



**A Review of Responses
to Family Homelessness
in Limerick: The Childers
Road Family Initiative
and Project Ivy**

A report completed
on behalf of Focus Ireland
Neil Haran and Niamh Haran

FOCUS
Ireland



April 2026

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Abbreviations

AHB	Approved Housing Body
B&B	Bed and Breakfast
CRFI	Childers Road Family Initiative
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
HAP	Housing Assistance Payment
HAT	Homeless Action Team
HSE	Health Services Executive
LCCC	Limerick City and County Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OBA	Outcomes-Based Accountability Framework
SLA	Service Level Agreement
ToR	Terms of Reference

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Executive summary

This document is the report of a rapid review into two separate though inter-related housing models for families experiencing homelessness in Limerick. The models involve a partnership between the Limerick Local Authority, Limerick City and County Council (LCCC), and Focus Ireland, the organisation that has commissioned this study. The accommodation models in question are:

- ▶ *The Childers Road Family Initiative (CRFI)*, comprising a block of 30 self-contained apartments, owned by LCCC and offering ‘own door’ *transitional* accommodation with supports to families experiencing homelessness in Limerick.
- ▶ *Project Ivy*, comprising 48 properties scattered across communities of Limerick city, sourced by LCCC on a long-term lease arrangement with a private investor and providing accommodation for people experiencing homelessness including families in preparation for their exit from homeless services.

This review report is primarily written as a case study for dissemination, with a particular focus on demonstrating how the individual models – and their integration – provide a continuum of supports to families experiencing homelessness and housing precarity. The review is timely, in light of:

- ▶ The ongoing growth in family homelessness in Ireland and the need for improved mechanisms for supporting families in homelessness.
- ▶ The State’s recent launch of its latest housing plan, inclusive of a particular emphasis on family homelessness and homelessness prevention.
- ▶ The Department of Finance’s 2025 predictions that Ireland’s current housing and homelessness emergency would persist for up to another 15 years.

Describing the accommodation models

Both models involve the provision of own-front-door accommodation with key-working supports to families in homeless services in Limerick.

CRFI provides apartment accommodation to families, with a particular prioritisation of families for whom the limited space of private emergency accommodation¹ and smaller communal family hubs would be most unsuitable. This includes larger families and/or households with family members who may have a disability or specific health needs. In addition to secure, self-contained accommodation, families receive key working support from Focus Ireland staff, designed to strengthen family capacity to exit homelessness and secure a long-term tenancy elsewhere. A unique feature of the CRFI model is the employment of a Child Support Worker, specifically to address identified additional needs of children accommodated in the facility.

Accommodation in Project Ivy, secured by LCCC via a long-term lease arrangement with a private property investor, has been used as part of a long-term resettlement initiative to transition families from homeless services. It is anticipated that, if they can demonstrate capacity to sustain a tenancy, families accessing Project Ivy properties will ultimately secure a permanent social housing tenancy. Families selected for accommodation under Project Ivy therefore present with low to medium support needs and, with resettlement support, are considered likely to make a successful transition to a full tenancy. Key working supports are offered via Resettlement Workers but at a less intensive level than those provided to families in CRFI. Accommodation units involve family homes that are turnkey ready, fully furnished and presented as high standard accommodation. They are also scattered around Limerick city.

Each of the models has a distinct function, supporting families at different stages on their journeys out of homeless service. However, as referenced above, it is their intersection as fundamental components of a continuum of supports for families exiting homelessness² in Limerick that increases their significance.

1 i.e. in hotels or B&B accommodation.

2 That is, from emergency to temporary to long-term accommodation with supports, provided in accordance with family needs and capacities.

Core achievements

Both models have been operational in Limerick for a number of years: CRFI since 2017 and Project Ivy since 2021. Qualitatively, both CRFI and Project Ivy are viewed as enhancing the experiences of families in homeless services, particularly when compared with the State’s primary accommodation models for homeless families, namely private emergency accommodation and communal family hubs. As a model of transitional accommodation, CRFI provides families with a self-contained, private living space, facilitating families “to conduct basic family functions that were neither possible nor permissible within hotel accommodation. Unlike the instability associated with hotel accommodation, CRFI offers families stability of accommodation in the knowledge that the apartment in which they reside will be their home until a longer-term alternative can be secured (Haran & Ó Siochrú 2021: 42).” Project Ivy also provides families with high-quality, fully-furnished self-contained accommodation on what is anticipated as their final step out of homelessness. Via Project Ivy, families in homeless services benefit from being housed in secure accommodation for a minimum of one year, gaining the opportunity to establish a positive tenancy record and increasing their opportunities for future long-term housing security. The benefits of both models to the physical and mental health of families, and to overall family functioning, cannot be overstated.

These qualitative statements of achievement are further strengthened by quantitative evidence. As will be outlined in the main body of this report:

In the context of CRFI	In the context of Project Ivy
<p>Since 2017, 196 families have progressed from the transitional accommodation offered in CRFI.</p> <p>Based on data between 2021 and July 2025, 88% of all families exiting CRFI have transitioned successfully to another form of accommodation, thereby either exiting homelessness in full or accessing another form of supportive accommodation.</p>	<p>To date, 16 family households,³ including 25 adults and 57 child dependents, who entered Project Ivy accommodation on a license agreement, have completed their engagement with Focus Ireland and have exited homelessness in full, having progressed to a long-term social housing tenancy with either LCCC, Focus Ireland or another AHB.</p>

³ One third of all households accommodated under Project Ivy.

Critical learning

Social innovation is defined as:

“the process of developing and deploying effective solutions to challenging and often systemic social and environmental issues in support of social progress. Social innovation is not the prerogative or privilege of any organizational form or legal structure. Solutions often require the active collaboration of constituents across government, business, and the non-profit world (Soule, Malhotra, Clavier).”⁴

It is the observation of this review that both CRFI and Project Ivy in Limerick, as core elements of a working partnership involving LCCC and Focus Ireland, fulfil the definition of social innovation offered above. The CRFI and Project Ivy Housing models emerge as socially innovative for a number of reasons. Principally, the models are innovative, not only because of the partnership between a Local Authority and an NGO, but because the transitional and resettlement housing with supports that they facilitate are an exception to the general practice of Local Authority letting schemes.

Furthermore, it has been the manner in which LCCC has secured properties for the transitional and long-term resettlement of families in Limerick that makes both CRFI and Project Ivy particularly innovative. In particular, LCCC’s decision to source a considerable body of housing from a private investor for long-term social purposes represented “thinking outside the box” and “taking a risk to do the right thing” in favour of people experiencing homelessness. It is clear from undertaking this review that LCCC was courageous in the development of these housing models and was ably supported in the delivery of both by its trusted NGO partner, Focus Ireland.

4 Soule, S., Malhotra, N., & Clavier, B. Stanford University, Graduate School of Business. Definition of Social Innovation, accessible online at <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/experience/about/centers-institutes/csi/defining-social-innovation>.

Effective, sustainable and cost effective

This review contends that both CRFI and Project Ivy are more effective, sustainable and cost effective models of provision than private emergency accommodation for homeless families, the main model of emergency accommodation invested in by the Exchequer. Both models result in clear benefits for families in homeless services, for the Local Authority and for the Exchequer. Until the State can create the volume of social housing required in Ireland, and specifically provide affordable and secure homes for vulnerable families, innovative responses such as CRFI and Project Ivy will be required – and, like Project Ivy, these responses will require creative engagement with private investors.

The key learning from this review is that the CRFI and Project Ivy models are important in their own right. However, it is their intersection as fundamental components of a continuum of supports for families exiting homelessness – from emergency to temporary to long-term accommodation with supports provided in accordance with family needs and capacities – that increases their significance as housing models for homeless families. They cannot and should not be viewed as standalones.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This document is the report of rapid review into two separate though inter-related housing models for families experiencing homelessness in Limerick. The models involve a partnership between the Limerick Local Authority, LCCC, and Focus Ireland, the organisation that has commissioned this study.

