



VIRTUAL SLEEP OUT 2020: THE DIFFERENCE YOU MADE

It is safe to say that it has been a year like no other for us all. Our entire community has faced change, suffering, and loss like never before. However, as we slowly start to come out the other side of this long lasting storm, it is important to reflect on all the positive things we have achieved during this particularly challenging time.

For Galway Simon's fundraising team, news of the Coronavirus pandemic started to break just as we had finalised our planning for the year ahead. Then all of a sudden, we had to start from scratch and completely rethink how we were going to continue to raise funds at a time when it wasn't safe to meet with anyone outside of our household, let alone host a fundraising event or collection. Our annual Sleep Out is our largest community fundraising event and a hugely significant source of income for the organisation so it was never a case of us not going ahead with it. Instead, the team remained fully focused on how to host the event in the safest and most enjoyable way possible – and thus our first ever Virtual Sleep Out was born! Every cloud has a silver lining and for our Sleep Out, going virtual meant that the event became more inclusive than ever before with people of all ages taking part; from Montessori Groups to Secondary Schools; Choirs to Scout Groups; Sports Clubs to Youth Councils, along with Businesses and Enterprises of all sizes. It was also more widespread than ever before with families, friends, colleagues and teammates taking part in communities right across the West, as well as in places as far away as Shanghai, Vancouver, and Seoul!

It truly was a phenomenal response; more than 200 participants took the challenge of giving up their bed for one night, to sleep in their back gardens, on their doorsteps, trampolines, garden sheds, living room forts and office carparks and in doing so helped to raise an exceptional €137,205.10 – by far our most successful Sleep Out ever!

As you know, 100% of proceeds will go directly towards safeguarding our essential Homelessness Prevention Services during this critical time of need and I am so pleased to be sharing the impact of this incredible support in the following report. I hope that by reading this you feel as proud as I do at the difference that we have made together and inspired by how so much can be achieved through just one act of solidarity over one night. My deepest thanks for all that you did to make this possible and I hope to see you again this year!



Warmest wishes,

Amy Lavelle,
Community & Youth Partnerships Coordinator



€137,205.20 Raised for Essential Frontline Services in the West

It has been an immensely challenging time for our community as our dedicated front-line teams worked tirelessly to put additional measures in place to keep our clients, staff and volunteers safe and well. The Coronavirus and associated risks pose very serious challenges to people who are homeless or living in homeless services. Our priority throughout the pandemic has been, and will continue to be, ensuring that people in our Community are housed, supported and safe. The Covid-19 crisis has put so many already vulnerable people at particular risk, including those who are homeless and those who are at risk of falling into homelessness due to a sudden reduction in income. Many of the people we support are truly isolated – exposed, vulnerable, and very often with underlying health issues which place them at even higher risk. Many are facing this pandemic without a place to call home. While our income continues to be severely impacted, the cost of running our services continues to increase as we respond to the Coronavirus crisis, and our finances remain under significant pressure. It is therefore difficult to express the real significance of such incredible support during this critical time of need.

More than 500 Individuals & Families to be supported through Funds Raised

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. If we can prevent someone from having to access homeless services in the first place, the outcomes are much better in that the trauma of emergency accommodation is not experienced and the associated costs of homelessness are significantly reduced. We were already dealing with a very serious housing and homelessness crisis and with the true economic impact of the pandemic looming, our focus on prevention has never been more critical.

Galway Simon's Homelessness Prevention Services include a Community Outreach Support Team, a dedicated Youth Service, a specialist Women and Family Service, and a drop-in Resource Centre in East County Galway.

Thanks to your incredible support, more than 500 individuals and families facing homeless here in the West, are set to be supported directly through funds raised through the Virtual Sleep Out.

- An estimated 211 individuals and families at risk of becoming homeless in County Galway will be supported thank to the allocation of funds to cover **the running costs of our Resource Centre in East County Galway** as well as an additional part-time social worker post for this service.
- A total of **12 new homes are set to be fitted out** with your support allowing those supported by our services to leave homelessness behind them for good.
- An estimated total of 272 individuals and families at risk of homelessness will be provided with **essential supports like electricity cost and basic household items in a time of need.**
- 20 young adults aged 18-25 years supported by our dedicated Youth Service were given access to **vital counselling and occupational therapy.**



Fund Impact Summary

Detailed Breakdown of Fund Allocation:

Allocation of Funds up until March 2021:

