



FEANTSA

**“Multiple barriers, multiple solutions: Inclusion into  
and through employment for people who are homeless  
in Europe”**

**National Report Ireland – Annual Theme 2007**



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# 1. Introduction

This is the Irish National Report in response to the FEANTSA Questionnaire 2007 on 'Multiple Barriers, Multiple Solutions: Inclusion Into and Through Employment for People Who Are Homeless in Europe'. The report is structured in line with that of the questionnaire, with responses to all specific questions contained in the body of the text of specific sections. It therefore discusses a number of aspects in relation to employment and homelessness in Ireland as follows:

- Section 2 considers, as far as possible, the profile of people experiencing homelessness in terms of accessing employment.
- Section 3 analyses the barriers to employment for people experiencing homelessness in relation to health, housing, transport, education, information, stigmatisation and discrimination, personal issues, the nature of services, bureaucracy and finance.
- Section 4 examines the wider policy and legal context, highlighting the constitutional right to employment in Ireland, national policy in relation to access to employment for people experiencing homelessness, the definition of employment and general trends in policy and legislation.
- Section 5 identifies a series of initiatives focusing on access to employment, education and training that have been progressed in Ireland in recent years.
- Section 6 notes the training and awareness raising activities targeting potential employers or public administrators that have taken place.
- Section 7 looks at cooperation between different stakeholders in addressing barriers to employment for people experiencing homelessness.
- Section 8 discusses the funding of employment services for people experiencing homelessness.
- Section 9 highlights the success factors in bringing people experiencing homelessness back into employment.
- Section 10 studies the current situation with regard to data collection and research on employment of people who are homeless in Ireland.
- Section 11 considers the political prominence given to the work situation of people who are homeless.
- Section 12 identifies the key conclusions from the research.

## 2. Employment Profiles of People Who Are Homeless

An analysis of the employment profiles of people who are homeless in Ireland is much constrained by the data available on this subject. This data deficit is further discussed in Section 10, but at present the only significant study of note that monitored the employment status of people experiencing homelessness was a study commissioned by the National Advisory Council on Drugs<sup>1</sup>, published in 2005, that focused primarily of addiction issues. Nevertheless this study did reveal that less than 1 in 10 of people experiencing homelessness (from a sample size of 355) reported employment as an income source, with only 1% in regular employment and 8% in occasional employment.

Other than this, only a general discussion of the characteristics in terms of accessing education, training and employment is possible here. Within the Irish context, homeless services for the most part do not directly provide employment or training services. As part of its role Fás, the National Employment and Training Organisation provides services targeting those who are long-term unemployed and others who may be excluded from the mainstream labour market. While Fás schemes have benefited many homeless people, there remains a gap in the availability of supported, flexible employment options for those who need time and support to get back to work. There is very limited availability of social enterprise/supported employment for those who may need this option as a step towards fully integrating into the labour market. There would seem to be two distinct tiers of participation apparent among people experiencing homelessness, with the majority of those accessing homeless services undertaking some form of training in relation to core and lifeskills, but only a small proportion accessing more formal education and training courses, work placement schemes or employment itself.

Levels of participation in lifeskills training by people experiencing homelessness are significant. General advice and counselling in relation to lifeskills development is generally provided as a matter of course within all homeless services. The adoption of a keyworker approach is also now commonplace in the vast majority of these services in Ireland and the development of lifeskills is a key focus of such interventions. Although the scope for such activity is sometimes limited in emergency shelters, there is nonetheless a commitment to such this approach, with access to external services often a key means of facilitating lifeskills development. The operation of day centres in this regard by some service providers provides a useful outlet for access to information on employment, education and training opportunities for people experiencing homelessness. Often direct access to

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<sup>1</sup> 'Drug Use Among the Homeless Population in Ireland: A report for the National Advisory Committee on Drugs', Marie Lawless, Caroline Corr, Merchants Quay Ireland, April 2005.

organisations such as Fás, the national training organisation, and VECs, county-based vocational education bodies, is facilitated on-site in such day centres (and occasionally on site in residential homeless services). Assistance is often provided in preparation of CVs and interview practice, although the extent to which this takes place depends on the current circumstances faced by the client and the individual issues that have to be addressed.

While homeless service provision certainly takes cognisance of the need to secure employment, education and training options as part of the progression route out of homelessness for all individuals, it is considered that a certain stage of development must be reached to make interventions in this regard effective. As such, the proportion of people experiencing homelessness that are either in employment or participating in education and training is more significant in services that are transitional in nature. These types of homeless interventions are seen as immediate precursors to independent living and it is intended that each client should have a secure source of income when they leave the service. The services focus strongly on activity that will build up capacity for a person to live independently and develop the lifeskills that her/she needs to function in the community, such as budgeting, personal hygiene, assertiveness, etc. Typically, the second half of the transitional programme then focuses on accessing more formal education, training and employment opportunities. There is strong use of schemes such as Fás Community Employment and Ready for Work that can provide work placements for clients. Some organisations, such as Focus Ireland and Dublin and Cork Simon Communities, also have their own training programmes that can be accessed by clients in any of their other services. Recent research undertaken of 20 transitional services in Dublin found that all service providers believed that the securing of education, training or employment opportunities were an intrinsic part of their transitional programmes and provided information on appropriate opportunities in this regard. Many services were also found to have developed formal links with Fás or the VEC to facilitate this<sup>2</sup>.

Of course, participation in formal education, training and employment is not merely confined to users of transitional services. Clients of emergency services have vastly different capacities and potential in this regard and in many cases they are willing and able to work while resident in these services. Keyworkers typically link these clients in with Fás, the VEC, Local Employment Service or appropriate training providers to facilitate access to employment and training. A relatively recent phenomenon in Ireland, clustered in specific urban areas, has been use of emergency homeless services by people from the new EU accession states that have migrated to Ireland to work. For an interim period, these individuals have a clear housing need and lack the income to establish themselves independently. Although working, they have sourced emergency accommodation while they

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<sup>2</sup> 'Evaluation of Transitional Housing and Support Services Funded under the Homeless Agency Arrangements in the Dublin Area', Fitzpatrick Associates for the Homeless Agency, May 2007.

save up sufficient money to pay a deposit on rented accommodation. Although not officially counted as 'homeless' within the Housing Needs Assessment and not able to access social welfare benefits for the first two years of domicile due to a Habitual residence Condition in place in Ireland, they fit the ETHOS definition of 'houseless' and their situation is worth of acknowledgement within this paper.