1.1 Focus Ireland

Focus Ireland is a voluntary organisation that has been working to prevent and respond to homelessness in Ireland for the last forty years. Driven by the fundamental belief that homelessness is a form of social exclusion and social injustice, the organisation works with individuals and families who are either homeless or at risk of losing their homes in a variety of locations across the country. Its services include advice and information; tenancy support and sustainment; and transitional and long-term accommodation. Since its foundation in 1985, Focus Ireland's services have continued to grow. Aligned to its commitment to social justice, the organisation has also developed and retained a distinct focus on research and advocacy, ensuring that the rights of people who are homeless remain clearly on the political agenda. This study forms part of Focus Ireland's research and advocacy agenda.

For the last decade and a half, Focus Ireland has sought to develop innovative, responsive and impactful responses to the growing problem of family homelessness in Ireland, in partnership with other stakeholders, particularly Local Authorities – and to disseminate learning from the implementation of those responses. For example, Focus

Ireland initiated *The Social Rental Model*⁵ as a pilot scheme in Cork in 2013, expanding the project to Limerick in 2015.

Two years later, in partnership with LCCC, Focus Ireland established the *Childers Road Family Initiative*, supporting families to transition with necessary supports from private emergency accommodation to *own door* temporary accommodation. CRFI is one of the two models on which learning is captured in this review report.

Evolving the concept of the Social Rental Model, *Project Ivy* was established as another innovative partnership response to homelessness in Limerick by LCCC and Focus Ireland in 2021. At an operational level, Project Ivy was designed to facilitate the transition of people in homeless services from emergency and temporary accommodation, such as CRFI, into longer-term stable accommodation. In relation to families specifically, at a strategic level, the end goal of the initiative was that families would exit homelessness and demonstrate capacity for a full tenancy with the Local Authority or other social housing provider. Project Ivy, which will be described in detail in a later chapter of this report, is the second of the two models that are the subject of this review.

1.2 Objectives

This review has involved a rapid examination of both the CRFI and Project Ivy Housing Models for families in Limerick – both as individual responses and as integrated elements of a continuum of housing supports for families in homeless services. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the study required the review to fulfil:

- ▶ A descriptive function, outlining the history, context and operational approach of both models and their intersection as part of a wider array of responses to family homelessness in Limerick
- ▶ An evaluative function, clarifying outputs from both models and detailing outcomes for families and system-level outcomes for both Focus Ireland and LCCC.

This review report is primarily written as a case study for dissemination, with a particular focus on demonstrating how the individual models – and their combination as two elements in a continuum of supports to families experiencing homelessness and housing precarity – could be replicated in other Local Authority catchments across Ireland.

5 The Social Rental Model operated as a form of transitional accommodation and was provided to families experiencing homelessness in Limerick City. Under the model, Focus Ireland leased properties from landlords in the private rental market on the understanding that the organisation would, with the full consent of the property owners, then sublet those properties to homeless families. Families received ongoing key-worker support from Focus Ireland. While the model secured social housing for an initial 12-month period, a further goal of the model was to transition properties into longer-term leases. Therefore, whereas the model was initially conceived as providing an emergency solution to family homelessness in Limerick, it emerged as a longer-term housing solution for families that had prior experiences of homelessness.

1.3 Report structure

The remainder of this report is presented as follows:

- › *Chapter 2* outlines the context in which CRFI and Project Ivy operate in Limerick. It does so by comparing statistics on family homelessness over the past decade, both in Ireland and in Limerick, while also anchoring those statistics within the State's new national policy on housing and homelessness.
- › *Chapter 3* presents a short overview of the methodology employed in completing this review, demonstrating the rapid nature of the data gathering process.
- › *Chapter 4* and *Chapter 5* fulfil the descriptive functions of this research. *Chapter 4* presents information on the establishment of CRFI, the approach taken in accommodating families and the supports offered. *Chapter 5* provides a similar description of Project Ivy.
- › *Chapter 6* engages with the evaluative function required of this study, highlighting the key achievements of CRFI and Project Ivy, while also referencing some of the benefits of both housing models to LCCC and Focus Ireland.
- › *Chapter 7* concludes the report, identifying key learning emerging from the housing models in Limerick and illustrating their potential for replication in other parts of the country.

Chapter 2: The national context

It is widely acknowledged, nationally and internationally, that Ireland has been in the grips of a housing crisis since the State's economic collapse in 2008/09. While, in the interim, the State has experienced remarkable economic recovery, in contrast, it has experienced a remarkable lack of progress in meeting the required supply of housing for its population, and in overcoming the structural barriers that place individuals and families at increased risk of homelessness. Statistics pertaining to homelessness across the country over the last decade reveal consistent increases in those accessing homeless services, with the exception of the period of public health restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. And there is no immediate end in sight. In fact, the Department of Finance⁶ recently predicted that Ireland's housing crisis was likely to persist for at least another 15 years.

2.1 Family homelessness

A notable feature of Ireland's growing accommodation crisis has been the considerable increase in the number of families and children entering emergency homeless accommodation. Whereas, in the past, homelessness in Ireland was predominantly associated with individuals, the majority of whom presented with additional complex needs connected to mental health difficulties, addiction, exit from care/detention, migration, etc, considerable attention in recent years has centred on the profound escalation in family homelessness across the country. Government figures on homelessness for February 2026⁷ revealed a total of **10,019 households in emergency homeless accommodation nationally**, of which **74% were one parent families (n=7,410 families)**. The total number of recorded homeless families in Ireland **comprised just under 10,000 individuals, of whom 45% (n=4,441) were adults and 55% (n=5,457) were child dependents aged under 18 years**.

6 Dept of Finance. (2025). Future Forty: A Fiscal and Economic Outlook to 2065. Government Publications Office: Dublin, accessible online at [Future_Forty_-_Full_Online_Version_311025_V2.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/Future_Forty_-_Full_Online_Version_311025_V2.pdf)

7 DHLGH: Homeless Report February 2026. Available at: https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/d585a64a/Homeless_Report_February_2026.pdf

While complex needs in families are a notable contributor to family homelessness, the significant rise in family homelessness in Ireland must be viewed principally as a structural issue and understood within a much broader context, paying due regard to the lasting impact of the aforementioned economic downturn and inadequate housing supply to meet national demand, particularly in the form of social and affordable housing.

The impacts of family homelessness are profound on both adult and child household members. In the words of the late Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy, Founder of Focus Ireland:

“We all know, in our hearts, what a home means. It is more than shelter; it is safety, stability and the foundation for a good life. For children, it is where they grow and thrive. For adults, it is the base from which everything else becomes possible.”⁸

The absence of a home undermines that safe, stable foundation and potentially leads to a myriad of other complex issues, including family tension and dysfunction, mental health difficulties, barriers to educational participation and attainment, social isolation, etc. To offer a further quote from Sr. Stan:

“Homelessness is not only a housing issue; it is a social justice issue, a child welfare issue and an educational crisis all at once (ibid).”

2.1.1 Emergency and transitional accommodation

Two primary interventions have characterised the State’s emergency accommodation responses for families entering homelessness. The most significant of these interventions has involved the placement of homeless families in private accommodation, namely hotels and B&Bs, until such time as families can secure more permanent accommodation. The State’s reliance on hotel and B&B accommodation for homeless families over the years has emerged as an expedient solution, stemming primarily from substantial increases in the number of families entering homelessness across the country, particularly in the Dublin region, and from the absence of available, relevant social housing stock to meet the accommodation needs of those families.

⁸ Quote taken from Focus Ireland’s Annual Report for 2024, accessible at [Focus-Ireland-Annual-Report-2024.pdf](#).

Since March 2017, the State has also made significant investments in communal-hub facilities: purpose-built or adapted co-living centres which, in addition to accommodation, provide homeless families with shared cooking and laundry facilities, on-site support workers and, in some cases, play and homework facilities for children. The State has viewed these hubs as an important means of reducing its reliance on private emergency accommodation.

