housing agency

Family Experiences of Pathways into Homelessness

The Families' Perspective

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This report was commissioned by the Housing Agency and conducted by independent researchers.

The Housing Agency is a statutory body set up to work with and support local authorities, approved housing bodies and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in the delivery of housing and housing services. It also serves as the interim Regulator of Approved Housing Bodies. It brings together a wealth of practical, research and technical expertise to offer a broad base of services. The Agency's vision is to enable everyone to live in good quality, affordable homes in sustainable communities. The Agency understands that housing plays a key role in people's quality of life and life chances.

The views expressed in this research report are those of the authors and do not necessary represent those of the Housing Agency or the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

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Foreword

Over the last year, there has been a growing concern about the number of families presenting to homeless services. To this point, there has been a substantial increase in the number of homeless families – from 401 families to 657 between January and July.

These 657 families include 895 adults and 1,383 dependents. The number of new cases is also increasing, with an average of 70 new families presenting as homeless in the Dublin region in July alone.

The Housing Agency was requested by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to commission a piece of qualitative research to focus on the experiences of these families and their pathways into homelessness. The objective of the research was to explore the families' experiences with a view to informing policy responses to homelessness.

Shelter is one of the most basic of human requirements, and none are more in need of stable and appropriate shelter than families with small children. As is underlined in this research, secure housing is fundamental in itself, but this stability is also central to a family's ability to provide other basics - nutritious food, education, social interaction and participation.

The interviews with these families demonstrate how quickly and easily circumstances can dramatically change for a family. Many of the families interviewed reported leaving or being forced to leave their accommodation, predominantly in the private rented sector, because they did not want to have a dispute with their landlord that might subsequently go against their efforts to access alternative accommodation. Others reported leaving their accommodation because of domestic disputes, relationship breakdown and accusations of anti-social behaviour.

Typically, these families went through a period of less stable accommodation – often living with friends or families – before approaching homeless services. At this stage, often the resources they had, particularly savings, were beginning to diminish. Parents put considerable focus on trying to maintain a sense of normality for their children, for example getting children to and from school was a priority while searching for alternative accommodation. Many of the families interviewed for this research reported that rent increases and fewer landlords accepting rent supplement made this search increasingly difficult.

There are limitations to the scope of this research. Firstly the families interviewed are all Dublin based and have been accessed through one service provider. Their accounts have not been verified by any others, no more than the information provided by officials. But the commonality of experiences is very strong. This was an exploratory piece of research, which could be expanded

to address these limitations by, for instance: including families outside Dublin especially rural experiences of homelessness, including more service providers, and considering direct interviews with children.

The families interviewed for this research have, from their experiences, highlighted important policy and practice issues:

1. *The role of the private rented sector*
   The families interviewed as part of this research had all reported experiencing problems in the private rented sector. Issues such as: access, rent increases and affordability, top-ups, tenure security and quality were all problems. However, this sector has traditionally been the most accessible and flexible for low income families. It is where an increasing number of low-income households are accommodated, and in the absence of a significant investment in the social housing sector is likely to remain the most significant source of accommodation for low income families in the short to medium term.

   Prior to the competition of this report a new Housing Assistance Payment was rolled out to address this problem. We expect that the introduction of the Homeless Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) will offer a more secure tenancy for those currently in receipt of Rent Supplement with a long-term housing need. Under this new payment, tenants pay a differential rent (linked to their household income) to the local authority and the local authority in turn pays the rent to the landlord. Should a tenant's income change, the differential rent is adjusted, which means that this payment is more employment friendly than the traditional Rent Supplement. The local authority will inspect the property within eight months of the first HAP payment to ensure it meets the required standards. While the rent limits are currently the same as for Rent Supplement, in the four Dublin local authorities these can be increased by up to 20%, subject to a six-monthly review.

   With up to 75,000 households expected to transfer to this new payment by 2020. The expectation is that HAP will provide a more integrated and more streamlined service for households who need long-term housing support. It is also expected that it will facilitate better regulation of the private rented sector and provide more consistency in the way these households' housing needs are responded to.

2. *Social Housing*
   The families in this research clearly wanted greater accommodation security in the future. They reported being cautious of the private rented sector and wanted the stability they associated with traditional local authority social housing.

   Again, we expect that the introduction of HAP should address at least some of these concerns regarding rent levels and security of tenure. The Social Housing Strategy 2020 – a six year strategy to address social housing needs – should also contribute to the need for greater accommodation security with a commitment to the provision of 35,000 new social housing units. Over half (18,000 units) of which are due to come on stream by end 2017, with the remainder (17,000 units) scheduled for completion by end 2020. The total cost of these units is estimated at €3.8bn and is a marked re-investment in social housing. These additional units will take time to deliver. While the requirement is clearly immediate, a useful additional measure has been the introduction of a Ministerial direction which requires named local authorities to allocate up to half of available social housing units to homeless (and other special needs) households for the first six months of 2015.

3. *The personal impact of homelessness*
   This research focused on families' experiences of homelessness. Those interviewed reported spending higher than normal amounts of money on basics such as food, transport, and laundry – all associated with being homeless and lacking access to their own amenities. This makes the successful transition out of homelessness increasingly difficult as time goes on as families use up any savings they had on these extra costs.

   Those interviewed reported the stress being homeless caused, for themselves, their children and other family members. Homelessness is one of the most traumatic events that can happen to a family. Some reported that becoming homeless resulted in a splitting up of the family as older adult children (i.e. those over 18) were not considered to be dependents (of the family) and therefore had to register as homeless individuals.

   In this research, the families interviewed talked about the role of the key worker they were assigned. They noted that they saw this as an important step in resolving their accommodation problems. The

role of the key worker is to engage with services users to assist them identify and secure appropriate mainstream accommodation to move out of homelessness. Those interviewed for this research tended to see the key worker more as an advocate – to find information about their case and to argue on their behalf. It is important that the service response is adequately staffed, that roles are clearly defined, training is of a high standard and that there is clarity regarding roles and responsibilities.

The standard of the accommodation families interviewed lived in and are living in, both in the private rented sector and also in homeless services, was raised as an issue by many of the families interviewed. It is crucial that accommodation meets at least the minimum standards set down.

A key question arising from this research is to ask: what could have been done to prevent the families becoming homeless in the first instance? There are no definitive answers in this report, but it would seem that while families may not have felt they experienced homelessness before or recently, they had been in precarious housing situations and at risk of homelessness in the past. Some families reported being on a social housing waiting list for a number of years. The sudden changes witnessed in the demand for accommodation in the private rented sector over the last few years has left these families and others like them more vulnerable. The need for good quality, secure and affordable accommodation for low income families is clear – not just for those who are homeless, but those who are at risk and under increasing pressure from rent increases and increased demand for housing.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will help to inform the ongoing development of responses to family homelessness.

The Housing Agency wishes to thank Dr Kathy Walsh and Brian Harvey for this research. The research would not have been possible without the cooperation of those families who gave of their time to participate in it at a very stressful juncture in their lives. The Agency is also grateful to the staff of Focus Ireland for helping to make the initial contact with families to explain the research and invite participation and to the Data Committee, chaired by Professor Eoin O'Sullivan, for very helpful comments on earlier drafts of the report.

David Silke
Director of Research and Corporate Affairs
Housing Agency

August 2015

Executive Summary

The purpose of this research was to identify why families had recently become homeless in Dublin – from their own perspective.

Data extracted from the Focus Ireland database and the PASS system was used to draw up a representative sample of 30 homeless cases. Most were interviewed in hotels, bed-and-breakfasts and supported temporary accommodation, but some had exited homelessness and were now in permanent local authority or Approved Housing Body (AHB) tenancies. The research examined the circumstances in which they became homeless and their subsequent trajectories.

Almost all of the families involved in this research had exited private rented accommodation which they could no longer afford or were issued Notices of Termination (NoT) under a variety of circumstances. Most had been long-term residents of private rented accommodation for many years, albeit much of it of poor quality. A small number had been homeless previously. Whereas on previous occasions they would have quickly re-entered private rented accommodation, on this occasion they were unable to do so because of its unaffordability and landlords 'no rent allowance' rules. Typically, they spent time with parents, relatives and friends while they continued to try to source rented accommodation and did not necessarily go to homeless services immediately.

Once in homeless services, these families were placed in various hotels, bed-and-breakfasts and in some cases supported temporary accommodation, before being offered permanent local authority or voluntary housing tenancies - a process normally taking a year or more. Within homeless services hotel accommodation was the highest quality, but with families generally confined to one room they tended to be overcrowded. Due to the commercial focus of the hotels people often had to move at short notice to accommodate hotel pre-bookings. B&B accommodation was of poorer or poor quality. The advantage of supported temporary accommodation was that it gave a family some independence, with support available to the family if needed.

Being homeless was found to have negative effects on the physical and mental health of families, children and on their schooling. It was also found to be costly, as families explained they were exhausting remaining financial assets. They were infantilized by strict rules. Most families lost the vast majority of their personal belongings. Experiences of homeless services were mixed. The key worker service provided by Focus Ireland was valued, especially its role as advocate for the family in moving out of homelessness – which the families saw as most likely to be through local authority or voluntary housing associations. The perceived lack of transparency in relation to where families were on their particular local authorities social housing waiting list was a source of some significant frustration for the families involved in this research.

The key conclusion of the research was that the primary cause of homelessness for these families was the freezing out from private rented accommodation of low-income households. What was also clear was that without additional supports this group will remain unable to re-enter this sector. Schemes and services in place to support families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness sustain/re-enter private rental tenancies

identified within the report included the Tenancy Protection Services and the Housing Assistance Payment scheme for Homeless Households. Unfortunately none of the families included in this research were aware of these initiatives.

The preference of families consulted as part of this research was for social housing tenancies (local authority or voluntary housing body), because of their security and affordability. The reality is however that demand far outstrips supply.

This report outlines a number of structural and practical/ operational areas for attention. The key structural areas for attention include the need to increase housing supply and affordability. Other areas for attention include; the need to locate sufficient and appropriate homeless facilities and services to meet the needs of the growing numbers of homeless families; the imbalance of power between landlord and tenant (and insecurity of private rented accommodation); the vulnerability to homelessness of families suffering domestic violence; the normalization in practice of top-ups paid to landlords above the rent allowance.

The practical and operational issues identified included the need to address the strong perception of a lack of any transparency in the housing list; the need for quick access to a key worker as an advocate; and specific improvements to the quality and conditions within of some homeless services (all accommodation to meet adequate standards; family-specific accommodation free from active substance users; storage facilities; all staff to meet customer care standards; rules that contribute to institutionalization and infantilisation to be amended as necessary).

Acknowledgements

The researchers wish to acknowledge the assistance of those who supervised this report, David Silke of the Housing Agency and Dr Eoin O'Sullivan of Dublin University (Trinity College).

In Focus Ireland, we thank Sinead McGinley, Aine McLoughlin, Ciara Whelan, Jenny Hayes, Mike Allen, Padraig Lennon and their colleagues in the New Presenters team for their assistance with the analysis of the data and the organisation of the interviews.

In the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive we would like to thank Bernie O'Donoghue Hynes and Colm Moroney for their assistance in providing details of how the homeless system functions and the range of supports available.

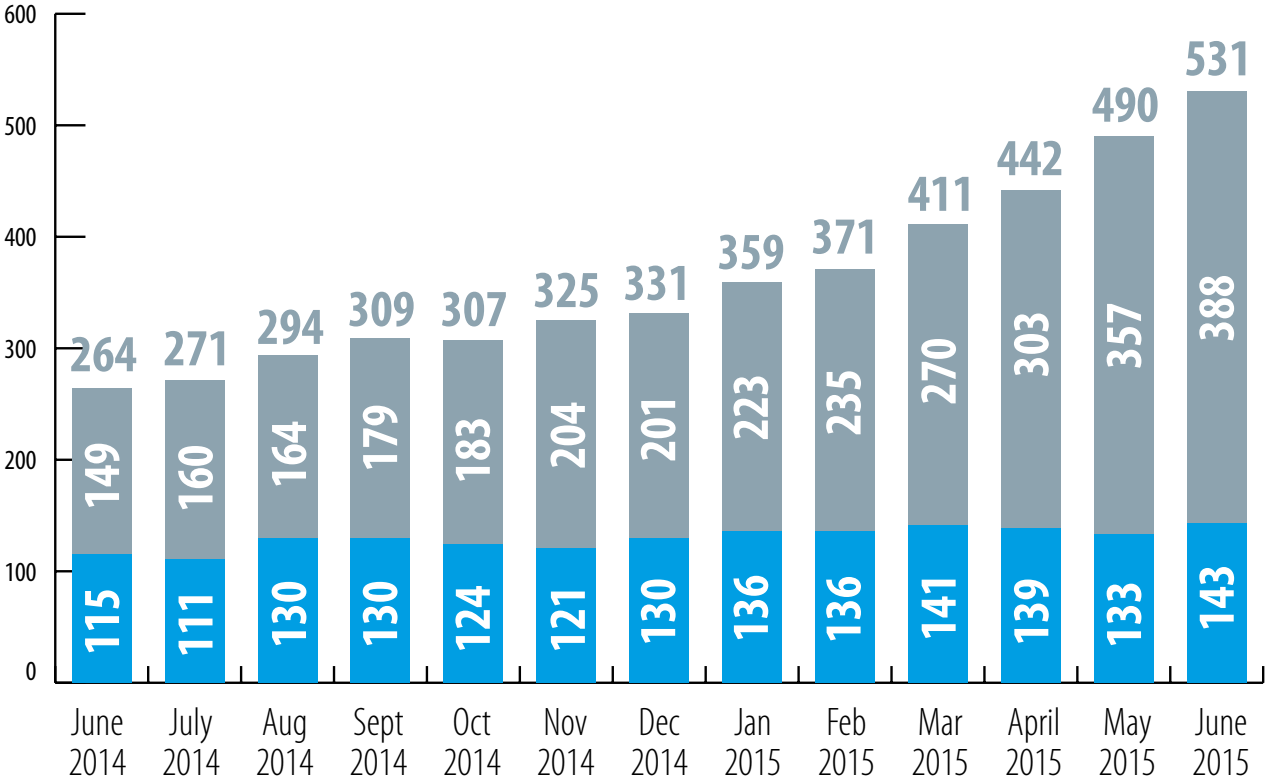
Most importantly, we would like to thank the homeless families who assisted generously with their time and telling their stories in difficult circumstances.

