



# Focus Ireland Youth Housing

**A Partnership Approach:  
Working to Tackle  
Youth Homelessness**

**Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.**  
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# Focus Ireland Youth Housing

## A Partnership Approach: Working to Tackle Youth Homelessness

### Tackling and Preventing Homelessness

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There are three main approaches to addressing homelessness: prevention, emergency responses and providing housing with support. Emergency responses, such as night shelters, only give short-term help or 'manage' the problem and aren't really helping people to find a way out of homelessness for good.

Research has shown us that this way of tackling homelessness can be more expensive and short-term. The longer a person is trapped in homelessness, the harder it is for them to cope with personal problems such as physical health, mental health and drug or alcohol use.

Focus Ireland has long recognised that young people leaving State Care can be particularly vulnerable and at risk of becoming homeless. We have a track record of providing a residential and support and settlement service to young people leaving care in Dublin, the Mid West and Waterford.

Our services work directly to support young people who leave care or are currently living in the

most vulnerable situations in emergency homeless accommodation. We provide these services with the support of the State and while much good work is being carried out there are still many young care leavers at serious risk due to a critical lack of accommodation which is leaving many homeless.

In recent years in Ireland we have started to lean more towards working to prevent homelessness and recently to take a 'Housing Led' approach, providing a secure home first, with support to stay in your home. Focus Ireland has been to the fore in delivering on this approach and Housing First is a key cornerstone of our new strategy which runs to 2020.

### Rising Youth Homelessness Problem

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Focus Ireland recently warned of a rising Youth Homelessness crisis as the number of 18–24 year-olds homeless increased by 78% over the last three years.

Figures from the Department of Housing reported that 776 young people were homeless in February 2017. This was a 78% increase from the earliest figure available in April 2014 which was 436. Young people ages 18–24 now make up some 10% of the record number of 7,421 people who are currently homeless in Ireland.

We know that young people aged 18–24 outside of families have really been hit hard by the reduced

rate of social welfare available to them. When a young person falls into the nightmare that is homelessness, there's always an underlying reason. Not getting accommodation or support upon leaving State Care, family problems, mental health challenges and/or purely economic pressures and unemployment. Focus Ireland believes that it is wrong that young people are often left to fend for themselves in these situations.

# Working in Partnership to Deliver Youth Housing First Service and Accommodation

Focus Ireland, and others, are providing many vital services in cooperation with the State and Local Authorities but a lot more needs to be done. However, the positive news is we already have the type of partnership approach and service up and running and delivering results.

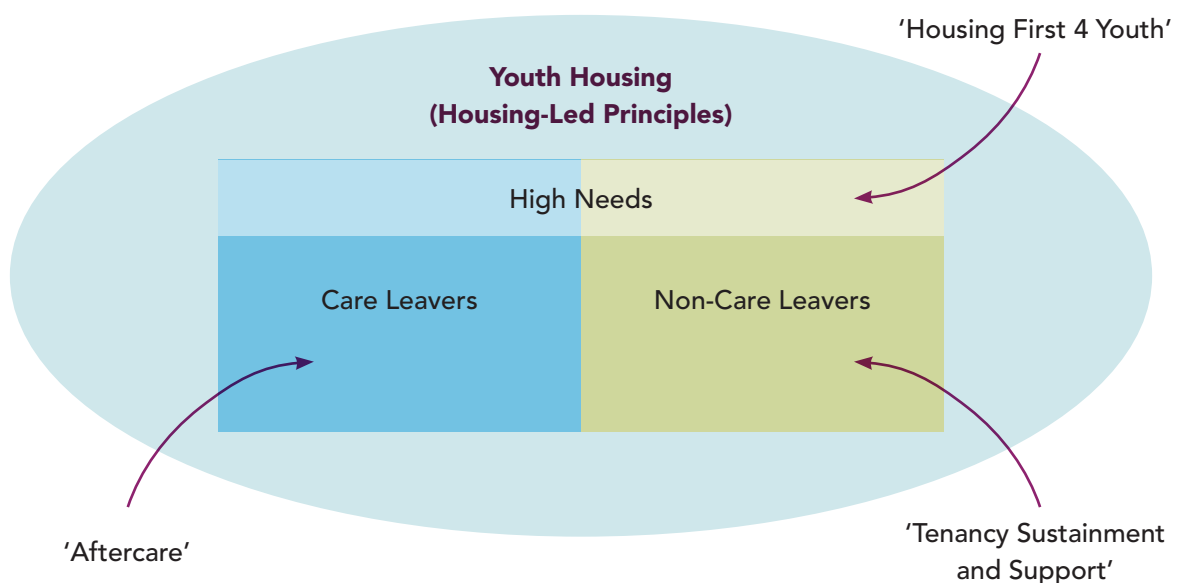
As part of our strategy we are already moving to address this rising problem through an innovative approach to target vulnerable people in the 18–26 age-group. The Focus Ireland service is called Youth Housing, which incorporates Housing Led and HF4Y (Housing First for Youth) principles. This provides young people with housing as quickly as possible to help them to escape from homelessness. The young person is then provided with intensive and targeted, person-centred supports including healthcare, counselling, education, training, financial advice and more. These supports are crucial to helping the young person to move on to independent living and to avoid them becoming homeless again in the future.

