

CentreCare and Emigrant Advice (projects of CROSSCARE)
Submission to Homeless Agency Action Plan 2007-2010
4 August, 2006

Introduction:

CentreCare and Emigrant Advice are two projects of CROSSCARE, the Dublin Diocese Social Care Agency.

CentreCare is an information and advocacy project with expertise in housing, homelessness, social welfare and related matters. CentreCare is in constant pursuit of new ways to get accurate information to those who most need it. CentreCare:

- Runs a 'walk-in' information and advocacy service accessible at its city-centre premises or by email, post, phone and via our website www.centrecare.ie.

Runs the above service through outreach clinics to:

- 7 Food Centres (Capuchin Day Ctr., Little Flower Food Ctr., Mendicity Institute, CROSSCARE Longford Lane Food Ctr., CROSSCARE Holles Row Food Ctr., CROSSCARE Portland Row Food Ctr., Cumberland St. Food Ctr.)
- Hill St. Family Resource Ctr.
- Open Heart House
- (Also, CentreCare is piloting outreach to B&Bs in the Dublin 1 area).
- Assists organisations to work with their clients in relation to housing, homeless, social welfare matters by offering information sessions on '*Accessing Accommodation in the Private Rented Sector*' and '*First Steps out of Homelessness*'
- Produces relevant documentation including a daily list of flats and houses available for rent for collection at our premises and a '*Map of Homeless Services*' (detailing services for over 18s which are 'self referral')
- Records homeless-related queries on Dublin Link and non-homeless-related queries on the CentreCare database using these records to track trends among service users. CentreCare researches the issues underlying the trends and campaigns for problems arising to be appropriately addressed
- Networks as a member of Homeless Agency Consultative Forum, Homeless Network, Homeless Agency Information Providers Network, DCC Central Area Forum.

Emigrant Advice is an information and advocacy service for people who are planning to emigrate from or return to Ireland and immigrants into Ireland. Emigrant Advice is the only direct service provider of its kind. Emigrant Advice:

- Runs a 'walk-in' information service accessible at its city-centre premises or by email, post, phone and via our website www.emigrantadvice.ie
- Runs an advocacy service (e.g. from contacting an Irish organisation in the UK to see what the housing situation is for a vulnerable intending Irish emigrant to liaising with a government department on entitlements of a returning emigrant to supporting a non-Irish national to challenge work exploitation through the Employment Appeals Tribunal)
- Produces and distributes high-quality publications on emigration, return migration and immigration. A new range of pre-departure publications will be developed by end '06 and '*Living in Ireland – A Guide for New Residents*' will be in circulation in booklet format in Poland (in Polish) and available on-line in English and Polish by end 2006
- Runs an immigration outreach service through weekly clinics in Dublin's Polish and Islamic Centres and runs an emigration outreach service through inputs to relevant organisations about continuing emigration of people in crisis (the latter is informed through regular communication

with Irish organisations in the USA and UK which inform us of cases of recent Irish emigrants ending up in crisis)

- Provides back-up support to information provision organisations nationally and internationally by phone, email and training inputs, where requested
- Inputs all client contacts into a database and uses data to compile social policy documents pushing for policy change
- Networks as a member of Integrating Ireland, NCCRI Migration Sub-group and Emigrant Advice Network.

CentreCare and Emigrant Advice are based in the same premises and work collaboratively. This submission has been compiled by both CentreCare and Emigrant Advice and is based on evidence drawn from the issues and queries of people who use both services.

1. Preventing people from becoming homeless

1.1. Issue: Pay rent supplement in advance

Background: Based on CentreCare's database records, an added barrier for people in accessing private rented accommodation is the fact that rent allowance is paid in arrears. A person in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance has already proved that they do not have the means to support themselves. While a CWO may pay a deposit up front, the prospective tenant is relying on the goodwill of the landlord to wait until the end of the first month for the rent payment for that month. The landlord may not always be prepared to wait. The need for a person in such circumstances to wait a month to pay rent to a landlord only serves to exacerbate an already difficult situation. In many cases, this forces people to stay without suitable accommodation for much longer than necessary while they get together the first months rent.

Recommendation: It should be common practice of Community Welfare Officer to pay first months rents in advance at all times.

1.2. Issue: End the need to stay in homeless accommodation as an apparent requirement of receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance from the Homeless Persons Unit (HPU).