01 Introduction

1.1 Introduction and background

Over the last year, there has been a growing concern about the number of families presenting to homeless services. These concerns are well based with the total number of adults accessing homeless accommodation in the Dublin Region increasing from approximately 1,500 a night in June 2014 to in excess of 2,000 a night in May 2015. A key feature of this increase has been the percentage increase in the number of adults presenting with child dependents (264 families were homeless in June 2014 and 490 families homeless in May 2015). On average, 44 new families presented each month over this period, while 24 families each month departed homeless accommodation, resulting in a net average increase of 20 additional families each month. See Figure 1.1 for details[1].

Figure 1.1 **Number of families in homeless accommodation**



Source: DRHE (2015)

*The figures relate number of families in homeless emergency accommodation during one week in the given month.

1. Email dated 2/7/15 from DRHE Head of Research.

According to the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) the increase *'is in large part due to difficulties being experienced by low income families sourcing or maintaining tenancies in the private rental sector, with families leaving private rented accommodation at a faster rate than families are leaving homeless services for tenancies'* [2].

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government requested that the Housing Agency commission a piece of qualitative research to focus on the experiences of these families and their pathways into homelessness. The purpose of the research was to listen to the families' experiences with a view to helping to inform policy responses.

1.2 Research objective

The specific objective of this research was to identify and explore why (from the perspective of families) families in the Dublin region became homeless. The objective is to inform policy and policy makers and influencers. It is also expected to highlight where positive interventions could either prevent homelessness, or move families out of homelessness more quickly.

1.3 Research methodology and limitations

1.3.1 Research methodology

This research was conducted with the support of Focus Ireland, the voluntary organisation designated as the Homeless Action Team (HAT) for families by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE). The DRHE are responsible for working with and supporting the vast majority of homeless families in the four Dublin local authority areas (Dublin City, Fingal, Dun Laoghaire/ Rathdown and South Dublin).

The first task of the research was the development of a sampling frame to ensure that a representative cross-section of 30 families who were or had been homeless at some time over the period 1st January 2013- 31st December 2014 were selected for interview. The Focus Ireland new presenters database of active cases (as of 31st December 2014) was used to compile the sampling framework. A focus group was held (13th January 2015) with Focus Ireland's New Presenters team to further refine the sampling framework.

See Table 1.1 for overview of the analysis of the database; Table 1.2 for an analysis of the active cases; Table 1.3 for a more detailed analysis of the active case management cases and Table 1.4 for details of the number of children per household in the Active Case Management Cases.

Table 1.1 **Analysis of the overall Focus Ireland New Presenters database (1st Jan 2013 - 31st Dec 2014)**

Total no. of families referred to the service over the two year period	**773**
Breakdown of the total	
No. of families who received case management support (assigned a key worker)	489 (63% of total cases)
No. of families provided with access to advice and information services only	284 (37% of total cases)
No. of closed case management cases (i.e. the family is no longer homeless) (at 31st December 2014)	174 (23% of total cases)
No. of families referred to the service who did not engage with the service (at 31st December 2014). The majority of these families were provided with access to advice and information services, but for whatever reason chose not to engage. Because these families did not engage with the service little is known about them.	161 (21% of total cases)
No. of Active Cases	438 (57% of total cases)

2. Email dated 9/7/15 from DRHE Head of Research

Table 1.2 **Analysis of the active cases (as of 31st December 2014)**

No. of families provided with access to advice and information (family is waiting to be assigned a key worker)	123
No. of case management cases (family has been assigned a key worker)	315

Table 1.3 **Analysis of the Active Case Management Cases**

No. of families with previous experience of homelessness	58 (18%)
No. of families with no previous experience of homelessness	257 (82%)
No. of families with previous experience of homelessness who presented as homeless more than once in the two years (Jan 2013-Dec 2014)	18 (6%)
No. of families with no previous experience of homeless who presented as homeless more than once in the two years (Jan 2013-Dec 2014)	20 (6.3%)

Table 1.4 **Number of children within the Active Case Management Cases**

No. of children per household	**No. of households**	**Total number of children**
One	129 (41%)	129
Two	86 (27%)	172
Three	55 (17%)	165
Four	25 (8%)	100
Five or more	20 (7%)	100+
Total	**315**	**666+**

See Annex 2 for details of the final sampling framework based on an analysis of the database. The framework includes active and closed cases, with families at different stages in their journey through homeless services, some in hotels, some in B&Bs, some in supported temporary accommodation while others were housed in a combination of voluntary, local authority and private rented accommodation. Some of the families selected for interview had limited advice and information support from Focus Ireland, while others had been assigned a key worker. Various options were reviewed in relation to who should recruit the research participants. Option 1 was recruitment by Focus Ireland, an organisation known to the potential participants. Option 2 was recruitment by an independent recruiter working with the research team. Ultimately a decision was made to opt for Option 1 because the research team believed that the families were more likely to consider participation in the research if the invitation came from a known organisation, rather than unknown researchers.

Initial contact with the families selected to fit the sampling profile was made by Focus Ireland staff. Where a family was or had been actively case-managed and had been assigned a key worker, it was the key worker who made the initial contact and invited the family to participate in the research. 70% of the initial 20 families selected who had a key worker agreed to participate in the research. The families who refused the invitation to participate did so for a range of reasons, including; not wanting to share their information, or, having moved out of homelessness, they did not want to revisit what had happened. Where families declined the invitation to participate, another family with a similar profile was selected and was in turn approached by their key worker with the invitation to participate in the study.

Ten of the families to be interviewed had only had limited contact with Focus Ireland and did not have or had not yet had a key worker assigned to them. In these instances, they were contacted by a Focus Ireland staff member and invited to participate in the study.

About 50% of these families declined the invitation, while about 10% were uncontactable (e.g. mobile number no longer in service, no response to calls, texts, etc.). Replacement families with similar profiles were selected to replace these initial invitees and about half of these families declined. A third round of replacement families with similar profiles was selected and invited to participate in the study in order to ensure that a total of 10 interviews were completed with this group of families.

The 30 interviews were arranged by Focus Ireland staff and divided between the two researchers. The interviews took place in the accommodation that the families were living in at the time of the interview (interview venues include Hotels, B&B's, Private Rented, Local Authority and Voluntary Housing Accommodation). Before the interview itself got under way, interviewees were asked to sign a consent form which assured the interviewee and their family's' anonymity (although several interviewees indicated that they would be very happy to be identified). The length of interviews varied, being typically an hour, but some were shorter and others much longer. The interview was conducted with the nominated head of the household: where a couple was present both parties participated in the interview. All of the families interviewed received a €50 One for All voucher from the Housing Agency as an acknowledgement of their assistance. A total of 30 families were interviewed over the period February - April 2015.

Interviews were also conducted with representatives from the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) in order to equip the researchers with background information on how the homeless system works and what supports are available for families who are homeless. Information provided by the DRHE is included in boxes across the report.

The report was finalised following input from the Housing Agency and Members of the National Homeless Consultative Committee Data Group.

1.3.2 Research limitations

This was an exploratory piece of research which as a result has a number of limitations. Firstly, the study focuses exclusively on the exploring the views of the families. Secondly all the families involved in the research were Dublin based. They were also all accessed through one service provider. Finally, the research focused on exploring the views of the adult family members (rather than the children)

Notwithstanding these limitations the commonality of the experiences is very strong, and the families' understandings of what has happened to them, no-doubt, influencing their decision-making.

1.4 Outline of the report

Chapter 1 provides the introduction to the research. Chapter 2 presents findings on the key research question, why families have become homeless. Chapter 3 provides an analysis of the experiences of being homeless and of homeless services with a view to identifying more effective interventions and routes out of homelessness, while Chapter 4 identifies recommendations for tackling homelessness.[3]

1.5 The system for supporting families who are homeless

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility for adults who become homeless in their area (under the Housing Act, 1988). The Act makes no special provision for families with children that become homeless, only referring to 'any other person who normally resides with him [the person presenting as homeless] or who might reasonably be expected to reside with him'.

When a family becomes homeless, they are required to present to the housing section of the local authority where they were last living (when the housing section is closed they can contact the 24 hour Central Placement Service). The local authority housing section is responsible for making an initial assessment of the family's housing needs. If they deem it appropriate they will identify and secure emergency accommodation for the family. There is very limited supported temporary accommodation available for families located in the Dublin local authority areas (e.g. Focus Ireland's Aylward Green and DePaul Ireland's Rendu House) so the vast majority of families are placed in B&Bs or hotels. The local authority generally takes on the responsibility for negotiating and paying

3. This research was not asked to and does not provide a contextual chapter on homelessness in Dublin, information on which is available from other sources, such as the Dublin Region Homeless Executive and Focus Ireland.

the cost of this emergency accommodation, and assuring that the accommodation is of an acceptable standard. The exception to this is where all DRHE contracted accommodation is full, homeless families are given the option to source accommodation themselves, directly from 'non-contracted' hotels. This type of accommodation where a family is able to locate it, can generally only be booked on a night-to-night basis. The cost of this is paid directly to the hotel by the relevant local authority. This practice which was introduced to help prevent rough sleeping is referred to as 'self-accommodation'.

Homeless Action Teams (HATs) were established in all regions in 2012. As part of this process the DRHE designated the Focus Ireland family case management team as the specialist "Homeless Action Team" working with families who have become homeless in the four Dublin local authorities. Once a local authority has placed a family in emergency accommodation, they notify the Focus Ireland Homeless Action Team (HAT) – also known as the 'New Presenters' team. The role of the Focus Ireland HAT is to:

- Make initial contact with the family- in person/by phone
- Make an initial assessment of the needs of the family
- Allocate the family a key worker to assist them in identifying and securing appropriate mainstream accommodation to move out of homelessness. (Because of the growing number of cases being dealt with by the team the current wait for a key worker is approx. six months.)

The New Presenters team also includes a specialist child support worker who identifies child welfare or child protection issues which may arise, and prepares a support plan for the children. They will also inform the child protection authorities of any issues as appropriate. The team also runs a general 'advice clinic' for families who have not yet been allocated a case manager. See Figure 1.2 and 1.3 for details of the process followed when a family presents as homeless or at risk of homelessness during office hours (Figure 1.3) and outside office hours (Figure 1.2). This information was provided by representatives of the DRHE at a meeting [4] held with one of the researchers on the 1st July 2015.

4. This meeting was attended by Bernie O'Donoghue Hynes and Colm Moroney from the DRHE and Kathy Walsh.

Figure 1.2 **Processes followed when a family presents as homeless/at risk of homelessness during office hours**

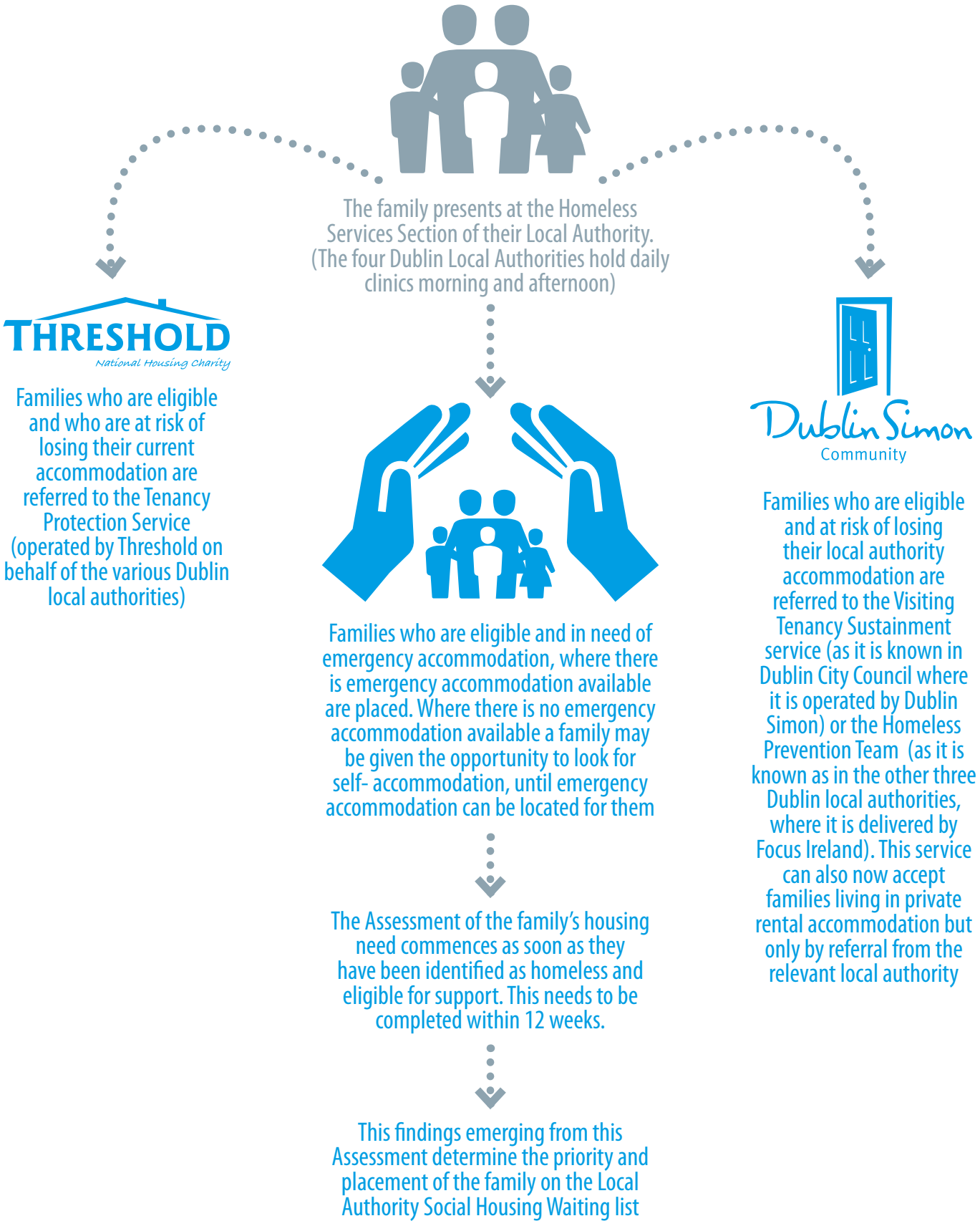
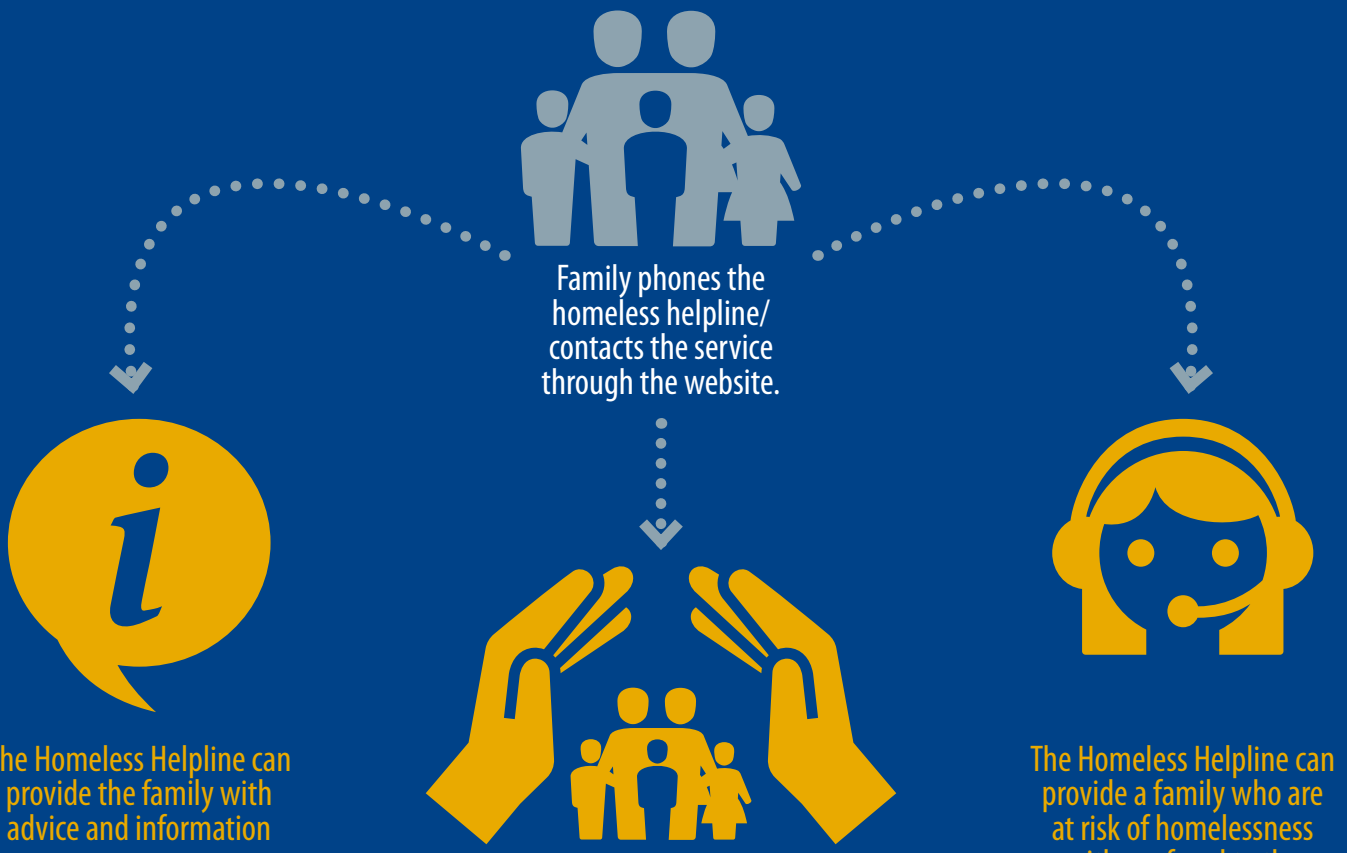