Our Youth Housing project in the Mid West has seen huge success – we’ve already set up 40 young people in secure homes. Twelve of them are in secondary or third level education and 23 are in training or employment. A crucial factor in the success of the pilot has been the active collaboration of Limerick County Council, Tusla and alongside the resources we can bring to this project.

The approach has also proven successful in Waterford as 16 young people have been housed and 11 have so far accessed education and training. Likewise the project in Cork, in partnership with Cork City council has housed 25 young people with a further 19 in education and employment. The service aims to maximize the education, training and employment outcomes for young people as it is clear this helps them on the path to independent living. The service is also operating in Cork and we’ve expanded the scheme to North Tipperary, Dublin and Clare. If this kind of cooperation can be replicated elsewhere then we could transform this situation. Focus Ireland now plans to build on these successful partnerships approach and to roll out the Youth Housing First service countrywide where required but this will take time and support.

This approach recognises young people have particular needs different to adults and all projects will work towards a Housing Led approach in order to meet these needs. The services are delivered in close partnership with Tusla and the relevant local authorities in each area and work with young people aged 18–26.

**Focus Ireland Youth Housing Model**



“One day soon I’m going to close my own door, lock it behind me and feel safe. quite secure.”

## One Young Person’s Journey from Homelessness to Home

A young woman ‘Paula’ (not her real name) talks about Focus Ireland’s innovative Housing First for Young People service and explains how it is helping to change people’s lives. Paula recently experienced a traumatic period of homelessness but has since been housed by the partnership approach between Focus Ireland, Tusla and the Local Authorities.

Paula said of her time homeless in sheltered accommodation and on the streets: ‘More than anything I wanted a future. I wanted control of my life. I was sick of life being something that happened to me, having no choices. Always

running.’ Focus Ireland was able to secure a place for Paula through its Youth Housing approach. Paula explained: ‘When I got in touch with Focus Ireland the staff were amazing. They’ve found me a temporary place to live and they’re going to help me to get a flat. I’m so excited! I can’t tell you how amazing it is to have a home and to not be on the streets anymore. One day soon I’m going to close my own door, lock it behind me and feel safe. I’m going to sit down, relax and start planning my next move. Looking for a job, doing a course, and starting a new life.’

**Conclusion: We want to replicate the success of the Youth Housing project across the rest of the country in partnership with Tusla and the relevant Local authority.**

A future is exactly what we at Focus Ireland want to offer young people like Paula. And we do this in a unique way: by giving them a home first so that they can solve their other problems. The traditional homelessness services can focus on providing food and emergency accommodation. While this is helping, we believe it is a short-term answer and we need to move beyond this

emergency response by ensuring people can secure a home as quickly as possible. Our partners in the Local Authorities, Tusla and the Department clearly also recognize the success and potential additional impact the Youth Housing approach can have in ending – or at the very least drastically reducing – the terrible and unacceptable problem of youth homelessness.

**Focus Ireland Head Office**  
9–12 High Street  
Christchurch  
Dublin 8

Tel 01 881 5900  
LoCall 1850 204 205  
Fax 01 881 5950  
Email [info@focusireland.ie](mailto:info@focusireland.ie)

**focusireland.ie**  
Registered charity CHY 7220

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