Focus Ireland
Annual Report 2015

2015 – the worst year for family homelessness
In 2015 ... of every Euro received was spent directly on our services to combat and prevent homelessness.
Focus Ireland marked our 30th anniversary in 2015. Our work has touched many thousands of lives since 1985 and continues to do so today.

We supported over 12,500 people who were homeless or at risk in 2015. This was a 9% rise from the number we supported in 2014. The great support we receive from our funders and supporters means that we are able to run 70 lifeline services around the country. We also provide a permanent place to call home for approximately 650 households.

A place to call home
I know from speaking to people using our services how important it is for them to have someone there to listen to them. To lend a helping hand when all other doors have been shut. Our staff are always there to listen and help. They all worked incredibly hard during the year to support people while they are homeless and also to prevent many others from losing their homes.

We can sometimes take our home for granted, but we all know what ‘home’ means. It is the foundation stone of our personal and family life. Sadly, not everyone has this security.

The harsh fact is that **2015 was the worst year for family homelessness.** The number of families becoming homeless rose from an average of 34 per month in 2014 to over 60 per month in 2015. I have never seen it so bad.

This crisis would have been worse again without the work of our family services, which supported 161 families to move out of homelessness and into their own home. These families are living under terrible stress and it’s the children who suffer the most. The specialist child support that our team provides can never be underestimated.

Steps to deal with the crisis
There have been recent positive steps by the Government to address the housing and homeless crisis but the litmus test will be when we see roofs over people’s heads. These homes need to be provided by building social housing and also by taking the urgent steps required to provide a better private rented sector.

Meanwhile, Focus Ireland remains committed to working with the Government – and our partner organisations – to help play our part in delivering these homes for families and people who are homeless. We also continue to place an even greater emphasis on preventing homelessness through our targeted services to help people to remain in their existing homes. This will also help them to avoid the trauma of homelessness.

"The number of families becoming homeless rose from an average of 34 per month in 2014 to over 60 per month in 2015. I have never seen it so bad."
About Focus Ireland

Focus Ireland works with people who are homeless or are at risk of losing their homes across Ireland.

We offer individuals and families advice, support, education and housing to help people to have and keep a home. We believe that everyone has a right to a place they can call home and we campaign to address the causes of homelessness.

Directors and other information

**Directors**
Sr Stanislaus Kennedy  
(Founder and Life President)  
Mr Gerry Danaher (Chairman)  
Ms Susan O’Connell  
Mr Diarmuid Burke  
Ms Anna Lee  
Mr Michael Layde  
Mr Declan O’Flaherty  
Mr Ronan Harris  
Ms Suzanne Quin  
Mr John Moloney  
Ms Pauline Burke (Worker Director)

**Chief Executive**
Mr Ashley Balbirnie

**Trustees**
Sr Síle Wall  
Dr Helen Burke  
Mr Tim Bouchier Hayes

**Secretary and Registered Office**
Mr Pat Dennigan, 9–12 High Street, Christchurch, Dublin 8

**Registered No:** 106149  
**Registered Charity No:** CHY 7220

**Auditors**
Deloitte & Touche, Chartered Accountants and Statutory Audit Firm, Deloitte & Touche House, Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

**Solicitors**
Arthur Cox, Ferrys Solicitors, McCann FitzGerald, Mason Hayes & Curran

**Bankers**
Bank of Ireland, Allied Irish Banks plc, Permanent tsb, Rabobank Ireland plc, Ulster Bank Ireland Limited

In 2015 ...

There was an increase of 52% in volunteering, from 105 to 160.
Mary had a part-time job and rented an apartment where she lived with her young daughter (aged 4).

However, she ran into difficulties when she lost her job and got into debt. Mary ended up homeless and living in emergency accommodation in a hotel in Dublin with her daughter. This went on for over eight months before she secured a home with the support of Focus Ireland.

Mary described her experience of living in emergency accommodation: ‘It was awful living in a small place with nowhere to cook and nowhere that was safe for my daughter to play. It was a roof over our heads but it wasn’t a home.’

