a relationship with her children. Her two youngest come and visit once a week and stay over sometimes, and her eldest daughter and son stay regularly. At the time of the interview her eldest daughter was planning to move into the apartment. Having the two bedrooms has really enabled this to happen, although she would have liked more bedrooms to allow her other children to come and live with her. Initially she was offered a one-bedroom apartment but she wanted a larger place to enable her to advocate for the return of her children.

Now I have this two-bed apartment and my oldest daughter is coming to live with me. If I had been offered the apartment earlier things might have been better for me.

Having the long-term accommodation has been fantastic, you have privacy and a place you can call your own. In the hostel it was very difficult to build a relationship with your children.

Samantha talked about the importance that her key worker played in helping her to stand on her own two feet:

My key worker has been fantastic support. Sara has helped me to stay in touch with my children and I feel more confident. Just so that they know that you are there for them. Focus Ireland has brought me a long way since last March. Slowly and surely I have built up a relationship with my children. This has been really important to me. My daughters and sons come and stay overnight sometimes. It is excellent.

I feel much better in my life and I am slowly coming off the tablets. Most days are good and some days are hard. But I have a relationship with my children which is what matters...I think the most important thing has been getting my family together. I have learnt to stand on my own two feet.

According to **Liam** his pathway out of homelessness began when he came into contact with Focus Ireland:

It was the nuns that recommended Focus Ireland. I was offered transitional accommodation and stayed there for twelve months before moving into long-term accommodation. It takes the weight of the world off your shoulders. The key workers in Focus [Ireland] gave me my chance in life and they were outstanding and they are still outstanding. They believed in me, they listened. They are there to help you and it's up to yourself to help yourself. They changed my life and helped me turn it around.

Ryan's homelessness came to an end when he describes his meeting with Focus Ireland as a 'lucky break'. He says that gaining long-term accommodation enabled him to get back on his own two feet. He received support from his key worker and gradually regained his autonomy and self-respect:

Focus Ireland helped me to bring my life back together and getting independence. I have got back with my children and my health is getting better. Focus Ireland are fantastic people, they have a lot to offer. You do become very depressed when you are homeless...this time last year I thought I would go under. If you have a little bit of hope and faith it can help...but for me this one break of getting out of homelessness has enabled me to get back into the swing of things and stop being a zombie....You feel like you are part of society again that you are not an odd ball...I've got more satisfaction in my life now.

I'm now in a position to have my two sons and one daughter to come and stay...before I felt ashamed of where I was...each time I spoke to them I was moving somewhere else...this time I have somewhere permanent to live...now I feel more confident and have my life back together...I have independence and have met new people.

e) Special projects for young people

Ciara's story illustrates how the provision of an effective transition from foster care at the age of 18 years can prevent homelessness. Ciara lives in the Young Women's Project in Dublin. The project provides supported housing for a period of one year for young women leaving the care system. Ciara moved into the project on the recommendation of her after-care worker when she reached 18 years of age:

They were trying to work out what to do with me and then my second after-care worker was very good and helped me find this place. Being here, it's a bit like a school of independence, you can do your work or go to school, and it helps you cope with any financial or emotional difficulties.

Ciara wants to go on to further education but says that the system does not work if you want to study full-time as students are ineligible for rent allowance, which means either living on benefit or working. She wants to go on to higher education eventually but she says:

Do they expect everyone to have to be working? It's very hard to get an education when you are here...if rent allowance allowed you to study and have some independence it would really help.

For Ciara the project is good because it helps you get on your feet, and she is working, which she prefers to being on benefit. She also wanted to find a way of supporting herself, and the staff have been important in helping her to achieve this. Ciara has a key worker with Focus Ireland whom she sees weekly and she also has support when she needs it from the other project staff. She has an after-care worker (employed by the HSE) whom she can contact any time:

The staff have been very important as you are not in an empty house and everyone would be doing their own thing...it's good for the support. The staff support you in non-financial things, they give you advice about self-budgeting and learning from any mistakes you make. The group work also helps emotionally as sometimes you feel a bit alone and the staff are here 24/7 which is really good. I like to be strong on my own but if I need the help it is there.

Ciara believes that the project has really helped her to be confident and is good as a way of preventing homelessness. She thinks in her case that one year is sufficient for the amount of support received, particularly as it provides help in moving on and gaining independence. She anticipates that she will have a key worker when she moves on after a year. She believes that there should be more projects like this one, particularly where people can learn to be independent:

It's a place where I can develop myself; I would have been more lonely and vulnerable and not coped so well. I have a number of options when I leave here and I have a choice which is really good...for some people they have been oppressed by their families and it's not good to have to go back there.

It's been great here. Having the girls around and having a girls project is very good. I think I would be a bit intimidated if there had been boys around. Definitely I'm not really scared of moving out now.

2. Meeting the support needs of homeless people

Table 3 provides an overview of the support services provided to interviewees, including the support services received at the time of interview.

Table 3: Support services received from Focus Ireland and other services (c = services currently received)

	Key worker (Focus Ireland)	Key worker in transitional accommodation	Key worker in temporary accommodation	Key worker in long term accommodation	Tenancy support	Intensive family support	Settlement services	Coffee Shop/ crisis team	Spokes programme
Irene		√				√c			√c
Samantha		√		√c					
Frank	√			√c				√c	
Chloe				√c					
Ciara		√c							
Ryan				√c					
Eoin		√c							
Natalie					√c				
Mary Jane		√c							
Liam		√		√c					
James	√c		√c					√c	
Laura	√c		√c					√c	
Sean	√c		√c					√c	
Michael	√c		√c					√c	√c
Christopher	√c							√c	√c
Lily				√c					
Padraig		√c						√c	√c
Eamonn		√c							

Homeless people have a number of personal, housing and social support needs, which if met can positively impact on routes out of homelessness (Edgar et al., 1999). These include personal supports in meeting everyday health and care needs; housing supports in providing advocacy, information and assistance in finding transitional and long-term accommodation and dealing with local authorities and landlords; and social supports in the developing of living and work skills, information and counselling in finding training and employment.

The type and nature of support needs vary from customer to customer. Support needs may be temporary and targeted for some groups who have transitional support needs, for example, some young people, lone parents, women fleeing domestic violence, and ex-offenders. In other cases, people with drug or alcohol addiction problems, people with mental or physical health problems, older people and people with physical or learning disabilities are likely to have support needs that are enduring and/or permanent.

Support needs in resettlement include: housing and related health needs, personal support, daily living skills, financial and social needs. Pleace (1995) highlights the connections between household problems and strategies and the need for addressing these by customer-led resettlement support, care and other support needs as well as the development of daily living skills, and building up self-esteem and self-confidence. Research has emphasised the importance of support for homeless people in moving out of homelessness and in maintaining tenancies. Douglas et al. (1998) highlight the use of floating support for former homeless people whilst Petch et al. (2000) show the importance of person-centred approaches to needs assessment that emphasise choice and provide advocacy in accessing services, and support to enable people to sustain tenancies in the long term.

a) Key workers

Padraig talked about the difficulties of losing your capacity to be proactive and finding somewhere to live:

They expect someone to come up to them and get them a place...you have to go out and get help yourself....When I came out of prison I went to Priorswood House in the Pace Project, I only found out about it from another inmate. I wouldn't have had anywhere to go. That's the only place to go and they help you move on but they don't. Sometimes I still felt like I was treated like a prisoner. I found a place myself in [the] privately rented sector. But I messed it up for myself with drinking.