2.1.2 Family homelessness in Limerick

Data on family homelessness in Ireland are gathered and compiled on a regional level and not on the basis of individual Local Authority catchments. Consequently, State calculations relating to family homelessness in Limerick City and County are incorporated in data pertaining to the Mid-West region, consisting of Counties Limerick and Clare.⁹

Over the last decade, the Mid-West region has witnessed a staggering growth in the number of families accessing emergency homeless accommodation. Analysing data for the eleven-year period of mid-2014 to mid-2025, O’ Sullivan *et al*¹⁰ found that:

- ▶ **The number of families in emergency accommodation in the Mid-West had increased by 420% between June 2014 and June 2025, and by 387% between June 2021 and June 2025.**
- ▶ **The number of child dependents in emergency accommodation in the Mid-West had increased by 415% since June 2021.**
- ▶ **Families in emergency accommodation in the Mid-West made up 6.5% of all families in emergency accommodation nationally as of June 2025.**¹¹

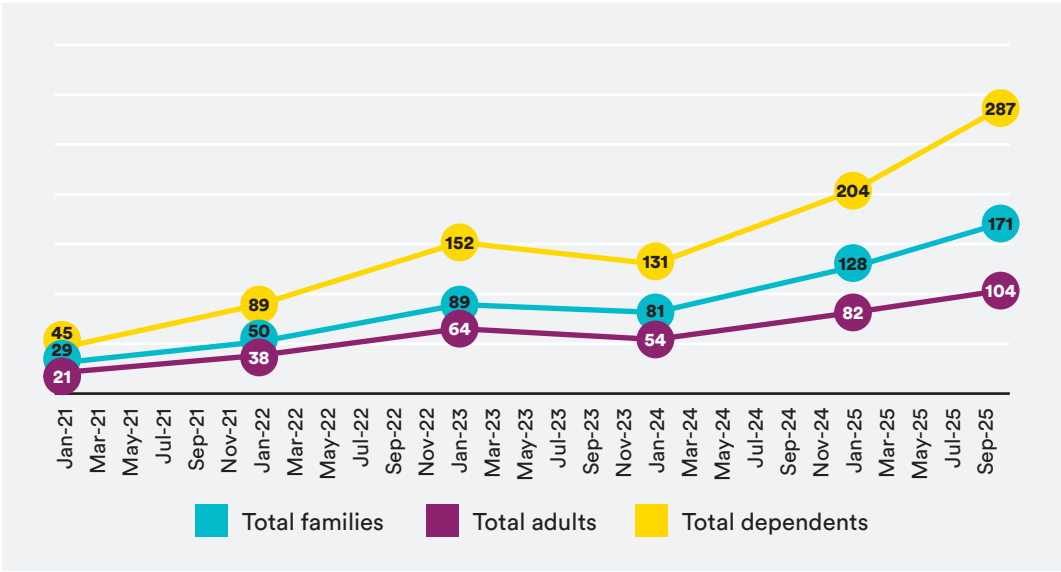
Figure 1 below presents an abridged version of those data, outlining details of families in emergency accommodation in the Mid-West Region (Counties Clare and Limerick) between January 2021 and October 2025, demonstrating the ongoing upward trend in the number of families entering homeless services.

9 It is worth pointing out, however, that State data indicate that homelessness among single adults in Limerick since 2021 has been typically four times the scale of single adult homelessness in County Clare. It is reasonable to assume that the picture of family homelessness in the Mid-West region is similar.

10 O’Sullivan, E., McGovern, A., and Allen, M. (2025). Focus on Homelessness: Mid-West. Focus Ireland: Dublin, accessible online at https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Focus_On_Homelessness_midwest_v4.pdf

11 Ibid.

Figure 1: Families in emergency accommodation in the mid-West region (Counties Clare and Limerick) between January 2021 and October 2025



Source: <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/collections/homelessness-data/>¹²

2.1.3 Data gaps

It is important to point out that the homelessness data pertain only to individuals and families in State-funded emergency accommodation. They do not capture details of ‘hidden homelessness’ (e.g. people living in squats or couch surfing with friends or family, or households living in emergency accommodation not funded by the Department of Housing).

Nor does the data take into account the families supported via the models described in this case study. CRFI and Project Ivy have been established in Limerick as *own-front-door* alternatives to the aforementioned primary State emergency accommodation models. Families accommodated in *own-front-door* transitional accommodation models are also not included in national monthly statistics on homelessness, however, in spite of the fact that families in these models continue to receive key working to support their exit from homelessness and have access only to accommodation under a license agreement, and not a full tenancy. In other words, the families in question are still technically homeless but not recorded in national statistics as such.

Therefore, official homelessness data cannot be assumed to give a complete picture of families experiencing homelessness. Equally, the non-inclusion in homelessness data of families accessing transitional own door accommodation raises questions regarding how the success of initiatives such as CRFI and Project Ivy are viewed by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, particularly from the perspective of ensuring funding for effective models of practice.

¹² Data was taken from the Monthly Homeless Report of January, each year between 2016 and 2025, and from the Monthly Homeless Report of October 2025.

2.2 Policy context

In November 2025, the government launched its latest Housing Plan, *Delivering Homes, Building Communities* as a successor to *Housing for All* (Government of Ireland 2021). *Delivering Homes, Building Communities* emerges as the State's fourth Housing Plan in 12 years, reflecting the significance of Ireland's housing emergency. The most significant headline of the strategy outlines a target to deliver 300,000 new homes, including 90,000 starter homes, over the next six years.

In the context of a national strategy to tackle homelessness, *Delivering Homes, Building Communities* articulates considerable commitment to families at risk of and experiencing homelessness. It also pivots from a focus on emergency response to a focus on prevention and early intervention, with a very particular focus on upstream intervention in a manner that will involve Local Authorities, the Health Service Executive (HSE), Tusla¹³ and the NGO sector. A distinct section of the plan is dedicated to *Ending Homelessness, Delivering Homes for Older People, Supporting Social Inclusion*. Key provisions in this regard include:

- ▶ Dedicated capital funding of €100 million in 2026 for the acquisition of second hand properties to support the exit of families longest in homeless emergency accommodation.
- ▶ Implementation of a cross-departmental and cross-agency action plan to address Child and Family homelessness urgently.
- ▶ Significantly expanding the 'Housing First' Programme by over 50%, with a target of providing over 2,000 tenancies to support rough sleepers and long term users of emergency accommodation with secure housing.
- ▶ Establishing rent controls on a national basis and introducing legislation to provide stronger protections for tenants.
- ▶ Delivering an average of 12,000 social homes every year to 2030, providing more homes to reduce long-term family homelessness, prevent people from experiencing homelessness and support people on low incomes.
- ▶ Providing 15,000 affordable supports annually through the 'Starter Homes' programme.

Reference is also made in the Housing Plan to the development of a Homelessness Prevention Framework, prioritising preventative action across a five step continuum:



The Prevention Framework will examine measures in place under each of the five key categories and it is anticipated that work on the development of this framework will commence in the coming months. Upstream measures are most likely to include the work of NGOs such as Focus Ireland, though the exact workings of the proposed Prevention Framework are yet to be clarified.

¹³ The State's Child and Family Agency.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As referenced earlier in this document, this review involved a rapid examination of both the CRFI and Project Ivy Family Housing Models in Limerick. Three primary research activities were undertaken in completing the review:

- › A contextual analysis of family homelessness in Ireland was conducted, as detailed in *Chapter 2* above, anchoring the Limerick-based housing models within a wider national and regional context.
- › Service-level data from CRFI and Project Ivy¹⁴ were accessed and compiled, and were analysed using a descriptive analysis approach to facilitate consideration and identification of outputs and outcomes from the implementation of both models.
- › Consultations were held with key informants who had been central to the conceptualisation, establishment and implementation of both initiatives. These comprised personnel from LCCC, personnel from Focus Ireland and the National Director of Housing First.¹⁵ Key informant interviews were designed to:
 - › gather descriptive information on both CRFI and Project Ivy and to deepen understanding of their interconnection in supporting families to exit homelessness;
 - › support identification of the principal benefits of CRFI and Project Ivy for a) families accessing accommodation and support¹⁶ and b) for both partner bodies¹⁷ participating in the delivery of the interventions;
 - › deepen understanding of how the model could be replicated in other Local Authority areas.

A thematic analysis approach was used to review and analyse information from engagements with key informants.

¹⁴ e.g. data pertaining to intake numbers, tenancy sustainment levels, duration of tenancies, move-ons to Local Authority 'general needs' housing.

¹⁵ This individual was formerly Head of Homeless Services in LCCC and was an instrumental figure in the establishment of CRFI and Project Ivy.

¹⁶ i.e. the intended beneficiaries of both models.

¹⁷ i.e. LCCC and Focus Ireland.

