

Submission to the National Homeless Action Committee: Youth Homelessness

February 2022

Introduction

Focus Ireland is one of the leading organisations working with homeless young people including not only young adults but also unattached minors and children who are homeless with their families.

The number of young adults homeless in Ireland has almost doubled in the last six years. Of all age groups, they are amongst the most vulnerable, least likely to know where they can get help or present to services, and most likely to bunk in with friends and extended family, live in other precarious situations, or sleep rough. As such, many are not included in the official figures and are in 'hidden homelessness'.

Young adults are at a crucial point in their emotional, cognitive and social development, transitioning from adolescence to adulthood; experiences at this stage have life-long impacts. To move successfully to adulthood, they need understanding, support, space and structure. Left to their own devices, those out of home often flounder and face a future of exclusion, potentially leading to a lifetime cycle of homelessness. However, with the right interventions their needs can be addressed and they can move out of homelessness and into productive, independent adulthood.

Young adults out of home are in crisis, without experience of independent living and the resilience of adulthood. They can have a range of needs and issues, stemming from adverse childhood experiences, which include poor mental health, behavioural issues, problematic drug or alcohol use, and sometimes all of these in combination. Some are parents and many are separated from their children because of their situation. Those leaving state care or detention, from migrant or ethnic groups, and who identify as LGBTQI+ are disproportionately represented in youth homelessness.

It is essential for the Youth Homelessness Strategy to be cross-departmental, intersectional and cooperative. A consultation process with stakeholders across the areas of youth and homeless services should be held to develop the contents of the strategy and as time goes on, to monitor and review its implementation.

Focus Ireland is a member of the Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness which was established in September 2017 to consolidate the work of a range of organisations who are trying to tackle youth homelessness. The Coalition comprises Focus Ireland, Barnardos, BelongTo, COPE Galway, Crosscare, EPIC, Foróige, National Youth Council of Ireland, Novas, Peter McVerry Trust, Simon Community, SVP, SpunOut.ie, Teen Parents Support Programme, Threshold, and the Union of Students of Ireland. For more information, visit our website: www.endyouthhomelessness.ie

Definitions

We recommend a clear definition of ‘youth homelessness’ for the purposes of the strategy in line with the FEANTSA European Framework for Defining Youth Homelessness.

Currently, youth services and government documents refer to ‘youth’ with differing understandings of what ages this includes and at what point a young person is no longer eligible for these services. This leads to confusion and inefficient policies and allows young people to fall through the gaps.

The FEANTSA definition states: “Youth homelessness occurs where an individual between the ages of 13 and 26 is experiencing rooflessness or houselessness or is living in insecure or inadequate housing without a parent, family member or other legal guardian.”

Actions currently within your own organisations that are supporting homeless prevention

As requested, the following section comprises a brief description of Focus Ireland services for older minors and young adults. These are set out below mapped against a pathway typology of homeless services, as follows:

- Prevention of homelessness
- Day-services
- Emergency residential services
- Housing solutions
- Education and Labour Market
- Research and Monitoring

Prevention of homelessness

RESIDENTIAL AND FLOATING AFTERCARE FOR CARE LEAVERS

The largest homeless prevention programme Focus Ireland provides for young people is our Aftercare Service operated in partnership with Tusla. Focus Ireland operates residential aftercare services and floating aftercare support in Dublin North and Dublin South/Leinster and Sligo. Residential aftercare services in the South East have been converted to a Housing First for Youth model – see ‘Housing solutions’ below.

YOUTH MEDIATION

Focus Ireland operates a youth mediation service in partnership with Tusla, designed for families where relationship issues are likely to result in a young person becoming homeless or where the relationship has temporarily broken down and a young person is accessing homeless services. Young people are referred to the service by Tusla.

The programmes work intensively with a small number of extremely vulnerable young people and their families and/or carers with the aim of preventing admissions to care or crisis admissions to homeless servicesⁱ.

The mediation service is primarily aimed at preventing crisis situations developing whereby a young person is asked to leave the home or care setting, or threatens to leave in response to an argument.

