



# Supporter Newsletter 2021



Galway  
**Simon**  
Community

# Thank you for your support

This will be an unusual Autumn/Winter – as the days begin to shorten, they will also continue to brighten as restrictions are lifted and life becomes more normal again.

I wonder how we will all look back on the last eighteen months in years to come? It has been an extraordinary time in Galway Simon Community. The collective response to the pandemic across our community has been phenomenal. Clients, staff and volunteers have worked together to keep each other safe. Throughout the last eighteen months, only one client contracted Covid and thankfully, they made a full recovery. A small number of staff tested positive for the virus and all have made a full recovery. Critically, there was no onward transmission within the organisation, and through the very hard work of the staff and volunteer teams, in addition to some very good fortune, there was no outbreak within our Services.



Our frontline staff kitted out with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Some major cities around the world have seen very significant Covid infection rates among their homeless populations and I would like to acknowledge and commend the inspirational work and effort of clients, staff and volunteers, and the deep commitment to keeping each other safe that has permeated our community throughout the pandemic.

As we come out of Covid, our work continues to be very challenging. To the end of July, we have supported 25% more people than in the same period in 2020. With delivery of social and private housing delayed because of the pandemic, and rents continuing to rise, finding secure and affordable accommodation is extremely difficult in the West of Ireland and more people are finding themselves at risk of homelessness. We are also seeing addiction and mental health difficulties arising from the pandemic – for many, mainstream support services such as group counselling sessions remain on hold.

***Our incredible teams continue to be here for people who find themselves in crisis.***

We welcome the publication of the government's new Housing for All Strategy and the positive solutions it outlines to address the homelessness and housing crisis. The successful implementation of the measures within the plan will be critical to its impact. In the period of the government's previous strategy, 'Rebuilding Ireland', the number of people living in emergency accommodation in the West of Ireland increased by 101%. Rents in Galway have soared since quarter two of 2016 when 'Rebuilding Ireland' was launched - according to Daft.ie reports, average rent has increased by 55% in Galway City and 67% in Galway County over this period. At the same time, only 985 new social housing builds have come on stream in Galway City and County.

Our teams at Galway Simon continue to place a huge emphasis on our prevention work. We support people to find alternative accommodation or to sustain their own tenancy when they are at risk of homelessness. When we can prevent people from falling into homelessness, the distress and trauma of Emergency Accommodation – for individuals and families – can be avoided.

For those who experience homelessness, we are deeply committed to providing long term solutions and we have been working to Housing Led and Housing First principles for a number of years now. Some members of our Community provide insights into our Housing First work throughout this newsletter and we hope this will provide you with a better understanding of the impact this Service has on the lives of our clients.

As always, our work is dependent on the support of our wider community. Our two charity shops were closed for six months in 2020 and again until the end of May this

year. Fundraising events continue to be significantly impacted by Covid.

***We are beyond grateful to our loyal and generous supporters, who continued to support our work in so many ways over the last eighteen months.***

In addition to the importance of your financial support in safeguarding our Services, knowing you were behind us during the darker days of isolation and lockdowns has been very important to all of us here in the community.

More than ever, on behalf of all of us across Galway Simon Community, thank you for your ongoing support.



With every good wish,  
**Karen Golden,**  
**CEO**

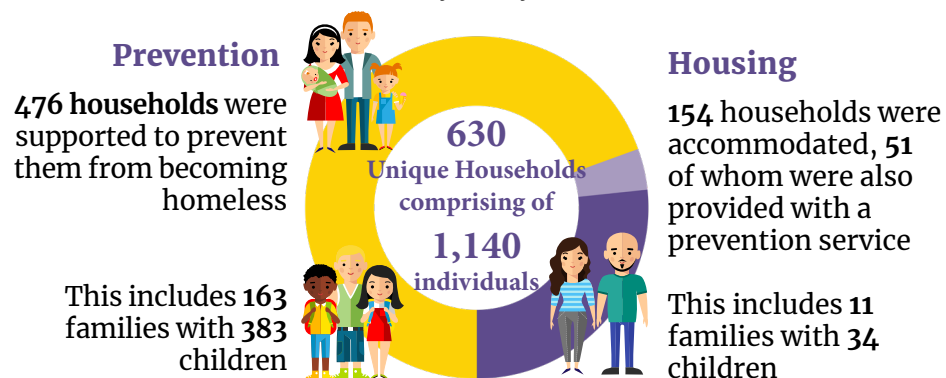
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## The impact you help to make