3.1 Plan to interview families

It had also been intended that a series of interviews would have been conducted with families who had been accommodated in both CRFI and Project Ivy. However, it was not possible because families had left Focus Ireland services for 1 year or more and making contact would breach the EU ePrivacy Directive. The absence of client input in the review emerges as a weakness of the review methodology. However, it is contended that the data derived from the other research activities listed above provide an adequate basis for describing, and capturing learning from, the implementation of both models in Limerick.

3.2 A framework for review and presentation

In preparing this review report, an Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA) Framework was applied to all data gathered. The OBA framework poses three performance level questions in respect of the implementation of programmes, services or interventions. These are:

- ▶ **How much did we do?** (i.e. in the context of this review, the quantity of services delivered within both CRFI and Project Ivy Housing models).
- ▶ **How well did we do it?** (i.e. relating to the quality and effectiveness of services and approaches undertaken in both CRFI and Project Ivy).
- ▶ **Is anyone better off?** (i.e. measuring outcomes for those expected to benefit from the intervention at both personal/family level and at systems level).

The answers to these three important questions are integrated throughout this review report.

Chapter 4: Describing the CRFI housing model

4.1 Background and context

The Childers Road Family Initiative comprises a block of 30 self-contained apartments¹⁸ and offers ‘own door’ transitional accommodation to families experiencing homelessness in Limerick. The apartments are the property of LCCC, while the initiative is managed fully on behalf of LCCC by Focus Ireland.

As an initiative, CRFI commenced operation in the final quarter of 2017. Initially, LCCC had purchased the apartments as an investment in long-term social housing stock. It had not anticipated the use of the facility as a temporary accommodation measure for families in homeless services.¹⁹ However, as illustrated in Figure 1 in the previous chapter, the growth of families presenting as homeless in Limerick, especially in Limerick city, motivated the Local Authority to alter plans for the use of the apartments.

CRFI therefore emerged as a cost-effective and comprehensive emergency response to the rise in family homelessness that was being witnessed in the latter stages of 2017. A 2021 report on the CRFI model²⁰ observed that LCCC had needed a property of this scale to reduce its reliance on private emergency accommodation for families in homeless services. Following purchase, LCCC sought a partner NGO to manage the facility on its behalf and to provide essential supports to families in their efforts to exit homelessness. Focus Ireland was the chosen partner.

During interviews as part of this review, representatives of both LCCC and Focus Ireland referred to CRFI as an “important cog in the wheel” among a suite of supports and interventions to counteract the impacts of family homelessness in Limerick.

¹⁸ Of which, 26 are two-bedroom apartments and four of which are one-bedroom facilities.

¹⁹ It is the understanding of this review that LCCC still holds that long-term ambition for the CRFI apartments.

²⁰ Haran, N., and Ó Siochrú, S. (2021) Exploring Own-Door Models of Emergency Accommodation for Homeless Families in Ireland: A Comparative Case Study of Four Models. Dublin: Focus Ireland, accessible online at https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Exploring-Own-Door-Models-of-EA-Report_FINAL.pdf

4.2 The model

CRFI represents a partnership between LCCC, as the property owner and co-ordinator of services for homeless families in Limerick, and Focus Ireland, the organisation commissioned to manage the property and to provide case management support to families in their efforts to exit homelessness. The partnership is governed by a service-level agreement (SLA) between both parties. Through that SLA, LCCC provides annual funding to Focus Ireland to manage the initiative. Funding covers three primary inputs:

- ▶ A staff team comprising a full-time project leader, a full-time assistant project leader, 2.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) project workers who provide key work supports to families,²¹ a Child Support Worker along with an administrator shared across a number of projects
- ▶ Full-time security in CRFI²²
- ▶ Service charges and property maintenance.²³

It is understood from research interviews that all apartments are generally occupied with non-occupancy only applying in the case of a recently-vacated apartment being readied for occupation by another family.²⁴ A critical feature of CRFI is its capacity to accommodate new families quickly once existing families have transitioned into longer-term housing.

Families are referred to CRFI by the Limerick Homeless Action Team, a joint response to homelessness, co-ordinated by the Local Authority and involving staff from LCCC, the HSE and the Department of Social Protection. All nomination rights rest with the Local Authority; Focus Ireland has no involvement in the selection of families who access the setting.

Representatives of both LCCC and Focus Ireland engage in regular operational and review meetings as part of project management arrangements. These involve discussions on HAT's allocation of families to CRFI; on collaboratively addressing the support needs of families in the setting; and on onward transitions for individual families into longer-term, more stable housing.

21 See section on Case Management below.

22 See section on Nature of Provision in CRFI.

23 Which is undertaken by the Focus Housing Property Management Team, which oversees maintenance arrangements of all Focus Ireland-managed properties across Limerick

24 This usually takes in the region of one week.

4.3 Families

The profile of families accessing the services of CRFI is varied and local stakeholders suggest that its client-base reflects the diversity of Irish society, involving a mix of single-parent and two-parent households. The HAT tends to prioritise families for whom the limited space of private emergency accommodation and smaller communal family hubs would be most unsuitable.²⁵ This includes larger families²⁶ and/or households with family members who may have a disability or specific health needs. Almost all families entering CRFI have resided for a period in hotel or B&B accommodation. Households accommodated in CRFI predominantly comprise families with child dependents though, from time to time, families with adult children or another dependent adult²⁷ have been accommodated.

Need and capacity vary across client families, with Focus Ireland support staff conducting a needs assessment with each family at the earliest possible point following their accommodation in CRFI. Certain families accommodated in CRFI simply have a housing need and require little in the form of key worker support. Others have additional needs that undermine their capacity to sustain a tenancy and therefore require significant case management support. Among others, additional needs can include factors such as mental health difficulties, addiction, child welfare concerns, and the need for budgeting, money management and home management supports.

4.4 Nature of provision

CRFI is referred to as a family hub but with significant differences to the communal facilities discussed in earlier sections of this document. It provides each family with furnished, self-contained apartment accommodation, inclusive of private kitchen and bathroom facilities. As noted earlier in this report, 26 of the CRFI units involve two-bedroom accommodation while four are one-bed. It is therefore common for multiple occupants to share bedrooms.

CRFI's self-contained apartment accommodation facilitates families to conduct key family functions, such as cooking, washing clothes, doing homework, and so on, in the privacy of their own units. Similarly, it is possible to carry out all key worker supports within the privacy of each family unit while a separate play-room is also located in the building for direct work with children. Because CRFI enables own-door accommodation, families are free to come and go as they please, with no expectations of having to be in the premises by a designated hour.

Each family in CRFI is issued with a licence agreement from LCCC. Because the families are involved with homeless services, they are not entitled to tenancy rights and, therefore, are issued with a licence and not a tenancy agreement. There is no specified maximum or minimum duration of stay in CRFI. Every effort is made to support families

²⁵ That said, it is recognised by both LCCC and Focus Ireland that, for certain families, CRFI apartments are also inadequate.

²⁶ e.g. six or more individual family members.

²⁷ e.g. an ageing or infirm grandparent.

to transition into longer term accommodation in the shortest time possible in accordance with their respective needs and capacities, and in accordance with the availability of appropriate longer-term accommodation to match those needs and capacities.

Interviews as part of this review indicated that the most significant obstacle to the success of CRFI as a model of temporary accommodation was the difficulty in securing onward long-term accommodation for families, thereby resulting in families frequently remaining on site in their apartment for up to two years and sometimes longer. This is particularly an issue for larger families, due to the shortage of larger homes in the private and social housing sectors. Progressing families where there has been a history of domestic abuse can also be challenging, particularly in the context of finding an appropriate move-on option for those families.

As part of their license agreement, families are expected to meet their respective key worker on a regular basis and adhere to the case plan produced with the key worker.²⁸ Families are expected to respect the property and the privacy of other families in the apartment block. They are also required to pay differential rents, based on their respective incomes, and a service charge. These monies are paid to Focus Ireland and are used by Focus Ireland to supplement its budget for maintaining the property.

Because families are accommodated in an apartment block and given the size of the building, Focus Ireland contracts 24-hour security services at CRFI. Some of the families accommodated in CRFI have particularly complex needs and the presence of security staff on-site is viewed as giving all families peace of mind. In the further interests of security, CRFI operates a no-visitor policy. While it has been acknowledged that families experience this no-visitor policy with great difficulty, particularly in terms of the exclusion of normal family and social connections, this policy exists to ensure confidentiality and the protection of all families.