Figure 1.3 **Processes followed when a family presents as homeless/at risk of homelessness outside of office hours**



02

Findings – causes of homelessness

This chapter addresses the primary question of the research, namely the causes of homelessness, starting with the profile of homeless families (2.1) and then the reasons for homelessness (2.2). Conclusions are then drawn (2.3).

2.1 Profile of homeless families interviewed:

Eight of the families interviewed were living in permanent [5] local authority (6 families) or AHB accommodation (2 families), one family was living in private rented accommodation. The remaining 21 families were living in varying types of homeless accommodation. See Table 2.1 for a profile of the *'case management families* [6]*'* interviewed and Table 2.2 for a profile of the *'advice and information* [7]*'* families interviewed.

Table 2.1 **Profile of the 'case management families' interviewed**

Description of homeless family	Details of the children	Current accommodation
Couple (on methadone) with one child (and 3 grown up children)	One primary school child	Private rented tenancy (for the last nine months)
Couple with one child	One secondary school child (and four grown up children)	Hotel for eight months
Couple and one child	Child in primary school	B&B for the last 12 months

5. The use of the term 'permanent' highlights the fact that a long term local authority or voluntary housing association tenancy are open ended (assuming the tenant does no breach the terms of their tenancy agreement), while private rental tenancies generally last no more than four years (See the Security of Tenure Section in Annex 1 for more details).
6. Case management families are families that have been assigned a key worker
7. Advice and Information families are families that are waiting to be assigned a key worker

Description of homeless family	Details of the children	Current accommodation
Couple and one child	Child in primary school	Supported temporary accommodation (for five months)
Couple with two children	Two pre-school children (and one primary school age child who visits weekly)	Permanent voluntary housing association tenancy (since Dec 2014)
Couple with three children	One primary school child with learning disabilities and mobility issues and two grown up children	B&B (for the last eight months)
Couple with four children	Two children in primary school, one pre-school, one infant	Permanent local authority tenancy (for the last seven months)
Mother and one child	Primary school age child with learning needs	Supported temporary accommodation (for the last eight weeks)
Mother (a recovering drug user) and one son	One primary school age child (two teenage children and another grown up child live with their father)	Supported temporary accommodation for the previous four weeks
Father and two children	Two pre-school children	Permanent local authority tenancy for two months
Mother and two children	One primary school child and one pre-school child	Living with a friend and her three teenage sons (for the last six months)
Mother and two children	One pre-school, one infant	Supported temporary accommodation (for the last three months)
Mother and two children	One pre-school, one primary school	Supported temporary accommodation (for the last eight months)
Mother and two children	One child in secondary school, three grown-up children. Two dealt with separately, but one permitted to live with her (ESN).	Permanent local authority tenancy (for the last six months)
Mother and three children	Two primary school children and one preschool child	Living in a B&B with shared facilities for eight months
Mother/Grandmother with three children	One pre-school grandchild, one teenage son and one grown up son (one other child in prison)	Voluntary Housing Association/AHB tenancy for four months
Mother and three children	Two primary, one secondary	B&B for the last 12 months
Couple and five children	Two secondary, three grown up	Hotel for the last five months
Mother and four children	Two primary, one secondary, one adult with relatives	Permanent local authority tenancy for eight months
Mother and one child	One in primary school	B&B for 14 months

Table 2.2 **Profile of the 'advice and information' provided to the families interviewed**

Description of homeless family	Details of the children	Current accommodation
Couple and three children	One pre-school, two primary	Hotel for last six months
Mother and one child	One pre-school	B&B for three months
Mother and three children	One pre-school, two primary	Hotel for last two months
Mother and two children	Two young pre-school children	Permanent social housing tenancy with SLI support since February 2015
Mother and two children	Two young pre-school children	In a B&B for four months
Mother and two children	Two primary school children	In a hotel for four months
Mother and two children	One pre-school, one infant	Permanent local authority tenancy for the last four months
Mother and three children	Two primary school children (both with behavioural issues) and one preschool child	Supported temporary accommodation for five months
Mother and three children	Two primary, one pre-school	In a hotel on a B&B basis for the last two months
Mother and six children	Two grown up; four in primary school	Permanent local authority tenancy for the last seven months

See Table 2.3 for an overview of the current accommodation status of the families involved in the research.

Table 2.3 **Overview of the current accommodation status of the families involved in the research**

Current accommodation	No. of families currently in this accommodation type
Permanent social housing tenancy	9
B&B	8
Hotel	6
Supported temporary accommodation	5
Living with a friend	1
Private rented tenancy	1

The families involved in the research included Traveller families, non-Irish-national families and families dealing with problematic drug and/or alcohol issues and disability issues.

Loss of employment (while not a focus of this study) had an impact on approximately one third of the families' ability to pay their rents. Among the various reasons individuals involved in this study lost their jobs included the downturn in the economy which saw a range of businesses (including building contractors, beauty/tanning salons etc.) reduce their staffing levels and unexpected pregnancies, linked with a lack of affordable childcare.

2.2 Reasons for homelessness from the interviews with families

The reasons for homelessness are analysed under two headings: the immediate circumstances (2.2.1) and the trajectory once homelessness (2.2.2).

2.2.1 Immediate circumstances

The majority (24) of the 30 families reporting having no previous experience of homeless and were homeless for the first time in their lives. Most had been living in private rented accommodation, some for considerable periods (e.g. one family had been renting from the same landlord for 22 years). Six families had at least one family member (generally a parent) who had been homeless when they were younger (generally many years ago). These episodes were, in the view of the family, unconnected to their current situation. One family that had left homeless services when they had located a private rental property expected to be homeless again when their lease ended as their landlord had already indicated that he planned to increase their rent to a level they could not afford.

None of the families interviewed described themselves as chronically or even intermittently homeless. See Table 2.4 for details of the reasons the families gave for becoming homeless.

Table 2.4 **The reasons given by families for their homelessness**

Reason	The families' description of their experience(s)
Affordability of private rented	• All of the families interviewed had tried to locate affordable private rented accommodation and some continued to search. Most were resigned to continuing to have to pay a cash top up, but despite this none could find anything they could afford in the longer term. • One family reported getting into rent arrears because of an unexpected pregnancy. 'The money that had been used to top up the rent supplement in our (private rented) accommodation was used to prepare for the baby. We were issued with a notice of termination and our deposit was withheld. This made it impossible for us to locate other (private rented) accommodation'. This family subsequently presented to homeless services and were put up in a hotel. After 'staying out' two nights the family reported returning to the hotel to find their 'bags had been packed (by hotel staff) and all our possessions had been returned to homeless services'. The family has been staying with friends since. • An increase in rent saw another family report having to leave their private rented accommodation. They initially moved in with the mother's family, but were asked to leave because of overcrowding. They moved from there to stay with friends and from there they presented to homeless services.
Quality of private rented	• Two families reported leaving their respective private rented accommodations because of rat infestations. Children in both families ended up ill as a result, one child spending a considerable time in hospital. • The roof of the bathroom of a house where one of the families consulted was living collapsed. It was not feasible for the family to continue to live in that property and unable to find alternative accommodation, the family presented to homeless services.

Reason	The families' description of their experience(s)
Issues with Rent Allowance	• Almost all of the families interviewed reported that landlords were reluctant to or refused to take on rent supplement tenants, preferring to rent to tenants not on rent supplement. • One family reported being issued with 'a NoT because of dispute over unpaid rent allowance (€4,000+) by the Dept. of Social Protection to the tenant'. The reasons for this were not clear.
Private rental property was sold or was to be sold	• Three families (one of whom had been living in their house for 22 years) received notices of termination as a result of the various houses were to be sold. Several months later the families reported finding out that all three houses had been re-let at a higher rent. All three families were unable to find alternative accommodation and presented to homeless services. • Another family was told that their flat was to be sub-divided, and were given notice of termination.
Private rental property was re-possessed	• The private rental properties two families had been renting were repossessed by the bank. These families could find no suitable alternative accommodation and presented to homeless services. • A mother and child were told the property was being re-possessed and they must leave. In the event, new tenants moved in shortly after.
Private landlord wanted to move into the property	• A family living in private rented accommodation for a number of years received a notice of termination as their landlord wanted to move into the property. The family went to stay with the mother's family and friends, but the father could not handle this and returned to his country of origin. The mother and three children subsequently presented to homeless services.
Private landlord issued a Notice of Termination	• One family (with four children) was given a notice of termination. The family had expected to find new accommodation but were unable to find anything they regarded to be affordable.
Domestic Violence & Harassment	• One family had to leave their home when a partner became violent. • Another family became homeless when a partner suddenly became violent and damaged their flat, smashing windows and personal possessions before leaving. The landlord issued a seven-day notice of termination because of his anti-social behaviour. The family moved from there to the family home of one of the parents but that was not sustainable particularly after the mother realized shortly after that she was pregnant with her second child. The family subsequently presented to homeless services. • A mother (with two children) living in private rented accommodation was harassed by her former partner to such an extent that she was granted a barring order against him. Despite this he continued to make a nuisance of himself to the point that neighbours complained about her. Aware that a formal Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) complaint would stand against any future attempt to get accommodation, she handed in the keys and left.

Reason	The families' description of their experience(s)
Relationship breakdown/ Death of a partner or child	• A mother and two children were put out by the partner (of his family home) where they had been living, when the relationship broke down. • A suicide within a family (in a local authority property) saw the family move out of the house (because of the suicide in the home) and into the parental family home. This situation was not sustainable and the family subsequently presented to homeless services. • The breakup of the relationship between the mother and father saw the father leave the family home and the mother was unable to meet the rent and the various bills alone. The family (including two children) moved back to the mother's family home, however a family row saw the family leave that house and present to family services. • One mother moved out of the family home because of the breakdown of her relationship with her partner linked to the re-occurrence of her addiction issues. She took her youngest (primary school age) child with her and left the remaining children with their father in the family home. • A family breakup saw one parent and two children return to one of the parent's family home. This situation became unsustainable due to overcrowding and the family presented to homeless services. • A father and his children moved out of the family home after the breakdown of the relationship. • One mother left the country to work abroad after the suicide of one of her children. When she returned, she exhausted all her savings in weeks in a winter-let holiday home and subsequently presented to homeless services.
Anti-social behaviour	• One family indicated that they were the victims of anti-social behaviour (as a result of a false allegation of robbery against one of the teenage children) and as a result were given notice of termination by the landlord. They were unable to find alternative accommodation and presented to homeless services. • Another family reported they were the victims of severe anti-social behaviour linked to gangland feuding. They left their local authority accommodation and sold their belongings in order to raise the fare to travel out of the country. When they returned to the country, they presented to homeless services.
Voluntary Housing Rent Arrears	• Rent arrears built up for a family because of one parent's mental health issues. Efforts to settle with the voluntary housing agency failed and the family left and presented to homeless services.
Reports of anti-social behaviour, abandonment of the property and local authority rent arrears	• One family housed by a local authority reported being made to feel very unwelcome by their neighbours when they learned that both parents were on methadone. A number of complaints were made against the family, but when investigated by the local authority no evidence was found to support the claims. With the father in prison, a death outside the country saw the remaining family travel to the funeral. While they were out of the country the house was broken into and the break-in reported to the local authority. When the family returned, the house has been boarded up as the family was considered by the local authority to have abandoned the house. The family subsequently presented to homeless services.

Reason	The families' description of their experience(s)
Ejection from the family (of origin) home or from friends	• Three one-parent families reported being ejected from their family (of origin) home because of pregnancies and overcrowding, with one family home providing shelter for four families. • Many families when they initially became homeless returned to the family home of one of the parents/or stayed with friends. Some families moved between the two. This only provided a temporary respite with most families leaving that situation to present to homeless services

In examining the circumstances of homelessness, the vast majority of the families had been in private rented accommodation, with the exception of one in voluntary housing and four in local authority accommodation. Quite a number had left in advance of an imminent eviction. Table 2.5 provides an overview of this analysis.