Restricted Allocation Category	Description	Number of People Supported (Jan-Mar 2021)	Amount
Essentials Fund	Essential supports such as heating, electricity costs and basic household items were purchased to support those at risk of, or experiencing homelessness in Galway City & County	117 Families & Individuals	€17,982.49 *€12,630 allocated in November & December 2020
Long Term Housing Fit Out	Fit out and refurbishment of 5 long term houses to provide a home for Clients moving on from resettlement that would have otherwise faced homelessness	5 Individual & Family Households	€10,863.06
County Prevention Services	100% of the running costs of our drop-in Resource Centre in East County Galway as well as supporting 2 part-time Social Worker posts for the County Outreach Support Service	100 Unique Households (including 51 Families with 144 Children)	€16,407.56
Youth Service; Counselling & Occupational Therapy Support	The provision of Vital Counselling & Occupational Therapy within our dedicated Youth Service	Up to 20 Young Adults (aged 18-25)	€2,954.99
Total Spent to Date	€48,208.10		

Further supports to be provided in 2021:

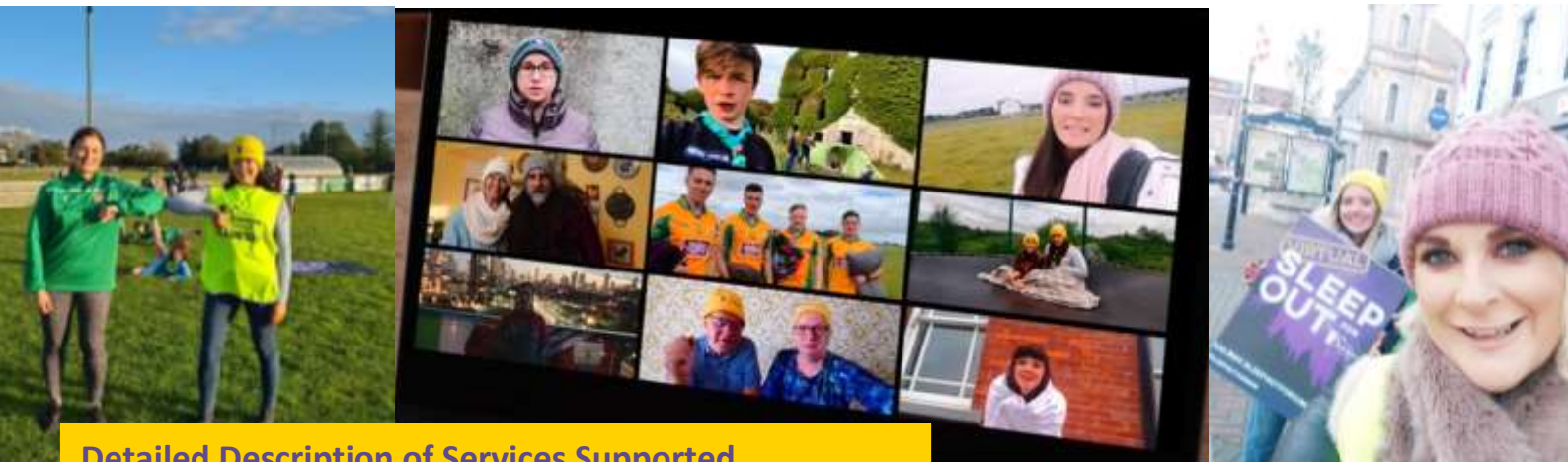
Restricted Allocation Category	Description	Estimated No. of People Supported (Apr – Dec 2020)	Amount
Essentials Fund	As above	155 Families & Individuals	€27,017.51
Long Term Housing Fit Out	Fit out and refurbishment of 7 houses to provide a home for Clients moving on from resettlement services that would have otherwise faced homelessness	7 Individual & Family Households	€21,176.60
**County Prevention Services	As above	Additional 111 New Unique Households	€28,592.44
Youth Service Expansion	To support the planned expansion of our dedicated Youth Service including the provision of 4 additional residential places as well as the increased Community Outreach support capacity to allow us to continue supporting young people in their own tenancies when they move on to independent living, minimising the risk of their return to homelessness.	Min. of 4 Young Adults (aged 18-25)	€8,322.15
***Total Budgeted Spend (Apr-Dec 2020)	€88,997.00		

Notes:

*Estimated number of people to be supported through the remaining allocation of the Essentials Fund is based on average support costs and beneficiaries of the fund YTD.

