

THE

SUMMER 2016



BULLETIN

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL



LIVING IN A HOTEL

A PARALLEL WORLD

Changing Patterns in Home Ownership in Ireland

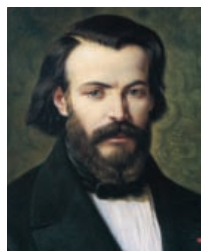
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THE VOICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IRELAND

"At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by "I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in."

MOTHER TERESA





This magazine is named in honour of the principal founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Frederic Ozanam

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EDITORIAL

Homelessness has been a long-running problem despite numerous promises from politicians to tackle the crisis. "Homeless is a loaded word; anyone associated with it is automatically judged and often stereotyped" says Peter McVerry. When we think of those who are homeless, we automatically envisage people living on the streets because of drink or drugs but this is not the full story as you will discover in this edition.

In Ireland, the legal definition translates into four types of homelessness: the visibly homeless living rough or sleeping in designated emergency accommodation such as a hostel; the hidden homeless, which include those staying with relatives or friends because there is no alternative accommodation for them, or remaining in institutional care because there is no other affordable option; those at risk of homelessness who have housing but are likely to become homeless through economic difficulties or the threat of violence; and, lastly, people rough-sleeping who are not in contact with emergency services, and who are not staying in emergency accommodation.

The death of Jonathan Corrie, the homeless man who died in a doorway close to Leinster House in 2014, sparked a national conversation about homelessness but many campaigners feel the situation has not improved since then.

A new UN Report has warned that homelessness is found in every country and is on the increase worldwide. It calls on member states to recognise homelessness as a human rights crisis and commit to its eradication by 2030, in line with the new UN Sustainable Development Goals. One of the key factors in rising homelessness, it indicates, is how governments played a part in allowing the expansion of real estate speculation and unregulated markets, which ends up in "treating housing as a commodity rather than as a human right."

The report also includes a specific mention of the shocking rise of homeless families in Ireland. Leilani Farha, UN special rapporteur on adequate housing, and Léo Heller, special rapporteur on the right to water and sanitation, wrote to the Irish Government

in September 2015 and requested a response to their confidential letter within 60 days, receiving a reply eventually on 6 June 2016.

The experts found that more than 700 of Cork city's 120,000 inhabitants were homeless. "Widespread homelessness is evidence of the failure of the State to protect and ensure the human rights of the most disadvantaged populations," said Ms Farha. She said the number of homeless has risen due to the lack of affordable housing and the impact of austerity measures.

The Dublin Region Homeless Executive also reported earlier this year that the overall number of homeless children in Dublin had doubled in the past year, with 1,616 children in emergency accommodation, compared to 803 in 2015. There is a clear crisis of homelessness taking place in our country, which must be tackled with action and not promises.

This specially themed edition on "Homelessness and Housing" highlights the work the Society, independently, and in partnership with other agencies, is doing to combat this crisis across Ireland, through providing accommodation and support via SVP homeless services, as well as in petitioning the government to act. You will read first-hand experiences from SVP members visiting families living in hotels and emergency accommodation, learn of the poor housing conditions some people are enduring in the private sector, and also of the new social housing projects being setup to tackle the situation.

What will hopefully become apparent from reading the many moving articles in this issue is that being left without a home can happen to any one of us. In realising this, we must continue to strive to acknowledge our common humanity, and endeavour to uphold the dignity of all whether we live on the streets, in emergency accommodation, are at risk of becoming homeless, or, are a home owner, landlord or politician.

Linda O'Connell

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OPINION

The homeless crisis remains a major national issue with still no overall strategy to resolve it. I have commented in the past on the need for all agencies to work together in providing a coherent plan that meets short, medium and longer term needs. With the new Government now in place, we again call for a concerted approach to tackle this problem and provide solutions and not just more words and promises.

Within all of this the Society is quietly and actively supporting people in various ways.

- Members are helping those in hotels or other temporary accommodation.
- Members continue to support many families at risk of becoming homeless, ensuring that, as far as possible, people are not being added to a growing crisis.

- Social Justice is providing advice and support, talking to Government agencies as well as other charities to both coordinate help and seek ongoing guidance.

- The Society operates a number of hostels across the country where support is given to around three hundred people on a daily basis through our Members and professional staff.

I thank and commend all of our Members, Conferences and Staff who are involved, in a wide variety of ways, in helping those who are homeless and who are also trying, where possible, to minimise the likelihood of others ending up in the same situation.

Dealing with people who are homeless presents a whole new set of challenges for those who find themselves in this unfortunate situation; equally, our Members need support, information and training to ensure they meet these specific needs as best they can. I urge our Members to continue with their support and, also, to make every effort to identify those at risk of becoming homeless, to spend time with them in order to understand their situation, and to guide them towards the best available professional advice.

All of this we will continue to do. However, it cannot substitute for Government actions to resolve the problem permanently. Where we find ourselves now is the result of poor policy decisions over an extended period of years. I re-iterate that there remains a lack of clarity around how the problem will be handled, both in the short and medium term. With the new Government's requirement for consensus building, this has to be an ideal topic for garnering cross-party support for a realistic plan with the necessary funding to finally tackle the issue. Again, what we do not need at this point is more general statements of intent as the crisis deepens by the week. Let us get our act together and get this resolved now. The Society will play whatever additional role it may be asked to play in both the short and medium term, as our Members and Staff are currently doing on a daily basis.



Geoff Meagher
National President



Living in a Hotel – A Parallel World

Noel Breslin, President of Blessed Peter O'Higgins OP Conference

Summer holiday time is approaching and for some people going to a hotel or self-catering apartment for their holidays is an annual event that they may look forward to however, if the truth was known after two weeks they are glad to be leaving and looking forward to putting their feet up back home.

However; hotels and guest houses in Ireland particularly in the larger cities have taken on a new meaning for some individuals and families who find themselves homeless in Ireland. Rather than a two weeks holiday stay these families will stay all summer in the hotel or guesthouse as emergency accommodation, provided by the local authorities, until a permanent house becomes available to them and for some it is not just this summer, they were there last summer also.

But can we imagine what must it be like for the 888 families with 1,786 dependents in Dublin alone (DRHE April 2016) living in emergency accommodation indefinitely while they are homeless. Our Conference the Blessed Peter O'Higgins OP Conference on the northside of Dublin was set up by the East Region as a response to the high demand of visitation requests received from families and individuals living in emergency accommodation in some prominent hotels and guesthouses in Drumcondra, Clontarf and a large hotel close to Dublin Airport and the Conference has called to in excess of 125 families in the four months between February 2016 and May 2016. Local Conferences in Marino, Clontarf and other areas had been calling to the hotels and guesthouses since early 2015 on a weekly basis however they were hard stretched coping with the high number of calls on top of their regular visitation calls.

People we have met while visiting have provided us with some insight into their lives by sharing their stories of living in emergency accommodation. For most they experience difficulties with the restrictions of movement while in the hotel or guesthouse, feeling awkward, isolated and uncomfortable in the middle of the night because you are in a single room only and therefore cannot get up and walk around other rooms as you would in a house or flat when you cannot sleep.

One young mother told us her story of feeling sad and lonely in the middle of the night when she was on her own while the kids were asleep in the room and how she felt restricted in what she could do as she didn't want to make noise in case she would wake them. Another young mother went on to tell her story on a national tv programme of having a panic attack in the middle of the night while on her own and having to call the night porter and rely on him, a stranger, to help her down to the foyer as there was nobody else she knew to help.

It must be difficult to be yourself when you are sharing some of your living space with strangers who are holiday makers in the hotel or guesthouse. One mother and father explained that they




get frustrated when they have to constantly “check the kids” for getting loudly excitable while playing with the risk of making too much noise for other guests. Our Conference members try and identify ways of facilitating entertainment for the children outside such as cinema or aquatic centre visits, Sunshine House holidays, sports summer camps, zoo visits and more.

Imagine when you cannot go to your own kitchen and cook a meal or make a sandwich when you are hungry because you have no kitchen of your own in emergency accommodation. One mother told us that she prefers not to use the shared kitchen in her situation because she is “particular about hygiene” for her young children and she feels that other people may not place the same value on hygiene standards than she likes to maintain for herself and her children and finds it hard to feel comfortable sharing the kitchen. Another woman explained the difficulties she experiences for her and the children in partaking in the breakfast provided by the hotel. She told us that she feels uncomfortable sitting down to breakfast in the main foyer at tables side by side with people who are on holidays and airline staff who are “dressed up”. She told us that she is “always on edge” that the children will not be able to “sit still” while having breakfast in the company of others. She also added that the food on offer at breakfast is not the kind of food that she or the children would eat generally. Conference members realise that the cost of eating out on an ongoing basis is challenging for families so we provide vouchers for local supermarkets to stock up on cold essentials such as breakfast cereal, small cartons of milk, sugar etc for breakfast/snacks etc. Conference members also encourage families to access a local Crosscare café for a full hot dinner for the family daily by providing them with vouchers for the café.

Therefore going to a hotel or guesthouse is a holiday for some but for families who are homeless it is a challenge. Our members have learned that what is equally more important outside of the vouchers or entertainment for the children we provide, is the listening, understanding, caring, sharing and encouraging and that is the best that we can offer while on visitation to those in emergency accommodation.

Preventing family homelessness in the private rented sector

Liz Kerrins
Member Support Development Officer
National Office



Most of the families now homeless in Ireland's cities and towns were previously renting a home in the private rented sector. Many of them lost their homes due to large rent increases.

They became homeless because they cannot negotiate a lower rent with the landlord and the new rent exceeds the limits of their incomes or the Department of Social Protection's (DSP) local rental limits to qualify for Rent Supplement. They cannot find a new home to rent privately within these limits; social housing is in desperately short supply; they cannot afford or would not get a mortgage to buy a home, even if one were available.

SVP Members continue to assist such families in order to prevent homelessness. While some Conferences may try to assist financially, for example by paying the difference between the old rent and the increased rent for a period of time while people try to find a new home, Members are finding this approach to be unsustainable. There is so little affordable, suitable private rented accommodation in their area. Subsidising high rents is depleting the local Conference of money, and ultimately, is not preventing homelessness.

What to do? There is no magic wand. However, there are actions that Members, and the person being assisted, can take before agreeing to the rent increase or leaving their home. The scenario below is a common one for Members. This article sets out a series of actions that MAY prevent homelessness.

A RENT INCREASE SCENARIO

Karen is a lone parent with three children aged 15, 12 and 6 years-old. She is living in three-bed house in a Dublin city suburb, and has lived there for nine-years. She cares for her children on a full-time basis, and is in receipt of One Parent Family Payment. All of the children go to school locally.

Karen's rent is €1,100 every month. She receives the majority of the payment in Rent Supplement from the DSP. Her landlord wants to increase her rent to €1,400 per month— he says that other similar houses in the area cost that much. Karen doesn't know what to do. She approaches her local SVP Conference for assistance.

SOME POTENTIAL SVP RESPONSES

- The initial strategy is to give Karen to the right information and sign-post her to the right services so she can try to avoid homelessness.
- The first thing the Member could find out is when she received her previous rent increase. And also find out when her tenancy began, and if she received notice of the rent increase in writing. A new law was introduced recently regarding rent increases. Landlords can only increase the rent of the property you are renting if 24 months or more have passed from the start of the tenancy, or it has been 24 months since the last rent review.
- The landlord must give at least 90 days notification in writing of the amount of the new rent and the date it will take effect. (Verbal notice/text messages/email are invalid notification, and written notice cannot be backdated to cover this).
- The increase cannot result in the rent becoming above 'market rent', which is the going rate for the type of accommodation in the area in which the tenant lives.

- Check the PRTB rent index www.prtb.ie, property websites like www.daft.ie or www.myhome.ie, local property agents etc. to establish whether the proposed rent is above market rent or not.

- If Karen wishes to challenge the proposed rent increase because she thinks it is above a market rent, she has 28 days to refer a dispute to the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) from the time of receipt of valid notice – www.prtb.ie

- She can stay in her home paying the current rent until a decision has been made. It is important to note that the PRTB process can take time and if they find that the review is valid she could be liable for backdated rent.

- If the rent increase is valid, and she cannot negotiate a lower rent, she should approach her DSP Representative to see if they will increase her Rent Supplement.

- The Department of Social Protection DO actually increase supplements on a case-by-case basis to prevent homelessness. But it's at their discretion.

- Alternatively, Karen could contact Threshold's Tenancy Protection Service (FREEPHONE 1800 724 724 – Dublin and Cork City only) to see if they can support her in seeking an increase in her Rent Supplement, should the rent increase be valid (i.e., in line with the law and market rents). This service is provided by Threshold on behalf of the relevant local authorities. In all cases, Threshold links with the landlord.

Of course, all of the above action is a sticking plaster. The problem is, in many parts of Ireland, the serious lack of affordable, good quality homes. How can a person or family be self-sufficient and content if they are totally deprived of a home, or if their housing situation is insecure because of rapidly rising rent levels and inadequate protection from eviction? We need policy and legislative change

This is why SVP's Social Justice Team in National Office work hard to communicate the housing and homelessness stories of the people we assist, and lobby the Department of Housing, Planning & local Government and the Department of Social Protection to increase the supply of social housing, reform the private rented sector, and increase the Rent Supplement rental limits and payment levels.

*SVP Submission to Dail Committee on housing and Homelessness
www.svp.ie/HousingandHomelessnessMay2016*

A HOTEL LIFE NOT A HOME LIFE

Aideen Lynch
Member of Inner City Conference

I am a third generation member of the Society following in the footsteps of my father and grandfather who both visited in Dublin. A lot has changed since my grandfather's Vincent de Paul days and with a changing Ireland, the needs of the most vulnerable people have also changed. The biggest change in my time has been the homeless crisis. In recent years there has been a growing number of homeless families placed in hotels across Dublin. These families are homeless due to the housing crisis – not traditional causes.

The people who suffer the most from the housing crisis include the most vulnerable people in society. Issues faced by some of the families we meet in the hotel include difficult backgrounds, lack of family support, mental illness, physical illness, low level of education, lack of self-esteem, substance abuse and domestic violence.

The challenges these people face are huge. Firstly they are not always from the area in which they have been placed. They have been uprooted to a hotel away from their schools, extended families and communities. Many families often have to get four buses a day to bring the children to and from school. Some homeless children have missed an inordinate number of school days due to the disruption in their lives.

These families also don't have the household facilities that we all depend on. There is no washing machine so laundry is done in the bath or sent to the laundrette. There is no cooker so it is convenience food, which is expensive and has little nutrition. The spread of germs is huge and with so many people in such a small space the adults and children are often sick.

Another challenge is a whole family living in one room providing no privacy for adults or children. There is no escape or personal space with family relationships being tested and it is not uncommon to see relationships break down.

Interactions between the different families can also be a challenge. In the hotel there is no privacy, constant noise, activity, tension and stress, so minor squabbles and children's fights can escalate out of proportion. In saying that, there is also a strong sense of community among those living there, they offer each other support, help with the children and share the little they have.

Life can be very hard for children living in the hotel. Their story began long before they entered the hotel and many of them also endured a hard road to get there. In being homeless they are robbed of their safe place, a home. They witness all the hard talks, fights and tears in their family. They are too young to understand but yet are involved. In a hotel room there is nowhere to play, to do homework or to be alone. There is no childhood in homelessness.