Table 2.5 **The key reasons provided by the families as to why they became homeless**

Theme	Reason provided by the family for their homelessness	No. families affected by this issue
Private Rental Market issues	Lack of affordable private rental accommodation	30
	Private rental property was/was to be sold Private landlord wanted to move into the property	5
	Quality of private rented accommodation	3
	Private rental property re-possessed by the bank	2
Rent Allowance Issues	Rent allowance tenants not accepted by many landlords	30
	Top up between real rent and rent allowance too great to be sustainable in the longer term	
Relationship-related Issues	Relationship breakdown/death of a partner	6
	Ejection by the family of origin	3
	Domestic violence	3
Anti-social behaviour	Anti-social behaviour caused by partner & others	3
Ill-health	Rent arrears linked to ill health	1
Other	Reported abandonment of local authority and rent arrears	1
	Private landlord issued a Notice of Termination (reasons unclear)	1

There are several striking features of this table. Some of which relate to housing others of which relate to life events:

Striking housing related features include:

The dependency of the vast majority of this group of families on the private rental sector to meet their accommodation needs.

- Difficulties experienced in sourcing affordable accommodation within the private rental sector.
- The impact on these families of recent rent increases.
- The reluctance or refusal of private landlords to accept tenants in receipt of rent supplement.
- The level of dilapidation and extent of poor quality private rental accommodation being used by these families. At least three tenants left their accommodation due to extremely basic health and safety reasons, two because of rat infestations, and another because of the collapse of a roof, while others lived in very poor quality private rented accommodation. Others continued to live in substandard accommodation in the absence of being able to locate suitable alternative accommodation.

The families appeared to be largely unaware of services that may have been able to help them, such as: the Private Residential Tenancies Board, the Tenancy Protection Services and the HSE Environmental Health Office/Officers.

Striking life event related features include:

- The impact of relationship breakdown and domestic violence a on the number of families who were homeless. In most cases, it was the parent with the children who was obliged to leave.
- The role of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) is another striking feature of this research. In almost all instances detailed in Table 2.4 the anti-social behaviour was by the violent male partner, yet it was the woman, and her children, who were forced to flee, despite having protection orders. The ASB complaint was normally taken against the woman, even though she was acknowledged not to be the perpetrator, but the mere allegation would damage her chances of future private or local authority accommodation. In one case, a withdrawal of the complaint was negotiated, on the condition that she left immediately (with a positive landlord reference), which she did.

The Role of a Notice of Termination ('NoT')
In some situations a Notice of Termination (NoT) was issued, but it was not used in others. Under the Residential Tenancies Act, 2004; the minimum notice that must be given is 28 days (and more in the case of tenancies of longer duration than six months), but this research encountered families who reported receiving notice of 10 days, 5 days or even no notice. Although these NoTs fell far short of the legally required minimum, it seems unlikely that a delayed departure would have prevented the family from becoming homeless. Several tenants formally insisted on being issued a NoT, lest they subsequently be accused of making themselves voluntarily homeless. A feature of the leaving of private rented accommodation is the grey area that can exist between notice to go and actual departure. Once a NoT is issued, or landlords make it clear the tenant is no longer welcome, most will leave sooner rather than later in order to begin to make alternative arrangements for themselves. An important factor is that the majority of tenants want - indeed need - a positive, written reference from their current landlord to present to a new landlord confirming that they are cooperative tenants. To ensure that this is provided, they comply with the landlord's request for them to leave within the landlord's timeframe, rather that the statutory minimum notice period. If they stood their ground and argued for their 'rights' as tenants, even if they were familiar with the terms of the 2004 Act (none indicated that they were), a positive reference would unlikely be forthcoming. An improved knowledge of tenant rights would ultimately have made little difference in such a legally unequal situation. It is worth adding that although participants had extraordinary personal resourcefulness to survive their situations, they were not well-networked or legally informed with the confidence to argue their case in a professional way. Two issues are now explored in more detail: sources of information and support; and pathways (2.3.1-2).

2.2.2 Sources of Information and Support

The families interviewed were questioned about their sources of information, advice and assistance. Just under half reported being either aware or becoming quickly aware of local authority homeless services and of knowing where to find them (in one case, the evicting partner drove the mother directly to the services). Although a range of Tenancy Sustainment Services (including a Tenancy Protection Service for

private rental tenants and tenancy sustainment services for local authority tenants) have been developed, and designed to avert loss of tenancies, none of the families interviewed appeared to be aware or had had contact with these services. One family who had been placed in social housing had engaged with the Support to Live Independently (SLI) service provided by Dublin Simon, while several had stayed in Sonas Women's Refuges.

The role of elected representatives
Interestingly, for the majority of the families consulted their first point of call had been their locally elected representatives including City and County Councillors and TDs. The Councillors and TDs advised the families where they should present and their entitlements (although not always accurately). A small number of Councillors were very active in support of the families consulted and had ongoing contact with them. Other Councillors had provided some initial signposting with contact petering out after that.

Accessing support from the voluntary sector
In general, the families consulted had never heard of Focus Ireland before they had become homeless, but once they did become homeless they had become aware of Focus Ireland at varying stages. A small number (4-5 families) had sought the help of Threshold. In two situations Threshold were able to work with the families to ensure that they received the correct minimum notice and in another case a couple of months' additional notice (It is also the case that some of the families involved in this study were homeless prior to the establishment of the Tenancy Protection Service operated by Threshold). For the families that were eligible to present to the service- most had presented to Threshold too late (i.e. when they were/ immediately before they became homeless) in the process for Threshold to be able to help them. One family went to a Citizen's Information Centre, but the only useful advice they were able to provide was *'not to do anything that could be construed as making themselves intentionally homeless'.* Another parent reported going to a local youth project they had been involved in when they were younger, this group put them in touch with the local authority homeless services and a supportive local councillor. A third family who had connections with the local GAA club went to the chair of the club who in turn put them in touch with a local County Councillor, who has been very supportive of the family over a sustained timeframe.

2.2.3 Pathways

Most of the participants in the study were long-term residents of the private rented sector, often for many years. None had been home owners. A small proportion had previously been local authority or voluntary housing tenants. They were used to being private rental tenants: some had lived in good-quality accommodation and were happy there. Yet for many, private rented accommodation combined high prices with poor standards. They emphasized that they had rented before: 'I was a good tenant'. Some were frequent movers and had changed accommodation several times in the course of the previous years. Leaving one private rented home and looking for another was a process that some were used to, albeit not so precipitously. A review of the subsequent trajectories of the families interviewed highlights how a lack of accommodation turned into a period of homelessness, sometimes prolonged. See Table 2.6 for details.

Table 2.6 **Pathways of the families interviewed (from the families' perspective)**

Length of time homeless	Description of the family	Journey through homeless services
> 1 year	Mother with three children	Staying in a B&B for the last 12 months, previously in a hotel for two months.
	Mother with two children	Staying with a family friend and her three children for almost six months, previously in hotel for six months but lost this when the family 'stayed out' without permission.
	Mother with four children	Staying in two rooms in a hotel, previously stayed in one room of a different hotel. This family has just been allocated a local authority house and are waiting for the keys and move in date.

Length of time homeless	Description of the family	Journey through homeless services
	Mother with three children	Staying in a hotel for the last two months, previously slept in the car for the month of January, and prior to this, they lived with family for 12 months.
	Couple with one child	Staying in a B&B for over 12 months.
	Couple with one child	Currently housed in private rented- spent the two previous years in a B &B.
	Mother with one child	Staying in in supported temporary accommodation. Previously lived in a B&B for six months and another B&B for two months.
	Mother and two children (and two adult children)	This family is now housed in social housing. Previously spent a month in a hotel and over 12 months is a B&B/guesthouse. Two older children (over 18) who had been living at home were not considered part of the family unit and had to make their own arrangements; one left the country, the other engaged with homeless services. While in homeless services this adult developed addiction issues, and is now in prison. The older sibling who left the country has returned to live with them.
	Mother with partner and one child	Following receipt of a NoT, this family stayed in various hotels & B&B's, then supported temporary accommodation (their current location).
	Mother with six children	Currently housed in permanent local authority accommodation. Became homeless due to the suicide of father, following which the family lived out of doors (for a short period), in hotels, and in various B&Bs.
	Mother and child	Staying in a B&B for the last 14 months. Left private rented home because of repossession.
>6-12 months	Couple with five children	Staying in a hotel for over six months.
	Couple with three children	Staying in supported temporary accommodation for the last eight months. Previous to this they were in a hotel and a B&B for a couple of weeks each.
	Couple with one child	Staying in a hotel for the last 8 months. When they become homeless initially there was some confusion in relation to which local authority was responsible for housing them. This was settled with the intervention of a local elected representative.
	Mother with two children	Staying in a hotel for almost four months, previously lived in a B&B for eight months
	Mother with one child	Currently staying in supported temporary accommodation, previous to this stayed in a B&B for seven months
	Mother with two children	This family is housed in social housing with SLI support. Previous to, this the family stayed in various hotels and a couple of women's refuges.
	Couple with two children	This family is housed in social housing. Previously they stayed in a B&B with shared facilities for six months and before that in a different B&B.

Length of time homeless	Description of the family	Journey through homeless services
	Mother with three children	Staying in a B&B with shared facilities for eight months, previous to this the family stayed with family for three months while trying to find alternative rental accommodation.
	Mother with two children (and two adult children)	Family now housed in local authority housing. Older children (>18) were obliged to find their own accommodation and family was separated.
	Mother with two children	Currently staying in supported temporary accommodation. Previous to this the family lived in a hotel for a short period and before that they lived with family until homeless services could place them. When the family initially became homeless the mother was pregnant and she and her child were place in a mother and baby unit until after the birth of her child.
	Mother with two children	Currently staying in supported temporary accommodation. They previously stayed with friend for a few weeks (having refused what the family considered unsafe temporary accommodation). Previous to this the family stayed in a women's refuge as a result of a former partner finding her.
	Father with two children	This family is now housed out of homeless services and living in permanent local authority accommodation. Previously this family stayed in a hotel for seven months and previous to that this stayed with his mother, then his sister after leaving the family home.
	Mother with four children	This family is now housed in permanent local authority accommodation. This family initially become homeless after being issued with a NoT, they stayed with family for the first eight months, before being sent to B&B.
	Mother with young children	This family is housed in permanent local authority accommodation. Initially became homeless when issued with a 'NoT' because of partner's violence, thereafter spent six months with relatives, a month living in car
< 6 months	Mother and two children	This family is housed in permanent local authority accommodation. Previous to this they spent four months in homeless services, during which time they stayed in five different hotels.
	Mother and one child	Staying in a hotel for five months, after being asked to leave the parental home
	Mother and two children	Staying in a B&B for four months. When the family initially presented as homeless, they reported being told by homeless services that they had 'nowhere to place them'. With nowhere to go the family went to a city centre Garda station where staff there found them a short term place in a refuge before they were re-located to the B&B they are currently living in.
	Mother and three children	Staying in supported temporary accommodation for four months. When they initially become homeless, they stayed on a friend's floor. Previous to this they had been staying with family until they were asked to leave.

These pathways illustrate important points:

- Many of those who become homeless reported going immediately to stay with friends or relatives in the hope that from that base they could quickly restore their situation and find other accommodation. Homeless services were not necessarily their first port of call. They continue 'sofa surfing' for as long as they can, which varies from days to months depending on the level of overcrowding and goodwill.
- Families moved quickly to try and locate alternative accommodation, when it became clear that they would have to leave their current accommodation. One participant spoke of how she received a phone call telling her to leave when waiting to collect her daughter from school: she 'hit the computers' that evening looking for a new place. She tried 40-50 different places, universally meeting 'no rent allowances'.
- Many tried to avoid a call on homeless services for as long as possible, though some later regretted not having tried to get themselves 'into the system' sooner. None appeared to regard homeless services as a source of advice and information about their options.
- Once families reached homeless services, they report being placed in B&B's, hotels and Supported Temporary Accommodation, with some families reporting being moved between these accommodation types. Before they are found permanent council or social accommodation, normally a flat but in some cases a house. *'We were in a B&B then a hotel, then another B&B before we got this flat'.*
- Some families were sent to B&B's, others to hotels. With families transferred from B&B's to hotels and vice versa. Some families were also placed in supported temporary accommodation.

Modest charges are made for B&B and supported temporary accommodation (typically €20 to €25 a week), but the full cost is paid by the relevant local authority in recognition of the lack of security associated with living in hotels.

At several stages of their journey through homeless services, families tried to re-enter the private rented market, but only one was successful. Six months after doing so, one family say that it was *'a big mistake'*, given that they know that they will have to leave that accommodation at the end of their lease as the landlord has already indicated that he intends to increase the rent. Despite this, homeless services continue to encourage families to re-enter the private rented sector, with families repeatedly told to *'keep on trying'*.

Families made strenuous efforts to obtain private rented accommodation, which was the strategy they had frequently and efficiently used before when leaving previous private rented accommodation - except that on these occasions they were unsuccessful. Families spoke of trying 40, 50, even 60 places. Had such accommodation been available, their periods of homelessness might have been confined to a few nights staying with parents or friends and they might never have been recorded as homeless or seen themselves as such. Participants in this research insisted that they had a history of skilled, determined and successful seeking of private rented accommodation. Their experience provided evidence that opportunities for affordable, low-cost private rented accommodation had dried up.

Eventually, sometimes after months, most of the families consulted had *'given up'* trying to find rented accommodation. This was either because of *'no rent allowances'* rules, financial exhaustion meaning they cannot afford two months' rent in advance, or because the gap between the *'real rent'* and the Rent Allowance was so large that *'we know we could never afford it anyway'*. For those with children attending school at some considerable distance from their *'homeless accommodation'*, most of their time was in any case taken up in getting children to and from school.

The issue of financial exhaustion

The families consulted reported having quickly used up their savings and any other assets as a result of the high cost of being homeless. For the three families interviewed who owned cars when they entered homelessness: two reported having to sell their cars because they could not afford repairs, while the third organised their schedule around the avoidance of car parking charges. Several of the families consulted reported losing their deposit in the course of leaving their previous accommodation. This in effect meant that they had to find a new deposit, generally a month's rent in advance, on top of the first month's rent in advance, to re-enter private rented accommodation. The length of time families are or were homeless varies. The shortest period was one month – this was the case of the pregnant woman sleeping with her child in a car (although she had been homeless many months before going to homeless services). Some of these trajectories

Box 01 Why families are moved between different types of homeless accommodation

- Families may be moved at their own request (to be closer to schools, extended family, etc.). Not all requests for transfers granted because moving a family from one accommodation to another (depending on how long they have been there) often necessitates some refurbishment of the accommodation before it can be made available to another family, thus reducing (be it temporarily) the available stock of accommodation.
- Access to supported temporary accommodation while waiting for a tenancy is the ideal, so if a vacancy arises families may be moved.
- Families may be moved at the request of the accommodation provider (commercial hotels can require their rooms back at short notice, while hotels and B&B's can request that a particular family/individuals be moved.
- Families may be moved in order to fill contracted accommodation spaces and reduce spending on hotel accommodation.