As someone who has been homeless most of his life **Sean** says that he has benefited from the support of his key worker. He is conscious that his pathway out of homelessness lies in finding secure and safe accommodation. He sees his key worker as being a very important advocate on his behalf.

I have an option to go back into transitional accommodation as I have already done that. My other option is to go into privately rented accommodation and I'm looking at that for the future. I've been given help by my key workers and I hope to get long-term accommodation. The key worker at Focus Ireland seems to be working with me in an intensive way. I see her once a week. She would also explore with me the idea of renting accommodation and linking me in with Threshold and with other services like AA. You get to find out things like what the cap on rent allowance is and how to get help with your deposit, and other options with your housing. The key worker is a person that guides you through the system. They give you information on what's out there for people in my situation.

Chloe says that her pathway out of homelessness can be attributed to a key worker who enabled her to stand on her own two feet and feel more confident about herself. She has recently moved into long-term accommodation which was found through the Limerick RAS scheme:

I couldn't have done it without the key worker...everyone needs support in their lives. It is good to know I see my [key] worker once a week and also that I can pick up the phone any time that I have a problem. She has helped me to learn to fend for myself and to be independent.

One of the important things for Chloe was having the key to her own front door. Her key worker has been important in providing her with ongoing support and helping her to budget and to organise her daily living so that she can live independently. The transitional programme helped her to look after herself, learn to cook, and establish a routine.

It has helped me a lot and to become independent....They helped me to get the things I needed for my house and to be independent in my life. I have a quieter life in my long-term place, whereas in the transitional accommodation there was less space. The first time I heard about Focus Ireland was through a social worker. She told me what it was about, why it was there, what benefits were available to me. I was very reluctant at first, but I was assured that my dealings were to be confidentially dealt with....I've been with Focus Ireland for eight and a half years. And in my opinion I found Focus Ireland to be very, very helpful and understanding in my dealings with them e.g. rent, late bills, conflict. They gave me a lot of support when I lost a loved one and also through court cases.... And for all of their support and help I will always be thankful and grateful to the staff at Focus [Ireland]. I think the transition programme they are running at the moment is a great success. That gives people their independence e.g. showing the tenants how to cook, keep their place clean and tidy and they put a lot of time and effort into doing this. And I'm certain that these tenants will benefit from this in the near future.

James and Laura believe that having a key worker has made a real difference. As Laura says:

The key worker is really good. I see her about once a fortnight, she really helps you. The key worker has helped my daughter too and she is going on a FÁS training course to work with children. It will be grand when she has her own money.

James and Laura are currently waiting for new transitional accommodation to be completed. They are also trying to get back on to the local authority list and having their two daughters back with them. Laura says:

We are aiming to have the three girls back together...when they first went into foster care it was really difficult...I cried all the time.

James describes his key worker as very good:

She has done a lot for me and for my two lads as well...The key worker helps you to move on.

Michael says that:

The key worker is important, they give you all the information you need and there are lots of things that you don't know like how to find a doctor or dentist or go to the council...but sometimes it feels like there are too many people involved in this whole industry...It's very important to be treated with respect, it's bad enough being homeless, it's degrading there's no other way of putting it...It is humiliating to be at the control of other people...Focus [Ireland] is good; they don't patronise you, they are respectful.

In **Liam's** view the key workers have been a great source of support:

One important thing is that they listen to you, they give you the chance. They did really practical things as well like learning to cook and feed myself. We sort out our problems and they help you to believe in yourself. They are 100% behind you. I had never learnt to cook and I never realised that I needed to look after myself. Now I can cook for myself. I'm doing good, really good.

Liam feels that he has got his confidence and dignity back:

I have my independence and now my son and daughter can now come into the house whenever they like. My son can come in and watch a football match with me on the TV. It means the world to me.

He currently sees his key worker once a week and can envisage a time when this regular contact would not be so necessary. In the longer term Liam says that it would be good if there was someone he could ring if there was a need.

Believe me Focus Ireland saves you. Being on my own and earning respect and confidence means you can be independent...You earn respect from people here, they believe in you and they listen to you. If I have a problem they can help me sort it out. Having my own place gives me self-respect and makes me happy. The programme works because of the staff. They treat you with respect. I never trusted anyone before I came to Focus [Ireland]. They gave me a chance of life. My pathway out of homelessness happened because of the programme and you learn to make it work for yourself.

b) Tenancy support and settlement

Eoin's biography shows the importance of tenancy support and settlement (TSS). It illustrates that when a person has access to long-term accommodation, it is possible to work with them on other problems that they face or help them access services that they need, for example, in dealing with addiction or mental health difficulties.

A key factor in the success of Eoin's pathway out of homelessness has been the way that his social worker from the local authority, the Focus Ireland Tenancy Support and Settlement worker and mental health services in the area have been effectively coordinated to facilitate Eoin's pathway out of homelessness, and on an ongoing basis to prevent him falling back into homelessness.

When a person has access to long-term accommodation, it is possible to work with them on other problems that they face or help them access services that they need, for example, in dealing with addiction or mental health difficulties.

Once Eoin engaged with services, his pathway out of homelessness was a relatively smooth one. There has been very good coordination between all of the services that he receives. His social worker has been instrumental in making this coordination work in practice and his Focus Ireland support worker has worked with him to bolster his independence and stability, and prevent him becoming homeless again.

The social worker from the County Council arranged for me to get this place [local authority rented accommodation]. The social worker was excellent.

It was through his social worker that Eoin came into contact with the settlement workers in Focus Ireland. He described the support he received from his TSS support worker as a major factor in helping him to regain confidence, independence and autonomy in his life. Eoin first met his TSS worker in February 2006:

I was on the drink – but now I'm off the drink, my son and ex-wife now come and visit me and this has been very good. At one time when I was drinking heavily they [the local authority] threatened me with eviction. I was in a bad way. But Seamus [TSS worker] managed to stop the eviction because I was already getting some help.

Eoin believes that having the support worker was very important in helping to prevent him drifting back into homelessness.

This was important to me as I would have lost my rent allowance and it would have been difficult to get a place again. Now I'm grand and am really happy in my place...I have my photos up around the place and now I'm doing the garden and making this place my home...I'm doing the gym everyday as well.

TSS has provided the level of support that Eoin needed to regain his confidence and autonomy. Help with daily living tasks and sorting out his finances and helping him to manage his money has been a very important part of this:

Seamus has been a great help to me...he got me into MABS to pay my rent, ESB and cable television – it helps me manage my money – and now I can do some cooking which is very good. I cook stew, cabbage, potatoes, carrots, bacon and things like that. Seamus helped me to cook and I don't mind doing it at all now – before that it was all ready-made food or cooked chicken.

It's been fantastic – the best thing that ever happened to me. I don't think I would be here today without this – when I was drinking heavily, it helped me to stabilise my life...but I can manage now and I can feel comfortable – giving practical support at a low point in your life is very good and helps getting you on your feet and managing your money has been good, it's essential for someone moving into a new house and coping.