From talking to the people we visit, the biggest stress of their situation is the waiting and the "not knowing". Some families, who have passed their one-year anniversary in the hotel, are still waiting with no end in sight. They feel that they have been left there and forgotten. It is so hard to have to put your life on hold while you are waiting. For many life will only start again when they leave the hotel.

These families' are part of the area we visit and are not like traditional visits in which we are there to overcome some problem. It is comfort and support that they need during their homeless experience. There is no avoiding the issue that the one thing these families need is a home. This is way beyond the remit of the Society, but we can be a support until a family is housed. We offer support, advice and friendship. We also offer help in material ways such as bus passes, food vouchers and family outings as required.

We have close relationships with De Paul Trust in our area and we refer our clients to the Trust to advocate for their housing needs. In other parts of Dublin Focus Ireland, the Peter McVerry Trust, Threshold and the Dublin Simon Community are working closely with homeless families. A small but growing number of homeless women we visit have joined a lobbying group on homelessness, they are informed of their rights, advocate for themselves and organise protests. We support these women.

We encourage all St Vincent De Paul volunteers to stand up against homelessness and make your voice heard.



Home is where the Hearth Is!

SVP & Clúid Housing working side-by-side in Kildare

By Albert Perris , National Manager for Specialist Services



The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul has recently signed a three year housing management agreement with Clúid Housing for the management of 30 units of its social housing in Naas Co. Kildare. It is one of a number of collaborations and partnerships with Clúid and other providers around the country – strengthening SVP's housing management and administration, and freeing SVP Conference members up to focus on their visitation work.

Clúid was established in 1994 and has grown to become the largest housing association in Ireland, and provides over 5,000 of the 27,000 homes provided by all housing associations in Ireland. Clúid, an Irish word, means 'the seat beside the fire'; the corner seat that was vacated for the guest, or reserved for the venerable elderly member of the family. The idea of neighbourliness and home is central to Clúid's work, and closely reflects SVP's own ethos and values.

The partnership between St. Ita's Conference and Clúid, was initiated by the Society on behalf of the Conference, and with close consultation with Kildare County Council. Initial exploratory discussions with Clúid were followed by a comprehensive stock condition survey. The three year management agreement includes a three year programme of cyclical maintenance and refurbishment which has been agreed between both parties and will involve a significant investment by SVP in the upgrading of the houses.

Increasingly, Conferences, many of whom have been managing housing for up to thirty years, are exploring new and innovative

ways, of ensuring SVP housing is managed sustainably into the future, while reducing their day to day responsibility for administration, compliance and management of housing. Albert Perris, National Manager for Specialist services, noted "the environment in which SVP volunteers and members are now managing social housing is far removed from the world in which SVP established its housing schemes 20 or 30 years ago". The extension and enactment of the Residential Tenancies Act, bringing Social Housing under the remit of the Residential Tenancies Board from April this year has focused the minds of many Conferences, and prompted wider consideration of options for the future of our housing locally. The increasing administrative obligations, and the complexity of compliance issues now surrounding social housing is and will be a challenge for many volunteers. Many Conferences are up for the challenge, but equally, some are taking a longer term view, and are recognising the value and benefits in partnerships with more specialist housing management providers such as Clúid.

The Voluntary Housing landscape has changed dramatically over the past 10 years. Consolidation and Partnership look to be two key trends in the social housing sector in the coming years, with many of the small and medium size providers entering partnership agreements with, or transferring stock to larger approved housing bodies.

SVP Building Partnerships

clúid
housing





LEARNING TO LIVE AGAIN

Gwen Harris, Money Advice Coordinator, Finglas Cabra MAB

Getting the keys to a new home is an amazing experience, something many of us can relate to. For the many families that have become homeless over recent years and are living in hotels currently, the news of getting a new house, a new place to call home, can give rise to the same reaction from parents and children.

The modular home developments in Poppintree and Finglas have caused many debates up and down the country with positive and negative views being expressed. Whatever views people have of the locations selected, the materials used, the development time etc... the bottom line is that a number of families will shortly be leaving their current 'home' in a hotel and will be establishing roots in the local communities through their placements in these new developments.

Finglas Cabra MABS and Ballymun MABS have an interest in these developments for many reasons, one being the opportunity to offer support and money management tips and ideas to the families embarking on this exciting adventure. We recognise the fact that these families did not have a fridge to fill, a cooker to use and cupboards to replenish in quite some time. These are things we take for granted when living somewhere with an accessible kitchen. Also these families would not have had utility bills to maintain during their time in the hotels.

A popular theory states that it takes 21 days to make or break a habit. Many other theories state that the habit forming or break-

ing starts within 72 hours. Therefore if you have been living for a period of time without an accessible kitchen or ability to shop and cook for you and your family, without bills coming through the door, it is possible that these skills could have weakened. We are therefore of the view that some of the families moving into the new developments would benefit from MABS support to help strengthen some life skills that they may have forgotten while living in a hotel room.

MABS met with Dublin City Council to discuss offering our support and Community Education Programme to the families shortly moving to the new modular homes. Our eagerness to be involved was welcomed with enthusiasm by the Council. They in turn are working with homeless charity Depaul offering support and guidance on all aspects relating to the families moving into the new homes. Each family will be assigned a case support worker to help them settle into their new community with as much ease as possible. The support workers will also assist the families in securing more permanent housing in surrounding communities.

The first development phase in Poppintree commenced with family placements in May 2016. A working group consisting of MABS, Dublin City Council and Depaul met and all agreed that not only would the families benefit from a money management skills development course, but that the surrounding communities would also benefit. A new approach was agreed unanimously to

offer an integrated community money management course to the community of Poppintree and not just to the families moving in to the modular homes.

The approach agreed by the working group is that an open evening will be planned in the local community sports centre. The families from the modular units as well as the families from all surrounding estates will be invited. The staff of MABS, Depaul and Dublin City Council will be there to assist with introductions and to put faces to names. MABS will engage with the community members with a view to designing a money management programme to suit their needs. The sessions will be designed not to be maths lessons, but to help people explore their own perceptions of money, to strengthen and give them confidence in the skills they already possess and to help build new skills in the areas of managing money, paying bills and running a new home.

MABS hope to be able to assist and support families to create new habits in the areas of bill management, money management, grocery shopping and shopping around as a consumer:

To date we have designed a leaflet giving tips to families getting ready to move in about buying their first week shopping, what they can look to buy ahead of the moving in date.

Many reports indicate that Irish consumers are moving more towards electronic and on-line activities, banking, shopping, paying for bills to name but a few.

We are all encouraged more and more to become digital consumers, offered reductions in bills we pay on line or by direct debit, reductions if we go green and receive online bills rather than paper, our use of cash to function in society is becoming reduced.

With cheques marked to become extinct in the near future and living by cash only becoming more and more expensive and restrictive, managing our money through the banking system is becoming more expected and more inclusive for consumers. However this can make it increasingly difficult to keep a track of our money, to see where it is going each week and indeed to be able to plan and save becomes more difficult as we become more separated from our physical piggy banks.

The increasing prevalence and almost necessity of being banked is something of interest to MABS. Recognising the positives and benefits on-line functioning of banking and bill payments can yield, MABS are anxious to marry our digital banking evolution and the development of our own financial skills, which we feel can be achieved by working within the communities in delivering community education programmes.

We also recognise that some families may not be currently living through the banking system, opening a bank account has increased barriers when you do not have a fixed permanent

address. We hope to design some sessions with the families to help them develop or enhance their skills in shopping around to choose a bank account suitable to their needs and to be understanding of bank charges and fees. This skill of comparison shopping can be employed when choosing all manner of financial products and services.

The programme we hope to design and deliver in the community of Poppintree will be supported by the Depaul and we hope to expand our working relationship to other developments, such as the development in Finglas due to open in late 2016. The programme is something that could also be introduced in many new housing projects or indeed with groups of social housing tenants in a pre-tenancy or post-tenancy position.

It is an exciting time for Finglas Cabra MABS and Ballymun MABS and our new partners in this venture. Collaborative approaches have always been a great success for MABS and we are sure that this partnership will grow from strength to strength.



The Changing Face of Homeless – The Life and Times of Brian Dee

Niamh Madigan, Project Worker

Homelessness in Ireland has come to be seen in the faces of people from all different walks of life. We mostly associate these faces with people who have addictions, those who may have lost their homes due to repossession or eviction, some may even have been simply priced out of the market due to rental price increasing to an all time high. The stereotype has well and truly been broken in recent years. In line with this so has the services being provided to meet the individual needs of each individual presenting seeking SVP's assistance within the homelessness services.

Just over 6 years ago, a man with tales to rival the best storyteller in the world, by the name of Brian, or better known to his friends as Jock, knocked at Laurel Lodge's door. The usual admittance procedures were adhered to, licence agreement signed and rules and regulations explained, with the usual expectations of a 6 month move on to private rented accommodation to be achieved. The reality was something quite different and no one could have ever envisioned when he presented on that faithful day in May 2010. We took a journey together through the homelessness system, facing challenges, overcoming obstacles, sharing experiences, with our final stage of the journey to support him through a terminal cancer diagnosis.

Brian was a unique character; full of knowledge and interesting facts, testing our intelligence and memory recall on a daily basis with his brain teasers. He showed an unimaginable level of strength, courage and will power when facing his final battle in life. He retained his humour and wit throughout until he found eternal rest in the presence of staff whom he termed friends, in a place he called home.

It cannot be understated the positive impact this man had on staff and residents alike. As the face of homelessness changes so does the individual journey of those experiencing it. In Brian's case his journey has been one paved with unique experiences and fond memories that will last a lifetime, and hopefully now the words of Charles Kingsley's *The Last Buccaneer* "And now I'm old and going I'm sure I can't tell where; One comfort is, this world so hard, I can't be worse off there;" which he loved to recite have been realised.

Rest in Peace our friend.



(Permission given by family to use this story)

The only way we can abolish Ireland's homelessness crisis is by working together

Tom Flynn, Manager, SVP Drop-In Centre



The people of Ireland instinctively know that homelessness in society is wrong and must be eradicated. An innate sense of collective justice says that families and individuals have a basic right to access affordable accommodation. I believe that it can be reasonably extrapolated from the recent general election campaign that the majority of people do not want a tax reduction at the expense of the homeless and would welcome their taxes being directed into increased social housing.

The social determinants of health, be they structural or individual, point to the social factors that profoundly influence individuals' chances of living a healthy life. The World Health Organisation reminds us that factors such as poverty, food insecurity, social exclusion, poor housing and indeed no housing are important determinants of most diseases, deaths and health inequalities. The SVP Drop-In Centre in Limerick during 2014 opened a GP Clinic for homeless clients. This was done in conjunction with the Partnership for Health Equity. The resident GP, Dr O'Donnell, a clinical fellow in social inclusion, talks of the social determinants of health in a pretty radical way. He occasionally reminds us that in terms of positive health outcomes he is doing approximately 10% to 15% of the work. He says that the work of the Drop-In Centre achieves about 50% to 60% of the positive health outcomes for its clients. He argues that providing basic food, showering facilities with a change of clothes and laundry facilities are very important for the health of people who do not have these facilities. He sees the supports that are given to individuals who secure accommodation to sustain that accommodation as very important to their health because of the greater sense of inclusion and decreased anxiety they bring.

A central blank of service delivery at the Drop-In Centre is to intensively support people in the early weeks of having accessed accommodation to better ensure that they hold on to it. International research shows that the longer people are homeless the more supports they need to return to mainstream living. Addiction can be one of the cause of homelessness and also the outcome of homelessness so the ability of individuals with addictions to access the Drop-In Centre and be supported into treatment is seen by management as critical. The Centre supports clients with addiction issues through the implementation of a harm reduction model which aims at minimising the consequences associated with addictive behaviours. This is a non-judgemental approach that attempts to meet people 'where they are at' with their drinking and drug use. Management has observed increased psychosocial functioning among clients who on presenting to the

Drop-In Centre have a strong tendency to isolate and mistrust and who after a period of months feel comfortable interacting with staff and others.

The SVP Drop-In Centre has 25 excellent volunteers who give of their time and expertise. The volunteers work to a core principle which is to welcome clients in a non-judgemental and non-directive way. The approach to service delivery prioritises the individuals who present and enables them to access services in a dignified and respectful manner. For a cohort of society who can feel alienated, disaffected, and excluded a basic welcome by staff, which permeates all service delivery, as our resident GP reminds us, can lead to positive health outcomes. A sense of inclusivity permeates the Drop-In Centre which allows clients to hold on to the most precious thing in life, a sense of one's own dignity. The following testimony affirms the approach of the Drop-In Centre in the case of John. 'The Drop-In Centre means a lot to me. The manager Tom has helped me on many occasions. He helped me with my bills. He's always there for everyone that comes in. The staff are brilliant, Noel washes my clothes every-time I need them to be done and also is a very caring person. They also do wonderful food. I never have to worry about never going hungry as the staff are brilliant. I suffer from scitsoeffective a mental disorder. Sometimes I get down but Tom and Noel lift me up again with their great advice. I would be lost without the Drop-In Centre. It's a wonderful place where you get the best help. Thank you Tom and thank you Noel and all the wonderful staff.'

On average 70 people present at the Drop-in Centre on a daily basis. Work at the Drop-In Centre isn't always glamorous. Progress can sometimes be slow. Integral to the concept of recovery is relapse. In a supported environment individuals who sometimes take a step back can ultimately move forward. Roisin Howard, a transition student from Laurel Hill Colaiste, Co. Limerick worked at the Drop-In Centre for 3 hours a week for six months in 2015. She won an essay writing competition run by Limerick University based on her experiences of working with clients at the Centre. I will let her have the last idealistic words.

"The only way we can abolish Ireland's homelessness crisis is by working together. You, me, your friends, your enemies, your family, the government, charities like Simon, Focus Ireland and St. Vincent de Paul, we must all come together and fight until each and every man, woman and child has a place where they feel safe, where they feel loved".

Changing patterns in home ownership in Ireland – what’s happening and what are the implications?

Caroline Fahey, Social Policy Development Officer

In 1991, Ireland’s rate of home ownership peaked, with 80% of households owning their own home (with or without a mortgage). By 2011, the rate of home ownership had fallen to 71%. It is likely that Census 2016 will show a further fall in home ownership and an increase in the number of people renting their homes from landlords in the private rented sector. The numbers renting from a local authority or approved housing body peaked in 1961 at over 18% and declined to just under 9% in 2011.

High rates of home ownership have been seen across all social classes in Ireland, supported by Government policy between the 1950s and the 1990s. The availability of tenant purchase for local authority tenants, as well as subsidies for private home ownership such as mortgage interest tax relief and the absence of capital gains tax have contributed to this. A high level of home ownership is one way in which wealth can be more equally distributed. The main benefits of home ownership are the accumulation of an asset and security of tenure. Research also suggests that higher levels of home ownership in a community can contribute to positive assessments of the neighbourhood by residents, high levels of school completion and greater participation in social and political activities. While the decline in home ownership has occurred across all social classes, it is particularly evident among low-skilled people, single persons and one parent families (NESC, 2014).

What are the implications of declining rates of home ownership, particularly among those with low incomes or low earnings potential, in a context where social housing waiting lists continue to grow, there is a lack of security and affordability in the private rented sector and it is estimated that up to 30% of households require some State support in meeting their housing needs?

Is it likely that access to secure housing will be confined to those on higher incomes only, as those on lower incomes who are unable to buy and who cannot access social housing due to the lack of supply will continue to be housed in the private rented sector indefinitely?