Mary said the worst thing for her was seeing the impact the conditions were having on her daughter: ‘She had no kids around to play with ... it affected her mood and confidence and it made me feel guilty as a mother ... like I had failed in some way.’

The experience also had a real impact on the young mother: ‘I felt really lonely and I was stressed out and didn’t know where to turn.’

She said things started to get better when she was put in touch with Focus Ireland, and we worked with her to gain access to suitable housing and to support her in other areas in the months before she moved on from homelessness.

Mary has now moved into a house in the private rented sector and said it’s great to be back on her feet again. She is also doing a course in further education and is already trying to get another part-time job.

‘It is great to be almost back to where we were, and as a mother I am happy to see the change in my little girl. She is happy again and that means the world to me.’
Overview

During 2015, Focus Ireland worked with over 12,500 people across the country, which was an increase of 9% on the previous year.

To understand the way that we work and the difference we make to people’s lives, it is important to understand that not all of these 12,500 people were homeless. Some of them required continued support in their new homes after experiencing homelessness. A larger number were at risk of losing their homes and needed support to stop them becoming homeless.

2015 marked the thirtieth anniversary of our establishment. Drawing on the principle that ‘everyone has a right to a place they can call home’, our work connects deeply with the importance of home to every human being: helping people at risk of homelessness to sustain their home and working with people who have lost their home to find and sustain a new one, with supports as necessary.

We work with people who are facing homelessness, and we have specialist skills in working with families and young people who are homeless. We are also strongly committed to the principles of Housing First, with its proven capacity to help the most marginalised people who are sleeping rough.

In this Annual Report we have set out to present our work and achievements in a concise way, outlining what we have done, what difference it made to people’s lives and how we deployed the resources entrusted to us to achieve this.

This report does not cover every aspect of our work, but concentrates on the key themes of family homelessness, youth homelessness and Housing First. More detailed information on particular services can be found on our website. In particular, a detailed breakdown of our financial governance can be found on our website at www.focusireland.ie. If you have an interest in any aspect of our work that you cannot find on our website, please email us at info@focusireland.ie.

In 2015 ...

thanks to our supporters, we made a difference in the lives of over ... 12,500 people
Families and homelessness

2015 was the worst ever year for family homelessness. The number of families becoming homeless rose from an average of 34 per month in 2014 to an average of 62 per month in 2015, and the total number of families forced to live in emergency accommodation increased from 407 in December 2014 to 775 at the end of 2015. Most of this increase occurred in Dublin.

For many years, Focus Ireland has been the lead organisation working on family homelessness and we developed and expanded our response on a range of levels as the number of families becoming homeless continued to rise alarmingly.

Supporting families out of homelessness
Since 2011, Focus Ireland has been designated by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) as the Homeless Action Team (HAT) for families. The primary objective of the Family HAT is to support homeless families into secure alternative suitable accommodation, either in social housing or in the private rented sector.

During 2015, the team supported 161 families to move out of homelessness into their own homes where they were supported for as long as needed.

We place a high priority on ensuring that families are supported to move into homes where they have the best chance of sustaining their new tenancy. At the time of writing, none of these families had returned to homelessness.

In 2014, a total of 20 families a month became homeless in Dublin; in 2015, this doubled to 40 families.
The success in supporting families to move into social housing was enabled by two long-running Focus Ireland campaigns, one of which was aimed at decreasing the number of empty local authority homes or ‘voids’, and the other which aimed to increase the proportion of social housing allocations going to homeless households.

Moving into private rented accommodation was much more difficult during the year due to the limited housing supply and also because rents payable under Rent Supplement are well below market rents. During the year we contributed to the development and delivery of ‘Homeless HAP’, an enhanced version of the new Housing Assistance Programme (HAP) for people moving out of homelessness. This allows homeless households to compete more effectively with other households for the limited number of homes available for rent, which resulted in an increase in families moving into private rented housing towards the end of the year.

Preventing families becoming homeless

Focus Ireland has consistently argued that much greater emphasis should be placed on helping families before they lose their existing home. Unless this is achieved, everything we do to provide decent emergency accommodation and early move-on will be overwhelmed.