Although his settlement support will come to an end soon, Eoin would like to see his settlement worker every couple of months to maintain regular contact and in case of any problems in the future. Initially, when he was trying to get settled Eoin said that he had needed two visits a week. He said that the scheduling has worked very well – very intensive to start with and now easing off. He hopes to keep up contact with his settlement worker in case there are any difficulties ahead.

But now I don't need to see him so much. It helps people to feel less isolated and get them learning how to cope on their own. I might have got a house earlier if Focus [Ireland] had been there when I first separated from my wife – it might have avoided me getting so down and out and becoming homeless...I'm just glad that I did eventually. It has helped me immensely, there has been mutual respect and I learnt to do things myself.

In addition, Eoin said that it has been good to have the support from a male key worker as there is a level of understanding between men. 'We can talk about the GAA and the rugby' which helps to equalise their relationship and provide a bridge. 'It helps as he's got a level of understanding with me.'

Natalie first heard about Focus Ireland from the security person who worked at the B&B. Focus Ireland helped her deal with many of the difficulties that she faced and after a year the anti-social behaviour ban was lifted. Her case shows how a lack of coordination of services can result in inappropriate housing options, although today better procedures and protocols are in place. Natalie and her children's pathway out of homelessness could have been short and smooth if there had been appropriate follow-on accommodation and services.

A lack of coordination of services can result in inappropriate housing options.

They [the local authority] could see that I had dealt with the problems – I had learnt a lesson, but I also think they could have handled it better. At the time I had a big fear that I wouldn't get re-housed so I didn't want to complain.

I went to the Coffee Shop and then the Family Unit – it was fantastic – the drop-in for mothers, after-school club for the children, play schemes and summer schools in the holidays and mid-term break. It was brilliant, they were so good, it really helped me to keep myself together. You got a key worker who helped you to get support, make some phone calls for you.

For Natalie being housed close to her own community was very important – she thinks that it was insensitive to have to go into Dublin to be housed.

I wanted to get back to the Ballybrack area so my key worker helped me with that. I then got a place in Blackrock House – it was a really fantastic place, bedrooms were spotless – it was like heaven compared to the bed and breakfast – and close to Ballybrack.

My tenancy support worker...has been great – I didn't want to go to the Council as I was still angry and upset with them, but my key worker came with me and she was able to get information from them – it made such a difference. One of the problems is that you have to take whatever house they offer you – they found a place for me in Ballyogan [social housing] but the house was too small and I felt I was being pushed into something that wasn't right for me.

The important thing for me about Focus Ireland is that you are treated with respect. No one judges you.

Natalie has been in privately rented accommodation for three years; she was housed there by the local authority from a private landlord. At the time of the interview, she was being moved into purpose-built accommodation that was more appropriate for her family. Although her lease was due to end she still had no information from the Council about how much longer it would be before she had to move. This has been very stressful:

I still haven't got information from the Council about how much longer it is – it is a real problem – the not knowing is really hard and then when they don't communicate...it is really hard.

Natalie got back in contact with Focus Ireland a year ago after she was finding it difficult to cope. She was getting into arrears with her bills and finding it a struggle to budget effectively.

I was under a lot of pressure. I didn't know that they would be able to help me. But Ruth [TSS worker] comes out when I want her to and she helps me sort out my problems, she got me in contact with MABS and sorted out my bills. It was great that she could ring and sort out things for me.

It's been a really difficult six years, when I look back I was angry and upset so I got evicted, but since then I have been back to do my leaving cert and I have learnt to drive with Focus Ireland – I have got my confidence back. I didn't have very good coping skills, the road was a bit rough and I got there – I learnt a good lesson. It's that fact that they don't judge you from the minute that you meet them; they treat you like you are a real person. If you go to the council I would be feeling very put down – even though my anti-social ban had been lifted the file still had that on the front of the folder – I feel like I am always being judged.

Natalie says that a straight path into Focus Ireland would have lifted some problems off her shoulders. She thinks that it would have been good if the social worker or Council had got in contact with Focus Ireland or if they had given her their contact details.

Natalie believes that if there had been someone there for her when she first became homeless it would be have made life much easier:

It would have been good to have help from someone like Ruth – it could have helped me to take away the anger and the fear and someone to talk to...Focus Ireland saved me and I am really grateful to them for how they have treated me and helped me. They are brilliant and they really treat you well and with respect. Having the contact with Focus Ireland helped me so much – the fear went. For the kids it was brilliant – taking them on trips and such.

I had never heard of Focus Ireland before; there is not enough information about who to contact when you are evicted. I've moved around a lot in the last few years and it's hard, like having to change the doctor. For me it causes pressures and stress when nothing is permanent. Last year I got very sick and getting the kids to school was very hard and the kids lost lots of days. Ruth got me to ring the school board and it was fine I managed to sort stuff out.

c) Coffee Shop and the Crisis Team

The Coffee Shop was cited by several people as being the gateway into services. Some people use the Coffee Shop as a place to have a good yet cheap meal or a cup of coffee and a place to meet, while others use the Coffee Shop as a place to source information and support. Six of the people interviewed had first engaged with Focus Ireland's services through the Coffee Shop and the Crisis Team. Having key workers on the floor was seen as a really good idea, as someone is there if you need them. The distance travelled through homeless services from someone's first step over the threshold of the Coffee Shop and their eventual pathway out of homelessness is often very dependent on the availability and supply of move-on accommodation.

As **Frank** says:

They help you to build trust again in services and they were brilliant at helping me find my way...now I am in a local authority flat which is brilliant.

Michael uses the Coffee Shop regularly and found it a very good source of support and information:

When you come into Focus [Ireland] it's totally different, they give you help with everything you need. It's great to come to the Coffee Shop, the food is good, and it gets me out and there's always a nice atmosphere, you get to know the staff and good to see familiar faces. The Coffee Shop is definitely fantastic. There's always someone to talk to and get information from if you need it...my key worker is based here and I see her regularly.

Sean also uses the Coffee Shop and found it important as a route to getting information and access to a key worker. In addition, he uses the Coffee Shop as a place to meet people:

The Coffee Shop is a great service, you get a cheap meal. It's been a real lifeline at times for me.

Christopher says that the Coffee Shop and other Focus Ireland services have given a structure to his life:

Focus Ireland has really helped me...I found out that Focus Ireland were open 365 days a year. I dread Christmas. Last Christmas was the first Christmas I have had without drink and I had a very good time with Focus Ireland. This really mattered to me.

It is good to know that there is an organisation out there that if you are down and out and need to talk to someone. I go to the Coffee Shop which is very good and spend Christmas there as well. I have my diary full for the week. Having the service is marvellous. I go to Cedar House every Thursday evening to do ceramics.

3. Pathways out of homelessness: training and employment

Access to training and employment is highlighted in the interviews as being central to enabling a homeless person to gain respect and autonomy. However, homeless people experience social, institutional and attitudinal barriers in trying to access work. It raises the question about what appropriate incentives can be given to employers and the types of workplace supports that can be given to homeless people entering or re-entering the labour market.