The homelessness and housing crisis has had a severe impact on people across our communities in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon with more and more becoming homeless or finding themselves at risk of homelessness. Galway Simon Community's services are needed now more than ever and it's with the support of people like you in our community, that we've been able to continue making a difference in people's lives. In the first seven months of 2021 alone, we have supported 630 households who were experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

### Households Supported by Galway Simon Community January - July 2021



### Demand for our services continues to rise

174 families supported  
January - July 2021

22%

Increase on the same period last year.

630 households supported  
January - July 2021

25%

Increase on the same period last year.

## Introducing Housing First



**Karen Feeney,  
Head of Client  
Services,  
introduces our  
new Housing First  
service.**

to those who have been identified as being long term homeless with high support needs. To date twenty people who have had long histories of crisis and homelessness have been provided with secure homes.

Amongst all the challenges experienced within our services throughout 2020, there were also some really wonderful developments, that meant solutions and safety for some of the most vulnerable clients accessing Homeless Services in Galway City. In particular the roll out of Housing First. Housing First is a program which aims to end long term homelessness by targeting those with the most complex needs, and those who have histories of rough sleeping. People are offered housing rather than emergency or temporary solutions. They are provided with comprehensive support to manage their accommodation, they are also offered wrap around support to manage their health needs, physical and mental, as well as support to re-connect with their communities.

There is a worker assigned who helps them with the whole process of moving into a new home, and is there to help them to adjust and manage living safely on their own. Whatever supports that a person needs, there is help to access. This work is about collaboration between ourselves here in Galway Simon, Galway City Council, The HSE Mental Health Services, and Cope Galway. It has been a hugely rewarding experience for our staff, working with people to take them on a journey that is about creating a home, and having the support to manage it well. For the most part the people who have been housed through the Housing First Program are people who believe that the world has given up on them, that they have nothing to be hopeful for. By providing a home and ending their homelessness people have the opportunity to focus more on what they need and want in their lives. People make extraordinary changes when they are no longer in crisis.

*All over the world there is clear evidence that this approach is most effective in ending long term homelessness.*

The program was introduced into Galway City in 2019, and has been expanded to include Counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon since the beginning of 2021. In Galway City 20 tenancies have been created. The role of Galway Simon has been to manage the Housing Support Services,

We are very proud of what the Housing First Team have accomplished during 2020, and continue to achieve. People with long and complex stories of homelessness and distress have been given focused and tangible help to move into tenancies, and create a home for themselves. They have been given hope, they have been offered solutions.

## The Impact of Housing First:

### Paul's Story

In April 2020, Paul was referred to the Housing First Service, and offered housing and support.

Paul was married and had a very successful career in America for many years, then alcohol addiction started to take hold of his life.

"I lived in America for a good number of years. I was married and lived extremely well.

*I was a trainer to senators and congressmen and lobbyists. So, I've been from one extreme to the other.*

I moved from there because my health deteriorated. I've got terminal cancer."

"Drink is a great eraser, it will get rid of stains, but it will also get rid of livers, kidneys, wives, houses."

For fifteen years, with ongoing addiction issues and ill health, Paul was entrenched in homelessness as he lived in and out of hostels throughout Ireland. Paul was known to Galway Simon's staff and he was approached about the Housing First Service.

"Simon put my name forward for all of this. They knew me for years. I'm not homeless anymore, it took me five or six months to get that sense, I had to become used to it again, and that took time."