Background: Homeless people having problems with accessing payments approach CentreCare on a regular basis. It has been noted that a large number of these queries relate to the fact that the people in question are staying with different friends on a night-to-night basis. When they approach the Homeless Persons Unit to set up a payment (or to investigate a non-payment) they are informed that they must stay in homeless accommodation and produce evidence to that effect to access a payment (see 4.2 below). The reasons that some people refuse to stay in hostels are outlined in 3.1 below. Being unable to access payments leads to further hardship and poverty, will lead to further isolation and social exclusion and may exacerbate any medical and social issues people are already experiencing. In the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, Chapter 9, section 189, it states "*Subject to this act, every person in the state whose means are insufficient to meet his or her needs and the needs of any qualified adult or qualified child of the person shall be entitled to supplementary welfare allowance*". There is no mention here of proving homeless status or anything other than having insufficient means and so refusing or withholding payment is unlawful.

Recommendation: While it is understood that the reason for the apparent requirement that people stay in homeless accommodation is to prevent fraudulent claims, it is proposed here that there be more flexibility in the system. The HPU should liaise with other homeless services i.e. food centres, information services etc. to investigate the validity of an individual's situation.

1.3. Issue: Respond to the needs of short-term homeless EU10 nationals

Background: Despite the clarification of the Habitual Residence Condition in relation to EU workers eligibility for Supplementary Welfare Allowance there are still reports of EU10 nationals sleeping rough. Those migrant workers that are unsuccessful in their search for work after their arrival are particularly vulnerable as the situation in relation to their eligibility for social welfare remains the same, i.e. a one off Exceptional or Urgent Needs payment. Emigrant Advice is in the final stages of developing a comprehensive pre-departure information booklet that will be distributed in Polish language in Poland. It is hoped that this will lead to migrant workers being better informed about their rights and entitlements before and after arrival in Ireland. Homeless migrant workers from the EU10 states represent a different kind of homelessness to which many of the current services in Dublin are unsuited. Many have never been homeless before, many do not have any drug or alcohol addiction issues and there is a considerable language barrier especially for older EU10 nationals. Since May '04 only piecemeal actions have been undertaken to address this issue. There is a danger that the conflation of the issues of homeless EU10 nationals with the issues of homeless Irish people will exacerbate the situation of EU10 nationals.

Recommendation: Temporary low support accommodation should be developed with access to mother tongue language supports for migrant workers that have:

- failed to secure work in the first few weeks of their time in Ireland
- run out of funds for private accommodation
- no wish to be repatriated

A suggested format on which such a service could be developed could be based on the old Iveagh Workman's Hostel. Liaison with the Polish Government in this work is recommended.

2. Increasing long-term housing options with supports for people who are homeless

2.1. Issue: Increase in accommodation for single people

Background: In the 'Distribution of homeless persons classified according to household type 2005' (page 29, 'Counted In, 2005, Homeless Agency', the number of single people counted was 1,046 out of a total number of households of 1,361 or 77%. It has long been acknowledged that the majority of homeless households are made up of single people however local authorities are not building for this group.

So, for the majority of homeless people, Private Rented Accommodation is the only option.

The issues with Private Rented Accommodation are many:

- It is very hard to find landlords that will accept Rent Supplement
- Private Rented Accommodation is often unsuitable in that bathrooms and sometimes kitchen facilities are shared which can be particularly difficult if someone is experiencing health problems
- Bed-sits, which under the current rent cap are all that is available to single people, are often small and in poor condition, which is also detrimental to health.

These issues can often cause people to stay far longer in Emergency Accommodation than is intended. It also brings with it the problems that exist in this type of accommodation such as substance misuse and shared facilities. Also, the curfews in some hostels can prevent working and viewing private rented flats, as this is often only possible in the evening.

Recommendation: Local Authorities need to prioritise the building of housing for single people. People should be housed in their areas of origin where applicable and appropriate. Both transitional and long-term supported housing need to be built for those preparing for independent living and those who cannot live independently. The reasons landlords refuse to take Rent Supplement need to be identified and addressed. Private Rented Accommodation basic standards need to be set and maintained - raising the rent cap so better accommodation can be accessed is also recommended.