A real barrier identified by **Eamonn** is the difficulty in finding employment. High rents and long housing lists have been a real problem in enabling him to gain housing stability, which in turn is important to finding a job. Eamonn recently got engaged and is planning on marrying his partner. He is looking forward to having more independence in the future and in finding a job. Although Eamonn wants to get back into work he has experienced a number of difficulties in doing so, particularly as he lacks experience. He believes that more should be done to encourage employers to take on homeless people:

I had a job for two weeks but that didn't last. One problem is that employers want experienced people... Most employers won't take me on because you have no experience like. The Job Centre helps and I hope that I'll go on a course soon which means I can keep my benefit.

Now that **Irene** is in long-term accommodation she has more stability in her life. She has one son living with her and hopes that her other son will also come and live with her soon. Irene has been attending the Spokes programme and is keen to find some work in the future. Having long-term accommodation and family support has enabled her to be more confident in thinking about taking up training and work:

I would like to have a part-time job and fit it around my children. I would like to work in horticulture in the future and I did this work before I was homeless you know... Going to the Spokes programme has helped me a lot and it's really good. [My Focus Ireland family support worker] has really helped me to build my confidence... it's finding a way to believe in yourself that is important... I lost that and now I am getting it back... having a place like this to live in really helps to make you feel like you have the confidence to take on some work.

Michael realises that finding employment is important to his long-term independence and to his pathway out of homelessness. He says that he would like to get into the routine of work. He has used the Spokes programme as a place to drop in to and to stay in touch with people:

In the longer term it would be good to get some training and work; you have to ask for these things. I'm interested in getting into social studies... bit of practical experience will help with that.

Sean says that he enjoys working outdoors and has followed a number of horticultural courses. He would like to attend the Focus Ireland course on horticulture and to work in that area in the future, but knows that there are limits to what he can do and where he can work. Ideally he would like to be part of a supported employment scheme such as the Community Education programme and would like to find work gardening and working outside. He believes that he would be discriminated against if he took up work and as a result has never put any effort into finding work.

People could be prejudiced about me. That's one of the reasons that I have never found work, it never seem[ed] an option for me.

In **Padraig's** case getting back to work will be a major factor influencing his long-term pathway out of homelessness. In the interview he talked about his hopes for getting 'a foot back in the door of employment' and he hopes in the longer run to go back to college to do an alarm fitting course, which also provides work experience and a licence to work in this area. But he is concerned that as he has a criminal record he may not be able to get the job he wants:

It raises the question about what appropriate incentives can be given to employers and the types of workplace supports that can be given to homeless people entering or re-entering the labour market.

They [employers] hold it against you for the rest of your days, even though you've had problems in the past and you are trying to go straight and do good. A criminal record goes against you all the time. They [employers] need to be better aware of what you have been through. If you seen someone who has been down on their luck and if they come through a programme like this – they can do alright – it shouldn't be held against them – when you look at the achievements that they have made in turning their lives around. I kept getting knocked back from jobs, it affected me and it's easy to turn back to the bottle.

Padraig says that he has benefited from the routine and structure of the Spokes training programme, which he views as being very important to his long-term pathway out of homelessness:

The Spokes programme has been good, it gives me something to do. It's good to do the course during the day...it will help me get back into doing what I want to do and work.

In **Christopher's** case having access to meaningful activities through the Spokes programme has been important to his pathway out of homelessness:

The Spokes programme is very good. It keeps me very busy. It's up to yourself to keep yourself busy. I do see light at the end of the tunnel and now that I know that my accommodation will be secure in the future and that it will be permanent for the rest of my life.

Liam has a part-time job which he first took up when he was still living in the hostel. He believes that having a job has been really important to his pathway out of homelessness:

It makes you feel part of the world and that makes you feel good about yourself. I would never give up my job, it is really so important to my independence. It's good to work as it gives you something that makes you feel a whole person.

4. Pathways out of homelessness: Engaging with public services

All of the homeless people's biographies refer to the importance of engaging with public services as the key to a pathway out of homelessness. A major issue raised is the way in which homeless people are treated by public services (including health, housing, social services, employment and social welfare services). Homeless people spoke about their regular experiences of poor customer services, being treated with a lack of dignity and respect, and poor access to information about services. People's experiences are that a significant role is played by key workers and support workers in advocating for and enabling homeless people to engage with public services, and in providing access to information about entitlements and where to find services.

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Natalie had a bad experience and believes that there could have been a lot done to help her and prevent her from being evicted:

They [the Local Authority] treated me really badly...they just wanted me off their hands. I realise I handled things in the wrong way. But there was no support, no mediator and no one to turn to. If there had been the Focus Ireland support I may not have become homeless – if there had been someone independent from the Council's welfare team that would have helped.

Frank found it very hard to get registered as homeless. Dealing with the bureaucracy around homeless services was a major barrier for him, particularly in dealing with Dublin City Council. Frank's experience was that the Focus Ireland key worker was both an advocate and a source of support and information in liaising between the Homeless Persons Unit and Dublin City Council.

He says:

When my key worker talked to them, well then something began to change...they [the City Council] treat you like something terrible... The system doesn't work...they throw barriers up at you to stop you registering... there has to be an easier system...It's as if there is an unofficial memo to keep the figures down to reject and reject as many people as you can and then people will stop coming to you.

According to **Chloe**, Focus Ireland has an important role to play here because they are close to the customer and are trusted:

Most young people who are homeless feel ashamed and embarrassed to come forward and seek help. In my own personal opinion I feel that Focus Ireland should ensure that if they do seek help that it will be discreet and in the best interests of the person involved...Focus Ireland should promote more advertisement about how serious the problem is e.g. radio, TV, paper...Just because a person is homeless doesn't mean that they are a bad person. Everybody is different!

Other barriers identified related to the coordination and integration of services. **Michael's** experience was that services broke down when he was discharged from hospital. He described a lack of coordination between the hospital and community-based services, which resulted in there being no information or provision of temporary accommodation when he left the hospital. This was a very humiliating experience for him:

The social worker was a bit hopeless, you had to drag information out of her, it was brutal... there is a basic pattern. People are being discharged all of the time...but you just get passed on. It's bad enough with what is going on in your life...It is humiliating to be at the control of other people...It's very important to be treated with respect, it's bad enough being homeless, it's degrading. There's no other way of putting it.

However, there are positive experiences of engagement with Focus Ireland services, where a customer-orientated organisational culture impacts positively on the take-up of services. Homeless people talked about the value of this approach, which was described positively as having the qualities of being listened to, in non-judgemental ways, with respect and dignity. This had a major impact on building the esteem and confidence of homeless people.

A core value that **Liam** sees in the key worker is being treated with respect.

Believe me Focus Ireland saves you....Having my own place gives me self-respect and makes me happy. The programme works because of the staff. They treat you with respect. I never trusted anyone before I came to Focus [Ireland]. They gave me a chance of life...My pathway out of homelessness happened because of the programme and you learn to make it work for yourself.

Irene says that it has been important to have someone supporting and advocating for her:

It's so simple, the solution...I see my support worker twice a week. It has helped me to become independent...what has been important is that it has been support for me...whereas the social workers worked in the interests of the kids.