## 3. Barriers to Employment for People Who Are Homeless

### 3.1 Barriers Related to Health

Significant barriers to employment for people who are homeless in Ireland are apparent that are related to health issues. The three most prominent barriers in this regard relate to drug addiction, alcoholism and mental health. A study commissioned by the National Advisory Council on Drugs in 2005 found that 52% of people who are homeless were currently using drugs, with 36% considered to be problematic drug users<sup>3</sup>. The research also found that 30% of the study population had been diagnosed with a psychiatric illness.

Under the ETHOS definitions, these problems are most prevalent and most severe among those that are roofless and houseless. The survey noted above found that 51% of those that were roughsleeping were problematic drug users, while this was the case for 31% of those staying in homeless hostels. However they are also a key concern for those living in insecure housing, and those living in threat of eviction or illegally occupying buildings. Often alcohol or drug addiction issues have resulted in this situation occurring, and there is a significant degree of risk in such circumstances then leading onto becoming roofless or houseless. The link between inadequate housing and these health issues are less clear, although there are clear implications in terms of health and hygiene from an overcrowded environment that can result in poor physical health. Poor physical health is also a key issue for those that are houseless, with this many in this group characterised by a previously insufficient and poor diet, often supplemented by the addiction problems noted above. Rooflessness in particular raises physical health concerns, with exposure to cold and wet weather, greater risk of violence and bad nutrition characterising rough sleeping in Ireland at present.

### 3.2 Barriers Related to Housing

A shortage of affordable housing does make some contribution to constraining access to employment by people that are homeless, particularly those currently living in inadequate or insecure housing. For those that are roofless or houseless, it is a lack of adequate move-on options that is the major barrier to progressing out of homelessness, and while still resident in emergency and transitional accommodation it is extremely difficult to convince a prospective employer that someone is in a sufficiently secure and stable environment to sustain employment. Permanent housing is a necessity to reduce this effect, yet the cost of private rented housing is noted as particularly prohibitive. People that are unemployed and

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<sup>3</sup> 'Drug Use Among the Homeless Population in Ireland: A Report for the National Advisory Council on Drugs', Marie Lawless, Caroline Corr, Merchants Quay Ireland, April 2005.

homeless have to rely on social welfare benefits to progress out of homelessness, and the rent supplement scheme, designed to support housing costs, has in place inadequate levels of rent caps that do not reflect the market cost of sourcing appropriate accommodation.

In addition traditionally the reduction of social welfare benefits including rent supplement payments should someone secure employment were such that there was often a disincentive to work. Recent transferring of rent supplement payments into the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) operated by Local Authorities and subsequent changes to the Social Welfare and Pensions Bill in 2007, have attempted to address this issue. Currently where a person has not been engaged in full-time employment in the previous 12 months and, during that time, in receipt of Rent Supplement, he or she may continue to receive Rent Supplement if he or she engages in full-time employment, provided that the person is included on a waiting list for accommodation under the Rental Allowance Scheme operated by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Should someone secure employment while in receipt of RAS they will have to contribute 15% of their overall income (regardless of how much they earn). This is more in line with the differential rents operated by Local Authorities within their own social housing stock.

Current occupancy of a homeless service may be time limited, typically to 6 months in the case of an emergency hostel and 9 months - 2 years in transitional accommodation. Although this often provides insufficient security to allow an individual to successfully obtain employment, it is necessary for a fixed-time programme to be in place to ensure a developmental focus to the interventions and avoid blockages in the system. The environment in emergency hostels can certainly be counterproductive to accessing employment, with living alongside chaotic individuals with specific addiction or mental health issues and high levels of turnover making it difficult to build the skills needed to access employment. However service providers practice' does as far as possible tend to facilitate employment access wherever feasible. Generally the adoption of a client-centred approach in most services mean that factors that might limit access to employment such as limited opening hours, lack of preparation or private space and availability of advice and assistance are generally provided for within such services. Therefore although homeless services are not the ideal environment for successfully securing employment, there is no doubt that the central barrier lies in the inability to source adequate, affordable move-on options for groups that are roofless or houseless.

For those in insecure housing it is ensuring that rent supplement payments are adequate to sustain themselves in the present or other alternative permanent accommodation or that alternative social housing is accessible. For inadequate housing again it is about ensuring access to alternative housing options, be that private rented, local authority, voluntary or even affordable housing. It must be emphasised however that, although there has been a

strong commitment to affordable housing schemes in Ireland, the access to such schemes by people that are homeless has been sporadic, with only occasional examples of such a progression route.

In terms of other potential barriers to employment, living in economically deprived areas is less of a factor, although for those in inadequate or insecure housing this can be concentrated within areas that have relatively limited access to local employment opportunities. Overcrowding undoubtedly has some negative consequences in terms of accessing employment, the latest Housing Needs Assessment in 2005<sup>4</sup>, produced by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, recorded 4,112 households living in overcrowded conditions in Ireland, although this did represent a substantial reduction from the previous needs assessment exercise undertaken in 2002.

Practical barriers that result from not having a permanent address are also relevant in serving as barriers to accessing employment, such as the ability to open a bank account, although a number of services have been able to facilitate access for clients in this regard by approaching individual banks.

### **3.3 Barriers Related to Transport**

Barriers related to transport would not be perceived as being any more significant for those people that are homeless in Ireland than for the general working population. The general buoyancy of the economy and labour market in the country mean that there are employment opportunities in most areas of the country. Lack of public transport and a vehicle or driver's license would clearly have more of an impact when dealing with rural homelessness, although overall this would not be deemed to be a key barrier.