Or that particular household types, for example single persons and lone parents, will face more barriers to home ownership, resulting in home ownership becoming concentrated among certain household types?

Will there be additional pressures on pensions, as home ownership declines among older people and housing costs have to continue to be paid into old age?

Will the unequal distribution of wealth in Ireland become even more entrenched, with those who cannot access home ownership unable to pass on a home to their children, while at the same time the inheritance rights of better off families are improving?

Will there be additional pressure on the State, as it continues to subsidise rents in the private rented sector for those who cannot buy and who cannot afford to meet their housing costs from their own resources, including older people on low incomes?

The private rented sector as it currently operates does not provide affordability or security of tenure to tenants. The homeless crisis is the most extreme manifestation of this failure. Long waiting lists and the collapse in the supply of social housing means that it is not a feasible option for many households. The decline in home ownership cannot be seen in isolation from these factors. A longer term view of housing in Ireland is needed, where the future implications of current trends are analysed and understood if we are to develop a housing system where everyone can access affordable and secure housing across the lifecycle.



Co-creating Ireland's National Renovation Strategy

Marion Jammot, Business Development Manager,
Irish Green Building Council

The residential sector currently accounts for 27% of all energy usage in Ireland, and emits 10.5 million tonnes of CO₂ annually. This makes it the single largest source of emissions after transport. Improving buildings' energy efficiency is thus one of the cheapest forms of CO₂ mitigation.

Yet, the benefits of retrofitting go well beyond energy savings. Energy inefficient homes are not only expensive to heat, they can also damage the health of their occupants. Cardiovascular and respiratory diseases are caused or worsened by living in cold conditions. The Institute of Public Health's report on fuel poverty states that more than one-in-four teenagers living in cold homes are at risk of multiple health problems, compared with one in 20 living in warm homes.

To tackle this challenge, the Irish Green Building Council (IGBC), in conjunction with the Department of Energy is working to

build a community of industry and civil society representatives to develop a 'national renovation strategy' – a long-term plan on how we will renovate Ireland's homes and commercial buildings to high standards of energy efficiency. This strategy is required by 30 April 2017 under EU law.

This work is conducted as part of the European Horizon 2020 funded "Build Upon" project. The €2.35m project is led by Green Building Councils from 13 countries, with the Irish Green Building Council facilitating the process in Ireland.

It sees a diverse range of organisations coming together to collaborate on how to tackle this issue. This ranges from governments to local authorities, construction companies, product manufacturers, energy providers, financial institutions, and NGOs. Organisations involved in the process in Ireland include the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, ESB, Kingspan Insulation, Saint-Gobain, Colliers International, Tipperary Energy Agency and the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

They are aiming to agree a strong national strategy for Ireland with clear energy saving targets. It plans to be quite comprehensive by: coordinated awareness of co-benefits, raising initiatives that engage citizens, skills programmes that train the construction workforce to deliver high quality retrofit, financial mechanisms such as green mortgages and loans, and policies such as strengthened energy performance certificates.

Pat Barry, Executive director of the Irish Green Building Council said: "We are engaging a diverse group of stakeholders to help our government to develop consensus for an ambitious national renovation strategy and action plan for Ireland. We do not plan to reinvent the wheel, but rather build upon and link up the strong but scattered initiatives for finance, policy, skills, capacity and awareness for energy efficiency that already exist across the country. The vision is a fully decarbonised built environment that delivers a better quality of life for all."

As part of this consultation process, a series of workshops are taking place across Ireland. For further information on upcoming events, please visit www.buildupon.eu/ireland.

Marion is Business Development Manager at the IGBC and coordinates the Build Upon Project. Her working background is in project management and membership organisations, with previous roles in Dublin Chamber, Eurochambres and the French Embassy in Serbia. Marion holds a MA in European Affairs from Sciences-Po Strasbourg and is currently completing a MSc in environmental sustainability in UCDC.





*Liam Casey, Regional President East Region,
Louise Casey – Key note speaker and Michael
Boyle Area President West Tallaght.*

Working with troubled families

Louise Casey

A UK expert on dealing with troubled families told an East Region seminar in Dublin early in May that making sure children went to school, well fed, clothed and happy is the silver bullet on social policy.

“It literally transforms families and children. said Louise Casey, who between 2011 and 2015 was Director General of the Troubled Families programme at the UK Department of Communities & Local Government.

She said that there were three measures of success for the UK programme. “The first is the education and welfare of children. The second was to get someone in the family working and the third to reduce significantly and in most cases halting crime and anti-social behaviour.”

In a wide ranging and emotional speech she set out some of the

key issues which made the Troubled Families programme successful, such as the involvement of family intervention workers and the building of a relationship between a family and their worker:

While acknowledging the good work of social workers, police and the other agencies who become involved with troubled families she strongly advocated the need for a change of focus by these agencies, engaging with the troubled families on their terms not always through the protocols and timetables of the agencies themselves.

The following is an edited summary of her speech.

“The aim of the UK Troubled Families programme was to turn around the lives of families who had many problems and often caused many problems, and who ultimately cost cash-strapped services a lot of money.

These families had an average of 9 of the most challenging problems possible relating to employment, education, crime, housing, child protection, parenting or health.

Many social policy experts will tell you that just one problem like mental health or domestic violence can derail a family. 9 can hold them back generations and it does.

The key to working with these families was Family intervention, with a dedicated family intervention worker to establish a relationship, engage them and to lead them through to change. To get change, you have to start with the person. Not the issue.

Good family intervention starts with the worker. Someone who gets into the family finds out where the family wants to start and builds from there. Someone who the family knows by name and who is alongside them helping them to change. Not making an assessment, going away and sending them a letter 6 weeks later. The worker may be the first positive authority figure that family has ever known. They need to be kind and tough and have an assertive and challenging approach – they don't go away when the door is closed in their face or back off when a family won't engage.

They need to look at what's really happening for the family as a whole and give practical hands on support.

The relationship between the worker and the parent has to build resilience, so that when the worker draws back, which they have to do when the time is right – the family is OK and the change can be sustained.

And it works when we go into their homes, onto their settees not when we make them come into our offices, our hubs and our assessment centres.

But it wasn't just the way we worked with the families that needed to change. The systems around the families, often just as dysfunctional, just as chaotic, needed a massive overhaul too. .

Not only did the families have an average of 9 significant problems but often a legion of agencies and workers in their lives.

It can be too easy to look at things from our own silos, our own systems, our own professional disciplines and let those things dictate how we work.

We have to get to people on their terms, not ours.

We have to restore a connection that's been lost between the system and the person, to make people believe in themselves and show them how they can change.

So a good family intervention worker turns up at the house every day for a week, showing the mother how to get the kids up and

fed in the morning. He or she doesn't tell the mother the night before or give her a parenting leaflet

There are so many agencies, not just children's social care, but youth offending, housing, the police, anti-social behaviour, probation, health and others circling the family that the family need a diary to keep on top of all the appointments they're required to attend – and they inevitably fail to turn up for them all and the system judges them on that failure.

So the families get stuck in the system.

None of us want to keep going back to the same estates, the same homes, the same families, seeing the same misery year after year.

There are a lot of people out there who think that we can't change these families. Who think it's just not possible.

It is possible.

And the children of any families in any circumstances deserve that."

The gift of volunteering.

Louise Casey also spoke about the importance of SVP volunteers who regularly support families in trouble.

"You have the biggest gift to give. You give of yourselves. And the families know it." she told the East Region members.

"Your power relationship is different as they know you're there not because you are paid but because you care.

"You are the givers of hope, of light and indeed of love. This is a fundamental part of the relationship – giving some furniture, explaining a leaflet or challenging behaviour is all about a relationship and you do all of this because you care

"You – at the centre of all this - as volunteers are fundamental

"You bring hope. You bring love and that brings change.

"We don't have to live with a sense that these families will always be with us. I don't accept that the poor always have to be with us."

A Place to Call Home - Homelessness & Housing

Aileen Woods – Holy Trinity Conference, Donaghmede

A home is more than just a roof over our heads or shelter. A home, for most of us, is somewhere we go to escape the pressures of life, for reassurance, to re-charge. A home provides space for a family to develop and grow, for people to feel safe and secure.

Take that away, or have the fear of your home being taken away and what do we have? We have people living in fear, feeling insecure and suffering intolerable stress as they try to go about their day. We all talk about the stress of modern life and trying to cope with the daily demands. Add the fear of losing the very roof over your head to those stresses and you would find it almost impossible to think or make decisions about anything else.

This is what many people are experiencing. It is what we hear and see when we visit families. We visit other mothers who are at their wits end trying to stay in private rented accommodation that has just gone too expensive for them. It is easy to say why don't you pack your bags and move out of Dublin to something more affordable? But that is to ignoring the human side of this problem. We have seen a mother with two young children who has been living in fear for the last two years. She works in what would be considered a good job, but the threat of an increase in her monthly rent by 300 euro has literally terrified her. She has read and heard the horror stories in the media of people becoming homeless and is terrified that she and her two young children will end up on the streets. Thankfully this particular story has had a happy ending as she has managed to secure social housing with a housing association, which underlines the need for more investment in this type of housing.

There are children growing up now who do not have a secure place to live, who have spent most of their young lives moving from location to location and community to community, not having time to settle and feel part of any community or remain in one school. What is happening to our future generation? These young people need and deserve to have a stable home and community to grow up in and to develop into confident adults who achieve their potential.

Another young mother we visit living in private rented accommodation with the help of rent supplement, previously paid a mortgage on her own apartment. It was repossessed when her circumstances changed and she could no longer make the full monthly repayments. The rent she pays now is similar to the mortgage payment, the difference being she now has rent supplement to make up the difference. She asks the perfectly reasonable question; why not give her the support to stay in her home instead of giving her the support to pay rent? This raises the question of housing finance and the reintroduction of financial plans for people on low incomes to purchase houses at reasonable financial costs.



Housing policy has failed. We have to ask what it is all about? Surely one of the most fundamental requirements of our society is that we provide a roof over the heads of our people. Government needs to get involved again in housing and we urgently need our local councils to get involved in building houses again: Outsourcing to the private sector has left us with a shortage of housing. The private rental market alone is not able to provide stable housing. In our home visitations we see people living in rented accommodation where some repair work is required; tenants tell us that they are afraid to draw any attention to themselves for fear of being put out or getting a rent increase. Security in the rental market is desperately needed so families can pay rents that are affordable to them so they can remain within their community.

We have observed some small changes and visit some families who have been accommodated following a couple of years living in hotels. They are delighted but need help with the costs involved in setting up a home and the extra demands on their income during that time.

We need to look at housing policy starting from the perspective of people and providing affordable homes: Not just build the physical homes but build communities. The housing crisis has a very human face that we see in our visitation work. The need to take action is beyond urgent. We need to ensure that we can provide homes for people and the security and peace of mind that goes with having a place to call home.

Bad housing conditions can create a dilemma for SVP members when tenants reluctant to approach landlords

One of the consequences of trying to help some people keep a roof over their heads is the dilemma for some members and Conferences when the quality of the current housing is extremely poor.

Is it better to live in unhealthy conditions rather than risk eviction if complaining antagonises the landlord?

Sometimes, as one Conference discovered recently, the tenant can be so fearful of being homeless that they were living in a rat-infested home rather than insist the landlord do something about it.

In that case the Conference were able to arbitrate and the situation was resolved.

The tenant who was a lone parent with 5 children living with her in the house was at pains to tell the conference that the landlady was nice and friendly but she didn't seem to realise the seriousness of the situation.

Before approaching SVP the tenant had attended her doctor and asked him if her baby could get sick from the rats. Someone later came from "Health and Safety" but she didn't seem to know who they were or who asked them to call. They asked her to get a quote to clear the infestation. She had this quote for €220 which she had difficulty paying.

The SVP members were shocked and very worried about the safety of this family. They asked her if she could move but she said she would be homeless.

The members arranged for a pest control company to visit the house. They found a longstanding infestation and felt that they needed to condemn the house and board it up if the landlord did not take the necessary steps to prevent a re-infestation. A plumber was also needed as a pipe had been chewed through and there was flooding under the house.

When approached the landlord did get a plumber and the water situation was resolved. The Conference arranged with the pest control company to clear the rat infestation.

The SVP members describe the tenant as a lovely person but extremely timid which meant she was not able to deal with the landlord and this left her very vulnerable.

It is a story that ended well but not all landlords have been so accommodating when approached to correct problems with the houses they are letting.

Fuel Stamp Saving Scheme

In this modern day of new technology whereby you cannot seem to do anything without having either Internet or WiFi access, a Smart Phone, an iPad or an "App" to help us manage our daily tasks it's refreshing to know that simple "Old School" solutions still work.

Our fuel stamp saving scheme would be considered an "Old School" type saving scheme. It's modelled on the same principles as the TV Licence Stamp saving scheme. Save stamps on a saving card then use them to pay for your service. In our case it's saving (budgeting) for Home Heating Oil or Solid Fuel.

Our saving scheme is currently being operated by Conferences in the following areas, Blessington, Clane, Greystones, Kilcock, Kildare Town, Naas, Staplestown, and Wicklow Town. We also have both Baltinglass and Celbridge ready to go-live and Enniskerry too, is nearly ready. We have been very busy with a number of Conferences in the Dublin area, who are currently going through the initial set-up stage.

Our scheme is being well supported by local Retailers with over 33 shops now promoting/selling our €5 Fuel Stamps. These shops include our very own Vincent Shops, Post Offices, SuperValu, Centra, Mace, Londis plus a host of other local Community Shops. We also have a total of 28 Oil Suppliers, both local and national, accepting our Stamps as part of full payment for deliveries.

Since the scheme's launch the Society has not only seen evidence that it is making a real difference for Families/Households we support, who really struggle to manage their heating bills but also to families who don't request our assistance but who also struggle. The scheme also reinforces one of the Society's core values "Promoting Self Sufficiency". It really does empower people to help themselves and in turn helping restore/retain their self-esteem. Conferences too are seeing benefits of the saving scheme with a noted reduction in calls, and their energy spend.

Now is the ideal time for your Conference to join our scheme. It will give households ample time to start saving throughout the coming months for their winter needs. It will also help Conferences better manage and reduce their annual "Coal / Oil List" by providing an "Old School" saving solution

If you would like further info about joining our scheme please contact:

Jimmy Scurry
T: 01-8198466
M: 085-1745070
E: jimmyscurry.east@svp.ie





Time to Take the 'Social' Seriously – And Find A Way to Pay for It

*John-Mark McCafferty
- Head of Social Justice*

The Programme for Government, negotiated by the members of the new minority administration in the Dáil, was finalised in early May. It commits to a wide variety of things over the lifetime of the present regime. The policy set envisages a strong economy and delivery of a 'fair society', with 'thriving communities' in both urban and rural areas. It rightly views housing and health as pressing challenges, which need to be decisively tackled, and pledges that 25,000 'new homes' will be built annually by 2020. The programme doesn't spare its ambition for jobs either: 200,000 new jobs are planned by 2020, with 135,000 of these intended for regions outside of Dublin. How we get there is another matter, and both housing and health have proven to be intractable problems for successive governments.

Ending the Housing Shortage and Homelessness?