Mary Jane spoke about the lack of dignity she felt in the way that she was treated by the local authority, and compared this to how differently she was treated by Focus Ireland:

They [the local authority] just treated me like I was nothing and then you just felt like you were nothing. But my key worker has helped me to get my confidence back and to stand on my own two feet.

Conclusion

From their biographies, homeless people have identified a number of barriers to moving out of homelessness as well as a number of areas of service provision that have helped to facilitate their journey out of homelessness.

The following are the main **barriers** to moving out of homelessness:

- Lack of access to secure, affordable and adequate long-term accommodation/ housing
- Lack of access to employment opportunities and other activities
- Significant amounts of time spent homeless
- Problems resulting from alcohol and drug addiction
- Mental health difficulties
- A lack of provision of accommodation for people whose behaviour prevents them from accessing hotel and long-term accommodation (because of addiction, challenging behaviour etc.)
- Inadequate supply of emergency, transitional and temporary accommodation
- Difficulties in accessing services and poor coordination of services
- Problems in accessing social welfare benefits and rent allowance
- Unsuitability of some accommodation (e.g. B&B accommodation for families with children)

The issues raised on the barriers that block pathways out of homelessness show that there are a number of areas that need to be addressed through prevention.

The following are the areas identified that **work** in facilitating the journey out of homelessness:

- Access to good quality temporary, transitional and permanent accommodation
- Limits on the time spent in temporary accommodation, particularly with children
- Choice in geographic area and type of housing
- Being treated with respect and dignity and listened to
- Building capacity and skills to be independent and autonomous
- Having needs met in a person-centred way
- Access to information, advice and assistance
- Advocacy to facilitate access to services and rights
- Support in daily living, cooking, budgeting, managing resources, managing tenancies and independent living
- Ongoing support, advocacy and assistance to be provided once someone is permanently settled
- Access to support workers when a crisis occurs, or support after permanent settlement.

The issues raised on the barriers that block pathways out of homelessness show that there are a number of areas that need to be addressed through prevention, including improved supply of affordable accommodation (particularly that which accepts rent allowance), improved interactions and engagement with public services (including health services and local authority housing offices), improved overall quality of and access to a broad range of services (particularly in mental health), dealing effectively with anti-social behaviour orders, and improved access to childcare and other family supports.

In addition, there is a clear message from the pathways biographies that there needs to be more early intervention and attention to the structural causes and individual risk factors that lead to homelessness. Key issues include living in poverty, stress, and mental health difficulty. Successful pathways out of homelessness encompass prevention, crisis intervention, intensive and relevant targeted support, and guiding people towards autonomous and independent living situations in transitional and long-term accommodation with appropriate support services. Regular contact with key workers/support workers, particularly in helping people to be independent, autonomous and self-confident, is of paramount importance.

Five key messages can be elicited from the pathway biographies of homeless people:

1. The **provision of affordable, secure and good quality housing** is at the heart of any policy to prevent and eliminate homelessness. It is when long-term accommodation is provided that it becomes possible to organise and meet appropriate support needs. The research has shown that pathways out of homelessness are blocked; many people are staying long-term in inappropriate accommodation through a lack of supply of affordable, secure and good quality privately rented housing and social housing. Gaps exist in the provision of emergency, transitional and longer-term housing options, particularly for single homeless people. Often homelessness could be prevented at an early stage through the provision of appropriate accommodation, in some cases with support services. Due to the shortage of affordable and good quality privately rented accommodation and social housing, many of the people interviewed had remained homeless for longer than was necessary. This situation appears to have worsened in the last year due to more limited access to long-term accommodation.
2. Homelessness strips people of dignity, independence and autonomy. **Building the capacity of homeless people and meeting their needs** through the more effective coordination of service provision becomes as important a goal of policy as providing access to decent accommodation. All of the people interviewed viewed access to affordable and secure accommodation together with personal support in daily living and advocacy (provided by a key worker) as essential for their long-term pathways out of homelessness. Enabling people to live autonomously depends on people's needs (whether their homelessness is temporary, transitional or chronic). Equally important is that homeless people talk about the negative impact on their lives of service providers who treat them with scant respect, which further reinforces their exclusion from services.
3. **The longer an individual or household is homeless, the greater the likelihood that they will be exposed to a second layer of risks and dangers** in their lives, including social exclusion, additional social problems, mental health difficulties, alcohol and drug addiction, service exclusion and exclusion from mainstream society, family, friends and local communities. What is distinctive about the biographies is that they illustrate the impact of being out-of-home on social exclusion, and the adverse connection between length of time in homelessness and engagement with services.
4. **Services need to be more effectively coordinated and service provision targeted to meet needs.** People placed a key emphasis on the impact of homelessness on self-esteem and confidence. Many people spoke about their sense of degradation, exclusion and humiliation as a result of homelessness and how this was reinforced in their engagement with public services. Focus Ireland, in contrast, was seen to be different in that people were treated with respect and integrity.

In addition, there are gaps in the provision of a range of services, including detoxification and rehabilitation facilities, in community-based mental health services and other support services, and poor knowledge of and access to information about rights and entitlements. A commonly shared barrier is a lack of information and understanding of how to seek help and advice, particularly when people are at their most vulnerable.

5. There are **generally higher levels of complex and problematic drug or alcohol use, and physical and mental ill health in the homeless population compared to the general population.** For this group of homeless people, housing pathways are often complex, involving temporary, unsatisfactory and unstable housing and further or repeat homelessness. Being out of home exacerbates many of these problems, creating a vicious circle of marginalisation and exclusion. Addressing these difficulties through appropriate housing, health and other supports will not only save people's lives, but it will enable them to have access to lives of dignity and autonomy.

How can a homeless pathways approach inform prevention and service provision?

The homeless pathways approach places an emphasis on preventing homelessness by addressing the needs of individuals and families that are at a risk of becoming homeless, remaining in homelessness or reverting back to homelessness. This addresses inter-related issues of housing supply and reducing the need for temporary and emergency accommodation in favour of sustainable housing. As a starting point, temporary and emergency accommodation should provide the service that it is intended for, with longer term housing options provided to enable people to live autonomous lives. The biographies demonstrate the inappropriateness and the negative impact on people's lives of living long term in temporary and emergency accommodation. This is also important in reducing levels of repeat homelessness, and paying particular attention to the support and other needs of specific groups of people who are at risk of homelessness.

The objective of prevention is to reduce the risks of homelessness and avoid a crisis that results in homelessness through early intervention and by developing effective actions to identify and respond to the complex, varying and diverse needs of people affected by or at risk of homelessness. Prevention is an ongoing process of activity which takes place across the life cycle. It begins when a child is at risk of homelessness because of poor living conditions and continues through childhood, teenage years, adulthood, parenthood and old age. The life cycle approach helps to identify the points at which early intervention and targeted interventions should take place. There is an increasing recognition in policy-making of the need to shift resources and work towards prevention in local authorities, the HSE and the voluntary sector. Similarly, the engagement of homeless people, through user-led and peer-led approaches, has been important in developing solutions and prevention techniques that help people to lift themselves and others out of homelessness.