*"Simon put trust in me, and had faith in me when no one would. That's priceless."*

With the help of the Housing First team, Paul resettled to his new home, an apartment in a secluded cul-de-sac, where he has paintings on the wall, a trellis up for flowers and AstroTurf on his balcony. He says it took a little while to adjust to living in a house again but relishes the fact he's not homeless anymore,

*"I have a key – I can come and go when I want. I cook and keep the house clean. I feel refreshed."*

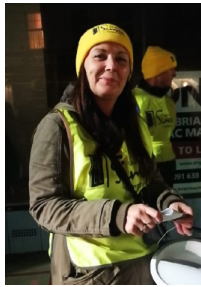
Despite health concerns, Paul is doing very well and continues to liaise with Galway Simon and other services, while maintaining his sobriety. He likes to upkeep a "buoyant nature", talk to neighbours, cycle into town, and looks forward to studying.



With Housing First's assistance and his own financial input, Paul is starting a Fine Art course and hopes to do a counselling course in the future.

*\*Paul's name has been changed to protect his identity, but his story is very much real.*

# Housing First with Andrea Fitzgerald



**Andrea Fitzgerald, Service Manager** at Galway Simon Community, is part of the **Homeless Action Team** in Galway and is also the manager of our **Housing First**

**Service Team.** Andrea introduces what Housing First is and how it will help individuals experiencing homelessness across the West.

## Who does Housing First help?

The service provides housing to marginalised individuals, who often have complex mental health or addiction needs. It targets individuals who have been entrenched in homelessness for long periods of time.

## What is Housing First?

Before housing led approaches like Housing First were introduced, typically people who were homeless and who entered into emergency and homeless services would 'progress' through services for several years, until eventually they would be ready to live independently again. However, now with Housing First, the approach is the complete opposite. Clients are admitted without preconditions, with research showing that stable housing and support is a basis for recovery and community reintegration.

With Housing First, you are meeting

individuals at whatever stage they are at, whether they're in a rough sleeping situation, or in emergency accommodation. The service places clients in their homes much earlier, wraps outside supports around them, and empowers them, with the aim that these aids will be pared back over time.

Clients are allocated a key worker who has the goal of supporting the client to thrive in their tenancy. Staff work with clients to devise their individual action plan. By maintaining low client to staff ratios, staff can address clients' complex individual needs in a holistic and supportive way, which is integral to Galway Simon's ethos.

I always say to my team,

*'It's about building that bridge; it's about building that trust with the person.'*



I think the beauty around Housing First is we're very strong at saying to people at the start,

'It does not matter what you tell us; it does not matter what your history has been up to this particular moment in time, it's not going to preclude you from getting your own accommodation.'

The biggest message I feel that we're conveying to clients is that,

*'We're not going to give up on you and if things go wrong or this gets overwhelming for you, we're here to sit with you and we're here to try and see what it is that we can do in order to make it a little bit more bearable for you.'*

## The Impact of Housing First

We have one young man who has been supported through the service, probably one of our youngest tenants in Housing First. He had a traumatic childhood and went through all of the systems, he was high risk. We knew that he would benefit from the Housing First Service. Now, he's

absolutely flourishing, it's actually quite unbelievable. He moved into his new home during the first week in January this year. There isn't a day in the week that he doesn't engage with his key worker, he's on top of his household budget and he's really engaging in a therapeutic-type of support with his key worker.

*Housing First has been extremely successful for every one of the 20 people it currently houses.*

Many of them have a mistrust of services and have experienced trauma, but know we're not going to give up on them, and they'll never have to sleep rough again; that's huge.

It's 20 people to date who aren't in emergency accommodation or sleeping on the street. And it's 20 people that I believe know that they have a dedicated team of people that are committed to ensuring that they never have to sleep a night on the streets again.





## Galway Simon's Youth Advocacy Programme

Our Youth Advocacy Programme aims to increase awareness about homelessness in our community by educating students through in-person and online workshops with a member of Galway Simon staff.

During the workshop, students are educated about the issues surrounding homelessness and how Galway Simon is supporting people impacted by homelessness to rebuild their lives. The workshops involve interactive activities to encourage students to get involved in the conversation around homelessness, and to demonstrate how they can make a difference in the lives of others in our community.