Day to day maintenance of apartments is provided by the Focus Housing Property Management Team, which oversees maintenance arrangements of all Focus Ireland-managed properties across Limerick.

4.5 Case management

Focus Ireland employs 2.5 FTE equivalent key workers, referred to as Family Support Workers within the project, each with an average worker-to-family ratio of 1:15. A Child Support Worker is also employed specifically to address identified additional needs of children within families. Following entry to CRFI, Focus Ireland staff carry out assessments and co-produce individual case plans with each family. These case plans outline the priority actions to be addressed by each family whilst accommodated in CRFI, actions designed to strengthen their capacity to exit homelessness and secure a long-term tenancy elsewhere.

Functions of the Family Support Worker role are varied, in accordance with case plans agreed with individual families. The role can include motivating families in their search for long-term tenancy options and building family capacity to advocate for themselves

²⁸ See Case Management section below for further detail on case plans.

with LCCC and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs). It can also involve linking families with the services of other agencies in accordance with their respective needs, services such as Tusla,²⁹ mental health support services, addiction support services and others. The Family Support Workers seek to engage weekly, on average, with each family. However this can be more frequent, depending on family need. A key strength of CRFI is that family engagements can take place in the privacy of each family's own apartment, ensuring consistency and confidentiality of support.

The Child Support Worker facilitates a range of child- and young person-centred activities in the facility, including the provision of one-to-one supports for individual children, group-based child activities, a parent and toddler group, programmes for parents and holiday-based activities. In certain cases, the Child Support Worker undertakes one-to-one support in schools, reflecting the strong working relationships between Focus Ireland and local education settings in the city.

The Child Support Worker works with individual children and young people identified by the Family Support Workers as requiring additional support. The nature of support provided to children is guided by the nature and level of individual child need. Amongst other supports, the work of the Child Support Worker can involve providing a parent and child some space apart from one another; providing one-to-one individual support to a child, for example, in the form of free play in a specific-purpose playroom located on-site in CRFI. The role may also involve supporting a family to link their child into existing community services, such as a parent and toddler group or local crèche. As above, the frequency of the Child Support Worker's engagements with individual children is informed by the nature of need within an individual family.

In addition, Focus Ireland supports children and young people accommodated in CRFI to participate in holiday-based activities such as Easter and summer camps. A Christmas party is organised in the building in December, inclusive of a visit from Santa Claus.

4.6 Enablers of the CRFI Model and obstacles to its success

The facility

Perhaps the greatest enabler of the CRFI model has been the decision of LCCC to designate the CRFI apartment block for the specific purposes of providing transitional accommodation to families in homeless services, particularly families with distinct needs that would be undermined by being accommodated in private emergency accommodation. Coupled with the availability of the apartments as a form of transitional housing for families in homeless services, a further critical enabler of the model is project partners' capacity to turn available units in the block around in an efficient manner, ensuring almost full occupancy throughout the year.

²⁹ In respect of child welfare concerns

Partnership

The other key enabler of this model is the partnership arrangement that exists between LCCC, as property owner and coordinator of homeless services in Limerick city and county, and Focus Ireland, as manager of the CRFI facility and provider of essential services to occupant families. While this working arrangement is underpinned by a funding relationship, both bodies refer to the working relationship as a partnership. Core features of that partnership involve ongoing communication between Focus Ireland personnel and relevant personnel in the Local Authority, especially Resettlement Officers in the Council. This ongoing communication is central to ensuring that families access the supports they need when they need them. And it is also key in informing future long-term housing solutions for families in accordance with their respective needs and capacities.

Each partner has a distinct role to play in this working arrangement, but the supports to families work because each party assumes their respective roles fully, while consistently communicating with the other in the best interests of individual families and their presenting needs. The partnership between LCCC and Focus Ireland was described in consultation interviews as involving “a high level of trust in the judgement of the other.” That said, both parties also stressed that they were willing to challenge one another as required when elements of the partnership were not functioning as effectively as they should.

It is also worth noting that, as part of this review, Focus Ireland’s working relationships with other statutory and voluntary services in Limerick were highlighted as adding real value to the supports offered to families by personnel in CRFI. Reference was made for example to positive working relationships with local schools, An Garda Síochana, Tusla, ADAPT Domestic Abuse Service, the Child Development Homeless Coordinator of PAUL Partnership, ABC Start Right (one of the programmes involved in the National Area-Based Childhood initiative under the auspices of Tusla) and to each of these services supporting families as required.

Core obstacle

One primary obstacle undermines the efficiency and impact of CRFI and that relates to the significant challenge of accessing suitable long-term accommodation for families in a manner that meets their needs. As noted above, every effort is made by LCCC and Focus Ireland to ensure that each family transitions from CRFI into stable long-term accommodation in the quickest possible time. Fundamentally, the speed of that transition is dependent on family capacity and on the availability of suitable housing to match family needs and capacities.

The challenges of sourcing suitable resettlement accommodation for families results in difficulties progressing families’ move out of CRFI. This is particularly true for larger families who, as explained above, are prioritised for accommodation in CRFI. As observed by one Focus Ireland staff member during interview:

“They [larger families] are often harder to move on. So they kind of get stuck here a little bit, especially if there is a four-bedroom need for the family.”

Chapter 5: Describing the Project Ivy housing model

5.1 Background and context

Project Ivy refers to a long-term housing model of LCCC that enables people who have experienced homelessness to transition from temporary homeless accommodation into long-term, stable social housing tenancies. The model evolved from prior experiences of delivering a Social Rental Model in Limerick, also a partnership initiative of LCCC and Focus Ireland. Under Social Rental, with funding provided by LCCC, Focus Ireland leased properties from landlords in the private rental market on the understanding that the organisation would, with the full consent of the property owners, then sublet those properties to people experiencing homelessness. A cohort of people who availed of this model is families. While the model secured social housing for families for an initial 12-month period on a license arrangement, a further goal of the model was to transition families into longer-term leases in those properties. Therefore, whereas the model was initially conceived as providing an emergency solution to family homelessness in Limerick, it emerged as a longer-term housing solution for families exiting homelessness.

As will be outlined below, Project Ivy adopted a similar approach to the resettlement of families. It was established to ensure continuity of support to families who had progressed through homeless services in Limerick. Project Ivy was intended as a housing solution for families with low to medium risk of returning to homelessness, and was viewed as a final layer of support to enable those families to make a complete exit from homelessness.

5.1.1 Acquisition of properties

Perhaps one of the most interesting features of Project Ivy is the manner in which LCCC secured properties for long-term resettlement purposes, particularly at a time when housing demand in Limerick exceeded housing supply. Consultations during this review process referred to an estate agent, acting on behalf of a large private property investor, approaching the Local Authority in 2021 with a proposal for a long term lease of up to 30 housing units³⁰ for social purposes across the city. The investor was, naturally, keen to ensure a profit on their investment and was therefore seeking full market rental value on all properties. But

³⁰ Administrative data from Focus Ireland reveal that this number grew to 48 units over the duration of the project.

they were also keen to demonstrate a social responsibility by offering the properties on a 20–25 year lease to LCCC. Bearing in mind the dearth of properties available in Limerick for social housing purposes at that time, the option of a long-term lease on such a number of properties was considered to be of significant value to the Local Authority.

While representatives within the Local Authority debated the merits and demerits³¹ of this approach, a decision was taken to acquire the properties on offer. Consequently, Project Ivy emerged as one of a suite of long-term resettlement options for people experiencing homelessness in Limerick. Among others, these options included resettlement in Local Authority social housing, in the private rental market via schemes such as the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) or in properties owned and managed by Focus Ireland and other AHBs. At the time of preparing this report, all units acquired by LCCC under Project Ivy were occupied.

5.2 The model

Supported under Section 10 funding,³² Project Ivy has been presented and funded as a homeless prevention strategy in Limerick, sustaining people who had prior experience of homelessness and reducing the risk of their return to homelessness.

Because of Section 10, LCCC required an NGO partner to manage and implement the scheme. Consultations during this review indicated that Focus Ireland was “a natural choice of partner” for this model. LCCC sought to build on its prior partnership with Focus Ireland, particularly in respect of on own-front door models of accommodation, recognising Focus Ireland’s capacity to provide supports to people in their homes.