Source: Meeting with the DRHE 1/7/2015

have lasted as long as four years. Accommodation was found for some families in voluntary housing, and others were accommodated in local authority accommodation.

For all the faults of this revolving system, the majority of families were relieved that they 'never had to spend a night on the street'. Two of the families consulted did however indicate that they had been left to fend for themselves on their first night of homelessness. One family reported it being suggested to them by the homeless services that they ask the Gardaí for a cell, but that was exceptional. The system of homeless services has the merit of preventing most families from sleeping rough. No families were placed or found themselves in traditional shelter-type accommodation. At the same time, some have been at risk of exposure. Two of the families consulted reported sleeping in their cars, one in January, who recalled how 'horribly cold' it was. The other family reported camping out in the last wet summers during which time all their clothes and possessions got wet.

2.3 Conclusions

Before coming to the principal conclusions on the causes of homelessness, some general points are made. For the vast majority of those consulted as part of the research, their homelessness was a first time experience, many volunteering that *'I never thought that this could happen to me'.* None had exited from mortgaged properties as a result of their own indebtedness and the vast majority had been housed within private rented sector. While four to five of the parents interviewed reported having prior history of homelessness, when they were younger (and not a parent) but this was not something they considered relevant to their current situation.

It is clear from the interviews that quite a number of the families had found themselves looking for private rented accommodation in similar immediate circumstances before, but this had never previously led to periods of homelessness. Previously they might have spent a week or two with parents or friends, and quickly re-entered

> "'I had thought there was nothing worse than becoming homeless and then they told me that the family would have to be split up, it was devastating."

the private rented sector, normally within days. This time, an immediate crisis turned into a prolonged event.

The key factors that contributed to this appear to be the lack of affordable private rental accommodation; increasing rents and the widening gap between rent supplement and actual rents (and associated increasing levels of top-ups required to meet the gap); the reluctance of landlords to accept rent allowance tenants; shrinkage in the private rental market due property sales, and bank repossessions. The quality of some private rental property also continues to be an issue. This situation was compounded by the lack of alternatives and the lack of social housing provision in general, with many of the families consulted remaining on the social housing waiting list for years.

Other factors that had a significant bearing on homelessness were relationship-related issues, which included relationship breakdown, domestic violence and in a small number of cases ejection from the family home. Rent arrears linked to ill-health and unforeseen events (an unexpected pregnancy, death of a family member, etc.) were also issues.

In most cases, there was a precipitating event, such as rats, the roof falling in, failure to issue rent allowance payments, arrears due to mental illness, or partner or child suicide. In a number of cases a violent male ejected a female and the children, while in others feuding and anti-social behaviour by others saw the family either leave of their own volition or be asked to leave by the landlord. The speed of the precipitating event, which may take place over hours or days, sometimes at weekends, means that the window of time available to prevent the situation from deteriorating was often very short.

Families who have or who are about to become homeless generally manage to locate homeless services quite quickly. Interestingly, for a number of families, locally elected representatives were their first point of contact and it was they who directed them to homeless services. The normal procedure is for families to be placed immediately in either B&B or hotel accommodation. From there, they may or may not be placed in supported temporary accommodation where they wait for a place in local authority or voluntary housing. Although in most cases this type of hotel/B&B accommodation is arranged by homeless services, a small number of the families involved in this research had been asked to make these arrangements themselves. None of these families had successfully managed to make a direct booking with a hotel.

One homeless family turns into a number of homeless clients:

There were four incidences of homeless families being split up by homeless services with the families precluded from bringing their older children (18+) with them, in an enforced separation described by one of the mothers as 'heart-breaking'. In effect, each adult child (over 18) was required to register as a homeless individual (an exception was made in case of an adult child with special needs, who was permitted to continue to live with the family).

These families and their adult children adopted different coping strategies. Some adult children spent their time 'sofa surfing' with, in the view of their mother 'generous and tolerant' friends, while others left the country. One vulnerable young adult entered homeless services with disastrous consequences - subsequently they started using drugs which in turn lead to involvement in serious

crime and incarceration in prison. This process was understandably the cause of some considerable distress for the families involved.

> *'I had thought there was nothing worse than becoming homeless and then they told me that the family would have to be split up, it was devastating'*

> *'I was so worried, (name) had never lived alone and now they were going into a hostel on their own, (name) was not ready for that'*

Five families interviewed as part of this research has previously been provided with accommodation, four by local authorities and one by a voluntary housing association. These families left their accommodation and ultimately became homeless as a result of unique personal circumstances (including suicides within the family and mental health issues). None made themselves homeless intentionally: it was generally an unusual set of often very tragic circumstances that had prompted them to leave. In two cases, the suicide took place in the home concerned, having unsurprisingly a traumatising effect.

For the families interviewed who had been provided with accommodation that could be described as permanent, they recognized it as a vast improvement- offering them security on a modest rent (€50). They had a palpable sense of relief at the security it brought them. Some would, however, still plan to move on later. Their reasons for wanting to move on generally related to either location (they were far from where they had lived before or from family) and or a lack of facilities, such as safe play areas for their children.

03

Findings – experience of homelessness

Chapter 2 looked at the causes of homelessness and subsequent trajectories, illustrating how a short-term event or crisis that might in earlier years have been manageable turns into a longer-term situation. Chapter 3 seeks to examine how homeless services and voluntary organisations support homeless families in terms of immediate responses (3.1); homeless accommodation (3.2); and then permanent accommodation (3.3) before conclusions are drawn which may shed light on the avoidance of and exit from homelessness (3.4).

3.1 Immediate responses

The first point of contact with homeless services is a critical one in the response to homelessness. Here the role of local authority homeless services is examined (3.1.1) and then that of voluntary organisations (3.1.2).

3.1.1 Homeless services

The families consulted reported being aware of the severe pressure those working in local authority homeless services sections were under, due to the growing number of families and others looking for support. Most staff working in the homeless services sections of the various local authorities were viewed as *'helpful'*, *'very helpful'* by the families interviewed, especially the female staff, who demonstrated sympathy and a desire to help. They were variously described as *'helpful'* and *'pleasant'* with one person commenting: *'I'm lucky what they did for me'*. Most of the families were well aware that homeless services staff were under extreme pressure and that it must be difficult for them: they made a distinction between the staff and the difficult system that they were obliged to operate. For example, one mother recalled how, when she became homeless, she was told to *'phone back at 10pm'.* When she did she was told she *'was number 125 in the phone queue'*. See Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2 for details of how the homeless services operate during office hours and outside of office hours.

A very small number of staff working in homeless services were identified by some of the families consulted as having a poor attitude. The families consulted described these individuals *'talking down to me'*, *'being difficult to deal with'*, *'wrecking my head'*, *'being at best unhelpful and at worst sarcastic and rude'*. Two interviewees reported feeling so strongly about their experiences that they reported having made formal complaints.

The way the system worked was also identified as a cause of significant stress by several of the families interviewed. Quite a number reported how the initial response of homeless services of *'we've nothing for you'* required them to begin to argue (*'we will be on the streets unless you help'*). The families believed that in many cases this created a problematical relationship from the start. Another family reported going to their local authority office (following the physical collapse of their private rented accommodation) only to find *'12 families already ahead of her and a two hour wait'*. This is probably not surprising given the numbers of homeless families within the system and newly presenting to services (See Figure 1.1 for details).

The families interviewed were of the view that once they had been placed in emergency accommodation they were often left there until such a time as they were appointed a case manager/key worker (the average waiting time is currently between five to six months unless a family has been identified as a priority, where this is the case the family are allocated a case manager key worker within a number of weeks [8]), or until the family made contact with homeless services to request a move to alternative emergency accommodation. Where a family had made contact with homeless services to determine their position on the list for social housing, they reported being told that it would be at least 12 months before they would begin to be considered for housing.

3.1.2 Voluntary organisations

The level of awareness of services provided by voluntary organisations was generally low among the families consulted. The principal helping agency was identified as Focus Ireland, This is not a surprise given that Focus Ireland have a key role to play in supporting families who are homeless. Interestingly though none of the families had heard of the organisation before becoming homeless. Few families had contact with Threshold, while 8-10 families had received support from the Society of St Vincent de Paul in various forms (hampers for Christmas, vouchers, a contribution toward rent arrears, help with meeting the cost of storing furniture, etc.). A couple of families had also received support from community-based organisations that they were already involved in, while one had gone to the Citizens Information Board for advice. About half of the families had made contact with at least one locally elected city or county councillor and some had also made contact with a local TD, with varying degrees of effectiveness depending on the individual elected representative contacted. Three of four families reported having a very positive engagement with an elected representative, for others it was less effective.

Interestingly, not all of the families consulted were clear about what Focus Ireland could do for them, given that 'they cannot manufacture accommodation'. Some said 'we never knew and we still don't know'. Despite that, the families were pleased to meet a 'friendly face' and their allocation by Focus Ireland of a key worker was something that was eagerly anticipated. Generally, key workers when they were assigned to a family were considered 'a help' and most 'could not do enough for you', while a minority were reported to be 'less hands-on' with only 'sporadic contact'. Most of the families consulted were very pleased with their key worker – 'you could confide in them, cry your heart out to them'. Ultimately the interviewees appeared to regard their key workers as their 'advocate', and they their main function as 'arguing their case as forcibly as possible with the local authority for accommodation for them'. As one interviewee described it: 'I need a key worker to get answers from homeless services'. It should be noted that the role attributed to key workers by the families is somewhat different to that detailed in Section 1.5.

Quite a number of the families consulted referred to the long wait for a key worker. Several of the families consulted were waiting to be allocated a key worker. With a current wait time of five to six months (at the time of writing June 2015), in that interim period waiting, many families were of the opinion that they had 'no advocate, no one to fight for you' and reported 'feeling forgotten about'. While waiting to be appointed a key worker, families can access Focus Ireland's advice and information service, but only a few families had done so.

8. Information provided by Áine McLaughlin, Assistant Project Leader, Focus Ireland email dated 2/6/2015.

Box 02 **How the Social Housing Waiting List works in Dublin City Council**

- Once a family has been deemed eligible by the Council for social housing, they are placed on its waiting list.
- As part of their placement on this list the family can specify up to three areas where they would choose to live.
- Where a family is placed on the list in Dublin City Council is determined by a) time of the list and b) priority status. Homeless families have the highest priority along with a range of other groups such as Travellers and people with disabilities.
- The length of time a homeless family spends on the list is determined their location choices and by their needs. (For example: some locations have more social housing than other locations, while four bedroomed accommodation is much scarcer than two bedroomed.)
- Families who want to know their current position on the waiting list and what this means in terms of a time wait, can contact the Housing Allocations of Dublin City Council to request this information.

Source: Meeting with the DRHE 1/7/2015

"'I was worried both about the impact of living here and the impact all the changes were having on the kids. I should not have been, for they were and are very understanding and supportive."

Interestingly quite a number of families unprompted by the researchers identified their children's teachers and school principals as very supportive. In one case:

> *'I was nervous and embarrassed about telling the school about what had happened and where we were living. I should not have been, for they were and are very understanding and supportive and I feel they are keeping an eye out for the kids. They keep in touch with me regularly and have told me not to worry about what we owe them until we are sorted'.*

In another,

> *'I was worried both about the impact of living here and the impact all the changes were having on the kids. When I told the school they were very good, they understood and they agreed. They offered and wrote letters to homeless services backing up my concerns. Nothing has happened yet, but it is good for me to know they understand and are in my kids' corner'.*

3.2 Homeless accommodation

With homeless families often spending a considerable period of time in homeless accommodation the question remains *'how effective is this as an intervention and as a route out of homelessness'*? This section explores the effectiveness of the different accommodation types as well as homeless accommodation more generally.

3.2.1 Hotels

While the quality of the hotels used by homeless services varied, hotel accommodation generally provided the highest physical standard of accommodation. Families provided with hotel accommodation were generally provided with one (generally en-suite) room (very large families were occasionally provided with two rooms to accommodate older siblings, many of whom required a quiet space to study) for themselves and their belongings. This meant the room was often both cluttered and over-crowded. In many cases, the number of beds provided was less than the number of residents, necessitating the sharing of double beds by family members, raising all kinds of issues within family units with older teenage children. Privacy issues also arose with a parents and older siblings having to share the same room to dress in. This research encountered a mother with three children in one bedroom, three beds, with small bathroom; another of a mother with three children in one bedroom, sharing a bathroom with another family.

Homeless families accommodated in hotels are provided with breakfast, but they must provide for the rest of their meals. Rooms generally contain an electric kettle, but no cooking facilities or fridge. Hotels generally prohibit residents from bringing food to their rooms. The normal procedure is for homeless services to be informed of breaches in these regulations, whereupon the family concerned is issued with a warning by homeless services (in one case, an exception was made for a man to bring his wife food in her room because she was immobile on oxygen through a tank). Some residents occasionally evade these rules by cooking pot noodles but for the most part families living in hotels tended to exist on takeaway food. One mother expressed her concern about her young child's need for milk; she could not keep milk in her room as it quickly went off.

Generally, hotel accommodation was considered warm, clean and safe. The challenge for homeless families were to keep children occupied, particularly during school holiday time. Laundry was also an issue, with no place to wash or dry clothes. Most families took clothes to the launderette at least once and often more a week. One family spent at least €40/week on laundry. Some washed and dried their clothes in their bedrooms, creating damp risk. One got her elderly mother to do her washing. While most hotels were also fairly quiet, some hotels were noisy, with music playing till late, making it hard for children to sleep.

3.2.2 B&B accommodation

Many of the families consulted as part of this research found living in B&B type accommodation particularly difficult. There were many rules e.g. a curfew of 11.30pm after which time you were not admitted, not being able to use the cooker in the mornings, not being able to access the kitchen after 10pm, only being able to use the laundry facilities (where they existed) at a certain fixed time during the week, no visitors, etc. At the same time, these places were noisy, with few if any places for children to play and children not being allowed to leave their room without being accompanied by an adult. Families were, in effect, confined to their rooms in very cramped conditions. In some cases 12 and 13 families were expected to share a kitchen and there was often argument over access to the cooker or cookers. In one B&B, which had no cooking facilities and where room facilities (e.g. microwaves) were prohibited, one mother, who had been on a cooking course, was so adamant that her and her daughter's health would not suffer from takeaways that she smuggled in vegetables and fresh food.