Effective prevention requires a detailed understanding of how and why people lose their homes, and we have taken a lead in researching the causes of family homelessness by undertaking analysis of the route into homelessness for families and by supporting a Housing Agency study of the experiences of families.1

Accurate and timely information and advice can be one of the most effective ways of preventing homelessness and our Advice and Information services in ten sites across the country supported 5,106 households at risk of losing their home. Training and facilities in the A&I services have been upgraded following an external evaluation in 2014.

Families with more complex challenges need a case management approach provided by our Prevention Tenancy Service, which supported 135 families (with 368 children) to avoid homelessness (out of a total of 421 households supported).

We also contributed to the Homeless Prevention campaign led by the DRHE.2

‘No homeless family turned away’

From May 2015, Focus Ireland services were reporting a growing number of families who had not found emergency accommodation by nightfall and who were at risk of sleeping rough. Where the Housing First Intake Team3 came into contact with families, they were provided with emergency accommodation, but there were a few confirmed cases of families with children forced to sleep rough (and many reports which could not be confirmed). Many of these families were not from the Dublin region, but had come to Dublin because of an inadequate response to their plight in their own localities.

Focus Ireland publicly warned that Ireland was ‘at a crossroads’ in its response to family homelessness: without leadership at the highest level, there was a grave risk of parents forced to sleep with their children on the streets of Dublin. Our campaign ‘No homeless family turned away’ called on the Taoiseach to show the required leadership. Our Facebook campaign

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1 www.bit.ly/HAFamilyhomelessness
2 www.bit.ly/DRHEprevent
3 The Dublin Housing First Project is a partnership between Focus Ireland and the Peter McVerry Trust.
regularly reached over 220,000 supporters and more than 5,000 personalised emails were sent to the Taoiseach, triggering many media and Dáil questions. In July, the Taoiseach responded, making a clear statement on RTÉ’s Six One News that no homeless family would be denied emergency accommodation and that adequate finance would be provided.

At a Dublin level, our services work collaboratively with the DRHE to ensure that protocols and agreements are in place so that local authorities, the Intake Team and the Family HAT can provide accommodation even where difficult situations occur late at night.

‘It is the children who feel it most’
Focus Ireland has pioneered child-centred approaches to family homelessness, and the Family HAT includes dedicated child support workers. During 2015, these workers gave special assistance to 59 children. Supporting children in homeless families so that they can continue to succeed in school is one of our core priorities, and this is supported by volunteers in our Education Matters programme.

Children in families who are homeless must not be isolated as ‘homeless children’, and Focus Ireland worked hard during the year to link up with a range of other agencies and groups which also provide services and supports to these children. As well as our on-going work with the DRHE, Focus Ireland linked in with Tusla, the INTO, Home School Liaison Officers and the Children’s Ombudsman, as well as briefing the membership of the Children’s Rights Alliance on our work.

Scaling up the resources to meet the challenge
With the number of families presenting as homeless increasing month after month, the HAT put in place a number of innovative processes to ensure that initial contact was made with families as quickly as possible, but, inevitably, given the scale of increase, waiting lists emerged. Towards the end of 2015 we entered discussions with the DRHE to further resource the Family HAT to increase the number of case managers to ensure that all families living in emergency accommodation have a key worker.

With the support of our key partner Bord Gáis Energy, we also organised a wide range of social activities for families affected by homelessness.

Sr Stan with Focus Ireland Family Team Manager Roisin McDonnell and her daughter Féile launching our Christmas 2015 campaign.
In 2015...

1 in 3 using homeless services was a child.
Young people and homelessness

Homelessness among young adults continues to be the most neglected aspect of the homeless crisis. Nationally, there were 477 young people under the age of 25 in emergency accommodation at the end of 2015, a rise of 102 (21%) over the year.

Virtually all of this increase occurred in Dublin. The evidence is clear that an experience of homelessness at a young age leads to a higher risk of chronic homelessness in later life.

We continued to provide emergency accommodation linked to vital case work support for young people who are homeless, while also moving towards a ‘Housing First For Youth’ approach.

