

centrecare

2004

Peter has a history of alcohol addiction for a number of years, but had never let it interfere with his family life. Lately this problem got worse and his behaviour started to get erratic. Peter lives with his elderly parents in the family home. Peter presented to CentreCare after his parents took a barring order out against him to keep him away from their home. Peter understood why they did this and realised that his behaviour had become completely unacceptable. Peter was now out of home and did not know what he should do. At this point he knew he had to do something about his drinking and was ready to seek help. CentreCare offered Peter support on this matter and informed him of his treatment options. Having contacted a number of therapy centres, CentreCare managed to get Peter into an alcohol treatment centre where he successfully underwent a 3-month detox programme. Peter then moved into a half way house for recovering alcoholics. CentreCare worked with Peter to explore options of training and employment, and made a referral for a place on a local training scheme that Peter was successful in getting. CentreCare has also made a referral for Peter for a place in a supported housing project and continues to support Peter on the road to rebuilding his life.

Ann was let go from her job and was having difficulty getting her P45 from her former employer. As she could not afford to pay rent, she was staying with family (with whom she does not get on) and was severely distressed when she called into CentreCare. CentreCare referred her to her Community Welfare Officer so that she would get a social welfare payment, contacted her former employer who sent her P45 the following day and gave Ann information on alternative routes to employment (including FAS Jobs Clubs, Local Employment Services, among others).

IRISH TIMES, October 2004



From left to right: Fr Michael Cullen (Director of Crosscare), Nora Kirrane (CentreCare Information Worker), Minister of Social and Family Affairs, Seamus Brennan TD, Yvonne Fleming (Coordinator of CentreCare). Photo taken following private meeting with Minister to address rent supplement cutbacks.

background:

CentreCare was established in 1980 under the auspices of St Mary's Pro-Cathedral and Crosscare, the Dublin Diocese Social Care Agency, to meet the diverse needs of those coming to the Pro-Cathedral seeking assistance. CentreCare operates at two levels;

- provision of a high quality information, support and referral service to vulnerable people, with a view to enabling them to make informed choices about their options and
- use of trends in client queries to inform relevant policy development, with a view to creating a more just and caring society.

CentreCare has a team of information officers and shares a co-ordinator, receptionist and administrator with Emigrant Advice (another project of Crosscare housed in the same building as CentreCare). CentreCare is advised by an Advisory Committee, which includes the director of Crosscare as a member. The chair of the Advisory Committee sits on the Crosscare Council.

Based in Dublin's city centre, CentreCare provides a drop-in information service to people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. The agency has an open-door policy, responding in a people-centred manner to those contacting the service. CentreCare carries out advocacy and follow-up work on cases of its clients and refers clients to specialist agencies where necessary. CentreCare's outreach information service to food centres and hostels represents its further efforts to reach more people with information needs.

CentreCare records its homeless-related queries on Dublin Link (the Homeless Agency's Dublin-wide database) and its non-homeless-related queries on its own database. It uses these records to track trends

among service users. It researches the issues underlying the trends and campaigns for problems arising to be appropriately addressed (see account of 'Creating Crisis - the impact of rent supplement restrictions' as an example of this work).

what we did in 2004:

Clients dealt with by CentreCare have increased from 3,853 in 2003 to 3,897 in 2004. As before, most contact with CentreCare was made in person to the drop-in service in Cathedral Street. However, in 2004 telephone contacts numbered 513 and outreach contacts numbered 673. This increase from 200 outreach contacts in 2003 is due to CentreCare's increased outreach service to include outreach clinics in Crosscare's Portland Row Food Centre (151 contacts since Feb. '04), the Salvation Army's Cedar House Hostel (21 contacts since Sept. '04), and the Capuchin Food Centre on Church Street (187 contacts since Feb., '04) in addition to its existing outreach clinics to Crosscare's Holles Row (191 contacts in '04) and Longford Lane Food Centres (123 contacts in '04). As in 2003, the majority (74%) of CentreCare's clients were homeless. However, 59% of queries related to issues other than accommodation - demonstrating the broad information needs of people who are homeless.

Presenting Issue	No.	%
Accommodation	1815	41%
General Information	1076	24%
Personal Support	508	11%
Practical Assistance	497	11%
Entitlements	458	10%
Health	125	3%
Total	4,479*	100%

*Clients may present with more than one issue or query, hence the total here exceeds the total number of clients for 2004.



crosscare

CentreCare continues to be funded by the Homeless Agency, Crosscare and Charitable Infirmary Charitable Trust. In 2004, it also received funding from Comhairle for its social policy research. Copies of 2004 accounts will be circulated as relevant. CentreCare is one of 14 projects of Crosscare, the Dublin Diocese social care agency.

contact information:

CentreCare Information Officers:

Bryan Gavin
Ciara McGrath
Nora Kirrane
Madeleine Murtagh

Posts shared with Emigrant Advice:

Receptionist - Ian Brennan
Administrator - Celine Long
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key achievements 2004 and planned developments in 2005:

In 2004, CentreCare improved its drop in service through

- the use of an appointments system for clients with whom it works on an on-going basis,
- visits to a range of agencies, which refer to it, to up-date them on the service,
- the development of a more detailed tracking of its clients. Monthly reports compiled from June to December '04, demonstrated the multiple information and support needs of its clients (see case studies for examples of this). CentreCare is revising its drop in service to reflect this.

CentreCare sees networking and on-going staff training as critical to best practice. It continues to be a member of Homeless Sector Voluntary Groups Network, to undertake training provided by the Homeless Agency and other training providers and to undertake group supervision with Group Analytic Practice.