Quite a number of the families spoke about the poor and/or cramped conditions in B&Bs. One mother with two young children who was visited by one of the researchers was in a cold, damp basement flat for which she paid €20 a week. Typically, she and her children wore heavy clothing and blankets to keep warm during daytime hours (Radiator heating was supplied twice a day from 7am-9am and 7pm-9pm). There was no hot water and cooking was a problem because when the cooker was turned on it set off the fire alarm in the building. For another family their issue with this type of accommodation was overcrowding as they described it *'if one person got flu, we all got flu'.*

In many cases, the B&Bs provided accommodation for families, for couples and for single people, leaving some families very uneasy about who they were sharing the building with. Many of the families also spoke about how the accommodation smelt of cannabis and about how they wished they could have spared their children the experiences of *'sharing with people who active drug users', 'seeing other children being taken into care', 'a man dying of a drug overdose in the next room', 'other people screaming abuse at one another'* and so on. One mother spoke about how the B&B in which she and her family were living, while it did have a number of families living there, the majority of rooms were taken by single male active drug users. She was not comfortable with her daughter being around these people.

The cleanliness of some B&B's was an issue for families. These families spoke at length about how the entire family was never well when they lived there. A number of the families with small children said that they could not put their children on the floor, to either sit, crawl or walk, because they were afraid of what they would pick up. Some parents believed that this had or was having a negative effect on the development of their babies and toddlers and it was something they worried about. Several described their B&Bs as dirty, with the bed so dirty that one interviewee bought her own bed linen.

Many of the issues identified by the families echo the findings of a number of earlier studies including the 1984 Focus Point Report entitled 'B&B in Focus – The use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation for Homeless Adults in Dublin [9] and the 2000 Focus Ireland study 'Focusing on B&B's: the unacceptable growth of emergency B&B placement in Dublin [10].

3.2.3 Supported temporary accommodation

Some families found themselves placed in this type of accommodation, but this was not a universal experience. The advantage of this type of accommodation is that the families live in small apartments with cooking facilities and a fridge within a larger building, with a manager and, in a small number of situations, 24-hour staff support. This accommodation varied significantly in quality. Some individuals, while initially disappointed with the accommodation, finding it *'dirty'*, quickly realised after they had *'scrubbed it with bleach'* and *'washed every soft fabric in the place including the curtains'* that it was a far more suitable type of accommodation for families than a hotel or B&B.

The researchers visited a number of these facilities which were clean, bright and airy apartments in good central locations. The families placed in this type of accommodation were generally content; indeed some of the smaller family units (parent and one child only) indicated that they would have like to stay there.

3.2.4 General aspects of homeless accommodation

In this section some more detailed aspects of homeless accommodation are reviewed so as to shed light on the homeless experience and the routes out.

Location/proximity to schools

Whilst in homeless accommodation, parents give an absolute priority to ensuring that their children's education is disturbed as little as possible by their being homeless. Going to school was one of the few things that families identified as helping them to maintain some sense of normality. They spoke about how important it was with all the changes in their lives that their children continued to attend school and keep their friends. In only a small number of cases were homeless services able to locate a family close to the children's schools. For the vast majority of the families interviewed, the otherwise normal daily activity of going to school became a financial and logistical challenge for a number of reasons. The first issue for families was generally the distance they had to travel from their accommodation to the child or children's school or schools. Various families described a 1.5 -2hr journey each way that involved getting the children up at 6.30am for breakfast to get the first bus, then a walk to the second bus, then school, then the same journey in reverse. This was particularly taxing in the winter time and for smaller children.

9. Moore, J (1994) B&B in Focus: The use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless adults in Dublin (Focus Point)
10 Houghton, F.T and Hickey C (2000) Focusing on B+Bs: the unacceptable growth of emergency B+B Placement in Dublin (Focus Ireland)

The second issue was the cost of public transport with some families spending more than €60 a week on getting to and from school. The cost and the time involved in getting to and from the accommodation, coupled with staggered school finishing times for children of different ages, also often meant that there was not enough time or resources for a parent to travel back to the accommodation, leaving them hanging around as they wait for school to end and unable to get other tasks completed.

Location/proximity to local services
Granted that only a very small number of homeless families had access to a car, the location of homeless accommodation becomes a very pertinent issue in terms of proximity to public transport, shops, supermarkets, launderettes, takeaways and so on. Some of the best-quality accommodation used for homeless families is poorly located for families without transport trying to access local services. Indeed a number of families indicated that they had requested a transfer from their accommodation which they liked in order to reduce the hassle of accessing other services and facilities, particularly the children's schools.

Loss of possessions
Loss of personal possessions was a particular aspect of homelessness. When they became homeless, many families left their home with only what they wore and what they could carry or as one put it, *'from that moment on I lived out of a suitcase'*. They either left their possessions behind to be skipped or put them in a skip themselves. Some left some possessions with family and friends. Only one or two families put their possessions into storage, but this was expensive (€160/month). One family did this with the support of the St. Vincent De Paul, but after six months in homeless services and no prospect in sight of being housed, gave up the storage and donated the belongings to the Society. Others, who had spent time sofa surfing, had left their possessions in plastic bags with friends across the city and were hoping to collect them when they had found a more permanent place to live. The inability to retain personal possessions means that families, when they do get more permanent accommodation, have nothing with which to fill it and must find money to do so. It is another form of exhaustion of assets.

High ongoing living costs
Being homeless is an expensive experience. Eating out every meal (except breakfast) is costly. Having nowhere to store and keep food fresh means that food goes to waste and families are not able to buy food in bulk at better prices. Travelling as a family on up to four buses a day is expensive. Families were also often paying €35 a week at the launderettes, as hotels did not have either washing or drying facilities. In other situations, families only had access to laundry services once a week, which is not sufficient when children play sports a few times a week. As a result of these and other ongoing costs, families were in no position to save to try to re-enter the private rental market. What savings they might have had were also exhausted by the time they exited homeless services, used to pay for activities and treats (including Christmas presents) for the children during school holidays.

Impact on physical and mental health
The interviewees consulted as part of this research all believed that the stress of being homeless and living in homeless accommodation had a negative impact on their physical and mental health and on the physical and mental health of at least some of their children. Having very limited control of what you eat with no access to cooking facilities for many families meant that they were not getting a healthy balanced diet, while travelling on a bus or walking a good distance to access a safe play area meant that children were not getting as much exercise as they would normally. In addition, living in B&B accommodation in such close quarters with other families meant that children in particular picked up coughs, colds and infections easily. Children with physical health challenges were particularly vulnerable in these situations and the researchers heard of required medical procedures being postponed by the family because they were afraid that the child could pick up a post-operative infection in their accommodation. Getting medical attention was also a problem, for doctors would not visit, *'no matter how sick you were'* and *'you had to travel to them'*.

Parents struggled to stay positive for their children and tried to protect them from their stress but this was hard. One mother of five recalled how 'homelessness will bring you right down. I was walking around with my head down, spending a year lying to people about where I was and what was happening to me'. Several interviewees spoke of how their doctor had prescribed them anti-depressants to deal with the situation, while several others told about how they had decided not to take anti-depressants even though they had been offered them several times by their doctor. For many of those interviewed, what kept them going were their children: 'I get up for them every day. I'd be gone but for them'. Many were conscious of how they needed to 'stay strong' and not give up in the face of hardship and

adversity. One of the families consulted, in the interview process recalled homeless services making 'a suggestion that social services take her children', a suggestion she dismissed immediately.

The challenge remained that homelessness 'grinds you down' leaving many of the interviewees asking themselves 'What have I done wrong?' over and over. The stigma of homelessness can also impact on the level of wider family support that the homeless family may receive. In some cases, members of the family of origin can be very dismissive: 'half my family disowned me', 'my brother is the only one talking to me, he is great, but the rest don't want to know me and the kids, they think I have disgraced the family. I think it is they who are the disgrace, whatever about me, how could they walk away from the kids, it's not their fault they are homeless'. Several mothers spoke of how deliberately vague they were to their friends about where they were living so as to conceal the reality of their being homeless, 'I don't tell them where I really am'.

Many parents believed that the stress of being homeless was having a negative impact on their children and particularly their teenage children *'they are finding it hard, they are not used to this', 'the kids don't have a normal life anymore, they have no space, they cannot visit their friends (they are too far away) and their friends cannot visit them, that is not normal.'* Children hated the inactivity: *'how can you tell an active 9-year old the only place she can go is bed?'* Various parents reported children acting out, becoming argumentative, while a teenager in another family was found to have started self-harming while living in homeless accommodation. Parents reported their children crying because of the situation in which they found themselves and being inconsolable. Embarrassment at being homeless was a particular issue for some teenagers and one previously high- performing teenager (routinely getting 90% marks) stopped going to school altogether because of the embarrassment that her school friends might know. One said *'you get very down here. You need a lot of will power to adjust'*.

Employment opportunities

Some of the adults within the families consulted with older children had tried to get work. In the few cases where they did (their children were teenagers) they rarely earned much more than social welfare but the job satisfaction and impact on self-esteem were huge. Where families did find work they tended to inform the social welfare office immediately, in order not to cause any difficulties for themselves.

Maintaining self-esteem in the face of the infantilisation of parents

The many and varied rules in place in homeless accommodation in relation to 'staying out', curfews, visitors, times of access to shared facilities (e.g. not being able to access the shared kitchen after 10 pm or not being able to use the cooker in the morning), are disempowering and clearly have the effect of making parents feel like they were being treated like children. This in turn has a negative effect on the self-esteem and autonomy levels of parents, making them increasingly dependent on the service system. Parents tried to find ways to circumvent no-cooking rules like schoolchildren hiding contraband sweets. In one place the rules were so strict, with a reputation for putting people out, that one of the consultees recalled being advised by staff in her accommodation *'to keep my head down and my mouth shut'*. The consultee (a mother) reported taking this advice to heart and making a point of never complaining. Only once did she report querying the 9.30pm bedtime rule, as she considered the time *'a bit early for a 45-year old'*. Numerous consultees also reported not being able to have visitors or indeed socialise on corridors *'you need permission in advance for your mother to visit, which you don't need in prison'.*

Action to tackle homelessness

Many of the families consulted were frustrated by what they perceived to be the lack of government action to tackle homelessness. When asked about what they believed should be done there were three sets of views. Most believed the government should *'build more houses'*, meaning local authority or voluntary housing homes. Second, they wanted to see houses that were boarded up being used to house homeless families. Many were aware of where all the boarded-up homes were and even how long they had been boarded up [11]. Third, though this came up less frequently, was the suggestion that the government should raise the rent allowance. None of the families consulted as part of this research were aware of the various initiatives recently introduced to prevent homeless among those living in private rented accommodation (the Tenancy Protection Service (See Box 3 for details)) or to provide the possibility if increase rent limits, (The Housing Assistance Payment Schemes (See Box 4 for details).

11. It was not clear how many of these houses were under the control of a local authority

3.3 Permanent accommodation

Essentially, there are a number of routes to permanent accommodation: private rented and local authority and voluntary housing association (AHBs) (3.3.1, 3.3.2).

3.3.1 Private rented

As chapter 2 noted, almost all of the families included in this research came from the private rented sector. They were, in the words of one of them, 'private rented people', one as long as 22 years, some staying in one place a long time, others moving frequently. The vast majority of the families consulted had formed the view that they could not and did not want to go back to private rented accommodation, because it was unaffordable (unless government policy on rent allowances changed), insecure and often of poor quality. They no longer saw it as providing a stable accommodation option for them and their families. There were two particular issues: rent allowances and top-ups.

The practice of 'No Rent Allowance' rules

Many of the families consulted had been quite affected by the continuous, repeated experiences of *'no rent allowances here'* and had come to the conclusion that *'landlords just don't want to know us'*. One saved herself trouble in advance by checking if prospective landlords had stated *'no rent allowances'* on the daft.ie website. One mother of two, who visited 4-5 private rented flats a week, eventually found one that did accept rent allowance – but found 50 people there already. In another case, Focus Ireland found a private rented flat for one of the families interviewed but when they got out there found that someone else had beaten them to it. Travellers reported being turned away once it was identified by their name, accent or appearance that they were Travellers.

The role of top-ups

Many referred to the increasing level of rents and the ever widening gap between rent allowance and *'real rent'* and the growing level of *'top ups'* required. An example was a mother with two young children who got a rent allowance of €950 monthly, but paid an additional €370 monthly out of her one parent family allowance. Another interviewee reported that with rent allowance of €975 any accommodation that she might be able to afford, could she find it, was generally in very poor condition. With the maximum rent allowance at €975 and typical rents in the range €1,000 to €1,400 (one was reported of €1,600), the gap was more than what could be afforded.

It should be noted that most of the families interviewed who had lived in private rented accommodation reported having paid a monthly top-up to their landlord. Not all used the term 'top-ups', but the expectation of adding additional money to the rent allowance had been normalized to the point that there was no point in complaining about it (one may speculate fear that complaint would lead to ejection and the loss of a reference). These top-ups varied from €150-€400+ per month and were considered by the families to be standard:

> *'If you want anyway decent accommodation you have to pay the top up';*
>
> *'The top up is a fact of life';*
>
> *'Everyone I know pays a top up, it is a fact of life if you are renting';*
>
> *'The rent allowance is just not enough; it is way out of step with real rents, so if you do want to rent you have to pay yourself'.*

3.3.2 Local authority and Voluntary Housing Association (AHBs)

Participants' preferred option for housing is local authority or voluntary housing association (most used the term *'council housing'*). Both local authority and voluntary housing association accommodation was considered secure and affordable and even if the standard was not high, it will almost certainly be higher than the majority of private rented accommodation, or as one said 'we could live there and know we never have to move again and we could make it into our home'.

The opacity of the social housing waiting lists

The opacity of social housing waiting lists was an issue for many of the research participants. If a points system is in operation, the families who participated in this study were not told how many they have, nor their place on the list, nor given an estimated duration. The view of the families was that homeless services approach was 'don't call us, we'll call you'. While research interviewees accepted that it was difficult for local authorities to know when a vacancy might arise, they believed that it might be possible to be given a rough estimate. Most had no idea of their relative priority on the waiting list.