The Dublin, Limerick and Waterford Aftercare residential services provided accommodation for over 70 young state care-leavers in 2015, with a further 8 young people supported in the Cork Youth Housing project. A further 200 young people were also supported through Focus Ireland’s Aftercare Support & Settlement service.

A significant strand of Focus Ireland’s work on youth homelessness in 2015 involved pursuing the recommendations from Young People, Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (Mayock et al.) which was published in 2014. A new partnership with other homeless organisations secured funding to commission the second phase of this important longitudinal study, which is due to be published in 2016.

At the end of December 2015, the Childcare Act (2015) was signed into law by President Michael D. Higgins, giving young care-leavers a right to an assessment of their aftercare needs and an aftercare plan. This historic legislation follows a decade long campaign led by Focus Ireland.

Attention will now turn to monitoring the implementation and impact of the legislation, and whether it works to reduce the high rate of homelessness among care-leavers.

More clearly needs to be done for this group of vulnerable young adults. We are working with one of our key partners and funders, the Human Dignity Foundation, on a five-year programme entitled Building Youth Capacity for Independent Living and are committed to changing the outcomes for young people affected by homelessness in Ireland.
Housing

During 2015, Focus Ireland gave new impetus to our objective of providing homes for people who need ongoing support.

We added a further 28 housing units to our portfolio through acquisitions and leases, with a further 75 units awaiting completion. An ambitious development plan, funded by borrowing and government grants, was agreed, which will bear fruit in future years.

The major renovation of Stanhope Green, where small studio units were converted into more spacious one-bedroom apartments, took place during 2015, with the final work to be completed early in 2016.

After many years of planning and seeking funding for a 28-unit development in Harold’s Cross, a major step forward was taken, with builders going on-site at the start of December, and a completion date for late 2016.

The other major construction project in hand is in John’s Lane West, where a renewed planning permission was obtained, increasing the number of units to 31, 25 of which will be available for families.

Construction is scheduled to begin by the end of 2016.
In 2015...

Over 450 families and 1,000 children (in these families) became homeless in Dublin alone in 2015.
Housing First

Housing First is an approach to homelessness that first emerged in New York in the 1990s in response to chronic street homelessness among people with severe mental health issues.

Traditional approaches to this form of homelessness essentially attempted to solve the mental health or addiction issues before contemplating a move on to housing. Housing First recognises that a person is more likely to be able to manage or overcome these challenges if they first have a secure home, with the support provided to them in that home.

Housing First programmes have been extensively evaluated and have very high – 80–90% – success rates. The programme is increasingly applied across the world and is named at the core of Irish government policy, partly as a result of Focus Ireland’s advocacy work.

We are an early adopter of Housing First in Ireland. The approach fits with Focus Ireland’s ethos of providing homes with tenancy sustainment. Focus Ireland was a partner in the DRHE-led Housing First Demonstration Project 2012–2014. In partnership with the Peter McVerry Trust, we were selected to provide the Housing First service in Dublin, arising from a tendering process. 2015 was the first full year of this new programme, which started in October 2014.

The Housing First project comprises two linked teams, the first of which is the Intake Team, which makes contact with chronic rough sleepers and offers opportunities to take up housing (with supports). This team also operates as the street homeless team for Dublin city. The second part of the project is the Intensive Case Management Team, which supports people when they move into their own homes. The project also includes accommodation finders and links with mental health and other supports.

The Intake Team engaged with 1,754 individuals who needed support on the streets during 2015.

By the end of the year, a total of 46 individuals had been provided with long-term housing, together with the Intensive Case Management support they needed. The housing was local authority housing, social housing or other long-term housing. A number of the Housing First tenants had been sleeping rough for very long periods of time before engaging in this programme – in one case for 18 years.
Alan saw the best and worst of society when he was sleeping rough on the streets of Dublin.

He said the worst was when some young people spat on him as he was sleeping in a doorway. Alan said: ‘You wouldn’t treat a dog like that. I can’t understand how you could treat another person with no respect at all.’