The plan states that it is not acceptable in 2016 to have families living in unsuitable emergency accommodation, which of course we would echo, and that political leadership on housing, including an action plan, is essential. A key aim continues to be improving housing supply in terms of social housing, a new affordable rental model, private supply, and a role for Credit Unions in the financing of housing. The programme commits to preventing and tackling homelessness, planning reform, and addressing vacancy in town centres. Interestingly, from an SVP point of view, protecting and promoting tenancy rights gets a strong mention, but the issue is how this will be achieved, and whether this is the priority housing policy for Government. Stated actions in the programme around protecting home ownership are mentioned and are likely to take precedence due to the reality that home owners are more likely to vote than lower income tenants. Indeed, tenant purchase commitments in the text seem to contradict efforts to maximise social housing supply, given the impact which right-to-buy schemes generally have on overall numbers of social housing units. In addition, the money, for the scale of social housing required, simply isn't there, and 'off balance sheet' approaches to date have not provided the capital required to even begin to meet demand.

How Social is a 'Social Economy'?

The phrase 'Social Economy' appears at various points in the programme. This is supposedly underpinned by sound public finances and a stable, broad tax base. However, more detail appears to be given over to turf cutting than to the ways in which a sustainable tax base will be achieved. More investment in economic, regional and social infrastructure is committed to in the plan also, but this reads like there will be a little bit of investment everywhere, which is not strategic and which, if implemented, won't yield the best returns for the economy and society as a whole. And, while climate-change plans talk of improvements in the built environment through better energy sources in social housing, there is no mention at all of Government's recently launched Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty, which included strong commitments on retrofitting and better energy efficiency across all rented housing. The rollout and extension of the Personal Microcredit Scheme, where Credit Union loans are made available to some

of the households we assist in order to combat moneylending, is welcome though, as is the promise to target investment in early years. More detail is, however, required on how the quality of early childhood education and care services, and the terms and conditions of workers in the sector, will be improved.

Future Budgets

Budgets are supposed to be 'equality proofed', henceforth, according to the programme. This may be a positive move for the people and families we work with, yet the devil will be in the detail of how that is to be done and how such an analysis may influence future budgets. A new Working Family Payment is currently being discussed in the Department of Social Protection with a view to addressing the number of jobless households and households where the adults have very few hours of work per week. Child poverty is mentioned but only in the context of making work pay. While work is crucial, work alone won't move all families out of poverty, and policies tackling child poverty need to be much wider than the work agenda. Government action needs to include ambitious commitments to invest in early childhood care and education, social housing and protection for private tenants, capital investment in warmer homes and social protection schemes supporting all one parent families already in work. And, at this time of violence and, indeed, menace in Dublin's inner city and other areas, the new government also needs to invest adequately in communities to redress the swingeing cuts to local supports implemented in the years of recession. Children and young people, especially in urban areas, need services that address the community deficits created in recent years and enhance their participation in society as well as help them access training, education and job opportunities.

Future Revenues

All of the above comes at a cost. Our population is ageing, while a relatively high birth rate ensures the need for substantial investment in schools and child benefit. Infrastructure gaps, due to the collapse in capital expenditure since 2008, are all too evident now in terms of the capacity of public transport and other services and utilities. Pressure is being applied to increase public sector pay, and cost of living increases will also impinge on Government budgets. The Programme for Government commits to 6.75 billion more being spent on public services by 2021, yet this is insufficient according to the Fiscal Advisory Council. Even if the programme committed to more expenditure, it is very unclear from the text how a sustainable tax base is to be developed in order to fund such promises, or, how a fair society is to be delivered while at the same time complying with the EU's Stability and Growth Pact rules.

The minority Government has set itself quite a challenge.

Homelessness and Domestic Violence



Mayo Women's Support Services provides refuge space and outreach support to women in the West region as well as an in-service childcare facility for young children who are staying in the refuge with their mothers. There has been an increase in the number of families looking for refuge this year and due to the current housing crisis has resulted in many families, their stay in refuge longer, resulting in fewer spaces being available. When our refuge first opened in 1994 the average stay was 12 days, now it can be up to 6 months. Women are now finding it very difficult to access refuge and when they do, the difficulty is around accessing suitable, affordable housing.

The issue of domestic violence and homelessness is a stark reality for many women and their children. Women take the courageous and necessary step to protect themselves and their children and are then faced with huge barriers and obstacles in securing a home for themselves, at affordable rents. A woman forced to leave her home because of domestic violence is not explicitly defined as homeless and therefore when she comes in contact with local authority housing departments she is not automatically regarded as an emergency case.

The umbrella body SAFE Ireland, which works with frontline domestic violence services, including MWSS, has published research which indicates that the frequency and severity of domestic violence forcing women to leave their homes could be worse than previously documented ("The State We Are In" 2016). In 2014, 1,658 individual women and 2,349 children (4,007 in total) were

accommodated in emergency refuge accommodation across the country. In addition 4,831 requests for refuge could not be met because the refuges were full.

Government figures at the end of February 2016 show that 912 families with 1,881 children were in emergency homeless accommodation but, crucially, this does not include the majority of those in emergency refuge accommodation.

Other obstacles include:

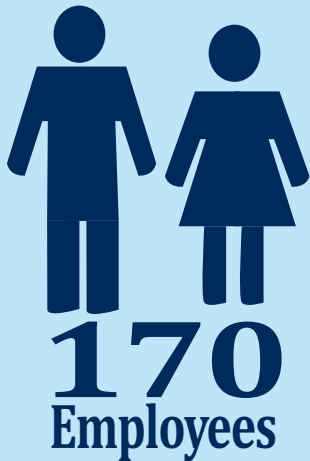
Some local authorities require that a woman is living or renting in an area for 6 months prior to receiving Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). This can be problematic for women who have to leave the county their abuser resides in, for her safety.

There is a severe shortage of properties whose rents will be covered, or almost covered, by HAP for everyone. Market rents have risen dramatically. The time for HAP applications to be completed and processed can be lengthy, and in some cases, the property is rented to another party.

There is a real housing and safety crisis for women and children, fleeing domestic violence, whether they are in refuge or not. Here in MWSS - we see firsthand that the current housing crisis is compounding their trauma and disrupting children's lives. We need partnership approaches across all sectors to bring about positive changes for the most vulnerable in our society in Ireland.

SVP Homeless Services

A look at our services for people out of home



SV P has ten emergency accommodation services (hostels) around the country, which employ close to 170 people and provide emergency accommodation for over 300 people. In Limerick city, the Society also operates a Drop-In Centre, which provides meals, laundry and showers on a day-service basis.

The size of our service provision often surprises people, and coupled with the work of the visitation Conferences supporting families in emergency placements in hotels & B&Bs, it means SVP is one of the largest providers of support to people out of home in the country.

All of our services are based outside Dublin, and differ from each other in many respects not least in terms of size – with some services offering as few as 11 beds and others as many as 74. We have one hostel for women, and the rest are for men.

[Read more about our emergency services.....](#)

St. Colmcille Hostel, Letterkenny



“People that stay at the Hostel, enter as strangers, but leave as friends”

The St. Colmcille Hostel was opened in April 1997 to provide short term, temporary accommodation for people experiencing homelessness.

This Hostel provides support in meeting the accommodation needs of homeless people not only in Letterkenny, but over the whole region.

This is the only emergency accommodation service in County Donegal and it deals with many different situations, such as people who find themselves without a home due to fire, flooding or any natural disaster, to those who get into financial difficulties, and people that are in recovery from an addiction or that are in domestic violence situations.

In May 2003 an extension was built to enable SVP to provide support for a wider range of people, this consists of 1 wheelchair assessable unit which can cater for the needs of many different types of physical disabilities, 3 single self-contained units and 6 self-contained family units.

While in the hostel, the staff work with people to support them to be self-sufficient to make sure that those passing through the doors get more than just a roof over their head, and that their time spent in the service is an opportunity to prepare themselves for living independently again. People that stay at the Hostel, enter as strangers, but leave as friends.

How are our services funded?

The funding for our homeless services is complex and comes from two government bodies – the Local Authorities and the HSE in each region.

Local Authorities are responsible for housing and make use of emergency accommodation where they cannot meet the housing need of any one individual or family. They contribute their portion of our funding on that basis. Our hostels take referrals from Local Authorities in their region, and work with the individuals to find a housing solution to their homelessness with whatever supports they may need.

The HSE provides funding for homeless services through the Primary Care/Social Inclusion division. This funding is to address the health or social care needs of people experiencing homelessness (for example basic healthcare needs, mental health, support with addiction and alcoholism). All service providers are required to offer holistic support and intervention to work collaboratively with service users on ending their homelessness and the factors that may be causing or exacerbating it.

Bethany House - Longford

Bethany House provides support to 6 women and up to 20 people in total when they have children with them. We try to keep a homely environment as much as we can, particularly to minimise the disruption or distress of the children who come to us under really difficult circumstances.

At the start of this year we received the wonderful donation from Ceardean Architects of a former shipping container which had been transformed into a beautiful living space. It is a warm, temporary home with all mod cons and a surprising amount of space which has enabled us to provide a modern space to women and their children who are out of home.

This has been a welcome addition during a busy

year at Bethany House, not just in terms of the number of women and children we have supported (19 women and 28 children for 2015) and but also because of the length of time they needed to stay due to a lack of move-on accommodation. The homeless crisis does not seem to be fading away, and while we are working hard to help our residents find new homes for their families, it's a constant challenge. We get a lot of support locally from our County Council, and the funders and fellow service providers in our region. But we are most deeply indebted to the support we get from our fellow Vincentians in SVP at local, Area and Regional level – which support and friendship is the very heart of SVP and we want to say a very big THANK YOU!

McGwire House - Waterford

In 1948 Saint Vincent De Paul set up a 46 bed men's hostel in Lady Lane in Waterford city to provide accommodation for the workingmen who were staying in Waterford overnight.

Eventually it became a hostel for men who were experiencing homelessness and were in need of food and shelter. The hostel was staffed by volunteers who reported to a local SVP Conference and was managed in this way for 55 years.

Over time, the Lady Lane building became unsuitable and in 2012 we completed construction on a new custom built hostel building.

McGwire House now provides emergency accommodation and services for up to 37 residents within the Waterford City and County Areas.

All clients must be referred to us by the Waterford City Council Homeless Officer. A resident is charged rent weekly and this includes three meals a day and a laundry service.

The service offers a number of activities to promote welfare and personal development for residents. Things like cinema, sport and fishing trips; quiz nights and pool competitions; use of the gym on site and the large garden for growing flowers and vegetables. We participated in the Irish Street

Leagues (a football tournament for people who've been homeless) and did quite well this year too! We encourage our residents to volunteer and get involved in local community groups and projects - for example working with furniture

“people need something to be excited about, something personally rewarding”

restoration and deliveries via Vincent's Shop. Our Project Workers work on a one to one basis with residents with a view to helping them to move on to independent living within six months.

In 2014 a number of our residents, and the service itself, featured in an RTE documentary on about the High Hopes Choir, which highlighted the plight of homelessness in modern Ireland. It proved an extremely positive experience for those involved, and

raised awareness of the issue.

We are still involved, doing what we can to support former residents and the choir itself with rehearsal space and travel costs. With move on accommodation proving so hard to find in the midst of the current housing crisis, and as a result residents frequently staying longer than the usual 6 months as a result, people need something to be excited about, something personally rewarding and uplifting - and the High Hopes Choir offers exactly that. Please go and see them if you can!

Ozanam House- Wexford

Ozanam House in Wexford town is a 30 bed men's emergency accommodation service. During 2015 the hostel catered for a total of 136 Service Users of this total 30 remain at the hostel with the rest having been moved to either private rented, or local authority housing.

The residents in Ozanam House experience first-hand the compassion and commitment of our very hardworking Conference. When the service opened first, it was run by volunteers and while it's now fully staffed, they are still involved and are an invaluable support. Last year they arranged for the buildings to be fitted out with solar panels which will bring our heating costs down and help keep the service running even in these difficult economic times.

Our garden is a source of great pride for us and the residents and last year, having entered ourselves in the Wexford Bloom Competition - we received a Bronze Medal Award. Special thanks to the service users and T.U.S workers

who were involved! Community Artist Dimitri Diamond was involved during the year with model making, and mosaic Artwork and in September four of our residents represented Ireland and the European Kick Boxing competition in Budapest, with one of our residents winning a Bronze Medal! The trip was organised by one of our project workers, Robbie Sludds and our hostel Conference gave us both the financial and moral support we needed to help these gentlemen have this really positive experience.

On the downside, our staff are finding it increasingly difficult to locate accommodation for hostel users due to the scarcity of houses/flats, the number of landlords who refuse to accept rent allowance. This is one of the really sad aspects of homelessness - you can be treated differently and find it hard to get back into the usual rhythm of life. Here in Ozanam House we are all committed to those SVP Vincentian values of friendship and support, whether you're employed or volunteering - homelessness is a social justice issue and we are committed to challenging it.

“Homelessness is a social justice issue and we are committed to challenging it.”

St. Martha's: Raising awareness through school talks about homelessness

Part of the work we do in SVP Homeless Services is to raise awareness of the issue itself and the work we do. One of the ways we do this in Longford is through talks to schools across the NorthEast & Midlands Region. In 2015 St. Martha's Hostel were invited to give a presentation in Ballymahon Convent School to Transition Year students in the school, with all of the proceeds going to the hostels.

The students were keen to find out what service both hostels provide and to learn a little bit more about the issue of homelessness in general. It was exciting to see their enthusiasm, both for our direct work and for the issue as a whole. After an interesting question and answer session, over 70 students committed to the sponsorship of St. Martha's Conference and in turn the people of the North East & Midlands Region who experience homelessness. Special thanks to Josephine Donoghue, Ms Bohan and all the students who participated and the people who donated for their support.

St Vincent's Hostel and Deerpark House - Cork

From street to home, SVP Homeless services stays with people for as long as they need us. Our Hostels St Vincent's and Deerpark work with people on a one-to-one, basis responding to all of their needs with the aim of housing people as quickly as possible. Our outreach Service works with people to maintain their tenancies in housing appropriate to their needs, and to support them to reconnect with family and the wider community.

Between January and April 2016 we supported 274 people in our hostels – a 23% increase compared to the same four-month period in 2015, and a 74% increase compared to the same period in 2014. At Christmas as part of a cold weather strategy extra beds were set up in St Vincent's. Due to the demand on these beds we have been unable to remove them.

“The biggest help has been my key worker. She is wonderful and has helped me with everything; filling in forms, preparing housing applications, typing letters... everything.”

A story from one of our residents

“When I was 13 or so I started drinking. You wanted to be the same as everyone else. Up around the school there'd be 50 to 100 people – everyone who couldn't get into a pub. You'd do four cans or so. Then eight or twelve (cans).

“After the Junior Cert I left school and it was the time of the boom and my uncle got me a job laying blocks. At 16 I ended up getting a flat with a girl. We were together for 4 or 5 years. When that broke up I moved around. There was building work in the UK, so I moved there. It worked out well for a while.

“I ended up getting a girl pregnant. The relationship broke down and I returned to Ireland. A child on the way and not able to support it. How would you feel? I felt disappointed in myself. It brings up lots of emotions in me just thinking about it. I was drinking a lot at this stage.

“But I knew I had to get help and I came back to Ireland to get treatment and I got into an alcohol treatment centre in Cork. Then on to a residential treatment centre.

“I've been three weeks in St Vincent's Hostel. I've stopped drinking for three weeks. They've helped me go to AA meetings – I'll probably go to one tonight. SVP have been a huge help.

“The biggest help has been my key worker. She is wonderful and has helped me with everything; filling in forms, preparing housing applications, typing letters...everything. Getting you to do things is good. Keeping me occupied. So you don't have to get to think too much. They've also helped get me onto a FAS course. It starts in three weeks and then in five weeks I want to be out of here.”