At the pre-crisis stage, once both parties have explored and understood the issues, mediation can assist people to find alternative options. The aim of the service is to reintegrate young people back into the family home and repair relationships with their care givers. The same approach can be used successfully with alternative care givers in the context of state care, whereby a placement is in danger of breaking down or where there is a plan for a young person to return to his/her family of origin.

CRISIS INTERVENTION SERVICE PARTNERSHIP (CISP)

The Crisis Intervention Service Partnership (CISP) is a joint Tusla / Focus Ireland service. Service delivery includes direct one-to-one key working with young people who access emergency accommodation. The overarching aim of the service is to support young people to return home, if possible, or move to a more stable placement. The CISP team work alongside social work departments in planning for the best outcomes for young people accessing National Emergency Out-of-Hours Service. CISP also has a role in the provision of emergency foster care placement as a resource to the Out-of-Hours team, and link work support is provided by the CISP Social Work Team Leader.

THE LEAVING WELL PROJECT

Focus Ireland is exploring the potential of digital technology to support the relationship between aftercare workers and young care leavers, allowing co-creation of care plans and detailed tracking of outcomes. The trial is based on an app specially devised by Social Finance UK who have invested substantially in a digital tool which is widely used in the UK by local authorities. The Irish trial of the app is operating under an implementation committee including Tusla and colleagues in Crosscare and Don Bosco but is currently on hold due to Covid-19.

Day Services

THE EXTENSION

The Extension Day Service provides a drop-in facility for young people aged 16 to 25 years who are homeless and availing of emergency homeless services in Dublin City Centre. It is funded by the CDYSB, Tusla and public fundraising. It provides a safe, welcoming and supportive environment for this vulnerable cohort during the day. It also provides access to case management support, advice, information and advocacy to enable them to access appropriate support services, address the causes of their homelessness and move towards independence. It operates from our Georges Hill site, with separate access to the supported residential services.

Emergency Residential Services

THE CARETAKERS HOSTEL

The Caretakers Hostel was established as a partnership project with The Society of St. Vincent de Paul and is funded by Tusla. In 2020, Focus Ireland took over full responsibility for the service. In operation since 2004, this project provides emergency placements for young people (U18s) who are accessing the National Emergency Out-of-Hours Service.

GRANGE LODGE

Grange Lodge provides short-term residential accommodation to young people between 15 and 18 years of age as part of the Tusla's Crisis Intervention Services. The young people referred avail of a

high support, structured and individualised programme tailored to their specific needs which is focused upon their move-on to a more permanent home. It is a vital service within CIS for those young people for whom a return home is not possible and no other suitable placement within the care system can be identified by Tusla.

GEORGES HILL

'Block V' in Georges Hill provides 'Supported Temporary Accommodation' for homeless young adults in self-contained housing units with on-site support.

Housing solutions

TUSLA CAS/CAS FOR CARE LEAVERS

The designated CAS funding for the purchase of homes for care leavers via Tusla is potentially one of the most significant initiatives for this cohort in recent years. Focus Housing Association has secured 76 homes under this scheme and is committed to working with Tusla to acquiring a further 50 homes per year, rising to 75 per year under this or similar programmes.

LIMERICK YOUTH HOUSING

The service was specifically established to provide housing to address the needs of young people by preventing them accessing or removing them quickly from Emergency accommodation. The service is available to young adults, with or without dependents, between the ages of 18 and 26.

SOUTH EAST YOUTH HOUSING & HOUSING FIRST FOR YOUTH:

Focus Ireland, in partnership with the Tusla, provides services for young people leaving the care of the State in Dublin, Waterford and Limerick. Our Aftercare Support and Settlement services provide outreach support and guidance for young people as they make the transition from State care to independent living at 18 years of age. The residential programmes provide high quality, semi-independent, residential accommodation for young people who have left State care. Both the Support and Settlement Services and the residential components offer a wide range of supports to enable young people to make a successful transition to independent living.

All Focus Ireland housing projects for young people are exploring the adoption of Housing First practices for young adults, developed in collaboration with the European Housing First Hub and colleagues in Scotland and France.