Alan said that at other times the way people treated him kept him going at his lowest points. ‘I remember one Christmas Eve this woman started talking to me, asking me how I was. She then went off and bought me a brand new jacket and blanket to keep me warm. I don’t want to seem soft but I felt like crying. It was a great lift to see someone cared and took the time to treat me like a person.’

That was Alan’s third winter on the streets and at this point he started his journey back to getting a home. He said: ‘I had a few problems and ended up homeless. I was working in construction but lost my job when the recession hit. I started drinking and then I got into drugs too, I am sorry to say. Life on the streets was tough. You had your whole life in a little bag and nothing to do and nowhere to go all day.’

Alan said that the Focus Ireland Coffee Shop in Temple Bar gave him the help he needed: ‘They really listened to me and helped get me somewhere safe to stay and then after another while I got into a Focus Ireland housing programme.’

Alan said one of the best days in his life was when he got a permanent home through Focus Ireland: ‘It is great to be able to turn the key and walk into your own place. I have to pinch myself sometimes when I see where I am and how much better my life is now. I wouldn’t have been able to do it without the support of Focus Ireland. A lot of people see someone sleeping rough on the street and think they are lost causes, but I think my story shows that nobody is a lost cause and that when you have the right support you can turn your life around.’
Financial review

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<td>Fundraising income</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rental income</td>
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<td>Other income</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<table>
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<th>Mix of expenditure</th>
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<td>Direct charitable activities costs</td>
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<td>Governance and support costs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundraising and events costs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>20.95</td>
<td>100%</td>
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NB: Our audited statutory accounts are available on our website at www.bit.ly/FI2015Accounts

Analysis of income and expenditure

Breakdown of income
- Grant income 55%
- Fundraising income 33%
- Rental income 7%
- Other income 5%

Breakdown of costs
- Direct charitable activities costs 89%
- Governance and support costs 3%
- Fundraising and events costs 8%
Finance

Focus Ireland continued to work hard during 2015 to manage the rising need for our services, as 9% more people sought our help during the year. The family homeless crisis deepened and would have been worse without the dedicated support provided by Focus Ireland.

We managed to secure a place to call home for one family each day during the year to help them escape from homelessness. Sadly, however, another three families became homeless each day, so the situation got worse and called for an even greater response by our organisation.

We always work to ensure the continued funding of all of our vital services for people who are currently homeless and to enable our organisation to respond to new crises – such as the shocking rise in family homelessness – when they arise.

To achieve this, we ensure that all costs are tightly controlled so we remain strong and agile enough to operate efficiently while meeting rising demand.

As a result, we were able to support over 12,500 people who were homeless or at risk of losing their home in 2015.

The financial outcomes for the organisation for 2015 were positive, and a total of 89% of all of our expenditure was spent on delivering services to help combat and prevent homelessness.

In an economic climate which continued to be very challenging, Focus Ireland’s fundraising income was over €7 million in 2015. This integral support (along with grant income received) ensured that we were in a good position to continue to remodel and develop our services in line with our current organisational strategy to place an even greater emphasis on prevention. We anticipate that the current crisis will continue for a number of years. In these circumstances, we will have a continued emphasis on delivering services and building up reserves to sustain the organisation into the future.

During 2015, the Human Dignity Foundation awarded a five year grant to Focus Ireland to deliver a programme of work tackling Youth Homelessness in Ireland. The Human Dignity Foundation pledged €2.1 million over five years for the Building Youth Capacity for Independent Living project; the first instalment of €229,170 was paid to Focus Ireland in 2015 and is accounted for in fundraising income.

Bord Gáis Energy and Focus Ireland entered into a three-year Corporate Social Responsibility Partnership in October 2015. Concerned by the rising number of families becoming homeless in Ireland, Bord Gáis Energy aims to raise awareness, promote volunteering, and donate €1 million over three years to support Focus Ireland’s advice and information services for families. Bord Gáis Energy contributed €107,570 to Focus Ireland fundraised income in 2015 as part of this corporate partnership.

Sincere thanks as always to our funders and donors for their continued support and to our staff whose continued commitment and flexibility allow us to continue our work.
In order to protect the identity of our customers, the photographs in this document are of volunteers.

Registered charity CHY 7220