Although there has been no specific in-depth evaluation of the effectiveness of the different services on pathways out of homelessness, this research does show that, from the experiences of homeless people, effective responses that impact on pathways out of homelessness include a **combination of access to accommodation, support services and preventative measures.**

Pathways out of homelessness need to be seen in the overall context of prevention, aimed at ensuring that once an individual or family is homeless that this is short-term only and that a route out of homelessness can be identified immediately. Prevention of long-term homelessness can be implemented through improved access to housing for those at risk, settlement support (including advice and guidance), counselling on how to manage personal difficulties or manage financial resources, advice on developing family and social ties, access to and guidance on training and employment, and mental health and other health supports. Prevention aimed at enabling former homeless people to sustain their tenancies and reduce the risk of becoming homeless means ensuring that, once a person is housed and settled, they receive supports and services to ensure that they remain in independent living.

In summary, effective services to facilitate pathways out of homelessness are as follows:

1. Access to accommodation

- a) Access to long-term accommodation in privately rented, local authority or social housing schemes with or without floating and flexible support.
- b) Specific schemes which provide people with better access to privately rented housing, through extension of programmes such as the RAS scheme and improved access to accommodation with rent allowance and assistance through the Access Housing Unit. Preventative measures can also be put in place to improve access to housing advice and information, access to rent deposit schemes to secure admission to privately rented accommodation for potentially homeless people, and improved supply of affordable rented accommodation.

Prevention is an ongoing process of activity which takes place across the life cycle.

- c) Social housing schemes provided by voluntary organisations or housing associations.
- d) Access to transitional accommodation and supported or group accommodation schemes for specific groups (e.g. young people, women fleeing domestic violence, families with children and single men).
- e) Schemes and supports to enable people to remain in their current accommodation and prevent eviction, such as early intervention for people at risk of debt or rent arrears, preventative tenancy sustainment schemes, help with information, improved access to benefits, preventative schemes regarding anti-social behaviour and/or mediation support with a landlord or family member so that a person or family is able to remain in their current accommodation.
- f) Measures to ensure that no family should reside in B&B or emergency accommodation for more than one month, with adequate move-on accommodation.
- g) Case and care management planning for families in B&B accommodation and those who have been in temporary accommodation for more than one year.

2. Support services

- a) Provision of key worker supports that are focused on prevention of homelessness or repeat homelessness, to enable people to gain in confidence, capability and autonomy in areas such as budgeting, parenting, engagement with service providers, and access to and participation in training and employment.
- b) Tenancy sustainment and support services that provide support to people in managing their tenancies, including budgeting, and that prevent homelessness or recurring homelessness.
- c) Family support and intensive family support for parents to provide early intervention and early years supports as well as preventing homelessness or repeat homelessness.
- d) Supports for people released from prison and other institutional care who are at risk of homelessness, so that there are effective transitions for people into secure and affordable accommodation and into training and employment.
- e) Specific coordinated and integrated supports for people experiencing ill health, stress, mental health difficulties or addiction problems, so that they are combined with secure, affordable and supported accommodation.

3. Training and work-related issues

- a) Access to appropriate training and educational guidance supports to enable people's learning choices and pathways.
- b) Improved access to work experience and work placements.
- c) Work with employers to improve awareness of the barriers faced by homeless or former homeless people in entering the labour market.
- d) Incentives to employers to hire homeless or former homeless people.

4. Preventative measures

- a) Measures aimed at avoiding or averting a personal crisis that could lead to homelessness (e.g. marital, relationship or family breakdown). Examples of interventions to prevent homelessness include: family mediation services, domestic violence support services, and support with young people's transitions.
- b) Specific interventions for young people, including family mediation services or intervention by local youth services, to resolve situations that are near crisis point; providing support for a planned move; and providing appropriate supported accommodation for young people, alongside supports to overcome addiction. Other longer term preventative measures include awareness of housing issues in schools; early intervention in families experiencing difficulties and where there are disputes between families and children; identifying children at risk from a young age; and building effective care teams to assist young people leaving HSE care.
- c) Adult/late life initiatives, to include specialist preventative work with at risk groups such as people with addiction problems; housing information and advice in prisons and support leaving institutional care and prison.
- d) Policies and provisions to assist people leaving prison including: positive sentence management, planned discharge and release from prison with mainstream agencies, development of skills and potential employment, appropriate accommodation for single people leaving prison, and follow up and provision of through care and community supports based on case management as necessary.
- e) Policies and provisions to prevent homelessness resulting from discharge from hospital including: discharge planning in liaison with the statutory and voluntary sector, multi-disciplinary approaches through care planning and case management, appropriate accommodation with relevant supports, and community-based services.
- f) Coordination and integration of services with a preventative approach, for example, between local authorities and the HSE to develop multi-dimensional approaches that cover both accommodation and appropriate support services.

The lessons from homeless people's pathways are that there are specific barriers which need to be overcome and areas of policy and service provision that need to be developed and resourced on the basis of what has been shown to work.

Recommendations

The recommendations are given under three main headings: Focus Ireland service provision, national policy issues, and Focus Ireland research and evaluation.

1. Focus Ireland Service Provision

- a) A reorientation of services towards preventative work should be a priority. This should include an examination of how existing support services (such as key workers, family support, tenancy sustainment and support), that are currently working through support and sustainment to prevent homeless people returning to homelessness, can be resourced to play a role in early intervention to eliminate the risks that lead to homelessness in the first place. This could take place at the level of staff teams, as well as at a strategic level throughout the organisation. Focus Ireland tends to work with people once they are homeless or when there is a crisis. Shifting this emphasis towards early intervention could also play an important role in the future. Many of the biographies of homeless people demonstrate that, if there had been a key worker present when they were at risk of becoming homeless, many of their later problems, including homelessness, could have been prevented.

- b) Support services should be provided in a flexible way so that those people who have completed settlement programmes can be supported in the long-term, where this is appropriate, in order to prevent people (particularly those with long-term support needs) falling back into homelessness.
- c) An examination of how more effective systems of referral can be made to Focus Ireland services should be put in place so that Focus Ireland can pick up on people who are potentially at risk. Key areas of referral to be targeted are: after-care workers, social workers, local authorities, the HSE, family resource and community-based projects and other service providers working with people at risk. It will be particularly important to liaise with these agencies in identifying where and how early intervention and prevention can take place, as well as improved methods for ensuring that accessible information and outreach services connect with those people who are invisibly homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- d) Work should be carried out to develop closer working relationships with other service providers to ensure that there is no duplication of activity and that there are mechanisms for coordinating services internally and externally.
- e) Focus Ireland should look at how it can further develop and extend care and case management schemes and their implementation for families in B&B and for young people. These schemes should be extended to all homeless people, and particularly to people who have been homeless for more than one year or who have been homeless on a recurrent basis in the long term.
- f) Services need to address the implications of homeless pathways of later life/older people and minority ethnic groups, as well as greater analysis of specific gender-related pathways into homelessness, such as domestic violence.