### **3.4 Barriers Related to Education**

In contrast, barriers related to education are a critical factor in limiting access to employment by people experiencing homelessness. Again the National Advisory Council on Drugs report that profiled the homeless population identified low levels of educational attainment. For 25% of the study population, primary education or less was the highest level reached, 50% reported lower secondary education, 15% reported upper secondary education with only 6% having completed higher education<sup>5</sup>. The accessing of education and training by clients has been a key focus by a number of homeless services providers, with initiatives such as the Spokes programme of Focus Ireland, the Dublin Simon Training

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<sup>4</sup> Housing Needs Assessment 2005, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, June 2006.

<sup>5</sup> 'Drug Use Among the Homeless Population in Ireland: A Report for the National Advisory Council on Drugs', Marie Lawless, Caroline Corr, Merchants Quay Ireland, April 2005.

Programme and the PACE Training for Employment initiative examples of how such approaches have been developed. These are discussed further in Section 5.

The lack of basic qualifications in terms of literacy and numeracy is a key factor in this regard and is often prevalent within people experiencing homelessness. Lack of specific qualifications and secondary education is also a characteristic of a significant proportion of people that are homeless as noted above, although there are also some with relatively high levels of education that have ended up homeless because of factors related to health or family breakdown. Lifeskills training is a key need that that forms a strong focus of the interventions delivered by homeless service providers in Ireland. Access to workskills training remains a barrier, although Fás has been good at accessing such opportunities for disadvantaged target groups at community level and both themselves and the VECs have developed good links with specific homeless services, as will be highlighted later. These organisations also help to provide qualified advice on what training to follow, and the Fás Community Employment scheme has facilitated quite significant throughput with regard to people experiencing homelessness in recent years.

### **3.5 Barriers Related to Information**

Information barriers represent an area that has received significant attention in recent years from homeless service providers, improving the situation for those that are roofless or houseless. Information on education, employment and training opportunities is typically displayed within accommodation and other support services such as day centres or training services. Some services have engaged Fás in providing on-site advice at specialist times. Citizens Information Centres are also accessed to help provide relevant information on rights and entitlements. Good relationships have developed with Community Welfare Officers that can advise on entitlements and they also control access to rent supplement.

Internet and telephone access can usually be facilitated by homeless services and this would not be deemed to be a major barrier. Access to employment advice is also available via the Local Employment Service. It provides the gateway to the full range of options which should be available to enable an unemployed person to return to the world of work - including information provision, career guidance, training, education, employment supports, work experience and job placement. This service is very localised and hence very accessible to people experiencing homelessness.

### **3.6 Stigmatisation and Discrimination**

There is some discrimination apparent in terms of those that are roofless or homeless, as without a permanent address most employers would not consider an application. Physical

appearance and personal hygiene issues are important issues in acting as a barrier to employment for those that are roofless or houseless and in emergency accommodation.

It is also true that there may be a lack of awareness with regard to homelessness that limits access to employment to some extent. A recent representative public survey<sup>6</sup> showed that homelessness was only deemed an extremely serious issue in Ireland by 28% of respondents, low down on the list of priorities behind drugs, house prices, road safety, crime levels, alcoholism and health.

### 3.7 Personal Barriers

Personal barriers are a major determinant of access to employment, education and training for people that are homeless and, as has been emphasised, the addressing of such barriers is a critical focus of homeless service provision in Ireland at present. Of the specific examples identified in the FEANTSA questionnaire, the following would be considered to be important barriers:

- Transient, unstable 'chaotic' lifestyles
- Lack of 'core' life skills
- Problems with debt
- Poor financial skills
- Lack of communication skills
- Long term distance from the reality of the labour market
- Lack of social and work networks
- Family related problems
- Experience of domestic violence
- Criminal record
- Lack of work experience
- Behaviour issue
- Hygiene issues
- Disempowerment

The above barriers would clearly be more prevalent in people that are roofless and a range of them would present themselves in people that are houseless. The extent to which they would be seen in people living in insecure or inadequate housing would vary, although problems with debt and financial issues would typically be significant contributory factors to ending up in the situation and would remain relevant to these groups.

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<sup>6</sup> 'Homelessness: A Barometer Survey', Behaviour and Attitudes Marketing Research, February 2007.

### **3.8 Services**

There is an issue with regard to unstable short-term services due to funding regimes with access to employment not a high Government priority in the funding of homeless service provision. Successful initiatives have been progressed but these have been quite sporadic and delivered over fixed time periods. There could be scope to expand services specifically targeted at accessing employment, education and training for people that are homeless. There is certainly a growing recognition of the need to address barriers to employment for homeless people, with a network of service providers established, an Expo held on Employment, and a number of service specific interventions progressed and initiatives from statutory agencies delivered. These are further discussed in Section 5, while the funding of employment-related services is considered in Section 8.

### **3.9 Bureaucratic and Financial Barriers**

The only issue with regard to the bureaucratic and financial barriers defined in the FEANTSA questionnaire concerns the legal status of migrants from the EU accession states as a result of the introduction of the Habitual Residence Condition. This means that they cannot access social welfare assistance in the first two years of residency in Ireland. If the employment of new migrants falls through there is therefore no safety net, making it difficult to sustain housing while they seek new employment. This has placed pressure on a number of homeless service providers and if housing cannot be sustained this becomes a major barrier to securing further employment as noted in Section 3.2. The Habitual Residence Condition was motivated by a desire to encourage employment but social consequences impacting upon homelessness have resulted that now require targeted intervention.