Education and Labour Market

PREPARATION FOR EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT (PETE)

Focus Ireland's Preparation for Education, Training and Employment (PETE) programme helps people, including young adults, who have been or are at risk of homelessness to engage with training and education in order to access paid employment. The PETE programme contributes significantly towards the prevention of homelessness, and supporting those who have been homeless to achieve sustainable, independent living. The PETE programme currently operates in three geographical locations (Dublin, Waterford & Limerick)

PETE does not aim to replicate existing mainstream services, but to provide for a vulnerable and disadvantaged group and support successful progress from the crisis of homelessness to the stability of paid work through a flexible education and training programme.

Research and Monitoring

The area of Youth Research is one of the three key themes of the Focus Ireland Research Strategy. The Strategy reflects the fact that youth homelessness is an under-researched area in Ireland and that baseline data is sparse.

The youth homelessness research strategy draws heavily on the two-part longitudinal research carried out by Dr Paula Mayock and originally funded by Focus Ireland and later support from a range of partners in the sector.

The main research projects relevant to the new Youth Homeless Strategy include:

(i) [Aftercare Outcomes Framework – University of York](#)

Research project involves developing and adapting a framework to measure outcomes for young people leaving care over a wide range of domains. The first phase of the project was funded by HDF and took an assessment measure developed by Social Finance UK and adapted it for the Irish context. The second phase will involve the piloting of this framework by Focus Ireland and other partners in the project (Don Bosco and Crosscare). The pilot will use a data collection and analysis app developed by Social Finance UK and will feed into the Digital Transformation Strategyⁱⁱ.

(ii) [PhD support \(Funding HDF/Research Council\)](#)

This four-year project involves supporting a UCD PhD student, Clíodhna Bairéad, in her research of trajectories through homelessness, including young adults, using PASS data. A series of interim reports setting out key dimensions of youth homelessness will be produced from 2019 onwards. This project supported the first quantitative analysis of youth homelessness in Ireland.ⁱⁱⁱ

(iii) [Qualitative research into the impact of sexual identity \(LGBTQI+\) on youth homelessness, jointly with BeLonGTo.](#)

This research, funded by Focus Ireland and St Stephen's Green Trust and carried out in partnership with BeLonG To, will be the first Irish study of the link between sexual identity and youth homelessness. In addition to the qualitative outcomes, the project generated proposed guidelines for services and feed into an organisational strategy on LGBTQI and homelessness.^{iv}

(iv) [New family formation.](#)

Around 25% of all families becoming homeless are headed by an adult who is under the age of 25. These families face a number of distinct challenges, but there are no distinct policy or service supports in place.^v

(v) [Youth Housing First](#)

Focus Ireland, as part of the European Housing First Hub, is a lead participant with European partners in developing assessment tools for HF4Y. We will continue to invest in this work and apply the assessment tool to Irish services. This is currently in the second phase of the pilot with a view to ultimately have this survey carried out across all our Youth Housing services.

The potential for further actions to be taken by your organisation.

MEDIATION

With appropriate funding, the mediation services described above could be extended to other population centres. Additional capacity in Dublin would also serve to prevent further young people entering the care system and/or facing the risk of homelessness.

YOUTH CAFE

Focus Ireland is currently working with Tusla and Dublin City Council to identify premises for a dedicated youth café-style service for the cohort of young people who currently use the Extension and for care leavers who wish to re-engage with aftercare professionals to receive advice and guidance or review their existing aftercare plans. The service will comprise a one-stop-shop including a drop-in advice and information service, as well as an intensive case management support service for those who require ongoing assistance to avoid homelessness, move out of homelessness or who require support with regard to other issues affecting them as they make the transition from state care.

In Focus Ireland's experience, vulnerable young people need access to specialised, multidisciplinary supports but often these supports are not readily available when they need them or are not tailored to meet their specific needs. The service being proposed by Focus Ireland and Tusla would be specifically designed to respond to young people in a way that will ensure such supports are delivered in a targeted, youth-friendly environment and at an appropriate level of intensity to meet the specific needs of each young person.

The need for a dedicated youth services for vulnerable cohorts, such as care leavers or young people accessing homeless services is acknowledged in the government's national policy framework for children and young people, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, which emphasises the importance of supporting quality youth work, both as a protective factor contributing to the young person's overall development and in reaching out to young people at risk. The National Aftercare Policy for Alternative Care requires Tusla to provide an aftercare drop-in service to all young people who are eligible for an aftercare service. Any young person with a care history may avail of such services for advice and guidance. The establishment of these drop-in services represent a critical preventative measure to reduce the number of care leavers who end up in homeless services and also interrupt the development of longer-term issues via early intervention and blocking entry to adult services.