3. Ensuring each local area provides a sufficient range of services to effectively address the housing, health and other relevant needs of people who become homeless

3.1. Issue: End ‘dormitory style’ homeless accommodation

Background: People who refuse to access hostels because they have to share rooms approach CentreCare regularly. The reasons for this include:

- Fear of violence and intimidation
- The levels of drug and alcohol use in hostels can be very intimidating but also very difficult for those trying to stay clean and sober
- Fear of property being stolen
- For those who have suffered abuse, particularly institutional abuse, having to share a room with other men/ women in quite close quarters is extremely intimidating, feels very unsafe and can trigger memories of the abuse they suffered. This can also lead to fears, whether founded or not, of the threat of sexual violence
- For a person with health problems sharing facilities can be detrimental to their health and at times can put others at risk.

In addition, on a more basic human level, every person should have the right to privacy and dignity. Some people are inclined to sleep rough rather than use hostels. For this reason, they are likely to remain homeless longer and any physical, emotional and mental issues they are experiencing will undoubtedly be exacerbated.

Recommendation: While Crosscare acknowledges that dormitory style accommodation is still in use in its Food and Shelter programme, it is working towards the development of single room accommodation and is endeavouring to source funding for same. Crosscare recognises the need for **limited, short-term** dormitory style accommodation for some situations (see note 1 below). However, new purpose-built emergency accommodation must be built with single rooms only.

4. Improving the collection and dissemination of information on the nature and extent of homelessness.

4.1. Issue: Expand the use of the Dublin Link System

Background: The Dublin Link system is a useful tool for homeless services to offer effective and efficient support and services to people. However, we feel that it is being underused by organisations. The absence of such key organisations such as the Homeless Persons Unit from the system places gaps in information.

Recommendation: The Dublin Link system should be rolled out across the board and that every organisation working with homeless persons (including the Homeless Persons Unit) should use the link. This would:

- Improve the knowledge we have on the extent of homelessness in Dublin.
- Prevent duplication of work done by different organisations
- Help us to be even more aware of the needs of the homeless population in Dublin.
- Make the link a key tool in the homeless count in future.

4.2. Issue: Accurately count the ‘hidden homeless’

Background: In “*Counted In, 2005 (Homeless Agency)*”, it was noted that, in the sample week, 22 people (or 2%) stayed 4-6 nights (out of the last 7) with friends and family and 13 or (1%) stayed all 7 out of the last week with friends and family. This small but significant number is considered ‘hidden homeless’. CentreCare believe that this figure is in fact much greater.

Recommendation: To accurately count ‘hidden homeless’ the Homeless Persons Unit and Local Authorities should record people who state that they are living with ‘friends and family’ when they register. Having accurate numbers of homeless people is a vital first step in the development of accurate homeless policy and services.

5. The Role of the Homeless Agency in leading and coordinating the implementation of the action plan

5.1. Issue: Make practical changes to make participation in the Homeless Agency workings more effective

Background: CentreCare and Emigrant Advice acknowledge the great work achieved by the Homeless Agency. It welcomes the opportunity to input at all stages of planning, implementation, review and evaluation of the work undertaken by the Homeless Agency through its participation in the Consultative Forum, networks and training events.

Recommendation: CentreCare and Emigrant Advice recommend the following:

- Continuation of the development of service user participation methods in collaboration with the Homeless Network which is welcome and key to the accuracy and effectiveness of the future work of the Homeless Agency partnership.
- Consultative Forum meetings could be shorter. The current level of detail covered is unnecessary.
- A focus must be kept at all meetings kept on ‘how will what we do today end long term homelessness’
- There is a need for advance annual timetabling of all Homeless Agency meetings
- The effectiveness of the Information Workers Network (of which CentreCare /Emigrant Advice is a member) needs to be reviewed.

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Note 1: Crosscare's two accommodation centres in Longford Lane and Dún Laoghaire provide dormitory style emergency accommodation for homeless men and (women in Dún Laoghaire.) These services provide high support to a very vulnerable group of people. However, we agree that each individual has the right to a private room. There is a new purpose-built building being developed in Dún Laoghaire which will have single rooms, respecting the privacy of clients. Here, provision is also being made for 6-bed dormitory style accommodation for individuals becoming homeless. A provision will be made on this that they will spend a **limited** amount of time in this accommodation before moving on to more appropriate accommodation. In Longford Lane we have reduced the number of beds in the dormitory from 20 to 14.