



Ending Homelessness Creating Homes

National Strategy 2006-2009



Dear Friends,

We in Simon have always believed that homelessness in Ireland can be ended. Homelessness is not, and should never be accepted as, an inevitable outcome for any person. This is perhaps the first time in our nearly forty-year history where we can say with conviction that there are both sufficient resources in the State and sufficiently robust solutions to make the vision of ending homelessness a reality.

When Simon began in Ireland as a volunteer-led soup run, the founders had a vision of delivering unconditional help in a way that recognised the dignity and humanity of each person. While the range and quality of services, and indeed the scope of the organisation, has improved substantially over the years, this vision is still fundamental to how we do our work. This strategy sets out how we will put the people who use our services at the heart of creating the solutions to homelessness, both in planning their own futures and in ensuring our organisation is as effective as it can be. We want to focus our efforts on enabling everyone who uses our services to move out of homelessness. To do this, we need to listen carefully to the needs of the people who use our services, measure the outcomes of the work we do with them and constantly strive to improve the services we offer. In the long run we want emergency accommodation to be for just that: emergencies. Over time we will create and stimulate suitable accommodation to ensure that everybody has housing that meets their individual needs.

Being committed to ending homelessness means being committed to working to prevent it also. Through this strategy, Simon will expand our efforts in prevention, understanding more clearly the causes of homelessness for the people who use our services. We will test new approaches to prevention and we will lobby for changes in policy and funding where needed. We know that preventing homelessness in the first place is not only the best outcome for the person at risk; it is also substantially more cost effective.

This strategy also marks our pledge to play a critical role in informing and influencing Government policy. While campaigning has always been a hallmark of Simon's contribution to society, we are committed to strengthening our own policy solutions and playing a greater role in the public debate on ending homelessness. The contribution of the people who use our projects and services, our expertise across Ireland, our commitment to research and best practice, and working in partnership with those who share our vision, will form the backbone of our strategy to influence Government policy on homelessness.

We are also committing in this strategy to work together, as eight Communities with individual expertise and service provision, with common purpose and values. We will strengthen the accountability of our organisation by measuring and demonstrating effectiveness in all of the work that we do.

We have a vision of Ireland where nobody is homeless. For this to become a reality, the people who are homeless need to be at the centre of the services that are provided to them. All organisations that provide services must be accountable and focused on real outcomes. Preventing homelessness must underpin all relevant policy and service provision. This is what we want to see in the future; therefore this is what we must be. Simon is pledging to become the change we wish to see in society in order to play our part in ending homelessness.

There is a role for every part of Irish society in ending homelessness - central government, statutory and voluntary services, the business community local communities and concerned individuals. We look forward to working with you all.

Anne Connolly

Anne Connolly
Federation Chairperson
June 2006



The Simon Communities of Ireland is the federation of eight Communities in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the Mid West, the North West, and the South East. Simon has been working with people who are homeless in Ireland since 1969.

In order to achieve our vision of ending homelessness
Simon will work in the following **key areas** over the next three years:

PREVENTION

Developing and testing effective ways of reducing the number of people becoming homeless

- Research and understand better how and why people become homeless
- Apply our learning to develop new and effective ways of reducing the number of people who become homeless
- Seek to 'mainstream' prevention approaches that are shown to work

CAMPAIGNING

Effecting changes in economic and social policy in Ireland that will contribute to the elimination of homelessness and its causes

- Build support among policy makers and the public for increasing the supply of appropriate housing for people who are homeless
- Seek policy and legal changes that deliver on the right to housing and the support needs of people who are homeless
- Use Simon's knowledge of supporting people who are homeless across the country to strengthen our influencing and advocacy work
- Work through the alliance of NGO's committed to building support for the measures needed to eliminate homelessness

CREATING HOMES

Enabling the people who come in contact with our services and projects to move as soon as possible to an appropriate place they can call home

- Develop and deliver services and projects that enable people to move towards their own independent or supported homes and ensure that our emergency accommodation is for short-term use only
- Design all Simon services and projects to meet the differing needs of all our service users
- Improve the quality and responsiveness of all services continuously, benchmarking against relevant best practice standards

STRENGTHENING SIMON

Increasing our capability to achieve our objectives

- Review and improve the Federation structure, to take account of the growth in Communities and the need for consistently high standards, while still designing services to meet known local needs
- Strengthen governance across the organisation, ensuring that we provide maximum impact and value for the money we receive
- Enable our service users contribute to the planning and management of our organisation to ensure all our services meet their needs
- Raise the funds needed to deliver on our plans and ensure all our fundraising contributes to strengthening the Simon message
- Strengthen our communication processes and procedures
- Capitalise on the potential each Simon volunteer brings to our organisation
- Evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of Simon's organisation & strategy





Among the **activities** that will be undertaken as part of this **strategy**...