AFTERCARE AND PREPARATION FOR LEAVING CARE

With appropriate support to increase the number of aftercare workers and reduce the current caseloads to a more manageable level, it would be possible to allocate an aftercare worker, where a social work assessment indicate it is appropriate, at the age of 16. This would allow the Aftercare worker to deliver the exiting objective of the National Standards for Children's Residential Centres commitment that 'two years prior to a young person reaching the age of leaving care, the care plan will outline the preparation and support in place for the young person.'

Proposed further policy actions beyond your own organisation that can be taken in respect of specific areas of interest or activities.

- Restore the full rate of Jobseekers Allowance for vulnerable young people under 26s. The current policy recognises that care-leavers require the full adult payment, but no discretionary policy exists to protect young people who have been on the margins of the care system and experience the same vulnerabilities. At present, a lot of the time of care workers is taken up with trying to mitigate the harm done by the low income of vulnerable young people. This is neither cost-effective nor humane.
- Ensure an after-rent income based on the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) developed by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice. This will introduce equity across household types and age groups and help to improve the sustainability of renting.
- Aftercare should be extended to the age of 26, in line with the definition of youth proposed above. Currently, aftercare supports beyond the age of 21 are only available to young people who remain in education, when often the most vulnerable young people are those who are unable to continue in education due to mental health or other issues. This exclusion from supports should be ended.
- It is well known that young people leaving care are particularly at risk of homelessness, yet many face long delays in accessing aftercare workers due to extremely high caseloads. In aftercare services run directly by Tusla, a caseload of up to 50 young people per aftercare worker is not uncommon. Funding additional aftercare workers would prevent young people from facing the 'cliff edge' of exiting care on their own.
- The new Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures framework should include youth homelessness as a key issue and should be integrated with the National Youth Homelessness Strategy.
- International evidence indicates that a disproportionate number of young homeless people are LGBTQI+. A recent Focus Ireland and BeLonGTo report into the experiences of homeless LGBTQI+ youth in Ireland which called for the Youth Homelessness Strategy to include specific reference to the particular risks and pathways into homelessness which LGBTQI+ youth are likely to experience. The Strategy should put in place educational, family and youth service supports to help prevent homelessness among LGBTQI+ youth, including increased funding for family mediation services and specialist training for teachers and youth workers on LGBTQI+ issues.
- Review the operation of the National Emergency Out-of-Hours Service to ensure that an appropriate service is available for young U-18 people across the country when mainstream social services are closed.
- Review and update Circular Housing 46/2014 (Protocol on Young People Leaving State Care) to ensure that Care leavers are able to be registered on local authority housing lists prior to turning 18 and that they are included in the Schemes of Lettings as a priority group for social housing in all Local Authorities.

- Ensure that local authority housing output plans developed under Housing For All provide a more diversified social and affordable housing stock to include adequate units for single person households reflecting the full range of housing needs.

ⁱ You-tube Video of a Seminar on Mediation The Leaving Well Project The Leaving Well Project The Leaving Well Project bit.ly/324g1iE

ⁱⁱ Dixon, J., Ward, J., & Stein, M. (2018) *Brighter Futures for Careleavers: A Consultation on Outcomes and Aftercare for Young People Leaving Care in Ireland*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/35O6g9J> (Accessed: 3rd February 2022)

ⁱⁱⁱ Bairéad, C., & Norris, M. (2020) *Youth Homelessness in the Dublin Region: A profile of young, single emergency accommodation users in 2016, 2017 and 2018*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/34w61zB> (Accessed: 3rd February 2022)

^{iv} Quilty, A., & Norris, M. (2020) *A Qualitative Study of LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness in Ireland*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3L4TZhl> (Accessed: 3rd February 2022)

^v Lambert, S., O'Callaghan, D., & Jump, O. (2018) *Young Families in the Homeless Crisis: Challenges and Solutions*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3ulDeIP> (Accessed: 3rd February 2022)