## 4. Policy and Legal Context

### 4.1 Right to Work

The Irish Constitution recognises a right to work for every citizen in the country and is under a duty to protect the earning of livelihoods from unjust attack. It stipulates that: "The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing...that the citizens (all of whom, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood) may through their occupations find the means of making reasonable provision for their domestic needs." <sup>7</sup>

### 4.2 Mutual Support Between Employment, Homelessness and Prevention Policies

There has been a general acceptance of the importance of access to employment, education and training for people that are homeless since the launch of the Government's 'Homelessness: An Integrated Strategy' in 2000. Under the heading 'Work, Education and Training, the Integrated Strategy proposed 3 specific actions as follows:

- Fás will undertake an assessment of skills and training needs of homeless persons and will appoint a person to work with homeless services in Dublin.
- Literacy skills will be integrated into forms of vocational training provided by Fás or any other service including in particular by the Vocational Education Committees
- Action plans will include provision of outreach tutors. For the Dublin area the Vocational Education Committee will appoint a person to work exclusively with the homeless services.

The Review of Implementation of Homeless Strategies undertaken by Fitzpatrick Associates<sup>8</sup> for the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in 2006 considered progress made with regard to these actions. It found that some positive developments had resulted, such as the employment by Fás of 2 Employment Services Officers to actively engage, in an outreach and referral capacity, with homeless service providers in Dublin in order to provide appropriate services to clients. The community-based model of Fás intervention has also facilitated the engagement of people experiencing homelessness at local level, with 30 Fás community-based projects found to either be fully or partly

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<sup>7</sup> Constitution of Ireland – Bunreacht Na hÉireann, November 2004

<sup>8</sup> 'Review of Implementation of the Government's Homeless Strategies', Fitzpatrick Associates for the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, February 2006.

engaged in providing services and supports for homeless people in Ireland, with literary skills development a prime focus of activity. In addition, Fás has reserved places in Community Training Workshops for persons that are homeless and become involved in housing foyer projects which combine housing, training and leisure facilities for homeless people on one site. However, the review noted little Fás activity in terms of targeted interventions outside of Dublin and recommended action moving forward in this regard.

The third action noted above within the integrated strategy concerned the VEC, and Dublin VEC delivered on the commitment to appoint a person to work exclusively with homeless services. However the Review of the Implementation of Government Homeless Strategies noted a distinct lack of progress outside of Dublin in provision of outreach tutors and involvement of other VECs in homeless initiatives. It was recommended that focus should be given to this area in the future.

Wider social policy has however given little focus to the issue of employment and training for people experiencing homelessness. The latest National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016<sup>9</sup>, under its planned services in relation to employment and employability, identifies a range of target groups on the margins of the labour market including people with disabilities, lone parents, travellers and prisoners. However people experiencing homelessness are not highlighted as a focus for action. More encouragingly, there is a strong commitment within the plan on building adult literacy, a key barrier to employment for many people who are homeless. An additional 7,000 places will be provided by Vocational Education Committees for this purpose. Further investment is also to be provided for the Back to Education initiative, operated by Fás, which has been accessed by users of homeless services for second chance education, as will be highlighted in Section 5. A further 2,000 places will be provided via this initiative. The only other commitments in relation to addressing homeless within the plan relate to development of the new national strategy, the greater involvement of the community and voluntary sector in this regard and elimination of long-term occupancy of emergency homeless services.

### **4.3 Definition of Employment**

Employees in Ireland are defined as persons working under contract or service or apprenticeships. Employment rights legislation applies only to this group. The Central Statistics Office regularly analyses employment via the Quarterly National Household Survey<sup>10</sup> and uses the ILO definition of employment as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016, Government of Ireland 2007, Stationery Office, February 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Quarterly National Household Survey Methodology, CSO, 2007.

- In Employment: Persons who worked in the week before the survey for one hour or more for payment or profit, including work on the family farm or business and all persons who had a job but were not at work because of illness, holidays etc. in the week.
- Unemployed: Persons who, in the week before the survey, were without work and available for work and had taken specific steps, in the preceding four weeks, to find work.
- Inactive Population (not in labour force): All other persons.

The labour force comprises persons employed plus unemployed. All those taking part in supported employment initiatives, such as the Fás Community Employment scheme, are classified as 'employed'.

## 4.4 Social Benefits and Compulsory Participation

Social benefits for those seeking employment in Ireland consist of two components: jobseekers benefit and jobseekers allowance. Jobseekers Benefit is a weekly payment based on previous insurance contributions made by an individual. To be eligible for Jobseekers Benefit you must have suffered a loss of employment, that is, you must have lost at least one day's insurable employment including a loss of income. Jobseekers Allowance is also a weekly payment but is means tested. Both payments are dependent on the person proving that they are genuinely seeking work which is suitable for him/her, having regard to his/her age, education, physique, location and family circumstances. To satisfy this condition, it is necessary for the person to demonstrate that s/he has taken some positive action and is making genuine efforts to secure employment. This might include making applications for work to employers, looking for information on the availability of employment from employers, advertisements or employment agencies, availing of reasonable training opportunities suitable in his/her case; or acting on the advice given by a Jobs Facilitator, a FÁS advisor or other placement agency such as the Local Employment Service (LES). A Deciding Officer judges whether each potential welfare recipient has fulfilled his/her obligations in this regard.

As highlighted elsewhere, there is a Habitual Residence Condition in place with regard to receipt of social benefits in Ireland. This precludes those from the new EU accession states that have resided within the country for a period of less than two years from accessing social welfare payments. This is having increasingly prominent impacts on homeless services within Ireland, as new migrants often arrive with no income and no accommodation and need emergency assistance to avoid rough sleeping. As much of the employment of those

that are subject to the Habitual Residence Condition is concentrated in low paid occupations, this group is also at more risk of social exclusion should their employment cease at any time. There is a need for Government intervention to address these issues, as there is currently unsustainable pressure on homeless services in a number of urban centres as a result of emergency accommodation needs of new migrants. A decision needs to be made on whether existing emergency services are funded to assume this responsibility or whether alternative services, such as temporary 'workers hostels', providing a roof while an individual finds work and saves for a deposit, might be an alternative solution.