Accommodation under Project Ivy has been used as a mechanism to transition people from temporary accommodation, such as that provided in CRFI. Project Ivy differs from CRFI in a number of ways. Firstly, it is established as a long-term resettlement initiative and not as a transitional accommodation arrangement for people in homeless services. It is anticipated that, if they can demonstrate capacity to sustain a tenancy, people accessing Project Ivy properties will ultimately secure a permanent tenancy.

Similarly, whereas CRFI is operated within an apartment block in a single location, the accommodation units made available under Project Ivy are scattered around Limerick city, thereby minimising the risk of any negative public pushback regarding concentrations of social housing.

CRFI is also limited in the scale of accommodation it can offer to families, offering a maximum of a two-bedroom accommodation. Properties under Project Ivy involve homes that are turnkey ready, fully furnished and presented as high standard accommodation. Focus Ireland personnel involved in this study described the accommodation as “of a very high spec”³³:

31 Concerns were expressed within LCCC that paying full market rents to private investors risked fuelling rent increases in the private rental market.

32 Section 10 Funding evolves from the 1988 Housing Act and enables local authorities to provide funding to voluntary bodies, such as Focus Ireland, for the provision of emergency accommodation and long term housing for people who are homeless.

33 This statement should not be viewed as a comment on the quality of accommodation provided in CRFI, which is also of a high standard.

“It’s something we wouldn’t have seen previously [i.e. within private rental accommodation] and it was fairly consistent across the board.”

The importance of high quality accommodation for families provided via Project Ivy was recognised as important among those who participated in this review. For example, a Focus Ireland staff member commented:

“Families who have gone through past trauma. A lot of these families became homeless through no fault of their own... You’re not giving them broken stuff or moving them into a dump. These were lovely houses in lovely areas. And that can’t be underestimated, the importance of that, because when you put people into a good environment, people will thrive and do well.”

The funding arrangement between LCCC and Focus Ireland enables Focus Ireland’s operation of its Resettlement Team. Members of the Focus Ireland’s Resettlement Team that have engaged in Project Ivy have included the Resettlement Project Leader, Assistant Project Leader and two Case Workers. The Case Worker role is similar to the Family Support Worker role described in relation to CRFI, but involves less frequent and less intense engagement with families. This case working was described in one stakeholder interview as:

“focused on practical support around maintaining a tenancy or any kind of emotional support around mental health. The crux of the support is the same, but the intensity would vary.”

As with CRFI, day to day maintenance of properties is managed by the Focus Housing Property Management Team.

5.3 The families

Similar to CRFI, the Local Authority has been responsible for nominating families to access resettlement properties under Project Ivy.³⁴ However, in the context of families transitioning from CRFI, this nomination process has involved significant consultation with Focus Ireland.

Families offered Project Ivy accommodation have initially been offered a 12-month license arrangement, similar to that offered to families in CRFI. Typically families selected have been those presenting with low to medium support needs and who, with resettlement support, were considered likely to make a successful transition from a license arrangement to a full tenancy with the Local Authority, independent of support from an NGO such as Focus Ireland.

³⁴ Where feasible in an area of interest to the family in question.

Families have also been prioritised for inclusion in Project Ivy on the basis of distinct needs, such as a medical need in the family or a dependent with additional needs, combined with a lower risk of the family returning to homelessness.

Consultations during this review indicated that families tended to integrate well in the communities in which they had been accommodated. Interviews with personnel from Focus Ireland indicated, however, that a minority of families had been subjected to prejudice and discrimination in communities, most notably Traveller families and large families from international backgrounds.

5.4 Nature of provision

In addition to the allocation of accommodation to a family, the other key aspect of provision in Project Ivy has involved the provision of case management support to families. Reference has been made above to two Resettlement Case Workers supporting families in Project Ivy. This includes the provision of tenancy support to families in accordance with respective family need, in areas, for example, of budgeting or money management, home management, issues related to addiction or mental health, etc.

A fundamental aspect of the Case Worker role is to ensure that each family is successfully managing their tenancy and, by extension, demonstrating to the Local Authority that they have the capacity to manage a longer-term lease independently of Focus Ireland. Indicators of capacity typically include families being up to date on their rent payments, having a bin service in place, having no reports of antisocial behaviour, etc.

Whereas, CRFI Family Support Workers would have a worker to family case load of 1 to 15, the average case load of Resettlement Case Workers would be in the region of 1 to 20/25. As a result, Resettlement Case Workers engage with families in Project Ivy approximately on a monthly basis.

5.5 Enablers of Project Ivy and obstacles to its success

Stakeholders consulted during this review process highlighted the courage of LCCC as the ultimate enabler of this initiative. It was stated that LCCC had demonstrated the courage to approach solutions to homelessness in a radical and courageous manner, and to be innovative in providing more appropriate accommodation to people who had experienced the distressful journey of entering and exiting from homelessness. This courage, accompanied by LCCC's positive partnership with Focus Ireland, has enabled Project Ivy-accommodated families to flourish, as will be illustrated in the next chapter of this report.

LCCC's courage to innovate also emerged as the most significant challenge in its efforts to maximise the opportunity of a long-term lease option of private properties for social purposes. In a complex housing market with a severe shortage of supply,³⁵ LCCC faced a difficult balance between the opportunity provided to lease multiple properties on

35 Which leaves those with social housing needs at the greatest level of housing precarity.

a long-term basis and not contributing (or, at least, be perceived as contributing) to rent inflation in the private rental market. Those consulted in this short review emphasised the importance of LCCC having taken a risk for vulnerable families and believed that, within the limitations of the housing market and housing policy, availing of the long-term lease option was certainly the right thing to do.

5.6 Intersection of CRFI and Project Ivy

The description of Project Ivy in this chapter and that of CRFI in the previous chapter demonstrate the roles played by each housing model in supporting families on their journey out of homelessness. Each of the two models described in this report is important in its own right. However, it is their intersection as fundamental components of a continuum of supports for families exiting homelessness – from emergency to temporary to long-term accommodation with supports, provided in accordance with family needs and capacities – that increases their significance as accommodation models for homeless families.

Stakeholders involved in this study noted that the intersection of both models hadn't originally been intentional but emerged as a natural course of progression for families. One stakeholder spoke during review consultations of the importance of "creating a culture of throughput" in homeless services for families, and stated that the intersection of CRFI and Project Ivy had facilitated that desired throughput.

Chapter 6: Achievements

It is clear from the descriptions presented about both housing models – and their intersection as important parts of a pathway out of homeless services for families – that the rationale for the development of CRFI and Project Ivy in Limerick is sound. It is also clear that stakeholders involved in the conceptualisation, development and implementation of the models believe wholeheartedly in the value and effect of both models. This chapter takes time to explore the achievements of CRFI and Project Ivy and, drawing on the final question of the OBA framework, to assess if anybody is better off as a result of their delivery. It is worth repeating that the absence of customer input in the review emerges as a weakness of the review methodology and limits the capacity of this review to offer comprehensive statements on the effect of both models on families, that is, as expressed by families who have participated in both models on their journeys out of homelessness.

6.1 CRFI

6.1.1 Families

Reference has been made earlier in this document to a study completed in 2021, which examined own door models of temporary accommodation for families in homeless services. This study included a case study on CRFI. Key conclusions in respect of CRFI stated:

“There is little doubt that CRFI, as a model of emergency accommodation, has many advantages over private emergency accommodation and communal family hubs. It provides families with increased and private living space, enabling them to conduct basic family functions that were neither possible nor permissible within hotel accommodation. Unlike the instability associated with hotel accommodation, CRFI offers families stability of accommodation in the knowledge that the apartment in which they reside will be their home until a longer-term alternative can be secured.

But as outlined above, family experiences of the model are challenging, and concerns about the length of time needed to transition from emergency into longer term accommodation are considerable. While the transition into CRFI from private emergency accommodation offers peace of mind to families, concerns related to the length of time required to transition out of CRFI negatively impact that initial peace of mind. (Haran & Ó Siochrú 2021: 42)”

These sentiments were repeated consistently in stakeholder consultations undertaken with representatives of LCCC and Focus Ireland as part of this particular review. Interviewed stakeholders emphasised the value of “a private family space, somewhere where they can perform everyday family functions like cooking, washing clothes, etc.” They spoke of positive impacts on family nutrition and families’ capacity to prepare food of their choice, alongside “less reliance on takeaway meals.” They referred to the manner in which CRFI supported “family routine and having a space to be a family.” And they also spoke about CRFI as a safe space, supported by the presence of full-time on-site security.