Among our activities will be:

We will put the people who use our services at the centre of the organisation

We will develop and implement the policies and supporting infrastructure to enable the people who use our services to become partners in the assessment, quality and development of all our projects and services. We will devise practical processes that give the people who use our services a meaningful input into everything we do.

We will demonstrate the outcomes of our work

To ensure that we are delivering on our values we will enhance the measurement and demonstrate the outcomes of our work. We will develop an outcome management tool for all of our services and also for our governance, fundraising, campaigning and management controls. We will introduce external auditing of all our services.

We will play our part in reducing the numbers of people becoming homeless

We will undertake a major research project examining people's pathways into homelessness and identify what are the most

successful interventions in preventing homelessness and assisting people to settle in a new home. We will use this information to improve our services, pilot new services and lobby for changes in policy to prevent homelessness.

We will build support for solutions to end homelessness

We will lobby for adequate public funds, increased supply and access to appropriate housing. We will seek policy and legislative solutions that will deliver on the right to housing and support needs, such as health & employment, of people who are homeless. We will build public and political support for our proposals, and actively campaign with organisations that share our vision in order to achieve this goal.

We will deliver housing solutions throughout the state

Throughout the State, needs assessments for housing will be undertaken and strategies to meet local need will be developed. Our national housing association and local developments will create new housing options. Our priority will be to deliver permanent housing solutions tailored to each individual, incorporating support as appropriate.



Simon believes that any person who sleeps rough, lives in emergency accommodation or in inadequate, insecure or unsafe housing is experiencing homelessness.



Photography: Fran Vale / Aidan Dullaghan



Vision - Simon has a vision of society where no one is homeless. All people who are homeless, or at risk of facing homelessness, are given every opportunity to realise their potential to live fulfilled lives in appropriate homes of their own. Simon is recognised for providing innovative solutions to ending homelessness and for influencing government policy and public opinion.

Values

Justice and Equality

People who use our services will be informed of their rights in Simon and in the wider community. We will proactively advocate with and for people to claim their human rights, in particular the right to housing.

Individuality and Diversity

We will respect the dignity, privacy, confidentiality and safety of every person who uses our service. Our services will become accessible to under represented groups and the principles of equality and anti discriminatory practice will underpin our work.

Effectiveness and Innovation

All stakeholders will be given the opportunity to share their ideas on how to improve on all aspects of managing the Simon Community and we will continually update our knowledge of best practice in all areas of our work.

Accountability and Integrity

All aspects of the work of the Simon Communities including governance, service provision, fundraising, spending, human

resources and campaigning will be regularly audited and evaluated. We will continually monitor the impact of our work and its impact on the people we work with.

Partnership

Our primary partners in combating homelessness will be the people who use our services. Collaborative partnerships will be created with all those who work towards the elimination of homelessness.

Community

Each Simon Community is part of a wider local community; the Simon Community value is expressed through how we integrate and support people in both our own and the wider community.

Voluntarism

Voluntarism is an inherent part of our ethos and all of our volunteers will be given adequate training and support in their roles. Both volunteers and paid staff are central to the work of the Simon Communities.

Mission - Simon works with people who experience homelessness and housing exclusion in Ireland by:

- Assisting people at risk of becoming homeless
- Campaigning for legislative and policy changes and resources that will deliver on a right to housing and responsive services for people who have no homes
- Providing high quality care, accommodation, projects and services, which support people and enable them to acquire and sustain an appropriate home of their own



By an end to homelessness we mean that:

- No one will have to sleep rough because of a lack of appropriate services
- No one will have to live in emergency accommodation for longer than is an emergency
- No one will become homeless due to a lack of services or inadequate housing provision

Simon throughout Ireland

Cork Simon Community operates a range of projects across Cork which include street outreach, emergency accommodation, day and health care, high support and independent living housing and support. We have over 400 active volunteers and 100 staff. Cork Simon works with approximately 600 people each year.

Tel: 021 4321051 • Email: info@corksimoncommunity.ie

Dublin Simon Community works at all stages of homelessness, providing outreach and emergency accommodation for people sleeping rough, helping people make the transition out of homelessness and by supporting people in their own home. We operate 13 diverse projects supported by more than 250 volunteers and 120 staff and work with approximately 900 people per year.