Homelessness

we do to help address it. One of the most enjoy- Recently the managers of Bethany House and St students as they were organising a 'sleep-out'

work we do, the range of people we work with in the services and for the work of the Society and sleep out.

Homelessness, are indebted to the school principal, for continuing support. Thank you so much!

St Patrick's Hostel - Limerick

St Patrick's Hostel is a 47-bed emergency accommodation service for single homeless men right in the centre of Limerick city. We also have 10 apartments next door to the service, with a mixture of transitional and long term units, in order to help men move on into more appropriate housing at the right time for them. We, like all homeless services, have been very busy all year – but we work closely with the local authority, the HSE and the other homeless services providers locally to make as much progress as we can despite this current housing crisis.

While staying with us service users can avail of support through our key workers and staff, through attending in-house clinics provided by other services in the area of mental health and addiction for example. We would also try and respond to needs by providing courses in areas like cooking to build skills and independence.

The housing crisis has meant people are staying longer simply because there is nowhere else to go. In 2015 we had 112 people avail of our services and the length of stay for someone who eventually ends up moving into private rented accommodation was 12 months whereas previously service users would secure alternative accommodation in 6 months or less. 12 months living in emergency

accommodation can feel like a very long time. The impact of being homeless can be damaging to a person's self-esteem and one of the ways we work to help people cope is through sport.

Last year staff and residents took part in the Great Limerick Run last year and this year they have been playing soccer in the Irish Street Leagues this year. This has many positive outcomes in terms of a person's fitness, confidence, teamwork and wellbeing. We have had players return to playing with clubs after getting active again in the street leagues, and we have had players called for trials with the Ireland Homeless World Cup squad.

At the end of the day, the issue of housing supply is at the core of the current crisis – and it will be a challenge for the new government and all the service providers to continue to provide helpful support to people who are out of home and unable to get somewhere to live. Housing First and Housing Led initiatives will alleviate difficulties for some people and reduce the length of time spent in emergency accommodation, but not for all. Our role at St Patrick's is to try and make sure nobody has to stay longer than is necessary and to ensure the best possible outcome for the person while they are with us.

“The impact of being homeless can be damaging to a person's self-esteem and one of the ways we work to help people cope is through sport.”

What to expect at our Monastery Hostel in Carlow

Initially you would be met by a hostel Project Worker – a trained social care practitioner – or a Caretaker. Once admitted you would be allocated a bed, shown around the hostel, introduced to roommate, familiar full meals, laundry service and the house-supervision of a member of staff 24/7.

In the following few days you would engage in several one-to-one talk sessions with your Project Worker, to most immediate needs would be met first, e.g. medical attention, restoring payment if allowance is cut off, to regain independent living and sustain it.

A clear care-plan would be drawn up, with you, for you. In the course of this entire process you would be cent. Periodically, you would receive training on site e.g. gardening, cooking, and art. You would be referred to other services and support you to fulfill your plan, the ultimate goal of which is to secure independent accommodation for you. Your experienced Project Worker will give you the benefit of years of work in the sector, so that you will not

Laurel Lodge - Clare

Laurel Lodge Accommodation Centre is a 13-bed accommodation centre for men based in Ennis, Co Clare. During a typical year we would have approximately 70 admissions and our aim is to resettle these as soon as possible into independent accommodation.

Whilst initially very successful with our resettlement programme we are now struggling with the 'housing crisis' that dominates the news every night. There is a scarcity of rental accommodation in Ennis, which is impacting significantly upon our client group. Currently the market means that with so many people keen to rent, that the Landlords have the ability to be very selective about the people to whom they will lease. Employment references are now almost a standard request, which many of our services users cannot provide. The National Response to homelessness is now to focus on a Housing First model rather than having a reliance of emergency accommodation such as hostels.

The idea of housing first is that rather than putting an individual into a hostel, that they be given a home of their own, where they will be given on-going drop-in support at various levels depending on their individual need to ensure that they can manage and that they will be able to maintain their tenancies in the long-term.

This development will inevitably impact upon the type of services we provide and we must demonstrate a willingness to adapt. As a result at Laurel Lodge Accommodation Centre we are currently

taking a three-pronged approach in addition to the existing services we provide.

1. Developing our housing stock

We already have twelve units of Social Housing operating successfully in Ennis. However we are keen to develop more units, which we hope, will assist us in resettling individuals and families. We currently have put down deposits on another two properties. The effect of our Social Housing scheme has been overwhelmingly positive in that we haven't had any tenancy collapse or a single complaint.

2. Increasing our 'Supported' Accommodation

In recognition that a small number of our service users have long-term support needs we are currently building three units of 'supported accommodation' on-site at Laurel Lodge Accommodation Centre. These units will allow people to have their own home and live as independently as possible - however there will always be staff on-hand at all times in case support is required. We envisage that the tenants of these units will have higher needs than those in our Social Housing.

3. Movement towards Housing First

We are in conversation with Clare County Council on developing a small-scale 'housing first' scheme where we would support new tenants in Local Authority accommodation to settle and establish themselves within the community. Our team would call at agreed times and go through whatever issues might arise and take the new tenants through a skills development programme.

If you arrive between 5.00pm and 9.00pm, who would listen to your story and assess you for admittance. You will be provided with house rules, and offered a meal at the next mealtime. While you stay at the hostel you will receive

support to tease out the issues arising for you and your capacity/preference/needs in dealing with those issues. Your needs will be followed by your secondary needs – all the time bearing in mind that the aim of the hostel is to enable you to

prepare for each move planned. Your opinion and preferences would be sought and advice and information given. Other services e.g. adult guidance at ETB, or support for addiction at ARDU. Your Project Worker would assist you.

You will have to learn all the lessons about homelessness the hard way.

Policy Developments

A key policy development that has a direct impact on our services is The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008-2013: “The Programme for Government contains a commitment to ending long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough by implementing a housing-led approach. This approach recognises that long-term secure housing is the best outcome for people affected by homelessness. By moving away from expensive emergency or shelter type accommodation better use can be made of scarce resources.” This indicates a strategic intent to invest in service models that prioritise getting people straight into housing when they become homeless, then supporting them to stay in their homes with community based and outreach supports. Emergency accommodation would be reserved for people with more complex support needs, who find it harder to sustain housing and need additional. In recognition of the demands of this new policy context and the regulatory environment, we have recruited a Policy Development Officer who is working with our staff, funders and service-users to update the SVP Homeless Services policy manual through a nationwide consultation – a process which is very exciting and productive.

A further development in this national strategy which has direct implications for our services is the commitment to developing Quality Standards: “In order to ensure a consistent standard in the quality of services, it is intended to develop and apply a national quality standards framework for homeless services, which will include arrangements for monitoring compliance.” A draft set of these quality standards has been rolled out for testing in a number of services around the country in 2016 and SVP Homeless Services has been invited to participate in this testing in Bethany House in Longford. These standards mirror the format of the national standards framework, which HIQA use to monitor and improve standards in other social care settings. It’s a substantial development for all homeless services providers and we are thrilled to be involved in the testing period.

The task for us now is to continue to develop our services, staff and volunteers to provide safe and effective support to the individuals we work with, to embrace the principles of the housing-led approach to homelessness and adapt to find our place within that model.

What this means in practice

At Bethany House we have been invited to participate in the testing of the National Quality Standards Framework for Homeless Services. We are joining the testing in the North East & Midlands Region, under the authority of the lead local authority in our area – which is Westmeath. In practical terms, it means we are going through a voluntary process of measuring our service against a set of 27 standards under 8 themes (just like the themes HIQA use in nursing homes for example). It’s a big job and all hands are on deck – with our Project Workers, our Service Manager and the National Manager of Homeless Services all taking a portion of the reporting tool each and sharing the task as well as the learning. It’s really interesting to recognise the things we are strong on, but equally helpful to identify the things we need to focus on to improve. And it feels like we have a bit of a head-start, because soon enough these National Standards will be rolled out across the country. It’s a big change for the sector and we hope the experience and knowledge we gain will help SVP Homeless Services as a whole to prepare for them when they are rolled out everywhere else.

“It’s a big change for the sector and we hope the experience and knowledge we gain will help SVP to prepare for the roll-out”

Budget 2017 must prioritise investment in services over tax cuts

Audry Deane, Social Justice & Policy Officer

Ireland has a new Government. This new Partnership Government has promised to invest more in public services, prioritising public spending over tax reductions. Alongside many commentators such as the Irish Fiscal Council - the independent body which monitors Government finances - Ireland invests very low levels of resources into public services. If capital investment stays at such low levels, serious challenges across the public system will emerge. These challenges will be exacerbated due to our ageing population, the current and projected levels of economic growth, and the fact that in the austerity years serious rationing of public spending undermined many local and national services.

Our 11,000 members see the impact that these cuts have had on those most in need of quality services. The effects include:

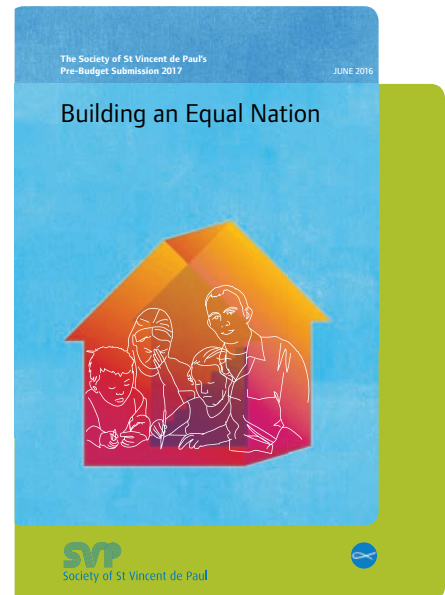
- the housing and homelessness crisis
- child poverty
- educational disadvantage
- living in cold homes and the related health and household budgeting problems, and
- the way in which living on low incomes affects individuals and families across Ireland.

Being priced out of rental housing and having poor or no access to adequate early years, childcare and after school supports blights too many lives and prevents many from reaching their potential.

Our Pre-Budget submission "Building an Equal Nation" calls for the long term needs of the country to be put ahead of party and constituency politics. We want those in leadership positions to focus on delivering the commitments made in both the new Programme for Government and in other existing national strategies. There is now a genuine opportunity for deeper more meaningful engagement on policy development in the new cross party approach. We look forward to more creative dialogue with Government to secure better outcomes for people and communities we assist. We also welcome the reform of the budgetary process which should result not only in increased transparency, inclusion and effectiveness but also in improved quality of debate and discussion on important budgetary decisions.

Inequalities of income and life opportunities are not inevitable and should not continue to be tolerated. Deeper ethical considerations must prevail in deciding the Government's priorities for Budget 2017 and beyond.

Our submission for 2017 asks Government to do the right thing and to make long term investment in services which will benefit future generations. Short term political cycles should not be the driving force behind budgetary decision making. Government spending must have the greater long term benefit of all our citizens at its core. Ireland needs mature, long term strategic invest-



ment, including sufficient capital investment; based on evidence, sound demographic, social and economic planning; and resulting in people being able to access quality services and supports, regardless of their socio-economic status.

This is the moment for Government to show its intent to act on objective analysis of what structural challenges must be reformed. A clear message must be sent to domestic stakeholders, Irish civil society and our European partners, that Ireland is prepared to make the right investment choices for the right reasons - to build an equal nation.

SVP's 2017 Pre Budget Submission asks Government to:

Income adequacy

Ensure that all families and households in Ireland have an income which allows them to meet their needs through adequate social welfare payments, tackling the problems of low pay in work and addressing the cost and availability of services.

Housing

Improve security of tenure and quality standards for private rented sector tenants, increase Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment to realistic levels and commit to meeting the majority of social housing needs through the build and acquisition of social housing units by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

Early years, childcare and after school care

Deliver the promised single subsidised childcare scheme from 2017, replacing current targeted schemes, increase investment in early years and strengthen quality to secure better outcomes for children.

Affordable energy

Prioritise investment in affordable energy initiatives to ensure that everyone can afford to adequately heat and power their home.

Read full submission: www.svp.ie/PBS2017



Rural Homelessness

"It's easy to drop into homelessness" That's how John (not his real name) summed up his situation. In his case it was a combination of things. He was born and lived in a midland town for the most of 40 years until all went wrong. He lost his business, his house and his marriage as well. Somehow the drinking increased and the self-esteem, exacerbated by bouts of depression, plummeted. Like many people from rural areas who become homeless, he managed to get shelter in various friends' houses, until he ran out of excuses. No one sleeps rough in midland towns. After a year or so, he is in Dublin and although had some money for a while, found himself on the street. He gets a bed most nights, and when he doesn't he searches for whatever shelter the streets of Dublin can provide. He is homeless.

He will be counted as one of the statistics of between three and four thousand homeless in Dublin. There is no statistics measuring homeless numbers outside of the city, but even if there was he would not be counted as rural homeless. Unfortunately there is no mechanism for estimating precise numbers of homeless outside of Dublin. The Simon Report on rural homelessness 'Left Out in the Cold' 2014 describes rural homelessness as a hidden problem. Over the years Irish Rural Link have demonstrated that rural homelessness is manifested in the cities, where anonymity is easier.

John is of course the extreme case. Much of the homelessness associated in rural areas is a tapestry of different life stories. The newly married couple who can't afford to build or rent a house and move in with parents or relatives. The older person, whose house is beyond repair and needs somewhere to stay, young people who need to move out of their own home because of overcrowding, women and children who need to leave abusive situations. Linked to homelessness is the situation of poverty caused by multi factors. The economic ones are obvious, such as unemployment, over borrowed and so on. The non-economic factors include gambling, drug addiction, poor education and often because of difficulties in childhood, the coping skills necessary to survive in what is a competitive society are weak or nonexistent. Thankfully many people overcome these disadvantages; however a significant minority do not and need systematic help. In very recent times homelessness is emerging in terms of young people working in Dublin and because of spiralling rents can no longer pay the rent. Wages especially for employment entry levels are not in line with accommodation costs and consequently are forcing people to return home. At home the employment levels are still, worryingly behind the national average and in many cases the jobs are of minimum pay and will not support families.

For all of these situations, local authorities may be able to help, but only if they have the necessary accommodation. In fairness they have facilitated the building of social housing units. But social housing, not directly sponsored by the local authority in rural Ire-

land is a relatively scarce event and has a long way to go. Unfortunately as in all new housing much of this building has been in the past and coupled with the lack of normal house building, there is now a huge scarcity of accommodation.

Of course the problem of homelessness is not solved by accommodation only. It requires a range of support services tailored to assist people who are affected. In many cases these services are available in a random way, often from a range of agencies and voluntary groups or not at all. There seems to be no overall system which coordinates the management and ultimately the bringing of people out of homelessness. The lack of such an approach contributes to the prolongation of the problem for individuals and families. In a situation where people are ashamed of their plight, a shame that is magnified in rural areas, it would be of huge help if families could make contact with a single agency who would set in motion the necessary mechanisms to resolve the problem. Of course the chronic shortage of accommodation will not be solved quickly. Yet the fact is, according to the Housing Agency, 230,000 vacant houses in rural areas. Clearly bringing them into the equation may involve considerable effort, yet such effort must be expended if the problem is to be resolved. It is not as if the problem is static. All indications suggest that in rural areas the problem will grow. Stricter regulations surrounding lending, the lack of any sign that house building will recommence and that includes social housing, means that homelessness will grow rather than decline. It is therefore welcome that the new Minister Mr Simon Coveney has placed the solving of homelessness as one of his key priorities. As a former Minister for Agriculture, he will be acutely aware that the invisibility of homelessness in rural areas does not mean it is not there.