**Estimated number of people to be supported through the County Prevention Services for the remainder of the year is based on the number of new unique households supported YTD i.e. 37

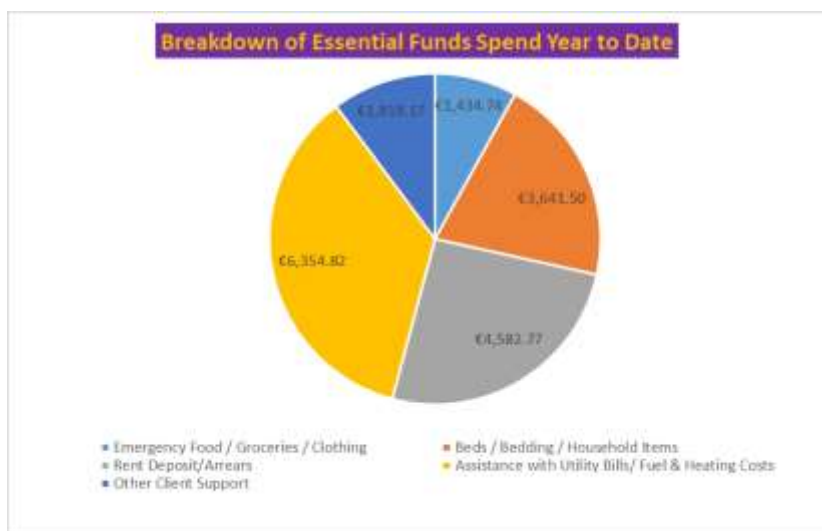
***We estimate that approximately 515 individuals and families who are at risk of, or experiencing homelessness in the West (Galway, Mayo & Roscommon) will be directly supported as a result of the 2020 Sleep Out for Simon.



Detailed Description of Services Supported

1. Essentials Fund

In response to an increase in the number of families and individuals struggling to maintain their tenancy, Galway Simon set up an 'Essentials Fund' in 2016 to support basic costs which could have an impact on a family or individual's capacity to sustain their home. The fund provides practical assistance on an expedited basis, to allow those at risk of, or experiencing homelessness to bridge the gap between funds they have and the costs incurred in securing accommodation in the private rental market. Practical items associated with moving into a new home are supported through the fund such as bed linen, a first week's groceries or kitchenware and rental deposits. These essentials enable individuals and families to get back on their feet in a time of crisis. €45,000 of funds raised through the 2020 Sleep Out were placed into this Fund which to date has supported 117 families and individuals with basics such as food, heating, electricity, and basic household items. The remaining allocation of these funds are estimated to benefit a further 155 families and individuals this year.



2. Long Term Housing: Fit Out

The delivery of social housing in Galway has been inadequate in recent years, resulting in an overreliance on the private rented sector. With demand outstripping supply, rents have continued to increase beyond what is affordable for many – resulting in significant numbers of people accessing emergency accommodation and homeless services. We had anticipated that a larger number of new social housing units would become available in 2020 and 2021, but the Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on housing delivery.

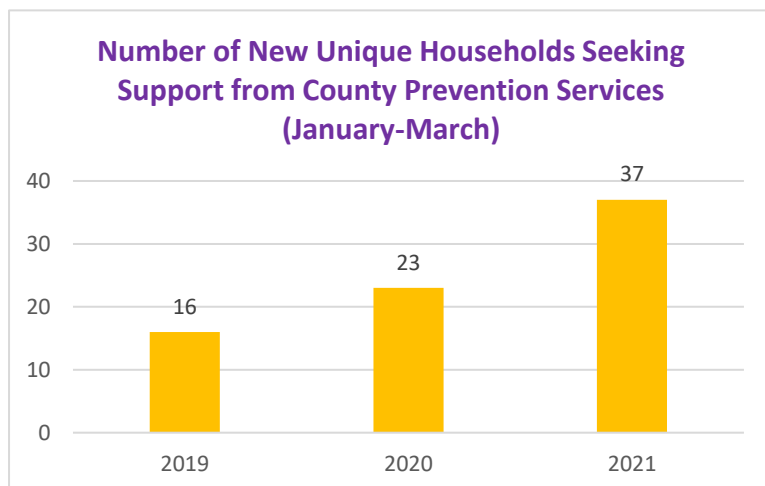
While we continue to advocate for more social housing locally, we are also taking urgent action to ensure we can provide sustainable long-term housing solutions for very vulnerable clients who may struggle to find secure accommodation in the private rental sector.