Box 03 **What is the Tenancy Protection Service (TPS)?**

- The TPS (est. June 2014) operates a FREEPHONE service providing advice and support to households living in private rented accommodation, whose tenancy is at risk (problems include rent arrears, rents increases, threatened eviction, etc.) The TPS purpose is to protect existing tenancies and prevent households having to access homeless services.
- A key support provided by the TPS is a referral to the Dept. of Social Protection for an uplift to rent supplement payments where families are a risk of becoming homeless because of rent increases beyond the rent cap.
- A total of 4,139 households have contacted the service (June 2014- March 2015). 1,937 (47%) of these households were identified as 'at risk of homelessness'. Of these
  - 553 household's tenancies were protected (including 462 approved for a rent uplift and 30 rehoused)
  - 400 cases were closed following engagement with Threshold.
  - 53(3%) households engaged with the PRTB to challenge their landlord
  - 917 cases are ongoing.
  - 11 households entered homeless services

Source: Email from DRHE 2/7/2015

Various interviewees recalled how often they were told *'you're not the only one'*. Another was simply told *'you're way down the list'* but given no idea how far down. Where they were given any specific numbers, the figure were unreliable: *'we were originally told we would have to wait 2-3 months, but then a year'* (the family was still there after a year). One family who went to a local TD was re-assured they were *'at the top of the housing list'* – but are still homeless some time later - so the assurance which the deputy believed was meaningless. Quite a number of the families, when asked how long would they have to wait, reported being told that they has *'no hope any time soon'* or that they had not been on the waiting list long enough – when they asked how long was long enough they reported being told *'another year to two years'*.

There were additional complications to the waiting list and some examples are given:

- Several families reported finding it difficult to get on the relevant housing list because (even though they were from the local authority area concerned), they had once taken a cheaper private rental in another local authority area, which appeared to disqualify them.
- A family with a child with disabilities for whom they should have got extra points in their housing application reported having significant difficulties getting both support and recognition for this by local authority personnel.

Many of the families consulted were also put to some trouble to get medical letters of support, only to be report being told later that these letters were *'not relevant' 'no longer on file'*, *'lost'*. Some of the families

Box 04 **What is the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme?**

- Under this scheme tenants source private rental accommodation, and the local authority enters into the lease agreement with the private landlord
- The rent must be within the HAP rent limit for household size and area lived in. At present these limits are based, on the current Rent Supplement limits established by the Department of Social Protection.
- This scheme operates in a number of local authorities (including South Dublin County Council in the Dublin Region),

Source: Email from the DRHE 2/7/2015

consulted reported particular difficulties in getting recognition for mental health issues.

Dealing with the lack of transparency in the housing lists
Families dealt with the lack of transparency of waiting lists in different ways:

- Some families appeared resigned to being on the waiting list indefinitely, making just occasional intermittent enquiries (a number of these families had been on the housing waiting list for more than ten years);
- Some families made very frequent enquiries. A few families tried to visit the local authority on a daily or weekly basis, their theory being that this way the local authority personnel could not forget them and their application might progress;
- Many felt that their Focus Ireland key worker, who could argue for them, their best help in accelerating their progress on the waiting list.

The lack of transparency in the system was not only the cause of significant stress for the families consulted, they also reported it diverting the time of the key worker allocated to the family away from supporting the family and towards trying to interrogate and engage with the non-transparent system. Another issue for some of the families consulted as part of this research was where they found that (unknown to them), that they had been 'taken off the list'. The result of this was that they had to go back to the bottom of the list again. Experiences cited by some of the families interviewed are cited below:

- One mother of three children had been on the waiting list since 2003, believed she was taken off the list because of the violence of her now-dead partner. She got back on the list in 2008;
- One woman, homeless with her partner and two teenage children, in receipt of rent allowance for 13 years, enquired about her status on the waiting list and reported being by the local authority that she had never been on it. She later reported being informed that she might have been taken off the list because she failed to reply to a triennial letter sent to all applicants to check whether she still interested in remaining on the list. She was adamant she never received such a letter.
- Some consultees were concerned an accusation of antisocial behaviour could result in either not being put on the housing list, or not being progressed on the list.
- Consultees also reported being asked about drug addiction, which for those without any such prior history found offensive. While the small number of

consultees with a previous drug problem found this problematic, for even if they had been drug free for many years, they feared their history would count against them.

Competitive interviewing by Voluntary Housing Associations (AHBs)
The practice for some voluntary housing associations appears to be: when a property becomes available, there is a competitive interview of applicants to assess their suitability. The practice of having to apply separately for each voluntary housing association opportunity was identified as dispiriting for many of the families consulted: *'They raise your hopes and then they dash them'*. Some of the families consulted reported having poor experiences of voluntary housing associations- one of the families consulted had decided that they would not apply because they believed *'they have strict rules, you are not allowed visitors and there is no play space for children'.*

3.4 Conclusions

The principal conclusions from this chapter are:

- The type of accommodation provided while homeless families await re-housing is clearly preferable to shelter style accommodation or being on the streets, although it has not prevented instances of people sleeping in cars or staying on floors with family and friends for extended periods in overcrowded situations.
- The quality of the accommodation used and provided by homeless services varies significantly from good quality to very poor quality. Conditions in some B&B's and supported temporary accommodation units were observed to have questionable standards, while hotel conditions, whilst generally more comfortable, tended to be over-crowded.
- The location of homeless accommodation is a significant issue for homeless families for a number of reasons: families who are provided with accommodation at a distance from where they were living can end up spending up to four hours a day travelling to and from their accommodation

Box 05 What is the Homeless Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme?

- Under this scheme which became operational in the Dublin region in late February 2015, tenants source private rental accommodation, and the local authority enters into the lease agreement with the private landlord.
- The rent must be within the HAP rent limit for household size and area lived in. These limits are based, on the current Rent Supplement limits, established by the Dept. of Social Protection with sanction to grant up to 20% increase, subject to 6 monthly review.
- The scheme operates in a similar way to the general HAP with an additional option to access rent deposits and rent in advance if required.
- To be eligible households must be staying in homes accommodation on or before 1/12/14

Source: Email from the DRHE 2/7/2015

to school, which is particularly challenging for younger children. Families who are provided with accommodation that is not adjacent to a range of local services can struggle to access basic services.

- Local authority homeless services personnel are under severe pressure. The families consulted reported finding the vast majority of local authority staff *'supportive', 'efficient'* and *'professional'.* That was unfortunately not the experience of all of the families a small number of whom has experience of dealing with local authority personnel who they variously described as *'lacking in understanding'*, '*difficult'* and *'less than helpful'*. These less positive experiences made the families in question very reluctant to return to/or to make any further direct contact the local authority.
- Locally elected representatives and in some cases local TDs are often a first or a very early point of contact for families who are or who are about to become homeless. Some city and county councillors are very knowledgeable and supportive and keep up a sustained contact with the family, but others have less interest and would benefit from being better informed.
- Voluntary housing support organisations are barely known to homeless families, Focus Ireland being the principal one. The service provided by key workers is generally good and in many cases exceptional. The lengthy and increasingly long wait to be appointed a key worker is a significant worry for homeless families as little seems to happen without a key worker. Because of the blockages and a lack of transparency in the system the primary function of the key worker appears to have become to advocate the case of a family to homeless services.
- The use of a combination of homeless accommodation (hotels, B&Bs and supported temporary accommodation), whilst providing shelter for families, does so at a high cost to their health and overall well-being and in some cases the education of their children.
- Re-entry by homeless families to private rented accommodation with Rent Supplement as it is currently constituted is not an option without additional supports, due to a lack of affordability and availability. Interestingly while a range of supports have put in place over the last 12 months to support families retain/re-enter the private rental sector none of the families consulted as part of this research appeared to have been made aware of their existence.
- The focus of the families consulted was to secure a long term home for their family. They did not believe that the private rental market as it is currently constituted could provide that for them. The other available accommodation options are local authority or voluntary housing, where demand is clearly greater than supply, leading to long waiting lists.

In summary, the trajectory of homeless people after the point of homelessness is one costly to both their own and their children's well-being, exhausting their financial reserves and causing considerable hardship. The challenge must therefore be to prevent families becoming homeless where possible and where this is not possible move them quickly through homeless services (ideally with support) and into social housing as the ideal, and secure private rental accommodation as the second choice given that there is simply insufficient social housing to meet demand.

04 Conclusions

This chapter draws together the main conclusions from the research.

4.1 Conclusions

The primary cause of family homelessness appears to be the freezing out from private rental accommodation sector of low-income households. This freezing out has happened because the stock of private rented accommodation has seen rents increase and the number of properties available to rent, reduce in number. Almost all the families included in this study were long-term private rented residents. Previously, when these families lost their accommodation they were able to find an alternative within a short space of time. This time they were not able to re-enter due to the lack of affordable properties to rent and the practice of many landlords to refuse to accept Rent Allowance. Thus a problem which would in the past have been a manageable short-term issue turns into a longer-term situation.

It should also be noted that the condition of properties at the lower price range (the only ones available to low income families) tended to be poor quality and in some cases grim, with no evidence of the enforcement of minimum standards. Research participants regularly reported damp, precarious internal and external conditions, lack of insulation, inefficient heating, infestation and dangerous electrics in the properties they previously lived in and in one case returned to. It was also clear that many landlords were not observing the requirements of the Residential Tenancies Act in issuing notices of termination.

The families involved in this research began their engagement with various local authority homeless services once they were homeless. With a growing range of initiatives being put in place to help sustain private rental tenancies it is increasingly important that families be directed (by local authority officials, elected representatives and other service providers) to homeless services at an earlier stage (i.e. before they are actually homeless), so that they be made aware of initiatives that could to help them sustain their tenancy and prevent them becoming homeless.

With the number of families presenting as homeless growing, while the number of local authority accommodation units available is largely static and the number of units provided by the voluntary housing sector small, homeless services are clearly under significant pressure. The families involved in the research did however identify a very small group of local authority staff whose attitudes had been both the cause of distress and had made the families very reluctant to make contact with the local authority. With local authority housing staff likely to continue to be under pressure, as the numbers of families who are homeless grow, staff working in homeless services need to be supported and strengthened in order to enable them continue to provide quality service to all who access support from the service.

Focus Ireland, the key voluntary service providing case management supports to homeless families in Dublin, and indeed other voluntary service providers are also overstretched, with average waiting time for a Focus Ireland key worker of at least six months and growing. The homeless families involved in this research valued the advocacy role of the key worker in relation to, as they saw it, *'speeding up'* their placement and priority on

what the families considered an 'opaque' social housing waiting list. The families who participated in this research also valued the social work type support provided by some key workers.

Homeless accommodation clearly serves an important purpose for families, in terms of preventing them having to sleep rough or present at shelter type accommodation (although the research found evidence of at least two homeless families in a crisis situation being turned away from homeless services and referred to Gardaí as the alternative).

The issue is; while much of this accommodation is adequate in the very short term, as time passes it presents significant challenges for families. Issues identified by the families in the research included over-crowding; dislocation from school and wider family support; the financial and health costs of continuously eating out, the costs of laundry and transport all of which become more acute over time aggravated over time. Each type of homeless accommodation was seen to pose its own distinct challenges for families. Hotel rooms were small with no storage and the costs of eating out expensive. B&B's varied significantly in terms of cleanliness, access to cooking facilities, warmth/ dampness, the sharing of common spaces with others, strict rules. Given the length of time some homeless families are spending in these types of accommodation (which were designed for overnight stays rather than family living) it is not surprising to find that the families reported that the experience of living in homeless accommodation had impacted negatively on their physical and mental health. Supported temporary while not perfect, was the accommodation option which clearly best met the needs of homeless families, in terms of giving them a degree of autonomy and independence, with support available if required.

The private rental sector, as it is currently constituted (with existing Rent Supplement levels), cannot by itself provide the solution to tackle the growing number of low income families who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness. The most effective long-term solution lies in increasing the supply of social housing as this type of accommodation offers families the security, the affordability and the possibility of better quality accommodation they crave. Increasing the supply of social housing will take time and resources. Increasing the supply of social housing to meet demand would require very significant resources. It is not surprising therefore to find that the National Social Housing Strategy 2020 Support Supply and Reform (2014) has three pillars 1) Provision of new social housing units (via local authorities and approved housing bodies), 2) Providing accommodation within the private rental sector, with support from the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rent Supplement (RS) and 3) Reform creating more flexible and responsive social housing supports.

With increasing number of families becoming homeless a range of additional short and medium term solutions are needed. The Tenancy Protection Scheme and the various House Assistance Payment (HAP) schemes are relatively recent developments put in place to support families sustain/locate private rental tenancies. Unfortunately none of the families involved in this research appeared aware of their existence. It is also the case the families involved in this research generally put off contacting homeless services, until they were actually homeless, at which point the Tenancy Protection Services would be of little value.

05

Priority areas for attention arising from the research

In this chapter the report authors identify what they believe to be some of the priority areas for attention highlighted by this research.

5.1 At a structural level

'Affordable', permanent accommodation
Affordable and permanent accommodation of reasonable standard is a critical requirement for homeless families. The families themselves only saw this available from local authority, council housing, although possibly also from voluntary housing, but the latter must be tempered by some bad experiences reported here of voluntary housing associations. Local authority rents were considered affordable and although the standard of such accommodation varied, most was considered in a range from acceptable to good. Above all, it offered the security of tenure that they craved and which was absent from the private rented sector.

While defining what it is that constitutes 'affordable' was outside the scope of this research, it is clearly something that needs further exploration, particularly in the context of different types of low income households.[12] Those interviewed did consider local authority rents to be affordable and that may be a useful benchmark.

Prevention as a key point of intervention
Considering the increasing numbers of families becoming homeless and the time families are spending in homeless services increasing; preventing families becoming homeless becomes an increasingly important strategy. A striking feature of this research was the families we consulted had a sense of powerlessness when dealing with private landlords. Few of the families we interviewed appeared to be aware of their rights as tenants and for them, the absolute imperative was to get a 'good reference' from their landlord to present to their next prospective landlord. Any argument with the landlord about their 'rights' was perceived to put that prospective reference immediately at risk.

None of the families involved in this research were aware of the various schemes put in place to make accommodation more affordable. In this context the development of various tenancy protection schemes (including the Tenancy Protection Service and the Visiting Tenancy Sustainment/Homeless Prevention Team), which offer private and local authority tenants

12. The work of the Vincentian Partnership for Justice in relation to a Minimum Income Standard Calculator may be very relevant in this context. . Harvey, B (2015) Capture the learning Atlantic Philanthropies (forthcoming).

alike access to information on their tenancy rights is a welcome one.

It is the Tenancy Protection Service, established in June 2014 to provide support to tenants in relation to their tenancy rights, that would probably have been able to provide useful support to the largest number of the families we interviewed. The problem was that these families (living in private rented accommodation since June 2014) only approached homeless services when they became homeless. With clear evidence from the DRHE that engagement with the Tenancy Protection Service can protect tenancies and prevent homelessness (See Box 3). The challenge is to get tenants who are experiencing difficulties with their tenancy to engage at a much earlier stage and at a sufficiently early stage to enable the intervention of the service to make a difference. While we are aware that there have been some public information campaigns we believe that more awareness raising is required in relation to promoting the existence and update of the various Tenancy Protection Services. The aim for us would be to make the various tenancy protection services a first port of call when experiencing tenancy difficulties. The challenge will be to ensure that this information reaches families (like the ones we consulted) who have no history of homelessness.