## 4.5 General Context and Trend

In general, there seems to be a growing recognition of the need for interventions to address homelessness that focus on access to employment, training and education. Although part of national strategy since 2000, there has been limited activity in this regard since that time, particularly outside of Dublin. In some ways this was perhaps understandable, with priority given to provision of emergency accommodation and coordination of healthcare supports, but with progress made in this regard, there are increasing indications of renewed attention being directed on barriers to employment. As will be highlighted in Section 5, a number of specific initiatives have been established in recent years that aim to address such barriers, delivered by both education and training agencies and organisations providing other homeless services. The establishment of networks and events focusing on employment issues for homeless people have also been more prevalent. The new Government homeless strategy will be published later this year and it is expected to include a renewed commitment to action on employment, education and training. This recognises a growing acceptance that an effective progression route can only be achieved if an individual can become financially independent once in permanent housing, and of course sourcing employment is the critical factor in this regard.

## 5. Employment Schemes/Tools for People Who Are Homeless

### 5.1 Support Schemes to Help Find Work

In terms of supporting people experiencing homelessness to find a job, the contribution made by homeless service providers must be acknowledged. As part of the overall keyworking and personal development plan put in place, many providers deliver a range of activities that assist people in the securing of employment. This might involve the preparation of CVs, practice of interview skills, conveying of information regarding vacancies and training opportunities, help in setting up a bank account, and so on. As has been noted earlier, there is also a heavy emphasis in the development of lifeskills in these services in order to prepare clients for independent living, and part of this focus is to build sufficient capacity to access employment. There are also other specific initiatives that have been progressed by particular organisations in order to help people who are homeless overcome barriers to employment. Given the existing capacity and issues to be addressed by many individuals in this regard, the first step tends to be access to education, either via basic literacy or numeracy training, or more formal vocational based activities. A number of specific initiatives are discussed in greater detail below.

The **Foundations Project** was established by City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee in 2000 to work with homeless services in order to increase access to education for people experiencing homelessness. This involves a multi-faceted approach including:

- the direct provision of educational programmes for homeless persons in homeless services and education centres (including programmes for single people and families in B&Bs).
- support work and follow-up work with participants around their wider needs.
- referrals to other programmes, training courses and services through an advice and information service.
- provision of training for staff and service-users regarding literacy and, awareness raising actions with staff and homeless service-users regarding educational programmes and services available.

The project networks closely with both the education and homeless service sectors and aims to increase awareness and create linkages between the two sectors wherever possible. The Foundations Project has a team of workers including a full-time Co-ordinator, a Literacy Worker, a Peer Worker and an After-Schools Worker.

The Vocational Education Committees also run a number of **Back to Education Initiatives** (BTEI) with 4 projects (1 in Galway, 1 in Kildare and 1 in Dublin) specifically targeting people who are homeless. The Community Strand of the initiative also involves 5 projects in Dublin city and county involving mixed groups of early school leavers and people experiencing homelessness. The Back to Education Initiative provides a flexible adult learning programme prioritised for those with less than secondary education.

The **Spokes Programme** run by Focus Ireland offers people experiencing homelessness the chance to take part in education, employment and training programmes. Many of the training programmes offered in Spokes are Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) accredited. and courses include computers, photography, maths, preparation for work and childcare. Spokes operates one-to-one courses on an ongoing basis focusing on topics such as Computers, Maths and English. Support with a more personal development focus includes a course covering Social Skills and also an innovative Preparation for Work course run in conjunction with Hibernian Insurance. Spokes also recently launched a new self-advocacy course which helps people to learn about their rights and how to overcome any personal barriers to obtaining individual rights. Other courses available include childcare and photography and summer programmes have been developed for young people experiencing homelessness with a range of cultural and outdoor activities to enhance their confidence and self esteem. Spokes recently employed a dedicated Guidance worker that can link clients into agencies such as Fás and the VEC and provide practical advice and support on accessing education, training and employment opportunities.

Cork Simon Community works closely to build links with appropriate external agencies to facilitate access to training and employment by service users and has progressed two specific stand-alone initiatives in this regard. The **Parks and Gardens Work Scheme** has been established as a pilot initiative via a partnership of Cork Simon Community, Fás, the Bessborough Centre and Cork City Council to deliver training for the Community's residents and service-users. Based at the Bessborough Centre in Blackrock, it offers a wide range of training modules, many of which lead to FETAC certification. These include Computer Skills, Personal Development, Literacy Skills, Office Procedures, Counselling and Amenity Horticulture. The Amenity Horticulture module focuses on the practical application of amenity horticulture in enterprises such as landscaping, garden centre operations and food crop production. A second project has been developed with **Meitheal Mara**, a Cork based community maritime boat-building organisation. Here service users develop a range of skills that lead to FETAC accreditation and obtain practical work experience within a wider community setting.

The **Dublin Simon Training Project** was operated from Chapelizod, Dublin over the last few years to offer training courses that are tailored to the needs of people who are homeless or

who have experienced homelessness in the recent past. The project delivered a Fás supported initiative offering up to 15 people a part time programme focusing on activities including foundation level woodworking, glass craft, basic computing skills, literacy, numeracy and personal development. Dublin Simon developed links with employers to secure work placements and employment opportunities for the participants. It also linked in with the Business in the Community 'Ready for Work' initiative (discussed further below) to avail of such opportunities from major companies such as Marks and Spencer and Brown Thomas. Recently however, the training project moved from Chapelizod and has been restructured to focus on learning and development interventions within the other Dublin Simon services. Now based in Dorset Street, it will concentrate on broader lifeskills development for Dublin Simon clients on an outreach basis rather than the vocational training delivered previously.

The **PACE Training for Employment Project**, based in Santry in Dublin, is an education and training project dealing with up to 24 individuals at any one time that are experiencing homelessness and have recently been released from prison. By the end of 2007 this number shall increase to 40 places. The project offers a wide range of education and training options focusing on coping with life after prison and preparation for progression into employment or further education or training opportunities. The project works in partnership with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that the trainees are getting the best package of programmes possible. The nature of the courses available range widely depending on client need and include woodwork and metalwork skills; computer skills; catering; Junior Cert and Leaving Cert subjects; core skills development; health and fitness; and literacy. The project has established an Open Learning Centre and offers vocational and educational guidance, counselling, mediation and placement services and personal development training. This can focus on anger management, coping with life after prison or addiction support. The project also links closely with the PACE transitional accommodation project in Priorswood House, with many participants resident in this location. The project is currently in the process of expanding and developing an off-site Horticultural Project, that is aimed at providing training and education in the area of Horticulture.