Since the launch of our Youth Advocacy Programme in 2016, we have delivered workshops to over 3,000 students across Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. Students find these talks eye opening and often express their shock at the level of 'hidden homelessness' right on their doorstep.

### What the students say

"It's helped me understand much more about how serious it is and I would never have known how serious it was beforehand"  
- Nathan

"I would have thought that the type of homelessness was just people living in a sleeping bag on the streets" – Joe

"We can forget that it's there and it [the talk] really just made you remember" – Rita

### How to get involved

The programme runs from early September and is open to all schools across the region. To register interest in booking a talk on behalf of a school or group, visit [www.galwaysimon.ie/schools](http://www.galwaysimon.ie/schools) or contact Carol Hynes on (091) 381828.

## Our Upcoming Events



### Virtual Sleep Out for Simon

**Friday - Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> October**

Give up your bed for one night in support of those facing homelessness in the West. Take the challenge with friends, family, colleagues, or teammates and tune in for a jam-packed schedule of entertainment, activities and insightful content for all.



### Christmas Gift Voucher Appeal

**December 2021**

Give the gift of practicality and dignity to those facing homelessness this Christmas by donating a grocery, fuel, pharmacy, or toy shop voucher.



### Christmas Jumper Day

**Friday 10<sup>th</sup> December**

Get your festive woolies on and host a Christmas Jumper Day in your workplace, your school, college, or even on your morning Zoom call.



### Sprint for Simon

**25<sup>th</sup> December - 5<sup>th</sup> January**

Register to take the Sprint for Simon challenge. From December 25th, take the challenge and run, walk or jog 1k a day for the 12 days of Christmas.

For more information on events or to volunteer contact our team on [info@galwaysimon.ie](mailto:info@galwaysimon.ie) or 091 381828.

# Homelessness and Housing in the West of Ireland

The housing and homelessness crisis has continued to have a severe impact on individuals and families across our communities in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has created additional demand for Galway Simon Community's services, with many suffering the adverse effects of the dual crises of housing and the pandemic. The homelessness and housing crisis is a multi-faceted issue with a range of contributing factors that affects communities across Ireland in nuanced ways.

## Lack of affordable and social housing

The increasing size and changing demographics of our population has resulted in demand for housing far outweighing the supply. Unfortunately, the rate of new social housing builds in recent years has not been adequate to address the needs of people in emergency and homeless services, or on the social housing waiting list. The hoped-for delivery of social housing units in 2020 was negatively impacted by building sites closing as part of the government's Covid restrictions. The slow pace of social housing build, coupled with the level of vacant properties across the West, has resulted in a severe shortage of social housing, with many having no other option but to turn to the private rental sector.

## Over-reliance on the private rental sector

In recent years, there has been a huge reliance and demand on the private rental sector, which has contributed to a decrease in the supply of rental properties available across the West. Those relying on private rented accommodation include private residents, people in receipt of social housing benefits and students. Additionally, the West of Ireland has a vibrant tourist industry and there is a huge demand for short term lets through sites such as AirBnB. Due to the slow pace of social housing coming on stream, there has been a significant focus by the government on delivering social housing through Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) schemes which rely on the private rental sector. In 2020, 62% of social housing in Galway was delivered through HAP schemes, 57% in Mayo and 73% in Roscommon.

## Increasing costs

It is generally accepted that a household should spend no more than 25-35% of net disposable income on housing. However, it is reported that "more than one in five tenants paying market rent in Ireland are paying over 40 per cent of their disposable income on housing, with almost one in 10 paying over 60 per cent and more than one in 20 paying 75 per cent." In addition to putting tenancies at risk, this high cost of housing is contributing to food

and fuel poverty.

The Locked Out of the Market study published in August 2021 by the Simon Communities of Ireland showed that there were no properties available to rent in Galway City Centre or Suburbs that were within the standard or discretionary HAP limits. The private rental sector has dealt with a huge surge in demand over the last number of years, resulting in a decline in availability of rental properties as well as ever increasing rent prices.