A cornerstone of this action plan, as outlined in our current strategy “Journey Home: 2020-23”, is to further extend our Housing Programme this year by acquiring an additional 12 properties which will provide secure tenancies for 12 households and enable them to leave homelessness behind them for good.

As an Approved Housing Body (AHB), we can access statutory funding to purchase these properties. However, we rely on fundraising income to refurbish and fit out properties purchased. To date, Sleep Out 2020 funds have supported the refurb and fit out costs of five properties. The remaining €21,176.60 of this allocation will support the costs of an additional seven properties that will in turn provide an opportunity for those who are experiencing or facing homelessness to journey back to a place where they can live inclusively and with dignity in their local community.

3. Ballinasloe Resource Centre: Running Costs and Part-Time Homelessness Prevention Support Worker

Our Bridge Resource Centre in Ballinasloe plays a vital role in preventing homelessness in the local community. It operates a drop-in service that gives people advice and practical support with a variety of issues including personal challenges, addiction and health issues. The service is available to anyone over the age of 18 who is experiencing, or at risk of homelessness in the Ballinasloe and surrounding areas. Practical areas of support provided include hygiene and laundry facilities along with food provisions, managing tenancies and resettlement into a new home through mainstream housing; budgeting skills, rent arrears and debt management, addressing addiction, physical and mental health concerns, practical life skills and personal programmes; health and wellbeing including social isolation; training, employment and education including meaningful use of time.



Galway Simon’s Registered General Nurse also hosts a physical health clinic every Monday at the Resource Centre. Monthly podiatry sessions are co-facilitated, as well as a weight management clinic with a nutritional therapist. The team advocate on behalf of our clients and works in conjunction with mainstream services including mental health, counselling and addiction services. Integrating approaches ensures that our clients have access to the most appropriate healthcare and support, improving diagnoses, interventions and outcomes.

Although Galway Simon receive funding from Galway County Council and the HSE, there is currently a significant shortfall which needs to be raised through fundraising in order to keep the centre open. A total of €45,000 from the 2020 Prevention Fund will be allocated to fund the centre’s entire running costs this year to cover the basics such as light, heat, food, maintenance & repair, water rates, insurance, waste etc. These funds will also support two part-time social care posts in the centre. It is anticipated that this significant contribution will provide vital support to approximately 211 individuals and families in Galway County who are at risk of, or experiencing homelessness this year.

4. Youth Service, Counselling & Occupational Therapy Supports

Galway Simon Community are committed to working with vulnerable young people who are at risk of becoming homeless or becoming entrenched in Homelessness at a young age. Our commitment to this Service arose from the experience of many of our clients, who entered homelessness at a young age, largely because their families were not able to support them, or they were homeless on leaving Care. We understand that many of those in our adult services became homeless early in their lives and never had opportunities to effectively break the cycle. In 2016, we developed a dedicated Youth Service, that presently supports up to 20 young people, between 18



and 25 at any one time. This includes accommodation for 8 young people with visiting support from a dedicated key-worker, as well as our work with young people who might be at risk of homelessness.

The young people supported by this service can often be early school leavers, have little work experience, many are vulnerable to problematic alcohol and substance misuse, and are often highly at risk of long-term homelessness. A core objective involves ensuring that young people have necessary support to manage mental health and/or addiction issues, and gain stability. This is critical to ensure that a young person when resettled can continue to thrive and maintain a Tenancy and develop the necessary resilience to manage life's challenges, particularly when they do not have access to the supportive family networks we sometimes take for granted. The funds that you raised through last year's Sleep Out have helped us to offer targeted and client centred counselling and occupational therapy supports to the young people accessing this service.

5. Youth Service Expansion

We have acquired a further two units of housing which will allow us to provide comprehensive care and support to an additional four young adults at risk of homelessness. The remaining allocation of funds will go directly towards supporting the expansion this service so that on completion, Galway Simon Community will have 12 Young People living in our supported accommodation at any one time. The funds will also go towards increasing the capacity of our Outreach Supports that work with young people within the community helping them to maintain Tenancies and live independently. Sometimes a young person needs our help when they are at risk of their Tenancy breaking down, sometimes they need our help to find somewhere new to live. When we help people to move into their own Tenancies our work with them does not finish, we continue to support them as needed. Our work is focused on ensuring they continue to successfully live independently.