Those same stakeholders acknowledged that CRFI wasn’t a perfect solution to the ongoing problem of family homelessness and to the Local Authority’s need to facilitate emergency and transitional accommodation arrangements. They observed that there were drawbacks to the model while stressing that CRFI was a notable improvement on private emergency accommodation and communal hubs.

Administrative data shared by Focus Ireland demonstrates that between its initiation in 2017 and July, 2025, CRFI had provided temporary accommodation to 233 families, of which 196 had transitioned to other accommodation. By extension, a total of 1,907 children had been facilitated to move from private emergency accommodation in that time. These data are illustrated in greater detail in Table 1 below:

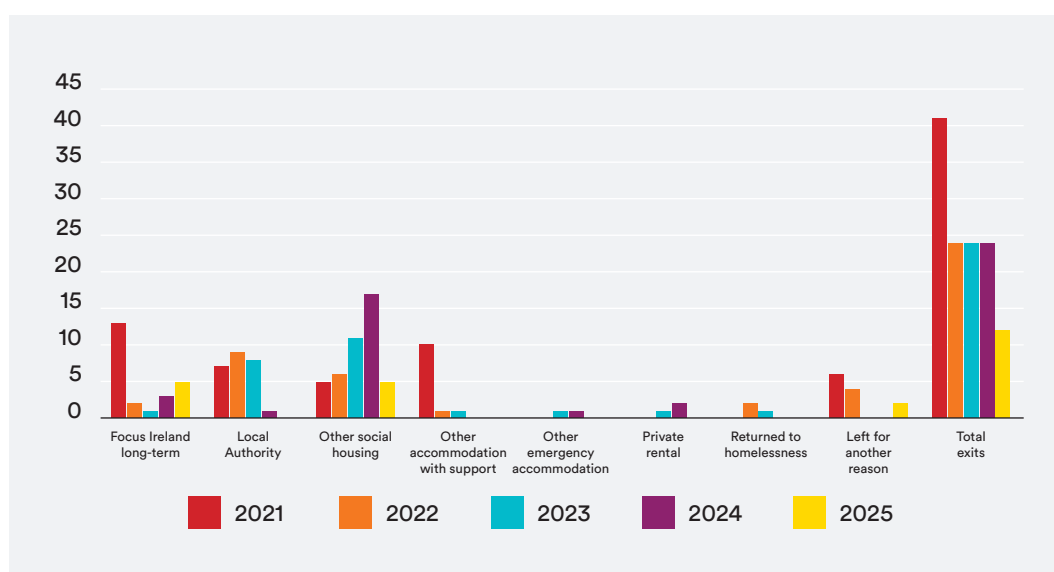
Table 1: Data on families accessing and exiting CRFI (2017 – July 2025)

Year	No. of new families accessing CRFI	No. of Families Exiting CRFI	No. of children supported
2017	21	0	34
2018	32	26	76
2019	29	23	181
2020	26	22	209
2021	40	41	361
2022	27	24	296
2023	24	24	274
2024	25	24	287
2025 (up to July)	9	12	189
Total	233	196	1907

A total of 16 families exited CRFI to take up accommodation under Project Ivy. Move on data pertaining to other forms of stable and/or supported accommodation are presented in Figure 2 below.

Available administrative data shows that, of the 125 families who exited CRFI between 2021 and July 2025, three (2.4%) of those returned to homelessness while 12 families (9.6%) departed CRFI for reasons other than progressing to another form of accommodation. Consequently, 110 families (88%) successfully transitioned to another form of accommodation, thereby either exiting homelessness in full or accessing another form of supportive accommodation. These data have to be viewed as extremely positive.

Figure 2: Move-on data for families exiting CRFI (2021 – July 2025)



6.1.2 LCCC

For LCCC, CRFI has enabled provision of a more suitable form of accommodation for families in homeless services, particularly families with specific needs and larger families for whom hotel and B&B accommodation would be utterly unsuitable. The Local Authority acknowledges its continued reliance on private emergency accommodation. However, CRFI offers up to 30 families at a time secure, self-contained accommodation while working towards an exit from homelessness. As a model, CRFI also offers a high level of efficiency. Once one family has been transitioned out of the facility, the apartment in which they resided is made available in a short time period to facilitate another family to access the benefits of apartment dwelling.

6.1.3 Focus Ireland

For Focus Ireland, CRFI provides the organisation with an opportunity to fulfil its organisational mandate with its customer group. Organisationally, Focus Ireland does not engage in emergency accommodation. However, CRFI enables the organisation to support homeless families in transitional accommodation, key working with families to reduce the impact of homeless on their functioning while simultaneously empowering families to proactively work towards an exit from homelessness.

6.2 Project Ivy

6.2.1 Families

The positive impact of Project Ivy on families and on family life is probably best appreciated via a comparison of the offering of Project Ivy with the offerings of hotel and CRFI accommodation. Stakeholders providing input to this review highlighted the manner in which CRFI apartments provided a much better home environment for families compared to single room accommodation in private hotels and B&Bs.

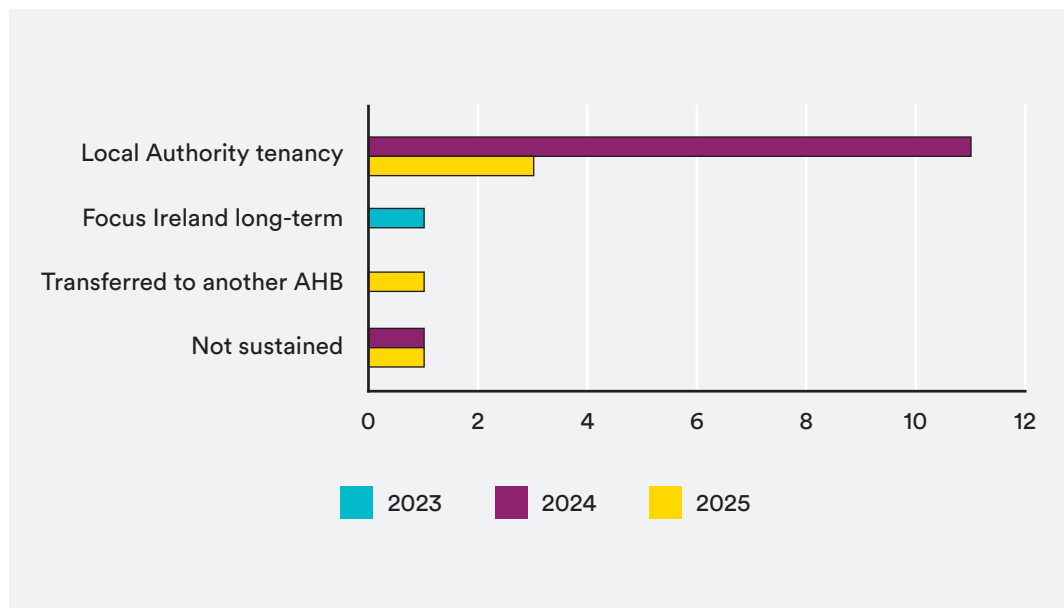
Equally, stakeholders observed that accommodating families in a Project Ivy property was a considerable step-up from CRFI. They referred to families moving from a one- or two-bedroomed apartment to a full family home in a stable community. And they referred to the security provided to families transitioning from temporary homeless accommodation to a stable accommodation that held the potential of a long-term tenancy. The value of this offering, after an often prolonged period in homeless services, was considered to offer families stability, security, peace of mind and optimism for their futures.

Of the 18 CRFI cases closed under Project Ivy, 16 (89%) progressed to successful tenancies, as demonstrated in Figure 3 below. Both closed cases that did not progress to successful tenancies had received notices to quit the accommodation as a result of antisocial behaviour, thereby returning to homeless services.

Fourteen of the 16 cases closed with a successful outcome progressed to Local Authority tenancies, in keeping with the original goal of the scheme. The remaining households were transferred to long-term Focus Ireland accommodation and to the accommodation of another AHB in Limerick. The total number of family members in these households was 25 adults and 57 child dependents.