The **Dun Laoghaire Step Up Homeless Project** is an education programme run by Dun Laoghaire VEC which caters for homeless adults in the Dun Laoghaire area. The project provides a range of courses including Cookery, Positive Thinking and Motivation, Literacy and Computer Skills. A summer programme has recently been launched delivering 'softer' courses such as reflexology and music skills. Participation levels have been strong thus far, with excellent links built up with a major local homeless service provider, Crosscare. It also provides an education guidance service. The provision of this programme takes into account the multiplicity of social, psychological and physiological issues that may affect homeless

learners. It's philosophy is to engage those experiencing homelessness in education allowing them to build on personal motivation, self esteem and create a sense of structure in their lives on a consistent basis. The project also provides homeless people with viable progression routes to further education and employment opportunities. The project is currently expanding its services and is supported by ESB Electric Aid Ireland and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council.

The **St Catherine's Foyer Project** was established in 2004 to provide short stay housing and training for young people aged 18-25 experiencing homelessness to assist them in the transition from dependent to independent living. The Foyer, Ireland's first such centre, offers living accommodation for 48 individuals grouped around a south facing courtyard and provides 8 cluster groups of 6 study bedrooms with their own shared kitchen and dining facilities, with communal rooms and classrooms for training on the ground floor. The Foyer is supported by Cara Housing Association, Dublin City Council, the Eastern Regional Health Authority, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and St Catherine's Combined Communities Group.

## **5.2 Supported Employment Schemes to Help Find Work**

It is also worth highlighting examples of initiatives assisting people who are homeless that are focused on providing supported employment activity as part of the intervention. Two such examples are discussed below, the Ready for Work programme and the Fás Community Employment Scheme.

The **Ready for Work** programme commenced in 2002 and involves working with service providers and businesses to provide homeless people with two days of training and a two-week placement within a company, with follow up support provided by Training and Employment Officers. The training was devised specifically for marginalised groups and centres on visualisation, motivation, plans and change. The benefits to those moving on from homelessness include improved self-esteem, work experience and a route to full time employment. The benefits to participating businesses include a recruitment solution, team building, company profile development, reputation enhancement and enhanced goodwill among existing and potential customers. A review of the programme over the period 2002-2006 found that since inception, 76 people have completed the programme. Of these 53 have begun work and 44 candidates have accessed further education and training<sup>11</sup>. The jobs have been filled primarily in the areas of retail, office administration and hotel work,

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<sup>11</sup> 'Ready for Work Review 2006', Business in the Community Ireland, November 2006

however placements have also for people with qualifications in engineering, teaching and linguistics. The Ready for Work programme is a division of Business in the Community Ireland (BITCI) and works in association with the homeless service providers and the Homeless Agency and in partnership with Fás, IBEC and the Small Firms Association. The main sponsors of the programme include Anglo Irish Bank, Marks and Spencer (Ireland), KPMG, Brown Thomas, PricewaterhouseCoopers and the Jurys Doyle Hotel Group.

The **Fás Community Employment Scheme**, although not targeted specifically at people experiencing homelessness, has been successful in providing a practical means for clients and former clients of homeless services to access work, sometimes within these homeless services themselves. The scheme aims to help long-term unemployed people to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to work routine. It assists participants to enhance and develop both their technical and personal skills which can then be used in the workplace. The programme is sponsored by groups wishing to benefit the local community, particularly voluntary organisations and public bodies involved in not-for-profit activities. Fás gives financial support in the form of allowances and funding to assist with the Community Employment programme, for example participant wages, supervisor grants, materials grants, and specific skills training grants. The training provided through Community Employment is delivered within a Quality Assurance framework and FETAC awards and qualifications can be achieved which lead to major awards on the National Framework of Qualifications.

## **6. Training for Employers or Public Administration**

Thus far there have been no specific training initiatives for employers with regard to raising awareness about the situation of people who are homeless in relation to employment. Where activity has been apparent, it has generally occurred as part of the wider homeless employment or training initiatives discussed above. For example, the involvement of Business in the Community in the Ready for Work programme raised significant awareness among high profile employers in this regard and was able to demonstrate the value in providing employment opportunities to people experiencing homelessness and the potential for participants to become full-time employees. There would seem to exist an opportunity to build on such success by providing awareness-raising and training initiatives for a wider base of employers.

## **7. Cooperation Between Stakeholders**

An important awareness raising initiative that was recently coordinated by the Homeless Agency in Dublin was the holding of an Expo on Training, Education and Employment entitled 'Choices' in April 2007. This was intended to offer an opportunity to those working in homeless service provision and to people experiencing homelessness to learn about the training, education and employment options available. It also provided a source of information, support and advice to over 100 delegates who attended. A wide base of organisations provided information and advice ranging from promoters of projects discussed in Section 5 to local employment services, employer representatives, education and training institutes, citizens information bodies and homeless service providers.

The Homeless Agency has also established a Training, Education and Employment Network that brings together a number of key stakeholders to discuss ways in which barriers to employment for people who are homeless can be addressed. Members of the network include the national training agency Fás, Dublin City Council, the HSE, the VEC, a higher education college and homeless service providers involved in training initiatives.

## 8. Funding of Employment Services for People Who Are Homeless

The funding mechanisms put in place to address homelessness in Ireland are spread across a number of different departments and agencies, often making coordination of activity difficult. The majority of statutory funding provided for homeless services is sourced from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and local authorities and the Health Service Executive (HSE). In theory, the Department and local authorities are responsible for funding in relation to accommodation, while the HSE is responsible for ongoing health and care support services. In practice, however, the lines have become somewhat blurred and the relative allocations for similar services have been found to vary greatly, with problems also arising in relation to delivery in tandem of capital and revenue funding for projects.