Séamus Boland
Irish Rural Link
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Irish Rural Link
Nasc Tuaithe na hÉireann

Personal Micro Credit

Brendan Whelan, Social Finance Foundation

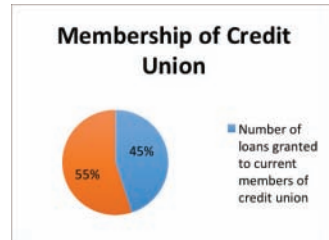
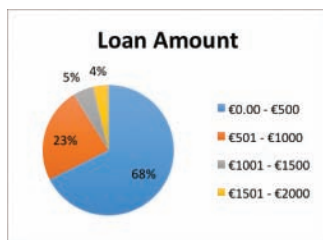
Background

Late last year a Personal Micro Credit (PMC) pilot initiative was launched in 30 credit unions across the country. Branded the 'It Makes Sense Loan', its aim was to prove that credit unions could offer a loan product that matched the convenience and ease of moneylenders' offers and addressed the exorbitant rates charged by them.

The pilot has been an undoubted success. Thanks to a huge commitment from stakeholders we are now looking forward to a national rollout of this initiative. The significance of the initiative is reflected in it being included in the Programme for Government "Specifically we support...the rollout and extension of the Personal Microcredit Scheme, which is providing simple microloans to members and helping to combat the use of moneylenders."

Pilot Observations

The majority of loans were written before Christmas and most borrowers learnt about the initiative via word of mouth and social media. In keeping with it being a pilot, marketing and promotional activities were limited to participating credit unions and their local networks. Indeed, some local SVP Conferences played an important role in spreading the word. So successful was the word of mouth marketing that, in a number of cases, credit unions reached their (fifty) loan threshold within a matter of weeks. While 45% of loans were written to current credit union members, these were probably previously dormant.



External Evaluation

In April 2016 Amárach Research conducted an independent evaluation of the pilot. The evaluation comprised three groups:

- Project stakeholders. The consistent message from the group was that the PMC loan offers the opportunity to avail of normal credit and financial services to a cohort of people who are otherwise excluded from mainstream credit.
- Seventeen of the thirty pilot credit unions sites completed a questionnaire. The vast majority of those who engaged in this

pilot did so from a social good viewpoint. Each demonstrated commitment to the principles and purpose behind the initiative. Moreover, they viewed the initiative as having a very positive impact.

- One hundred and thirty eight telephone interviews and three focus groups were completed with borrowers. Of those, 52% had previously used moneylenders. More than 90% of borrowers rated the overall credit union service as good or very good and would like to borrow from a credit union again. The scheme received an "off the scale" Net Promoter Score of 82% (this represents the propensity to recommend to family and friends). 47% stated that the loan scheme has had an impact on how they manage money. Most importantly and most impressively, all focus group participants scored their experience as a 9 out of 10 (or greater) in terms of the positive impact on their lives.

Next Steps

The project is now planning to extend the geographic reach of the current offering on a national basis as per the Programme for Government. In addition, we are delighted to report that the rollout offering will incorporate not just social welfare recipients where repayment is via the household budget scheme, but will also include all other social welfare recipients, once repayment is either by direct debit or standing order. This marks a significant step forward in terms of widening the target audience.

Therefore the essence of the 'It Makes Sense' offering is now:

- Fast track membership (for non-members)
- No savings needed
- Default history does not necessarily rule individuals out
- Social Welfare Recipients with repayment via An Post's Household Budget Scheme or via Direct Debit / Standing Order

The project is actively recruiting credit unions over the summer months with a view to a national launch in the autumn. If you would like to find out more please contact John Mark McCafferty in SVP johnmark.mccafferty@svp.ie or Lorraine Corcoran from the project (lorraine.corcoran@afanite.com). The role of referral agents such as SVP is vital to the success and sustainability of the initiative. We would ask for your help in promoting and working with your local credit union to ensure those who qualify are encouraged to talk to their credit union.

Finally, a further piece of work is taking place to examine if and how PMC can be extended to low-income individuals and families. The aspiration is to have solutions for this audience developed in tandem with the roll-out of PMC nationally. However, until the work is completed and findings known, it is not possible to give a commitment to this alignment.

User-friendly Best Practice and Guidance Notes Available to Support Members in Home Visitation

Background

The Membership Support Team in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's National Office have produced short, user-friendly national Best Practice and Guidance Notes with the aim of supporting Conferences with their day-to-day work in home visitation.

The Notes are available on SVP's CRM Portal

The Guidance Notes touch on common issues for SVP Conferences and suggest ways of approaching these issues. Best Practice Notes represent SVP policy on visitation.

The Notes were launched at the National Management Council meeting on April 2nd 2016.

SVP Conference experience is at the heart of these Notes. They written in conjunction with the SVP National Justice and Visitation Committee, which includes Social Justice and Visitation Representatives from all SVP regions, and other experienced Members.

Contents

Each Best Practice and Guidance Note is only 1- or 2-pages in length, providing both relevant information and advice for Members on the following topics:

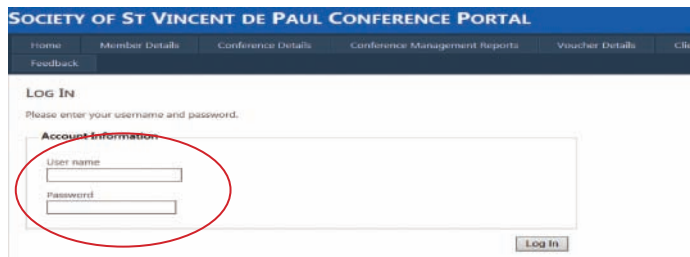
- Best Practice in Visitation Practice (Principles of quality visitation and guidance; Concluding contact with an individual or family)
- Best Practice in Conference Governance (Practical Guide to Data Protection)
- Guidance Notes for the Republic of Ireland on Issues Presenting in Visitation (includes Personal Debt and the Insolvency Service of Ireland; 'It Makes Sense' Credit Union Loan Scheme; Food Vouchers and Food Banks; Energy Utility Debt, Electricity Prepayment Metering; SVP approach to Energy Arrears and Disconnections; Assistance to Homeless Families; Social Protection; Public, Private and Hospital Transport).

The Notes will continue to be updated regularly in response to developments within SVP. Also, information from sources external to SVP, for example on Social Welfare, will change on a regular basis. Our advice is to use the most up-to-date versions of the Notes on the SVP Portal.

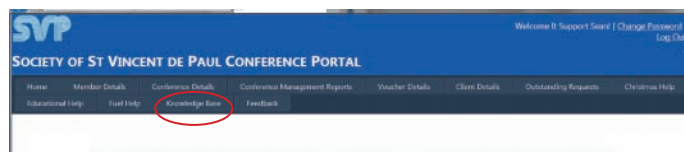
Finding the Notes

The Notes are available on SVP's CRM Portal: The most up-to-date versions will be available on line through the Knowledge Base. The following are the instructions for finding the Notes.

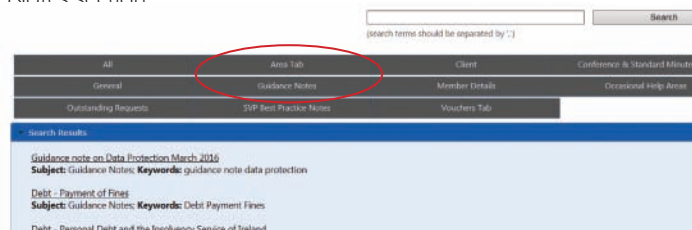
1: Log-in to the CRM Portal (username / passwords from regional office)



2 & 3: Click on 'Knowledge Base' tab



4 & 5: Once in the Knowledge Base Tab you can click on the relevant section. There is a Guidance Notes or SVP Best Practice Notes section



The Guidance Notes and Best Practice Notes sections give a summary of the documents and the links to the Notes.

For further information and support with Visitation Contact your Regional Membership Support Officer. Their contact details are available from your Regional Office.

SVP's National Membership Support Team, National Office, is available at 01-8386990 or by email, info@svp.ie

National Agresso Financial System Roll Out

Agresso is being introduced to the Society in order to help the Society comply with the Charities Act. The software 'lives' in a secure place in the 'cloud' and has effectively computerised the manual books that Conference Treasurers have been using for many years.

Agresso is actively being rolled out in 5 regions in 2016. Already this year 80 more Conference Treasurers have joined the growing online Agresso user community bringing the total as of May 2016 to 640 Live Conferences, and the rollout in the East Region has been completed.

In order to help as many Conferences as possible 'Go Live' in 2016 the Rollout Administrators will be filling their diaries with training and support between now and December. The summer months are traditionally a time to recharge the batteries. Our Rollout Administrators however remain on hand to assist Conference Treasurers who want to take advantage of the 'quiet time' to learn Agresso and enter their 2016 accounts into the new system. If you are in one of the active regions and want to move onto the system please make contact with one of the Rollout Administrators below.

Planning is underway for the Autumn. The Consolidation Team are rolling out Treasurers Training from September onwards. This is lecture style training covering everything a Treasurer would want to know about the role and responsibilities of a Conference Treasurer within SVP. The content provides useful ground work for those who are about to 'Go Live' with Agresso; is a useful refresher in advance of the Financial Year end for manual and Agresso users alike and finally it a useful forum for Treasurers to share common experiences and resolutions. Treasurers who attended The Treasurers Training were asked what they found most beneficial.

They said -

"Clarification of Financial Policies. Good Refresher to focus the mind"

"Explained very comprehensively - role and responsibility of Treasurer"

"Very appropriate for me as a new treasurer, found it beneficial, very interesting on role & responsibilities"

"Meeting other treasurers"

The Treasurer training is being organised in conjunction with Regional offices. Even at this early stage, expressions of interest are welcome.



Contact Details for Active Regions

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New Society of St Vincent de Paul International President elected

Renato Lima De Oliveira, a 45 year old from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil was elected in early June, as the new International President of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Renato succeeds Michael Theo.

A journalist and civil servant by profession, he currently works at the National Telecommunications Agency, Anatel in Brazil.

Renato joined the Society in 1986 as a member of the Santo Tomás de Aquino Conference, Campinas, São Paulo. He has held various posts within the Society, such as Coordinator of Youth Commission for two Councils, editor of *Convincente* magazine, Coordinator of the Antônio Frederico Ozanam Supported Learning Centre for the area covered by Divino Espírito Santo Central Council as well as many other posts within in the Society.

In 2001 Renato was Consultant for Communications to CGI for a year.

Since 2008 he has been the Territorial Vice-President (South America) and during the last 3 years has represented the International General Council for dealings with the Vincentian Family. Journalist by profession, he is also the author of a number of publications, including the "Vincentian Chronicles".

He has been the author of many Vincentian books (in Portuguese) including the Vincentian Chronicles and "The Vincentians



And The Brazilian Parliament" (in Portuguese). He was Co-author of "Government Relations on Politics" and lecturer on SSVF training course, and organiser of Vincentian events.

We wish Renato every success in his new role and know that he will bring a lot to the Society.

Vincentians on Pilgrimage *Knock Shrine* *Saturday, 10th September, 2016*

PROGRAMME

from 10.00 a.m. onwards – Sacrament of Reconciliation

12.00: Presentation on AIC (formerly Ladies of Charity)

Reflecting on the vision of St Vincent de Paul
(St. John's Rest Centre)

2.00: Stations of the Cross

2.15: Pilgrim walk with Our Lady (Rosary)

3.00: Eucharistic celebration
Sacrament of the Sick

YOUNG ADULT SPACE

11.30: Walk to the Oak Tree

12.00: The Hub – Hear – Understand – Believe
(This is an opportunity for young adults to see the relevance of the apparition in today's world)

Prayer Guidance takes place from 12.00 and throughout the day there will be Eucharistic Adoration in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel and a reconciliation service in the Reconciliation Chapel.

Contacts:

Fr. John Gallagher, CM: 086-8243992 • Sr. Angela Burke, DC: angela@vhp.ie • SVP – Enda Gleeson: 01-8299004; enda@svp.ie
Sarah Dooley: 01-8299024; sarah.dooley@svp.ie • Columba Faulkner: columbaseven@hotmail.com



Young SVP – A Different Perspective

Becca Gallagher - SVP National Youth Development Coordinator

On 6th April this year the Irish Times ran an article highlighting some of the work a small number of Young SVP members have undertaken throughout their involvement with our Young SVP youth development programme (<http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/17-under-17-impressing-in-their-communities-1.2598882>). There were seventeen “Young SVP Ambassadors” under 17 years of age showcased in this article and I was very proud to see their stories and achievements highlighted publicly in such a positive way.

This group is indeed Ambassadors of our programme, but they are not alone in the incredible work that young people are involved in within SVP. They are, in fact a miniscule snapshot of what is happening around the country. This (academic) year a total of 4,327 second level, and their teachers, Young SVP members are given the opportunity to explore issues that exist locally in their school/community, regionally, nationally or indeed globally. They and upwards of 2000 third level students, were actively and

directly involved in Young SVP activities, projects and groups. Our team of youth development officers, currently based in 6 regions, engaged with students and teachers in almost 200 secondary schools and 17 college campus' across Ireland.

With support from the SVP team are encouraged, and supported, in developing their own ideas in terms of the activities, campaigns, projects and programmes they come up with as a response to the issue(s) they wish to address as of particular significance to themselves and their own community.

Young SVP group members develop their projects and activities within four main categories; the first is befriending projects where they reach out to those they feel may be isolated/excluded. They also deliver a large number of education projects where they work with others to improve educational opportunities for themselves and others within their environments. The third type is campaigning/awareness raising projects, where students' research

and learn about an issues of social justice and then run campaigns to help raise awareness of these within their school/wider communities. Over the past year a wide range of campaigns have been run which have included mental health awareness, homelessness, child poverty and many more. Often with these projects there is a follow on action in terms of trying to impact change. The final project type is that of direct aid where the young people spend time researching what they would like to support and then raise money and donate to their particular cause within SVP. Every year we see some incredible, innovative and original activities going on all over the country.

Also this year Electric Ireland, who has supported our programme over the past three years, developed a video and campaign entitled "When Young SVP looks at a community they see things differently" to highlight the incredible work and vision of our young people. You can view this video online at www.whatdoyousee.ie. Young SVP really does offer a different perspective.

The work of all 6,327 young people involved in the Young SVP Programme this year has been truly amazing. The impact of

their work, projects and involvement is far reaching. There is the support to those who feel the impact of their activities; there is the personal and skill development for the students themselves; there are the inherent benefits to SVP as an organisation; and finally there is the greater awareness and social consciousness developed within this cohort of young people that will impact the future of our society.

Young people, quite generally, have an innate interest in fairness and equality for all in our society and want to see the world in which they live changing for the better. Combine this with incredible enthusiasm; energy and passion ...it is of little surprise that they develop such an array of fascinating and worthwhile projects. We are very proud to have the opportunity to work with and assist these young people as they explore what is important to them and in supporting them to take action in positive and proactive ways.