It is important to highlight the strength with which families emphasized that they had never expected to become homeless. As a result, they had not put themselves into the kind of circles of knowledge and information networks that might have brought them to an awareness of such services, which means that the challenge of reaching the large numbers of people in private rented accommodation potentially at risk of homelessness is a large one.

Ultimately, the heart of the problem is a structural imbalance in the legal relationship between landlord and tenant. No amount of information or 'awareness' will address that imbalance. The experience that we recorded showed that tenants had little protection against speedy and precipitous ejection. It is illusory to imagine that many of these problems could be solved by tenants having more awareness of their rights, when in practice those 'rights' are limited, they are not in a practical position to defend them and the consequences of doing so are punitive (no reference for a future landlord). Legal steps to redress that imbalance (e.g. legislation) go beyond the scope of this research, but it is important that it be flagged as an issue, especially as it recurs under issues of domestic violence (below).

We also believe that there is a continued need to raise awareness of the wider information and accommodation support services that can be accessed through homeless services and particularly the homeless helpline. With elected representatives often the first place a family who are at risk of homeless go to for access to information on their rights and entitlements. We believe it is critical that elected representatives are fully aware of the important role they play and keep themselves informed and up-to-date in relation to the various supports available for families at risk of homelessness, thus enabling them refer families at risk of homeless to the relevant services as soon as possible.

Supported emergency accommodation is the most suitable for homeless families

The families interviewed as part of this research clearly identified supported temporary accommodation as the most suitable type of homeless accommodation for families. Those who were lucky enough to have been located in this type of accommodation were very clear about how much more suitable it was, than other types of emergency accommodation. Sourcing and resourcing this type of accommodation is undoubtedly a challenge.

The challenge of using commercial hotels

With only a very limited supply of this supported emergency accommodation available, the majority of families find themselves allocated to B&Bs and commercial hotels, neither of which are suited to family living. The use of commercial hotels was found to pose particular challenges for families (and for homeless services) who find themselves having to move often at short notice to accommodate other commercial and seasonal hotel bookings.

Domestic violence

The findings of this research found that women and their children were particularly vulnerable to finding themselves homeless in the face of the violent behaviour of a male partner, resulting in the mother and children leaving the family home and presenting to homeless or domestic violence services. Whatever about the theory

13. Sonas Specialist Domestic Violence Visiting Support offers intensive outreach support to women (experiencing domestic violence) in their own home or in the community who may be at risk of becoming homeless, homeless or moving into a new home. This support is available for between 6 and 18 months and can complement the work of other housing support staff providing other services.

of tenant rights, they were unable to offer these mothers and their children any protection against landlords insisting they leave, generally immediately. This again raises the issue of legal balance. For the present, raising awareness of the Sonas Specialist Domestic Violence Visiting Support [13] which could in turn facilitate earlier engagement with the support service could provide a mechanism by which women may be able to reduce the risk of them and their children becoming homeless.

The gap between rent allowance and market rent and the role of top-ups
Increasing market rents saw the majority of families involved in this research and on rent allowance accept the (unwelcome) necessity of the payment of top-ups in private rental accommodation. As the gap between market rent and rent allowance grew, so did the scale of the top-ups required. Most of the families involved in this research who were in this situation would appear to have continued to pay the increasing top- ups until they exhausted all their savings, at which point they had to leave the accommodation as they could no longer afford it.

The role and value of Homeless HAP
The vast majority of the families involved in this study appeared to us to have dismissed private rental accommodation as a future option for them, because of a lack of affordability and availability. While the issue of limited availability remains and cannot be underestimated, the introduction of the Homeless HAP scheme in February 2015 in the Dublin region may offer some flexibility for families homeless before December 2014 to re-enter private rental accommodation. It does that by providing a 20% increase in rent supplement as well as access to rent deposits and rent in advance. It is important that service providers and key workers ensure that families homeless before December 2014 are aware of this as a possible short to medium term option. The ultimate success of this scheme will however depend on the willingness of landlords to participate in the scheme and the different between rent supplement + 20% and market rent.

5.2 At a practical and operational level

Social housing list issues
With the majority of the families on the social housing waiting lists for years it was not surprising that many of the families were exasperated by the wait. What was more surprising was the depth of frustration that existed among the families in as to the lack of transparency at a number of levels in the various different local authority social housing waiting lists.

The families involved in this research reported requesting but not receiving information in relation to their place on the housing list and perhaps more importantly some indication of when they might expect to be offered a house. This issue was also raised by the Irish Traveller Movement Legal Unit, [14] who went on to use the Freedom of Information Act to help individuals find their place. While it was beyond the scope of this research to investigate the practices that exist in the various different local authorities in relation to providing this information what is clear is that a) different practices exist in different local authorities and b) where this information is provided it is only provided in response to a specific request. The families were also unclear as to how and when applicants were removed from the housing waiting list and indeed how drug use and antisocial behaviour by them or their partners (or accusations of either) could impact on their on the housing waiting list.

In order to address lack of transparency in the social housing waiting lists we would suggest that:

a) all local authorities adopt a similar, standardised practice in relation to the operation of these lists and the provision of information in relation to an applicant's location on the list

b) a standardised request form be developed in order to enable housing list applicants formally request this information.

We would also suggest that given removal from the social housing waiting list has such potentially grave consequences that procedures be set in place both to set down a system of checking protocols before such a step be taken and that in the event that an applicant is removed from the list in error, that they can be re-instated on the list at the position they would have been had they not been removed).

14. Harvey, B (2015) Capture the learning Atlantic Philanthropies (forthcoming).

The quality of some emergency accommodation
The quality of accommodation provided a number of B&Bs and contracted hotels was raised by a number of the families involved in this study. Among the particular issues identified included dampness; a lack of ventilation/heating and generally unsanitary conditions raising questions of compliance with international human rights standards [15] and requirements. Whilst we recognise the significant and growing challenge of locating sufficient 'contracted' homeless accommodation for the growing number of homeless families, we believe that minimum standards and regular inspections must be put in place and enforced to ensure accommodation meets minimum standards. We realise that such standards are a long-standing issue but were taken aback at the persistence of such poor and evidently unpoliced standards of accommodation.

The role of key workers
Another striking feature of this study for us as researchers was the faith that the vast majority of families involved placed in their key worker, who they regarded as both a housing advocate and as a support in relation to accessing a wider range of social services. The families' perception of the role of the key worker clearly differed from that formally specified for the key workers (See Section 1.6). This suggests to us that some clarification is required in relation to the families' expectations of the key worker and what it is that the key workers are contracted to provide. Their sense that they needed key workers as advocate is a further illustration of their sense of vulnerability, powerlessness and need for support in addressing services.

The families involved in this research were waiting a minimum of six months and often longer to be appointed a worker, at which point their situation and particularly their morale has often deteriorated significantly. We believe that that families who are homeless need to appointed a key worker within a much shorter period of becoming homeless. We are aware that work is currently ongoing to re-structure the Focus Ireland Family Homeless Action Team hope that this will have the impact of enabling families to be allocated a key worker much more quickly [16].

Other areas arising from the research that we believe need attention include:

- The placement of families in homeless accommodation where there are active drug-users (narcotics or alcohol) or others with behavioural problems must cease. Ideally homeless families should be located in family-specific accommodation.
- The provision of for affordable secure storage facilities for families who become homeless in order to enable them keep their possessions. This would mean when they move out of homeless services they have the capacity to furnish it.
- While we recognise that rules and regulations are necessary for the smooth running of multiple occupancy facilities, these need to be amended to ensure that families do not become institutionalised or parents infantilised.
- End the practice of insisting that over 18 child dependants present to homeless services as an adult and enable them to continue to participate as part of the family unit within homeless services, as is their preference.
- The vast majority of staff in homeless services are generally courteous and respectful. Where staff need support to meet this standards, this should be provided as a priority as families who are homeless need the active and positive support of local authority personnel in order to facilitate their pathway through homeless services. An effective mechanism must be put in place to address and remedy the instances of inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour reported to us.

15. These standards are identified with the Revised European Social Charter. In March 2015 a complaint of breaches in relation to these standards application in Ireland was declared admissible by the European Committee of Social Rights. This will now be the subject of an investigation.
16. Email from Mike Allen (Focus Ireland) to dated 6th August 2015

Annex 1
Note on terminology

What is meant by homeless services?
The term *'homeless services'* used by interviewees, generally referred to the homeless persons unit in Parkgate St, Dublin 8 (Dublin City Council) or Tallaght (South Dublin County Council) or various locations in Fingal County Council.

Approved Housing Bodies (AHB's)/Voluntary/ Social Housing Associations
'AHB *(include Housing Associations and Co-operatives)* provide and manage social rented housing. They are private, not for profit organisations formed for the purpose of relieving housing need'. [17] The families consulted as part of this research referred to these organisations as either 'voluntary housing associations' or 'social housing associations'. To reflect the views of the families the term 'voluntary housing' is used in preference to AHB in the main body of the report.

Types of homeless accommodation
Homeless Accommodation falls into two types:

1. Private Emergency Accommodation (PEA) and
2. Supported Temporary Accommodation (STA).

Private emergency accommodation includes:

Hotels
Families placed in commercial hotels are generally provided with one en-suite room to house the entire family and their belongings. They do not have access to a fridge and are not allowed to cook or have a microwave in their rooms. The family is provided with breakfast but must make their own arrangements for all other meals. Where a family is housed in a hotel, a certain level of room and linen cleaning is provided. Hotels vary in quality and location, but some of the best quality hotels are found in locations that are difficult to access for families who are dependent on public transport. The commercial focus of these providers means that families can be asked to leave this accommodation at very short notice to accommodate advance-bookings for particular events. This type of accommodation does not offer any security for homeless families

B&Bs & Contracted Hotels [18]
Families placed in B&B or contracted hotel accommodation are generally provided with one room to house the entire family and their belongings. They can vary significantly in terms of the quality and the nature of services provided. Some facilities offer en-suite rooms, while others require the sharing of bathrooms and toilets. They generally provide breakfast, but some do not. Where a family was housed in this type of accommodation, a certain level of room and linen cleaning was generally provided. A small charge is made for this type of accommodation. This type of accommodation because of the funding arrangements with the DRHE, offers the families who live there a greater level of security of tenure.

Supported Temporary Accommodation
Refers to local authority or social housing provided accommodation in small self-contained 1-2 bedroom flats, generally with a supervisor/manager. A modest rent is normally charged for this type of accommodation.

Security of Private Rental Tenancies
A private residential tenancy agreement is in place were a tenant is renting their accommodation from a private landlord. The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 gives tenants the right to stay in rented accommodation for up to four years, following an initial six-month period. Tenancies are deemed to end after four years. The most common types of private rental tenancies are fixed-term tenancies (which cover a specific time period and are

17. https://www.housing.ie/regulation.aspx (accessed 28th July 2015)
18 Contracted hotels are hotels that have a formal (and often exclusive) contract with the DRHE to provide emergency accommodation.

generally detailed in a written contract) and periodic tenancies (which do not specify a fixed length of time and may or may not be in writing).

Security of Local Authority and Voluntary Housing Association (AHB) Tenancies
Assuming a local authority or voluntary housing association tenant pays their rent, maintains their dwelling, does not breach their tenancy agreement or engage in anti-social behaviour the tenancy remains in place. Local authorities operate a differential rent schemes, whereby the amount of rent is related to the amount of household income. Local authority tenants (only) have the option (after an agreed time period) to apply to purchase their local authority accommodation.

Notice of Termination
The term Notice of Termination appears frequently. This was formerly known as a 'notice to quit' and was still generally referred to by the research consultees as a notice to quit. Notice of Termination (NoT) is normally used here, rather than the term 'eviction', for technically this requires the obtaining and then execution of an eviction order.

Partner
The term *'partner'* is used regardless of whether there was a marriage relationship (many of those interviewed used the terms *'husband', 'wife'* or *'partner'* interchangeably).

'Staying Out'
'Staying Out' refers to the possibility of an adult or their child dependent to stay away from their homeless accommodation. Individuals or families are generally allowed to stay away one or two nights a month without losing their place. This must be agreed in advance with the accommodation manager or the local authority homeless section.

Annex 2

Sampling framework used to select the representative sample of 30 families for interview

Type of support provided	No. of families	% of total	Number to be sampled	Number of families									
				With no history of homelessness	With previous history of homelessness	>1 engagement with Homeless Services in the previous two years (2013-2014)	Number of one parent families	Number of two parent families	With 1-2 children	With 3-4 children	With >4 children	Who are non-Irish national families	Who are Traveller families
Number of families who received case management support	489	63%	20	13	4	3	13	7	14	4	2	2	2
Number of families who were referred to the Advice and Information Services only	284	37%	10	5	2	3	7	3	7	2	1	2	2

Annex 3

Most frequently cited reasons for homelessness

The eight most frequently cited reasons for homelessness

Reason [19]	**Further breakdown of reasons**
1. Property no longer available	• Landlord sold property • Landlord went bankrupt/property repossessed • Landlord required property back for his own need • Lease ended no option to renew
2. Relationship Breakdown/ Changes in Family Circumstances (including family relocation)	• Relationship with parents broke down • Drug dependency issues in family of origin home • Safety concerns in the family of origin home • Relationship with partner ended
	• Fled from conflict in another jurisdiction • Family of origin moved and could no longer accommodate the family in question
3. Affordability of rent	• Could not afford rent • Increased rent • Could not locate suitable affordable private rented accommodation • Tenant no longer in receipt of rent supplement/rent supplement reduced/refused • Landlord no longer accepting rent supplement/reduced rent allowance rate/ refused to sign rent supplement review
4. Notice of Termination	• Asked to leave private rental accommodation (no reasons provided)
5. Overcrowding	• Overcrowding • At friends accommodation • Overcrowding in the family home
6. Unsuitability of accommodation	• Accommodation not suitable (too big/too small) • Accommodation of poor quality • Rats
7. Domestic Violence	
8. Anti-social behaviour/ intimidation	• Included threatening behaviour /robbery/sexual assault/threats against the family/ relation murdered • Harassment by ex-partner • Fell out with neighbours • Breached exclusion order

Source: Data Extracted from the Focus Ireland Database Dec 2014

19. The categories used in this table were developed by the researchers. The data relates to approximately 180 families, with some families providing multiple and interrelated reasons.

www.housing.ie