2. National Policy Issues

- a) More resources should be allocated to improving access to and the supply of good quality temporary accommodation, as well as mainstream social rented housing and affordable privately rented accommodation of a good quality. A key issue is to ensure that there is sufficient move-on accommodation so that pathways through homelessness are not blocked. In the long run this can reduce reliance on costly accommodation provision.
- b) There should be more long-term housing solutions put in place so that homeless people, particularly young people, families and those with complex and multi-faceted needs, are not staying in inappropriate emergency accommodation for unnecessarily long periods of time.
- c) There is also a need to ensure that there are sufficient resources so that support needs are met through prevention (particularly for those with complex or multiple needs, young people and families with children) to meet the needs of people who are at risk of homelessness or who are moving out of homelessness. This needs to be customer-focused and implemented in coordinated ways.
- d) A national policy commitment on the prevention of homelessness should be implemented urgently. For this to be effective there is a need for the prioritisation and effective resourcing of service providers to be able to work in this area. There continues to be a need to prioritise the prevention of homelessness amongst young people and families so that work is not focused on immediate crisis prevention and management.
- e) Similarly, more effective coordination of services needs to be effected with financial, learning and other incentives for service providers, so that homeless people receive an integrated service response. This is important in ensuring that there are smooth pathways through and out of homelessness, to the implementation of mechanisms for effective case management, and to ensure that there is no unnecessary duplication of services.

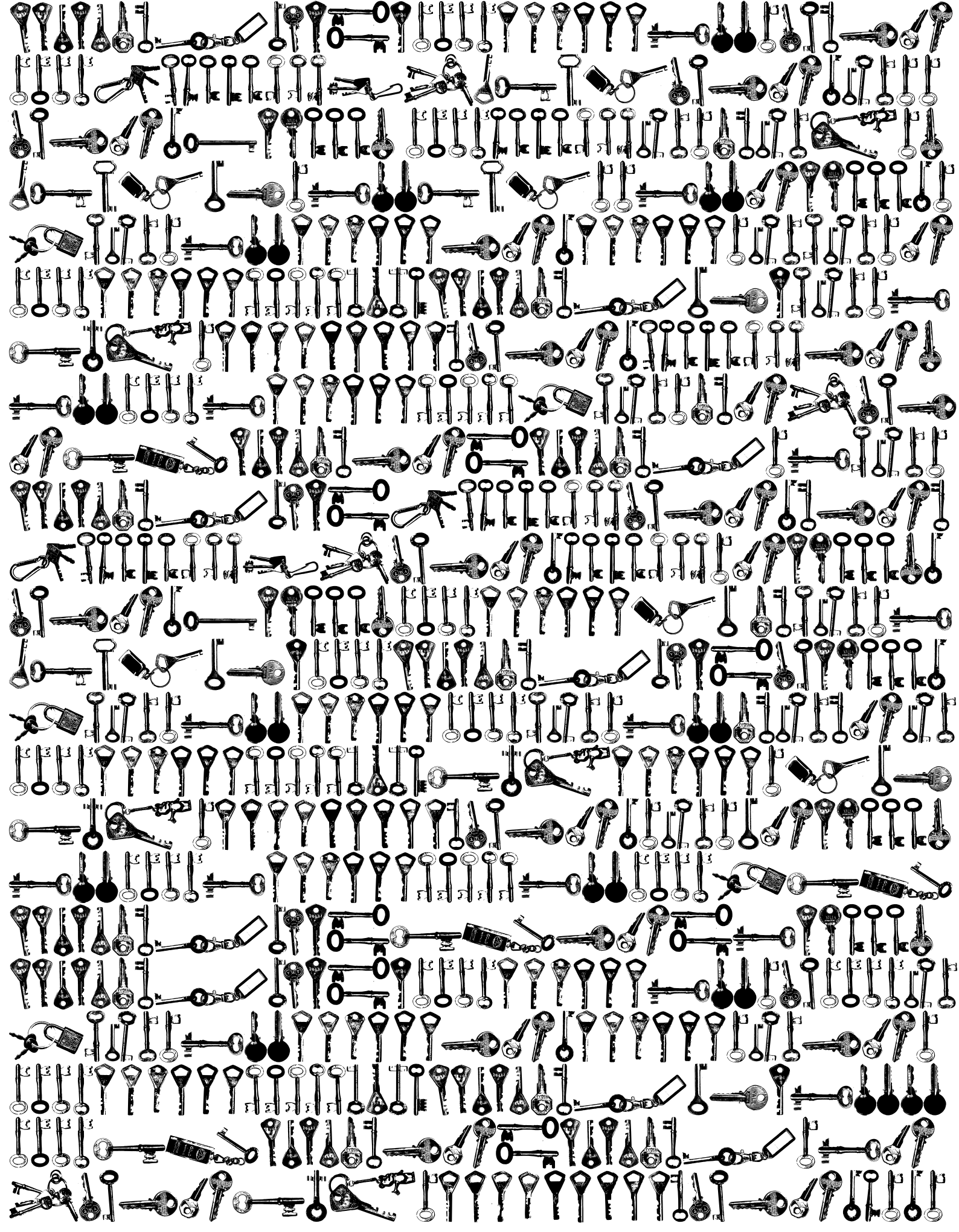
- f) Policy needs to be more systematically informed by evaluation and evidence-based policy approaches and service provision on homeless pathways, so that there is a better understanding of what works in reducing and preventing homelessness.

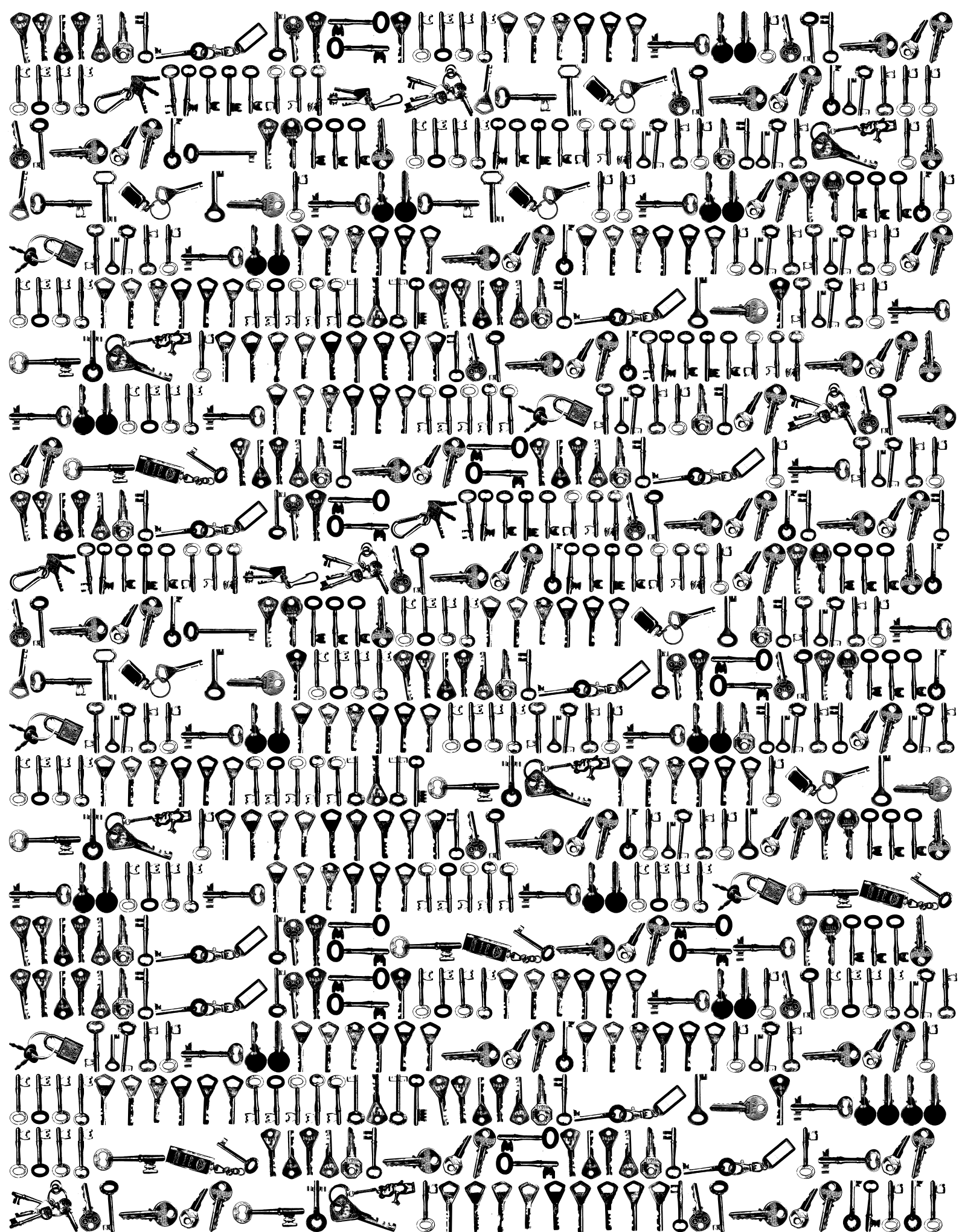
3. Focus Ireland Research and Evaluation