## The cumulative impact

These issues, among other factors, cumulatively put enormous stress on social housing and the private rental sector, which in turn leaves many people having no other option but to turn to homeless and homelessness prevention services like Galway Simon Community for help. Our services are needed more than ever by those in our community. So far this year, Galway Simon has supported 25% more households compared to the same period in 2020. This includes 723 adults and 417 children.

We welcome the government's new Housing for All Strategy and the positive actions outlined to eradicate homelessness. The successful implementation of the measures within the new plan will be critical to its impact. In the period of the government's previous strategy, 'Rebuilding Ireland', the number of people living in emergency

accommodation in the West of Ireland increased by 101%. These figures do not include rough sleepers, couch surfers, those living in squats or cars, and those involuntarily sharing. It must be remembered that behind every statistic is a real person whose life has been turned upside down by homelessness. Rents in Galway have soared since quarter two of 2016 when 'Rebuilding Ireland' was launched - according to Daft.ie reports, average rent has increased by 55% in Galway City and 67% in Galway County over this period.

## Looking forward

While the challenges we face have never been greater, there are tangible solutions to this crisis within our community. Through our 41 years' experience of providing housing and support services, we have learned that early intervention is key to keeping people in their own homes. Over the last number of years, we have extended our Homelessness Prevention Services and we are now supporting more individuals than ever before to ensure that we can prevent people from entering homeless services in the first place. In addition to this, Galway Simon is working to provide sustainable solutions to people experiencing homelessness through our Housing Led and Housing First Services.

Our work is only possible with the help of our volunteers, funders, and supporters. Together, we continue to make a difference.

## Get Involved!

# VIRTUAL SLEEP OUT FOR Galway Simon Community

TAKE THE CHALLENGE, JOIN THE EXPERIENCE, MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Get your hot cocoa and flasks of tea at the ready, pack yourselves into your warmest sleeping bags, we're in for a jam-packed night on **Friday October 1st!**

We are calling on everyone - individuals, families, communities, businesses, schools, clubs and groups – to give up your bed and usual comforts for one night in support of the vulnerable individuals and families facing homelessness here in the West.

Whether you pitch a tent in the garden, bed down on the living room floor, or spend the night under the stars in the office car park, you can help to raise desperately needed funds for those facing homelessness during this critical time of need.

For more information on how you can get involved, visit [sleepoutforsimon.ie](https://sleepoutforsimon.ie)

Alternatively, contact **Amy Lavelle, Community & Youth Partnerships Coordinator** at [amy.lavelle@galwaysimon.ie](mailto:amy.lavelle@galwaysimon.ie) or 091 381828.

## Other Ways To Get Involved



### Corporate Partnerships

With the support of our business community across the West, we can work together to end homelessness just like our many supporters who have motivated and engaged their businesses whilst helping to rebuild lives in our local community.



### Room Sponsorship

You can help us to keep more people safe from the housing crisis by becoming a Galway Simon Room Sponsor today. Providing someone with a room can provide a vital first step to an independent life. Visit [www.galwaysimon.ie/room-sponsor](https://www.galwaysimon.ie/room-sponsor) for more information.



### Community Fundraising

Whether you'd like to bake, climb a mountain or host a virtual games night, there are so many fun ways for you to raise funds for those facing homelessness in our community. And we've got lots of great ideas, tips and advice to get you started.



### Legacy Giving

A gift in your will, big or small, will help Galway Simon Community to be there for people facing homelessness in Galway in the future.

For more information contact our team on [info@galwaysimon.ie](mailto:info@galwaysimon.ie) or 091 381828.



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**Phone:** 091 381828 **Email:** [info@galwaysimon.ie](mailto:info@galwaysimon.ie)

**Registered Charity No. 20018962 | Charity Number (CHY) 8007**

Galway Simon Community is operating to the Charities Institute 'Triple Lock' standards and is compliant with the Irish Charity Governance Code, the Statement of Recommended Practices (SORP) and the Statement of Guiding Principles for Fundraising.