For more information about getting involved in the Young SVP programme please contact our Youth Development Team by email @ youth@svp.ie



Let Your Light Shine

Attracta McNeice, North East Midlands
Region Youth Development Worker

“And as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.” (Marianne Williamson)

On the 27th of April 2016, the Youth For Justice Exhibition took place in the Nuremore Hotel in Carrickmacross, which showcased action projects undertaken by the students on behalf of SVP from secondary schools all over the North East Midlands region. The key note speakers for this year's exhibition were three girls from Eureka Secondary School, Kells. After completing the Youth For Justice programme in TY, they set up a Youth Conference in their school, and ran it for fifth and sixth year, recruiting new members along the way.

The following is excerpts from their speech.

Danielle – Conference President

“Firstly we'd like to say how glad we are to be here. We are one of only a handful of Youth Conferences that meet in our own time as a senior Conference would.

Throughout TY we held fundraising events and raised awareness about SVP throughout the school. We established links with the senior Conference in Kells and talk with them regularly and donate the money we raise to help people in our community. At the end of transition year some of us decided to keep the Conference going as we felt a huge sense of achievement and pride. We now have 3 senior members and 10 junior members and hopefully some of our current TYs will join us now. We take for granted the things we have every day and all of a sudden it could be us struggling and in need of help. It costs nothing to be kind and to help others in need but to them these gifts of kindness are priceless.”

Megan – Conference Secretary

“We run numerous activities on behalf of the St. Vincent de Paul. I joined the SVP Conference in TY but was unsure whether to keep it on in 5th year as I thought it would be too difficult to balance it with the heavy workload and so I didn't rejoin. However, I'm delighted I changed my mind after Christmas when I saw what the girls had done for the Kells Conference by making Christmas hampers and donating money they had raised. This really impressed me; it highlighted the importance of our school Conference to the community and to me.

In the SVP Conference we organised a whole range of activities to fundraise;

Every Christmas we organise the First year classes to make Christmas hampers for the Kells Conference, who distribute them out to those in need in the community. We held balls, a “guess the weight” and “how many sweets in a jar” competitions, Christmas



jumper days, music quizzes as well as simple fundraisers like bake sales, and pancakes on pancake Tuesday.

We also do practical things like clothes collection in the school. Everything we've done has been relatively simple and quite easy to do.

We hope that we have motivated some of you here today to continue on with SVP next year and to create your own Conference. Lastly, we'd like to thank Attracta for giving us this wonderful opportunity and for all her help over the years and our teacher Mr. Mallen, who's been incredibly helpful. Finally, we'd like to thank you all here today for your time and attention.”

Michelle – Conference Treasurer

“I am going to speak about our transition from TY into fifth year with the SVP. The Youth for Justice project is a very diverse project for TYs and got my class thinking about how we could help the SVP. It did not seem like hard work and our class bonded from the experience.

When we returned to school in 5th year a few of us decided that we would continue. Members came and went during the first few months. Luckily for us we were heavily supported by the school and had access to a classroom once a week. Our principal never refused any of our ideas. It was a piece of TY that we could keep with us for ever.

Our meetings are similar to any SVP Conference; our president reads the minutes, we discuss the agenda, the secretary takes notes and our teacher Mr. Mallen guides us. Attracta McNeice often joins us also. Being a part of the Eureka SVP has been one of my Eureka highlights. I began to volunteer at the local SVP shop and they gave us great ideas such as the clothes drive we held. I believe it is always nice to give something back. Thank you.”

Attracta McNeice, Youth Development Worker, would like to thank the three girls for speaking at the exhibition and being an inspiration to us all.

“Re-Connect” Event for the Older Members of the Community in Mid-Kilkenny.

Ger O'Neill, Area President Mid-Kilkenny, Sout-East Region.



“Isolation is a particular issue we come across in SVP in this area”
Ger O'Neill, Area President, Mid-Kilkenny, South-East Region.

Having discussed the above concern with Conferences it was felt that there was a very real need to provide a day for the elderly in our communities. The aim was to provide a practical day which would allow the older people of our community to reconnect, to update, to take stock and to be supported with issues which were of concern to them.

In September 2015 we put together the “re-connect” committee. We agreed to cover six key areas on the day, entitlements, security, communication, social aspects, travel and health.

We agreed it was not feasible to have 100 older people at an event without providing a proper meal. The Kilmaganny Card Group partly sponsored lunch from their Easter draw; this was supplemented with Area Funds. Westcourt, home of Christian Brothers founder Ignatious Rice kindly gave us the use of their incredible facility for the day, we also had Malachy on call who was so helpful. Thank you Brother Damien.

The day started with a beautiful Mass at 11am, celebrated by Fr. Dalton and supported by The Church Choir.

We relocated from the church to the auditorium where the topic of security was addressed with the Crime Prevention Officer; Peter. John Cuddihy, Vice-President Mid-Kilkenny & Tullaroan CP was present to provide further practical advice on the many items that were spoken about at the presentation.

We broke for Lunch and got to chat with everybody and relaxed outside for a while, as the weather was so good.

We reconvened after lunch with an excellent presentation from Sarah Drea, Citizens Information, Kilkenny concentrating on entitlements and health followed by a question and answers session,

which proved to be very informative. Nicky Brennan, chairman of Kilkenny Age Friendly Alliance took us through the work of their organisation and their plans for the future.

Finally we relocated to another room where we had 4 information stands. Computer experts from DID Electrical demonstrated how to use I-Pads, PC, send E-mails etc while the phone company Carphone Warehouse showed and emphasised best practice in the use of mobile phones and offered advised on how to deal with “cold-callers”. Ring a link not alone gave a very informative talk on their service but also registered people on the day so they are now ready to “go”. SVP had a stand to tell people about the Society and the vision and the mission of the organisation. Thanks to Christina, MSO for the excellent stands! Also in attendance were The Kilkenny Lions Club and Age Friendly.

At the end of the day a comment book was used to capture valuable feedback.

My sincere thanks to the “re-conect” committee who worked long and hard for 9 months. Our speakers', who were practical, grounded and left corporate commentary at home. Br. Damien, Westcourt for the venue, please see photo of the amazing church where mass was celebrated. Fr. Dalton, the Kilmaganny Card Group and Christina for her patience while we gave most of our time to “re-connect”. A special word of thanks to Margaret and all her team in the Callan Conference for all the support.

Our inspiration before the event was to make this an annual event, perhaps using the census to check in on all our older people and create a day that would be very beneficial and so well deserved. Our inspiration on the day was the people who attended, all one hundred of them....

The comment book had one prevailing and overriding theme: Please do this annually... (the older members of our communities need and deserve it)

Wexford volunteers thanked for dedication



Thirty volunteers with the Wexford branch of St Vincent de Paul were honoured for their dedication to the cause at a ceremony in Saint Michael's Centre. Each of them was awarded with a medal and certificate to thank them for providing ten years or more of loyal service to the charity. Among them was Sean Kinsella who having joined as a volunteer in 1954 is the longest serving member in Wexford.

"The purpose of the ceremony was to honour the volunteers for their service and show our appreciation for what they have done", said Ben Doyle, Area President. "The dedication, care and compassion that they show is just fantastic".

Regional SVP Co-ordinator David O Neill and Regional SVP Resident Margaret Conway presented the awards to the volunteers on the night. Fr Aodhán Marken also joined them and marked the occasion with mass.

New SVP Shop for Tramore

The Conference of St Luke, Tramore, Co Waterford opened a new shop on the 27th April 2016 to serve the community of Tramore. The shop was blessed by the Monsignor Nicholas O Mahoney. Tributes were paid by Michael Power to all SVP members who contributed in fit out and set up and both Sue White Manager and Noel Cassidy Regional Retail Service Manager.



Sean O Hare Shop fitter, Tony Fitzgerald SVP Waterford, Jim Hally SVP Tramore, Sue White Manager, Christina Morrissey SVP Waterford, Noel Cassidy Regional Retail Manager, Michael Power Conference President Tramore.

Scouts helping out

The boys and girls of the 87th Cork St. Oliver's Scout Group earned a personal achievement badge for their community concern when they had a food collection for the St. Fiacre's Conference of St. Vincent De Paul recently. The cubs and beavers sections aged from 6 years old to 11 years old brought food from home to their meeting.

Their awareness and enthusiasm to help those less fortunate stemmed from a presentation given by Anne McKernan of St. Vincent De Paul the previous week on the work of the Society in Cork.

Well done to the young boys and girls of St Oliver's Scout Group.



One member making a real difference in the North East & Midlands Region!

Every day SVP is approached by clients with a plethora of different issues, ranging from simple requests to very complex problems. In more recent years, the issues we face can be more complicated and sometimes beyond the capacity of the Society, not only in financial terms but also in terms of knowledge and resources.

Philip Smith, a member in the Drogheda Area for the past six years has, through his legal studies and experience with SVP, been able to provide a service to clients which is proving to be invaluable.

During the recession when people incurred large debts and often faced losing their homes, Philip began looking more closely at such cases. He analysed the issues and began, with the client's permission, liaising with the various financial institutions, often negotiating payment structures agreeable to both parties. There are many people in Drogheda and its environs and across

the North East & Midlands Region who have Philip to thank as his skills have helped them to keep their homes by liaising on their behalf with banks and mortgage lenders.

To date Philip has helped over 300 families and continues to provide this much needed service. Conferences across the North East & Midlands Region can contact Philip through the Regional Office and he will work with the client and Conference to find the best outcome and plan forward to ensure that the situation improves over time.

*Philip Smith
LLB, MA, MLsc, P.I.P, BL cand.*



Navan SVP channels food from local store to those seeking our assistance

An exciting new initiative in Navan involves a project whereby surplus food from local retail outlets is distributed by SVP members to families in the town.

For the past few weeks the Society of St.Vincent de Paul has been participating in the project which has seen a large quantity of surplus food from the local Aldi store being brought weekly by SVP volunteers to the homes of people.

The nationwide internet-based FoodCloud initiative connects businesses that have leftover edible fare to charities for the benefit of the less well off. The provisions involve, often perishable items like meat and dairy produce, which would otherwise go to waste. However, all produce is well within its sell by date when collected by SVP members.

Navan SVP Area President, Stephen Flattery says that the scheme is a useful and appropriate way of getting good food that would otherwise be disposed of to a lot of individuals and families who are eager to avail of this aid.

"The amount of food we are given varies from week to week, depending on what the store has available, but there is always an urgent demand for it," he added. In addition, he feels that from the important environmental aspect, the scheme eliminates the practice of waste whilst helping people in local communities.

Using the FoodCloud app or through its website, participating businesses upload details of their surplus food and the time period in which it can be collected. This automatically sends a text message to the most appropriate charities in their community. The first charity to accept the offer collects it directly from the retail store.

Ozanam Holiday Centre - Failte Ireland Quality Assured

We are delighted to announce that the Ozanam Holiday Centre, Mornington, Co. Meath is now Quality Assured under the Failte Ireland Welcome Standard. The standards identified the strengths of our centre, without taking away any of our character and style.

The Ozanam Holiday Centre is going from strength to strength and with great effort and hard work from the combined team of St. Josephs Conference members and staff the newly decorated Day room, Dining room and entrance hall is now complete including a new ladies toilet block and refurbished wheelchair accessible toilet.

The Centre has 31 twin rooms, all en-suite. The building is on ground level making it fully accessible for those with mobility problems. During the Summer months weekly full board is offered to the over 50's, which includes in-house entertainment provided by five and six piece bands with nightly dancing and singing. The Centre has a relaxing sun room with a library and a TV lounge with widescreen TV and DVD player; an Oratory for guest use and where Mass is celebrated weekly. The bar in our sunny dayroom where our nightly entertainment takes place is open at lunchtime and from 8.30pm to 11.30pm each evening.

Our Summer Season has commenced and we have availability for individuals or groups to come and enjoy our 6 nights, full board accommodation in twin en-suite rooms with live music and dancing.

We welcome you as a friend, this holiday is for you to enjoy in your own way, however we know you will leave here with new friends feeling refreshed.

For further information please contact 0419827808 or email ozanamhome@eircom.net

YOUNG HEARTS BEAT STRONGER THAN EVER



Our intergenerational programme Young Hearts involves schools, transition year students working together with older adults within a community setting. Transition year students from Galway Community College and Older Adults from Croí na Gaillimhe meet weekly throughout the school year to engage in a shared learning experience. Along the way they make new friends, learn a lot about themselves and others and develop new interests and awareness. Through learning together, they share experiences and build up trust and understanding. This exhibition of paintings was made collaboratively by Transition year students from Galway Community College and adults in the intergenerational programme 'Young Hearts'. Now in its sixth year, the intergenerational project is run jointly between Galway Community College and Croí na Gaillimhe Resource centre in Mill St.

Over the years they have compiled two booklets of their own art and creative writing, staged a historical play they wrote themselves, and another which was generated by guided discussion of social issues. They have made a variety of artwork, enjoyed visits to museums, library and historic buildings, and enjoyed drumming, singing, and dancing classes and won the 2016 GRETB award for inclusion.

To help raise much needed funds for the Croí na Gaillimhe Centre the group has braved December cold and rain to sing on the streets of Galway and supported a craft fair with handmade decorations cards, cakes and much more all.



This year the group held an Art Exhibition 'IF YOU CAN WRITE, YOU CAN PAINT'

The title of the exhibition is a quote from words of encouragement from one participant to another and evolved from a series of workshops in January 2016, where the participants explored art appreciation. The exhibition was officially opened by John Langan, Chairperson of the BA in Contemporary Art at the Centre of Creative Arts and Media (CCaM) GMIT.

Once they began enthusiastically mixing paint it became obvious that we needed to find a venue to exhibit their work. Croí na Gaillimhe run homework programmes in the Eglington Hostel in Salthill, (a Direct Provision Centre), where there was an ideal space to display work. Keeping in mind that this large room is used by over 70 children of school going age each day and preschool children, as well as holding meetings for residents, the brief suggested that the work needed to be meaningful, uplifting and colourful.

Working together in small groups, the participants made small, rough sketches of their ideas before committing to the final compositions. Some groups were inspired by the work of artists, some by photographs and others worked from their imaginations. They taught one another and drew on every bit of experience they had. The kindness, sharing and fun was inspiring, and many mornings the aspiring artists were to be found working away long before the sessions officially began.

The results of their hard work are a series of a very high quality images and each participant should rightly be proud of their contribution to this unique and exciting exhibition.



For more information contact: Loretta Needham "Croí na Gaillimhe Resource Centre", 1, Mill St. Galway. Tel: 091 895203

Croí na Gaillimhe Lunch and Social Club – always ‘burning bright’

Croí Na Gaillimhe lunch and social club has been in operation since 2009 and was one of the first initiatives of this resource centre. The club meets each Wednesday 1-4pm and is a social way to support older people, helping them to remain living independently, particularly those who find themselves socially isolated and vulnerable. Hot nutritious meals catering for all dietary needs are served from 1-2pm and following this a variety of activities from bingo to floor games and art projects are on offer. We partake in the various festivals throughout the year that honour ageing e.g. Bealtaine, Positive Ageing Week, and Social Inclusion week. We also have guest speakers on health issues such as falls prevention and foot health, deaf-hear on hearing impairments, relaxation workshops either chair based yoga or chair based exercise, safety talks from community Gardaí and road safety awareness talks from the road safety authority. We involve our members as to the running of our club and regularly check in with them to ensure we are meeting their needs and interests.

Membership is open to anyone in Galway City and County and carers are welcome to support members who are less able or confident. The club is very welcoming and a special place to be where great friendships have been made.