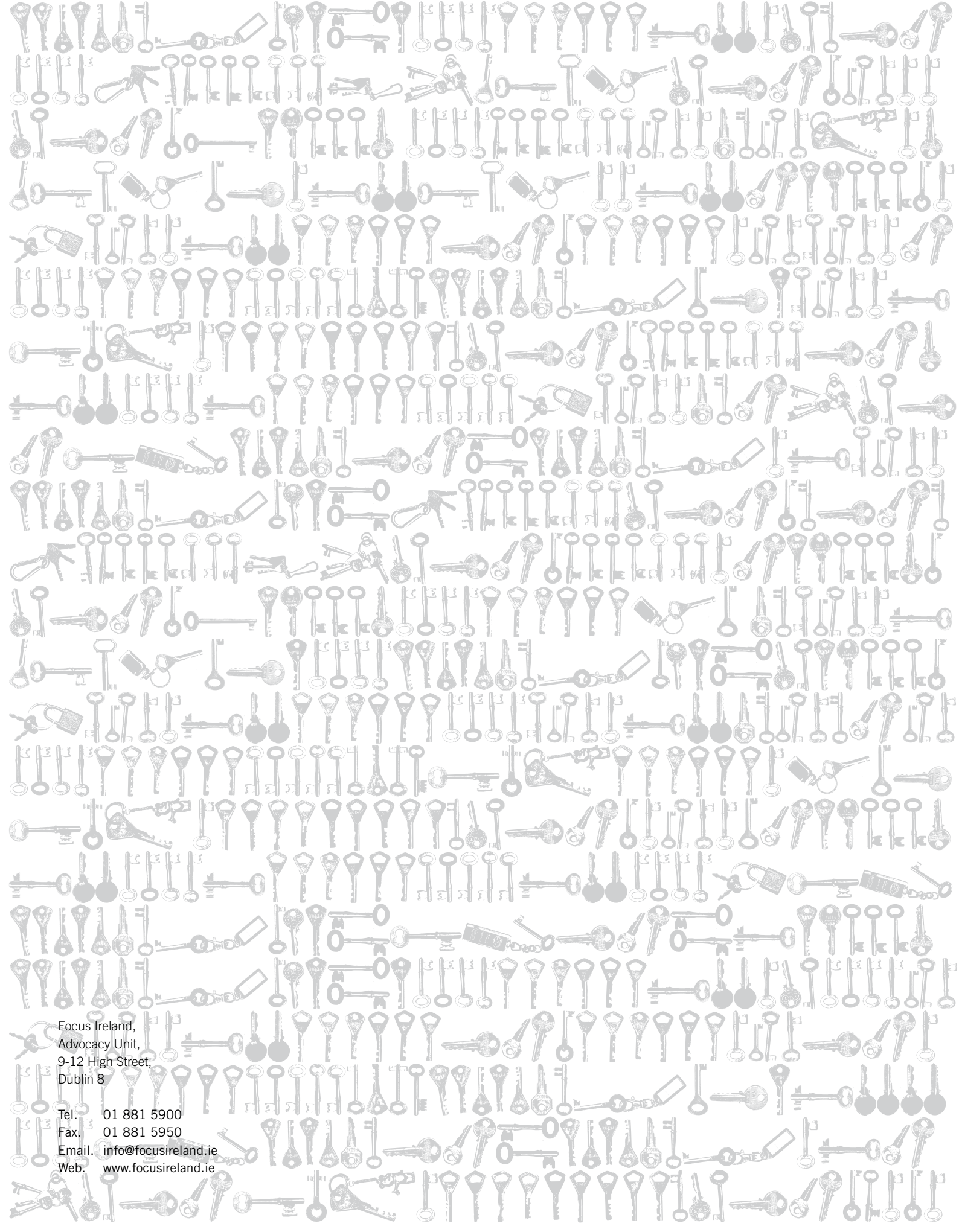
- a) The pathways approach points to the importance of tracking people's journeys through homelessness. There is a need for longitudinal research that provides for a more systematic tracking of homeless people's pathways, in order to identify and learn from what works and to assess different policy interventions, and to determine whether housing and settlement pathways and related support services are working in the long-term.
- b) For this reason it is proposed that Focus Ireland build on this research study by considering the possibility of developing a longitudinal study and approaching the group of homeless people who have participated in this study to track their continuing journeys through homelessness and settlement. Their progress and pathways could be tracked every one to five years. This would be important in improving knowledge of the sustainability of accommodation and support needs following resettlement.
- c) There is also a need to build on the pathways research to collect more qualitative data on the services that are needed to meet the short-, medium- and long-term support needs of those who experience homelessness. This is particularly important in the area of mental health difficulties and addiction.
- d) In order to build a more systematic picture of homeless pathways, it is also suggested that Focus Ireland consider undertaking quantitative research in order to improve the evidence base of homeless pathways by charting the pathways of larger numbers of people who experience short-term, intermittent and longer term homelessness, the length of time they spend in different services, and where and how people move through and out of homelessness.
- e) There are specific areas where more detailed research needs to be carried out in order to identify the role and focus of the prevention of homelessness on specific groups experiencing homelessness, including gender pathways (particularly of women experiencing domestic violence), adult and later life pathways, and pathways of minority ethnic groups.
- f) Homeless pathways could also be used to inform the data collected by the different services in Focus Ireland, so that there is a more detailed evidence base of how customers use and move on from services. Specific mechanisms could be put in place to retain confidentiality.

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