The True Impact of Your Support

A Message from Karen Golden, CEO



In the initial weeks of the lockdown in March and April of last year, one of our front line support staff said she felt like she was working on quicksand – it was sometimes difficult in the morning to know what the afternoon would bring, not to mind the end of the week, or the week after that. Case numbers, advice and guidance, protocols and even our everyday language kept changing against a backdrop of deep fear as to what the pandemic would mean for those in our Community.

Through all of the dread and the change, the dedication of our front line teams never wavered. The very exceptional people in our Community worked tirelessly to continue to support those experiencing and at risk of homelessness across Galway, Mayo and Roscommon.

With an enormous team effort, and some good fortune on our side, we have thankfully kept clients, volunteers and staff across Galway Simon Community safe from the pandemic.

As always, we could not have done this without the help of our extraordinary supporters across the West of Ireland. While we very much missed coming together as we usually would, it was heart-warming through the dark days to know that people were so behind us. To all of you who responded with enthusiasm and flair to our reimagined 'Virtual Sleep Out', it is near impossible to convey in words how grateful we were to you for your support during such a bleak year – it meant the world to us all and gave us such a lift.

I hope that this detailed report gives you a sense of the impact of your participation on the lives of people who Galway Simon Community supports. Long after the dark days of 2020 have passed, the funds raised during the Virtual SleepOut will have positive ripple effects for many years to come.

To the incredible media and technical teams who gave so generously of your time and creative energy to help us reimagine our SleepOut, we cannot thank you enough.

And to the fabulous team at Galway Bay FM, sincere thanks for your continued support.

From the very first volunteer soup runs in 1979, community and volunteering have been core to everything we do in Galway Simon – never did these values shine more brightly than during our 2020 Sleep Out.

Thank you for making it happen. Ní neart go cur le chéile, Karen

Olive Keane, Housing & Support Services Coordinator

Olive speaks about the profound impact of our Long-Term Housing Programme on the life of one client who moved into his home last year:

"I have been supporting this gentleman since early 2016 when he moved from one of our residential houses into Galway Simon's transitional community based housing. It had been a long journey for him so you can imagine how special it was to be the person who could go with him to see his new home for the first time and to hand over the keys. We live for these moments in Galway Simon!"

Since he was a teenager, he has suffered with very poor mental health and has sadly spent the majority of the past 20 plus years either in hospital under the care of psychiatric services or in homeless services. When he first came to Galway Simon, it was so that he could have a stable base and so that we could help him to build on his life skills.

When we opened the door to his new home, a small one-bed apartment in the City, his initial reaction was absolute disbelief. Through all my years working with him, even at the lowest points of his illness, he has always spoken about how being independent is important for him. However, with going in and out of hospital to homeless services for years he was feeling like he had no control over his life.

After a moment's thought he turned to me in the apartment and said "Olive, we need to talk about my independence". To this I couldn't stop smiling and I said... "this is your home, no one else will be living here, these are your keys you can come and go as you please." I think it was only then that it hit home to him that he was finally having his greatest wish fulfilled: a place that was his alone, no more sharing with other people like he had done for the best part of his life.

The tears welled up in his eyes. He replied..."I could have a girlfriend having a place like this couldn't I Olive?". This was a poignant moment for me. It struck me that the very basic need for love and companionship felt unattainable to him because of his circumstances up to that moment. I could not imagine thinking that I could not share my life with someone because I felt I didn't have the choice".

Thank you to everyone who supports Galway Simon's Sleep Out. I hope you realised the incredible difference you make in people's lives through your support"



A Final Word of Thanks to Our Event Sponsors & Partners

In addition to the deep gratitude we have for everyone who participated in and donated to the Virtual Sleep Out for Simon 2020, we would also like to acknowledge the huge support and collaboration from local businesses, individuals, communities, musicians, artists and entertainers, all of whom made the success of the event possible. There are far too many to mention and the list below is by no means exhaustive but we would especially like to thank the following:



The Dream Team Production Crew: Denise McDonagh, Dawid Szlaga, Mark Watson, John Conway, Harry, Kevin Hughes & Jay Burke

The Fabulous Presenters: Micheál O'Ciaraidh, Ciara King & Kieran O'Malley

The Star Studded Line-Up of Musicians & Entertainers: Leo Moran, Padraig Jack, Katie O'Connor, Rofi James, John Conneely, Barbara Vulso, Malachy Duggan – This is Galway, Baboró International Festival of Children & Jennifer Cunningham