CentreCare staff and Advisory Committee members carried out an annual review to assess its progress and prioritise developments for 2005 which include:

- the revamp of its drop in service based on the detailed tracking outlined above. The revised service will involve a focus on dealing with clients with accommodation-only queries in a more succinct way, key working clients with complex needs and a continued commitment to researching and campaigning for policy change in areas impacting adversely on clients,
- the expansion of its direct outreach work and the development of 'developmental outreach' i.e. up-skilling single-issue organisations to address accommodation needs of their clients. Thus, where a client is already linked into an organisation, that client will not be referred to CentreCare to address their accommodation

needs but the staff there will have been trained by CentreCare in accommodation finding.

case study policy work

In Budget 2004, the then Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Coughlan, made changes to the Rent Supplement scheme. The changes implemented meant that people

- who have not been in rented accommodation for six months
- who have not been assessed as having a housing need or being homeless
- whose spouse works over 30 hours a week
- who refuse two social housing offers

are not eligible for rent supplement.

In an effort to assess the impact of these changes CentreCare, together with the City Centre (Dublin) Citizens Information Service, initiated the 'Creating Crisis' initiative. Both organisations had growing concerns about the possible impact of these changes. Funding was secured from Comhairle to test the accuracy of these concerns. Over a number of weeks, 91 cases of hardship (throughout Ireland) caused by this change were gathered.

Cases highlighted through this initiative include that of a reformed alcoholic staying with friends who wants to get rent allowance so he could get a flat and get a job. Unless he was staying in a recognised homeless accommodation (e.g. a hostel) he would not be recognised as homeless and thus entitled to rent allowance. He did not want to stay in a hostel on account of his reluctance to re-enter the drink and drug culture he had been part of before. The case of the refusal of rent supplement to a young pregnant single woman living with her parents, grandmother, brother and sister on account that she did not have a 'housing need' is also included.

A researcher analysed the data collected. The findings and recommendations were compiled and launched in

September 2004. The report received substantial coverage in both print and radio media. To complement this initiative, CentreCare participated in a coalition of 42 voluntary groups (convened by Threshold), which came together to speak out against these changes and the wider issues of homeless people. CentreCare continued to campaign for the Budget 2004 changes to be reversed in the run up to Budget 2005 including a presentation at the Department of Social and Family Affairs Pre-budget Forum, a presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Social and Family Affairs and through a private meeting with Minister Seamus Brennan who stated that "if there are cases of hardship as of those adjustments, I will reverse them".

Rent supplement cuts result in extreme hardship - report

KITTY HOLLAND

Large numbers of vulnerable people are experiencing extreme hardship as a result of cuts to the rent supplement, the first report from the voluntary sector on the issue has found.

The report, *Creating Crisis: The Impact of Rent Supplement Restrictions*, was jointly published yesterday by

the CentreCare charity and the Citizens Information Service.

It says the Government has cut holes in the housing safety net "by removing eligibility to the scheme for many people".

In the absence of sufficient social housing the supplement had prevented thousands from falling into housing deprivation, it adds.

The cut to the supplement

was announced in the Estimates last year, and introduced at the end of January.

Since then people seeking the allowance must be renting already for six months and have their housing needs assessed by their local authority.

A vigorous campaign was mounted against the cut by up to 20 organisations working with the homeless, single

IRISH TIMES, September 2004

In Budget 2005 the need to be renting for 6 months before rent allowance could be paid, was axed.

Copies of '**Creating Crisis - The Impact of Rent Supplement Restrictions**' are available from CentreCare or on www.centrecare.ie

case studies direct client work

Joe and Bridie are an elderly Irish couple who returned from UK and rented a property in Dublin. Joe uses a wheelchair. The couple found a more suitable property, handed in their notice on their first property and paid a deposit on the second. However, rental of the second property fell through just as their original property was rented to someone else. Joe and Bridie came to CentreCare for support. CentreCare contacted the Homeless Persons Unit and secured wheelchair accessible short-term accommodation for the couple in a Dublin hotel. CentreCare contacted a social housing association to investigate the

possibility of securing a wheelchair accessible apartment in a new scheme of accommodation for the elderly in central Dublin. CentreCare accompanied Joe and Bridie to their interview for access to this scheme. The couple were successful and Joe and Bridie are now resident in their apartment. They regularly visit Crosscare's Food Centre in Portland Row where the CentreCare worker links in with them through the CentreCare outreach clinic based there.

Anna had been living in private rented accommodation for almost a year when her landlord evicted her. She had been in receipt of a One Parent Family Payment (OPFP). This payment had been stopped which resulted in her rent allowance being cut which rendered her homeless and without a social welfare payment. Anna was unsure of why her OPFP had been stopped. With the support of CentreCare, Anna appealed to have her payment re-established. She thought it had been stopped because she was not at her address for a number of weeks. On investigation, it materialised that Anna's payment had been stopped because she had failed to produce a piece of documentation to the OPFP section. Anna assured us that she had produced the documentation to the Child Benefit Section and that they were to pass this on to the OPFP section. They had failed to do this, which resulted in her payments being stopped. The documentation was produced and the OPFP section acknowledged that the payment was stopped due to no fault on Anna's behalf. Anna was assured that her payment would be re-established. The following week Anna's payment was in the post office, however she did not receive her double week payment for Christmas, which she was relying on. CentreCare intervened on her behalf and the situation was remedied. CentreCare also asked about the arrears that were due to Anna. Again it materialised that Anna had to formally withdraw the appeal she had been wrongly advised to make before OPFP section could start to process her arrears. CentreCare assisted her in this matter. CentreCare also worked with Anna on her homeless issue. Through negotiations with a landlord and the local community welfare officer Anna managed to secure private rented accommodation.