Once again, the outputs and outcomes described above are extremely positive.

Figure 3: Outcome of CRFI-Project Ivy closed cases



6.2.2 LCCC and Focus Ireland

For LCCC, Project Ivy facilitated the Local Authority to have at its disposal 48 high quality, long-term, private units of accommodation for social purposes, particularly at a time when available properties were in short supply. Stakeholders consulted in this review commented that Project Ivy provided a more efficient solution to the long-term resettlement of homeless families than having to wait for a Local Authority house to become available. This was observed as reducing the family trauma associated with prolonged exits from homelessness.

While family homelessness continues to deteriorate across the country, those consulted in this review felt that the family homelessness situation in Limerick would have been worse if not for the opportunity provided by Project Ivy.

Project Ivy was also viewed as having a positive impact on the personnel of both LCCC and Focus Ireland, particularly in terms of staff morale. It was suggested that for staff to observe families progressing from emergency to temporary accommodation and ultimately into secure social housing tenancies was a positive reflection of the efforts they had made with – and on behalf of – homeless families. Observing successful family outcomes emerged as rewarding for personnel in both bodies.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

A core feature of this review has been to apply the OBA framework in considering the value of CRFI and Project Ivy in Limerick as separate though inter-related housing models for families experiencing homelessness. The OBA asks three fundamental questions:

- › **How much did we do?**
- › **How well did we do it?**
- › **Is anyone better off?**

In the context of *How much did we do?*, this review has demonstrated that the partnership between LCCC and Focus Ireland has facilitated:

In the context of CRFI	In the context of Project Ivy
<p>Since 2017:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">› 233 homeless families in Limerick, most notably large families or families with additional needs, to access self-contained apartment accommodation and to move out of emergency accommodation in hotels and B&Bs.› Key working supports to those families, in accordance with their respective needs, aimed at building families' capacities to exit homelessness› Dedicated supports to 1,907 children and young people living with the traumatic experiences of family homelessness and its associated challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› Since 2021:› 16 families transitioned from temporary homeless accommodation to a housing unit in excellent condition and in a stable community.› Key working supports to those households, in accordance with their respective needs, aimed at supporting families to transfer from a license agreement to a full tenancy.

Critical inputs in the delivery of both models involved the acquisition of secure accommodation for families in homeless services, the nomination of families to access both models and the allocation of support staff to work with families as required.

In the context of *How well did we do it?*, this review has demonstrated that the partnership between LCCC and Focus Ireland has facilitated:

In the context of CRFI	In the context of Project Ivy
<p>Since 2017:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 196 families to progress from the transitional accommodation offered. <p>Based on data between 2021 and July 2025:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 88% of all families exiting CRFI to transition successfully to another form of accommodation, thereby either exiting homelessness in full or accessing another form of supportive accommodation. 	<p>Since 2021:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 89% of family households whose cases were closed under Project Ivy to progress to a long-term social housing tenancy with either LCCC, Focus Ireland or another AHB, totalling 16 households and comprising 25 adults and 57 child dependents.

Is anybody better off? Those contributing to this study argue that families in homelessness experience dramatic benefits as a result of their inclusion in these schemes:

In the context of CRFI	In the context of Project Ivy
<p>Families residing in CRFI, who had prior experiences of the inadequacies of private emergency accommodation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Have access to increased and private living space, enabling them to conduct basic family functions that were neither possible nor permissible within hotel accommodation. This includes basic functions such as washing clothes, cooking facilities: functions that most households in this country consider as the norm. ➤ Live in safe accommodation, secure in the knowledge that the apartment in which they dwell will remain a secure accommodation until such point as a stable and sustainable long-term housing option can be made available to them. 	<p>Since 2021:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 16 family households whose cases were closed have exited homelessness.

The physical and, in particular, mental health benefits of both models cannot be overstated.

7.1 Innovation and partnership

Social innovation is defined as:

“the process of developing and deploying effective solutions to challenging and often systemic social and environmental issues in support of social progress. Social innovation is not the prerogative or privilege of any organizational form or legal structure. Solutions often require the active collaboration of constituents across government, business, and the non-profit world (Soule, Malhotra, Clavier).”³⁶

To put the innovative nature of CRFI and Project Ivy into context, it is worth noting that, across the country, Focus Ireland provides a range of services that support households in their efforts to exit homelessness. The organisation’s housing arm, Focus Housing,³⁷ delivers homes with supports, as required, to enable families to exit homelessness.

Local Authority letting schemes, however, typically do not include a continuum of support for homeless households as they progress from homelessness to housing. As a result, Focus Ireland personnel frequently advocate with Local Authorities to facilitate the entry of ‘at risk’ families³⁸ to the accommodation of Focus Housing. This is considered in the best interests of the families involved and allows for more efficient progression of families out of homelessness.

The CRFI and Project Ivy Housing models emerge as socially innovative, therefore, for a number of reasons. Principally, the models are innovative, not only because of the partnership between a Local Authority and an NGO, but because the transitional and resettlement housing with supports that they facilitate are an exception to the general practice of Local Authority letting schemes.

Furthermore, it has been the manner in which LCCC has secured properties for the transitional and long-term resettlement of people experiencing homelessness in Limerick that makes both CRFI and Project Ivy particularly innovative. Both CRFI and Project Ivy demonstrate the value of innovating in addressing one of the most, if not the most significant emergency facing modern Ireland. Reference was made during interviews to the manner in which both CRFI and Project Ivy represented “thinking outside the box” and “taking a risk to do the right thing”. It is clear from undertaking this review that LCCC was courageous in the development of these housing models and was ably supported in the delivery of both by a trusted NGO partner, Focus Ireland. These commitments to innovation and partnership were central enablers of the success of these separate but inter-related housing models.

36 Soule, S., Malhotra, N., & Clavier, B. Stanford University, Graduate School of Business. Definition of Social Innovation, accessible online at <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/experience/about/centers-institutes/csi/defining-social-innovation>.

37 See <https://www.focusireland.ie/focus-housing-association-who-we-are>.

38 With whom they have been working and to whom they have been providing intensive case management supports.

7.2 Capturing learning

The recently launched national housing strategy, *Delivering Homes, Building Communities*, articulates bold ambitions concerning increased housing supply in Ireland and concerning the eradication of homelessness – while at the same time, the Department of Finance projects that Ireland’s accommodation crisis will not be solved in full for at least another 15 years.

Ireland therefore remains in the grips of a housing emergency and, while the targets set in the national housing strategy are welcome, as indeed is the increased focus on homelessness prevention, for the foreseeable future, there will continue to be a need for innovative partnership responses between Local Authorities and NGO partners to minimise the impacts of homelessness, particularly on families.

This review contends that both CRFI and Project Ivy are more effective, sustainable and cost effective models of provision than private emergency accommodation for homeless families, the main model of emergency accommodation invested in by the Exchequer. Until the State can create the volume of social housing required in Ireland, innovative responses such as CRFI and Project Ivy will be required – and, like Project Ivy, these responses will require creative engagement with private investors.

Creative housing models, like Project Ivy, benefit multiple stakeholders:

- › Families in homeless services benefit from being housed in secure accommodation for a minimum of one year, gaining the opportunity to establish a positive tenancy record and increasing their opportunities for future long-term housing security.
- › The local authority benefits from having a wider array of social housing at its disposal to counteract the incidence of family homelessness, benefitting particularly from the fact that those units are at its disposal for a period of up to 25 years.
- › Private investors benefit by leasing their properties to Local Authority at full market rent for up to a quarter of a century, while having tenancies managed on their behalf, initially by Focus Ireland and ultimately, the Local Authority.
- › And the Exchequer benefits by reducing emergency accommodation costs relating to homeless families.

7.2.1 Part of a portfolio of schemes

A key learning from this review is that the CRFI and Project Ivy models are important in their own right. However, it is their intersection as fundamental components of a continuum of supports for families exiting homelessness – from emergency to temporary to long-term accommodation with supports provided in accordance with family needs and capacities – that increases their significance as housing models for homeless families. They cannot and should not be viewed as standalones.

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³⁹ Data was taken from the Monthly Homeless Report of January, each year between 2016 and 2025, and from the Monthly Homeless Report of October 2025



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