There is an effort to introduce more coordinated funding mechanisms by the Cross-Department Team on Homelessness as part of new national homeless strategy. It is important that this activity also focuses on funding of interventions to access employment, education and training. The dominance of these two funding organisations in delivering previous homeless strategy and their respective remits has perhaps been a factor in the lack of attention given to this issue in the past. Where initiatives have progressed, they have generally been supported by Fás or the VECs as part of their education and training remits, but budgets for such a purpose must be more clearly defined in future strategy. One-off project funding sources have been used, while voluntary homeless organisations have supported projects via their wider fundraising income. Private sector sponsorship has also been apparent in some schemes, such as Coca Cola Bottlers involvement in sponsoring the Spokes summer programme delivered by Focus Ireland and ESB Electric Aid sponsorship of the Dun Laoghaire Step Up project.

However, the often short-term nature of funding from such sources makes it difficult to generate the desired outcomes. Often a pathway to employment for a person experiencing homelessness involves several years of development, building up lifeskills, literacy and numeracy capacity, accessing vocational training, work placements for experience before eventually securing a mainstream job. The same type of continuum of care approach being adopted in relation to housing and support needs is therefore necessary in relation to employment needs, and funding should be planned with this in mind. The allocation of statutory funding on an annual basis is highly restrictive in terms of delivering effective interventions and a move to a multi-annual system of funding would be hugely beneficial to addressing barriers to employment. The review of previous Government homeless strategies recommended such a move, and it is hoped that new homeless strategy will incorporate this when it is produced later this year.

## **9. Indicators and Success Factors**

### **9.1 Indicators**

The sections above have noted a number of different initiatives that have targeted access to employment by people experiencing homelessness, and where positive outcomes have been reported, these were identified. Section 2 on the profile of people experiencing homelessness noted some survey research, anecdotal evidence and also the findings of recent evaluations that show that a number of clients in homeless services, particularly in those focused on transitional service provision, have been able to access employment, education and training opportunities. There have also been instances of increase in employment levels among those users of specific emergency services in Cork and Dublin as a consequence of demand from migrant workers, unable to access social welfare support as a result of the Habitual Residence Condition, with insufficient funds to access private rented accommodation, and hence needing temporary housing support.

However, as will be discussed more fully in Section 10, there remains a notable lack of cross-service indicators of employment among people experiencing homelessness, alongside other key biographical characteristics. A substantial data deficit exists that serves as a significant impediment to fully understanding routes into and out of homelessness that would help to maximise the effectiveness of services that are being provided. As part of a wider data strategy, there is a need to establish cross-sector indicators measuring the number of people in employment, in education and in training, and also to monitor the nature of these activities and how access to them was obtained by the individual. It is only in this way that access can then be replicated for other people with the right capabilities, further facilitating a progression route out of homelessness.

### **9.2 Success Factors**

The success factors in relation to people experiencing homelessness being able to access employment, education and training opportunities have been generated by a number of initiatives. It would seem that a key challenge in terms of accessing employment is raising awareness of the employability of people who are homeless among the employers themselves. Interventions that focus on capacity and a phased approach to accessing employment were also able to demonstrate success. Understanding that in many cases the building up of lifeskills and capacity in areas such as literacy and numeracy were a necessary precursor to more formal training was important in facilitating a pathway into employment. A holistic approach that has been increasingly apparent in the delivery of homeless services has also served as a success factor in increasing access to employment. The keyworking, case management approach takes into account all of the needs of the

client in terms of housing, health, support and employment and training needs as essential components to successfully making the transition out of homelessness into independent living. This approach is now an intrinsic part of widely used sectoral standards<sup>12</sup> and has been adopted by the vast majority of homeless services around Ireland. Linked to this approach, the provision of information regarding employment, education and training opportunities has also been an important factor in encouraging participation. Most homeless services have communal information areas and also keep clients informed in keyworking sessions. Day centre initiatives in a number of locations have also facilitated access to PCs and the internet, with support provided in applying for jobs and courses.

There are of course also service user related success factors in terms of bringing people who are homeless back into employment. As was noted in section 3, there are significant health issues to be addressed in many individuals experiencing homeless, with a significant proportion suffering addiction problems or mental illness. This generally means that there is an initial period when clients lack the capacity to enter employment, education or training and must concentrate on rehabilitation and addressing the particular issues that they are facing. Such opportunities are only pursued once these issues are overcome. At this point, there is also more motivation on the part of the service user to seek such opportunities. Indeed the motivation of the client to live independently and access employment is among key criteria of many transitional homeless services. The care plan approach of most services foresees such a phased approach to accessing employment, dealing with health issues, building life skill capacity and then identifying and pursuing opportunities in this regard.

Context related success factors are also important, with institutional barriers such as the lack of a permanent address, contact telephone numbers or a bank account acting as major impediments to accessing employment. Where homeless services have been able to overcome these problems for clients by providing, for example, telephone messaging services or arranging for opening of bank accounts, service users have been more successful at moving into employment, education and training. The funding of initiatives focusing on barriers to employment for people experiencing homelessness is also a key determinant of generating more successful impacts. As was noted in Section 8, for potential service providers it is not as apparent where funding can be sourced for interventions meeting individuals' employment and training needs as is the case for their accommodation or health care needs. The success of the small number of initiatives that have been progressed in generating positive outcomes suggests that where funding for specific employment-related homeless interventions can be obtained, this is a critical success factor in generating more positive impacts.

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<sup>12</sup> 'Putting People First: A Good Practice Handbook for Homeless Services', Homeless Agency.

## 10. Data Collection and Research

Currently no data on the employment situation of people who are homeless is collected across services in Ireland. It was apparent in the discussion of the employment profile of people experiencing homelessness in Section 2 that existing understanding of the situation is dependent on anecdotal evidence and the results of wider focused research and evaluation studies.