Some comments from members and their families about the club

“I eagerly look forward to the Wednesday lunch and social club, everyone makes me welcome”

“Thanks to the help you gave Mary in the last year as you know she is not very talkative but going to the social club every week has given her a new lease of life. Turned her life around and it’s all due to you all. Big thank you”

We actively take part in many creative projects throughout the year and this year for Bealtaine we were part of the Burning Bright project

‘Art knows no age. The body may grow old, but the imagination still burns bright.’

Jane Alexander, Former Chair of the National Endowment of the Arts, USA

Burning Bright is a partnership project between Galway Arts Centre, Galway City Council, Galway County Council and Galway University Hospitals Arts Trust. This is the second year that Croí na Gaillimhe lunch and social club have been part of this arts initiative. Facilitated by Artist Fiona Hession the workshops were run over 8 weeks and introduce participants to a wide selection of art materials and techniques and encouraged them to celebrate and engage in their own creativity.

Our project this year was a fusion of two years’ work based on the 2015/2016 Bealtaine themes, which were ‘What land and

country is this?’ and Iconic Citizens’ respectively. The first piece we created was wallpaper based on the theme of home. The group choose items/visuals that they associated with home such as clocks/glasses/cutlery/cups/flowers from their garden and we created plastic stencils of them and printed the wallpaper using sponges/paint and all the stencils created. Drawing lines to create geometric shapes behind the completed prints the group painted the background shapes in various colours and collage for some of these shapes. On completion the wallpaper was painted with a tinted varnish to mute the bright colours somewhat to give an aged look to a 1950/1960’s inspired Grayson Perry- esque wallpaper.



The second piece was done this year and based on the festivals theme of iconic citizens and as the group are pretty iconic we decided to do portraiture. Taking photos of the group these were printed out in black and white and then used as templates to trace the lines of the faces onto a fine art paper creating a somewhat illustrated image of the person. The group then used the printed images as a guide to paint the illustrations in tones of white grey

and black. Fiona, the facilitating artist had taken photos of all the stages of the work and imported them all into Photoshop where she used the work created by the group to layer the images backwards leaving the outlined illustration on top of the painted and photographed image. Burning Bright culminates in an annual exhibition which opens every May, as part of the national Bealtaine Festival coordinated by Age & Opportunity. We were very proud of the project and following the launch we celebrated its completion at the annual Burning Bright Tea Dance in the Nun’s Island Theatre.



Grayson Perry- esque wallpaper (2015 theme) and portraiture (2016 theme) Fusion of 2 years work

Dublin North County, Annual Secondary School Get Together

Reported By Mary Ita Niall-Dublin North County Area Council



Reported By Mary Ita Niall-Dublin North County Area Council
Dublin North County, East Region, Secondary Schools Annual Get Together took place on the 10th of March 2016. The event was organised by Dublin North County Area Council and was kindly hosted by Lusk Community College. Six other schools attended on the day- Loreto Secondary School Balbriggan, Ardgillan Community College, St Joseph's Secondary School Rush, Balbriggan Community College and Colaiste Choilm CBS Swords.

The Get Together was an opportunity to highlight and reflect on the positive work young people do, as well as, enabling students share experiences and compare the impact of their activities and projects. The theme adopted for the meeting was Young SVP – A Different Perspective.

The meeting opened with the reflection "We cannot do everything" narrated by a student from Lusk Community College. Regional President Liam Casey addressed the guests thanking teachers and students for their committed contribution to the work of the Society. Liam introduced Clare Mander newly appointed East Regional Youth Development Officer. A DVD 'Celebrating 170 years of Charity and Justice' was shown followed by a presentation on social justice.

The main part of the afternoon was facilitated group work and feedback. Students discussed topics on poverty and exclusion, justice and inequality, power and society and social justice. The feedback was clear, characterising the Vincentian ways of working and representing the standards which members aspire to. Young people have the vision of Frederic Ozanam.



They said:

- A voice is powerful.
- Without committed volunteers, charities will not succeed.
- Everybody deserves to be treated equally no matter where they come from and what they do.
- Positive change needs new ideas and positive problem solving.
- Love, help, listening, respect, work towards improvement and show kindness to everybody.

On the day, schools gave presentations on the activities they are involved in. Students from St Joseph's Secondary School Rush presented "Bumper Hampers 2015". The school raised 10,500 by holding bag packing weekends from September to November and 279 large hampers were made up and presented to St Maur's Conference, Rush for distribution. A video presentation showed students and teachers hard at work covering boxes, sorting food and having great fun. The work was practical, like almost all the work carried out by the Society. It is important to recognise and thank these young people volunteering their time, energy and creativity to make a real difference in their community.



The students from Ardgillan Community College, Balbriggan shared with us the many fundraising activities they had organised during the year. On the day they presented a donation of 200 for the Sunshine Fund. They have also set up a support and friendship group in their school to welcome new students.

"Think Aloud, Schools Together" was the theme of the presentation from the Young SVP Conference in Loreto College Swords. Students proposed getting contact details from all secondary schools in Dublin North County and setting up a Facebook page. Having a communication system between school Conferences and social justice groups would help them all keep in touch and share ideas.

In conclusion, it is important for our Conferences to work with and support young people participating in programmes and initiatives that are designed to help the Society. Young people are a voice with a difference and are the voice of our future society. To quote Frederic Ozanam: "I tell myself that the mission of a young person in society today is very serious and very important I rejoice at being born at an epoch when perhaps I shall have to do much good".

SVP participation in Laochra at Croke Park 24th April 2016



On Sunday 24th April 2016 one of the biggest spectacles in 1916 Centenary Commemorations happened at Croke Park attracting a bigger crowd than any other commemorations. The GAA post-match spectacular "Laochra" captivated fans and a tv audience of all counties and colours.

"Laochra" meaning "heroes" brought together the best of Irish music, dance and theatre, entertaining fans who gathered for the earlier National Football League Finals and the wider television audience. As part of the celebrations the GAA marched all clubs and colours onto the pitch including a citizen parade representing Irish Society since 1916.

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul Ireland was founded in 1844, four years before the foundation of the GAA in 1848. The stunning pageant recalled heroes with roots in Celtic culture and community. The show began with the epic tales of Cú Chulainn and the Táin Bó Cúailinge with more than 3500 dancers and drummers entertaining the silenced crowd in Croke Park. Nar-

rations of legendary battles and rebellions were followed by children from every county reading a line from the Proclamation. The Grand Finale flooded Croke Park with colour as all groups depicting life in Ireland marched proudly, displaying their banners. Flags flown by heroes who have shaped and created the communities we know across the four provinces of Ireland.

The heroes of SVP proudly carried their banner representing all of our members and the people in communities who had hope when all around them failed them. The long day of dress rehearsals and standing around was certainly worth it when we saw the spectacle afterwards. It was a true reflection of a heritage evolved where dedicated men and women gave us an example of giving and hope.

SVP gave hope to men and women in Ireland in the days of the rebellion and still one hundred years on we celebrate that hope given by SVP members when others have failed for whatever reason.



John Forest, State President of SVP in Queensland, Australia on a recent trip to Dublin with his brother decided to drop in to the Dublin Office to say hello and was greeted by Liam Casey, East Regional President

New Regional Co-ordinator Appointed in the Mid-West

Michelle Putti has recently been appointed to the role of Regional Co-ordinator for the Mid-West. She comes to this post from North Tipperary LEADER Partnership, a local development company where she held the position of Social Programmes Manager for in excess of six years. Her role there included the management and oversight of the Social Inclusion Programme, Traveller Programmes, Domestic Violence Support Service, Family Support, Youth Programmes, a Community Childcare Service, etc. Her background is firmly in the community and voluntary sector where she has worked for many years in family support, community development and adult education. Michelle has a Masters Degree in Family Support Studies from the National University of Ireland, Galway. Her thesis From Tea and Sympathy to Optimal Matching of Need: Developing a Shared Vision for a Community Based Family Support Service was published in Child Care in Practice, in 2011. She is currently an external examiner with the Department of Applied Social Sciences, Limerick Institute of Technology and is a member of the Board of the Tipperary Childcare Committee.



REVAMPED CLARE LODGE OFFICIALLY OPENS Centre Provides a Holiday Lifeline for Thousands

St Vincent de Paul's (SVP) holiday centre in Newcastle was officially opened in March of this year by Sister Anne McCourt, following its recent £1 million facelift.

Clare Lodge was taken over by SVP in the early 1970s and from the outset the organisation saw the potential to offer a welcoming holiday experience and essential respite care for those in need within communities, with thousands passing through its doors during the subsequent years.

Brenda McLarnon, manager of Clare Lodge, explains: "The former facility did not meet the needs of our guests. It had dormitory style rooms and we were very restricted in what we could offer. We had insufficient space to extend our reach and the variety and range of services required.

"The decision to rebuild has opened up a wealth of new possibilities for our guests. Clare Lodge is very bright, fresh and welcoming and we have stunning views, overlooking the beach. With our new layout we have replaced the communal style accommodation with spacious en-suite bedrooms suitable for single, double and family stays and larger rooms for community organisations to gather.

"Clare Lodge is more than just a holiday centre. We are very keen to use our new facilities to offer additional outreach programmes that would enrich the experience of people visiting Clare Lodge through a 'Community Connections Programme'. This would include teaming with other charities and community and voluntary organisations, such as those supporting the elderly, families, those with a disability or those supporting people suffering from mental health issues.

"Overall we are aiming to provide a holistic experience that will encourage participation, develop both confidence and coping skills as well as stimulate a more positive outlook on life."

Sister Anne McCourt, a long-time supporter of Clare Lodge was invited to officially open the facility. She said: "I am delighted to see Clare Lodge open again and honoured to be a part of the formalities. It has been part of my life for so long and means a lot to not only me but also to all of the many guests that have come through its doors and benefitted from its welcoming warmth and hospitality over the years.

"I'd like to pay tribute to Charlie and Anne Hughes, who looked after Clare Lodge for many years on behalf of SVP. They truly extended the charity's ethos of caring and Brenda McLarnon, who has taken over from them, has demonstrated the same welcoming warmth to the guests.

"I have already visited the new facility several times with various groups and hope to return many more times this year. Our young people have likened the new building to a 'first class hotel' and



Pictured at the official opening of Clare Lodge in Newcastle, County Down, are (from left): Aidan Crawford, Regional President SVP; Pauline Brown, Regional Manager SVP; Brenda McLarnon, Manager of Clare Lodge; Sister Anne McCourt, long-time supporter of the Centre and Cormac Wilson, Regional Vice President SVP.

they thoroughly enjoyed the facilities, atmosphere and the food, as well as the trust and faith extended to them by the entire Clare Lodge team.

Pauline Brown, regional manager with SVP, said "SVP is continually looking at ways to enhance the wide range of services to communities across Northern Ireland and Clare Lodge is just one of the ways in which we support people in need, offering guests a beautiful, warm location for those in need to spend some quality time. There are many reasons why guests choose to stay at Clare Lodge and breaks are appropriately priced.

"Our hardworking team at Clare Lodge and the many SVP volunteers who befriend guests and spend time helping with the catering thoroughly enjoy what they do and their positivity is truly inspirational. We have an excellent network of 1600 volunteers across Northern Ireland who donate their time and energy to support people in need within communities and we are very grateful for their dedication."

Brenda concludes: "We have openings still available for 2016 and I would encourage people and groups to get in touch to find out more about what we have to offer and how we might be able to help."

Clare Lodge is a registered House with Tourism NI and can accommodate 52 people at any one time. As well as the accommodation, the premises also boasts a large dining hall, lounge area and outdoor seating looking onto the sea.

For further information on Clare Lodge or to enquire about availability, call 028 4372 2849 or email brenda.mclarnon@svpni.co.uk. To find out more about SVP and the Society's work across Northern Ireland, as well as how to volunteer, please call 028 9035 1561 or email info@svpni.co.uk.

Did you know we've gone Digital?

We've given our quarterly magazine "The SVP Bulletin" a digital face lift! You can now flick through our magazine, read and share individual articles you like, and view back issues in an exciting new way.

Check out <http://www.svp.ie/bulletin> now!

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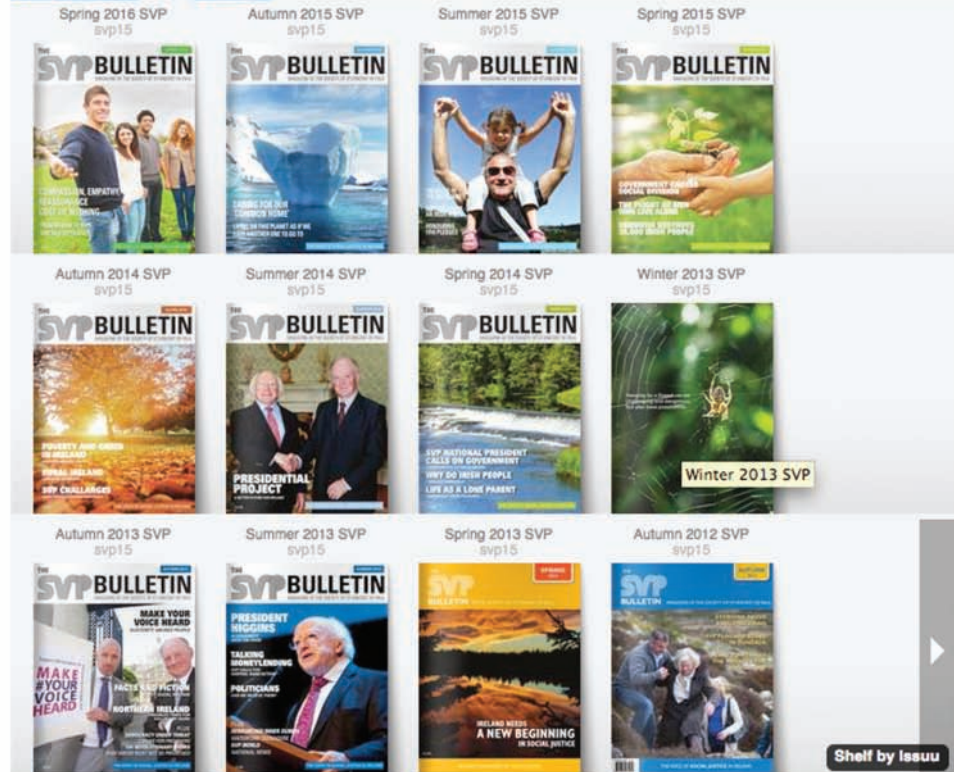
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In Tribute

To Deceased Members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Cashel Riordan Cork

Cashel Riordan who passed away last January is deeply missed by many members of the Society. A member since 1987 saw him start in St Michaels, Blackrock to then help found Holy Cross, Mahon of which he remained a member. He became President of the Conference and in 1993 became Regional President of the Cork Region. During his time he was hugely supportive of training and instrumental in the foundation of the training team that exists in Cork today. The loan guarantee scheme in conjunction with MABS was established. He presided over many initiatives such as financial support for job creation and provision of educational grants. This was a busy period and Cashel showed great commitment until he passed on the baton in March 1997.

Cashel was very supportive to members who took on roles in the Society and acted as a very encouraging mentor. He was dedicated to helping those less fortunate than himself, being a great listener to all who sought his help.

Cashel made an enormous contribution not only to the Society but also to other charitable causes. In his earlier years he was a very successful and well known Cork athlete going on to have a career as an outstanding physicist. In recent years he battled bravely and quietly with his illness. We express our deep sympathy to Cashel's family and many friends. May his gentle soul rest in peace.



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