There is currently therefore a data deficit in Ireland in terms of the general profiles of people who are homeless, including their employment characteristics. The data deficiencies that exist are a focus of significant attention at present, having been an important theme of the Review of Implementation of Homeless Strategies published in February 2006. The most recent development in this regard has been the establishment of a data sub-group by the National Homeless Consultative Committee to look at provision, as a minimum, of the following data:

- The count of the number and profile of homeless people at any one time (the point in time figure) and their needs
- The flow of people through services (the flow figure)
- The prevalence of homelessness over time for different geographies and communities.
- Identifying changes in profile and needs of identified 'at risk' groups

From an employment perspective, it is important that work in this regard takes account of the needs of people that are homeless in terms of education, training and employment. Identifying changes in profile must also examine closely an individual's employment status. At present the CSO Census data does not allow cross-tabulation of employment and housing data and this makes definitive analysis of the employment profile of people that are homeless immensely problematic.

Further development of the LINK system is also seen as a way in which information regarding access to employment, education and employment could be collected. LINK was established by the Homeless Agency as a client information system used to improve and develop services and their delivery within and across the homeless sector to clients and also to ensure that they receive a continuum of care based on an accurate and up-to date assessment of their needs. Although the LINK system provides the Homeless Agency with statistical information on the homeless population profile and use of services to some extent, this has yet to be linked to client access to employment, education and training opportunities. Currently monitoring reports focus on number of clients, admissions, referrals, and actions at various stages of the process, including during the project, on

departure and in post-settlement. There would therefore seem to be some potential to consider how these actions relate to employment objectives in the future.

## 11. Employment Rights & Political Context

As yet, there have been no examples within Ireland of where a rights-based approach has been adopted in relation to the right to work for people who are homeless. However there has been increasing attention given to the issue of the right to housing by all individuals in Ireland and to their wider social, economic and cultural rights, which would include the right to employment. Recognition of these rights is a significant focus of the MakeRoom campaign, led by four major organisations dedicated to addressing homelessness in Ireland - Focus Ireland, the Simon Communities of Ireland, the Society of St Vincent De Paul and Threshold. All political parties in Ireland have signed up to the objectives of this campaign and it is expected that more pressure will be brought to bear on Government moving forward to recognise economic rights in the allocation of all funding, including that for homeless services. Specifically, the organisations comprising the MakeRoom alliance have stated that "Our organisations believe that there is a need for Government commitment to deliver social and economic rights as a central component of homeless strategy. Government have acknowledged that rights encompass social, economic and cultural rights and obligations and that these should underpin equality of opportunity and policies on access to education, employment, health, housing and social services."

In general however, it must be acknowledged that the work situation of people who are homeless is not a major political issue in Ireland at present. Homelessness itself is viewed as a serious problem, although not one that is viewed as importantly as other issues such as drug and alcohol addiction, house prices or health services. More potential exists from a campaigning perspective in the right to employment of all marginalized groups in Ireland rather than focusing on employment needs purely from a homelessness perspective.

## 12. Conclusions

Developments in homeless service provision in recent years mean that the majority of people experiencing homelessness have participated in some form of lifeskills development training or coaching, with keywork and care plan systems now established in the vast majority of homeless services. Access to more formal education, training and employment opportunities is more concentrated within services that are transitional in nature. Indeed the only significant research that recorded the employment profile of people experiencing homelessness showed that less than 1 in 10 earned any form of income from employment.

Drug and alcohol addiction and alcoholism are major barriers to accessing employment for people experiencing homelessness. The lack of a permanent address and lack of move-on accommodation options is also an important impediment to securing employment, education and training opportunities, despite the best efforts of homeless service providers. Insufficient social housing provision and issues within the private rented sector, with an inadequate rent supplement scheme limited access to this accommodation, are key factors in this regard. Education barriers are important, with a very small proportion of people who are homeless having completed higher education. Personal barriers are perhaps the other key constraining factor, with lack of core lifeskills, financial problems and behavioural issues all preventing access to employment.

There is nonetheless a right to work within the Irish constitution and, since 2000, there has been explicit Government policy commitment to improving access to education, training and employment for people experiencing homelessness. There also appears to be a growing recognition of the need for interventions in this regard, with a number of specific initiatives established in recent years aiming to address barriers to employment. This issue is also expected to be a focus of the new national homeless strategy which will be published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government later this year.

A number of examples of employment, education and training schemes for people who are homeless were highlighted. Three of these involved the delivery of multi-faceted informal and formal training programmes linking to work placements delivered by existing homeless service providers. The involvement of Fás and Vocational Education Committees was also outlined in a number of specific initiatives.

Although little evidence was found of training for employers or public administration in raising awareness of employment access for people experiencing homelessness, there has been recent activity in bringing key stakeholders together to discuss the issue. The holding of an Expo and formation of a Training, Education and Employment network are positive

signs of increased commitment among relevant statutory and voluntary agencies moving forward.

The funding of employment services for people experiencing homelessness has been problematic, with a lack of clarity apparent about statutory responsibility for supporting such activity. The initiatives that have been progressed have often been reliant on private sector sponsorship or cross-subsidisation from wider fundraising activities, and there is a need for multi-annual budgets to be identified and set aside within the new homeless strategy in order to ensure that barriers to employment are adequately addressed.

The key success factors in terms of facilitating access to education, training and employment opportunities for people experiencing homelessness were discussed. Important factors include engaging potential employers in initiatives, a phased approach to accessing employment and provision of information and advice. From the service users perspective, motivation to enter employment is a key determinant of success, and this often only comes when addiction issues have been addressed and lifeskills capacity has been built up, reinforcing the need for a phased approach.

Currently no data is collected on the employment situation of people who are homeless across services in Ireland. This significant data deficit must be addressed in the ongoing development by Government via the National Homelessness Consultative Committee of a national data strategy on homelessness. This would reflect the need to reflect employment rights alongside other social and economic rights as a central component of new national homeless strategy, a major objective of a number of key voluntary homeless organisations currently operating in Ireland.