Tel: 01 6715551 • Email: inforequest@dubsimon.ie

Dundalk Simon Community through the Community House, the Gatehouse, and the Crescent project provides accommodation and housing for 36 people. Seatown House and our settlement services provide daycare, move-on and support facilities. We have 26 staff, 8 full time volunteers and 15 part time volunteers. We work with approximately 280 people each year.

Tel: 04293 39583 / 04293 28764

Email: yorkestsimon@eircom.net / dlksimon@iol.ie

Galway Simon Community provides a range of supported accommodation with full time and peripatetic cover depending on the needs of the service users. We have a residential resettlement service and also provide self-contained independent accommodation with individually tailored programmes of tenancy support. We have an active service users group, a staff team of 29 and more than 30 full - and part - time volunteers. We work with approximately 100 people each year.

Tel: 091 589 415 • Email: admin@galwaysimon.ie

The Federation Office exists to provide support and coordination to all of the Communities across a number of key areas: lobbying and research, best practice, housing, fundraising and the recruitment of full time volunteers. Tel: (01) 6711 606 • Email: info@simoncommunity.com

Midlands Simon Community works with people who experience homelessness in Counties Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath. In September 2005 we established a Regional Settlement Service which aims to support individuals, couples and families to progress out of homelessness. The organisation currently employs four staff and aims to work with approximately 60 adults in 2006.

Tel: 090-6444641 • Email: info@midlandssimon.com

Mid West Simon Community is a newly formed voluntary organisation (2006) established to deliver services to people who are experiencing homelessness in the counties of Clare, Limerick and North Tipperary. We will develop services in partnership with local Homeless Fora and to the best practice standards of the Federation.

Email: mwsimon@eircom.net

North West Simon Community will operate throughout counties Donegal, Leitrim and Sligo. We employed a Regional Development Officer in November 2005 and launched a two-year strategic plan in June 2006. This plan provides for the establishment of a Settlement and Tenancy Sustainment Support Team and the purchase of units of accommodation.

Tel: 071-9851680 • Email: nwsimon@eircom.net

South East Simon Community delivers services to people homeless and at risk of homelessness throughout counties Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford. Through our advocacy, outreach, re-settlement and tenancy support we work with approximately 70 people per year. The organisation employs four staff and has six volunteers.

Tel: 051 874 838 • Email: sesimon@eircom.net

Policy Context

Ireland is at a critical point in time in relation to homelessness. Since the introduction of *Homelessness - An Integrated Strategy*, in 2000, there has been a substantial increase in funding of homeless services, an increase in co-ordinated responses between statutory and voluntary actors and increases in the quality of service delivery. The numbers of people sleeping rough has declined in all major urban centres. However, the number of people relying on emergency accommodation appears to be static. The official figures do not include the numbers becoming homeless each year, or groups such as prisoners and those in hospital who have no homes or people denied access to welfare payments because they do not meet the residency criteria set out by Government. The structural problems that prevent people who are in emergency accommodation from getting the housing and other supports they need remain, as do the structural reasons why people become homeless in the first instance. Removing structural barriers and investing in long term as well as emergency solutions is vital. If action is not taken the success of recent years will be undermined, and

more people will be consigned to live in emergency accommodation on a long-term basis.

Notwithstanding substantial government spending in recent years outstanding commitments on the funding of homeless services remain. Government have acknowledged the need for a more cohesive funding system. Investing in prevention and in housing solutions will, in the long run, be more cost effective; in the interim the real cost of running services must be met.

The 2006 review of the Government's homelessness strategies prioritised the following four areas: the provision of long-term housing; person-centred needs assessments and solutions; equity of standards in homeless services throughout the State; and the improved co-ordination of capital and revenue funding. This shift is to be warmly welcomed.

In addition, there is growing focus on the need to ensure that housing allocations are made in an equitable fashion and on meeting the long-term housing needs of vulnerable single people. Providing long-term housing and support solutions is more cost effective as well as more humane

than leaving people to linger indefinitely in emergency services. To provide high quality accommodation in the private rented sector with support from a tenancy sustainment worker on a yearly basis would cost approximately €12,000. The average cost of hospital based psychiatric care is €120,000 per annum.

To provide the same person with supported housing in a community environment is €40,000 per annum. We are committed to running cost efficient, high quality services; the very real lack of housing options means that many people are living in emergency services that should be in homes of their own.

A commitment to capital investment in social housing options is a prerequisite of ending homelessness. The National Economic and Social Council recommendation of 10,000 social housing units per annum must be acted on.

The cost estimate is €1.4bn per annum. As a society are we prepared to meet this cost and make ending homelessness one of the legacies of our unprecedented economic prosperity?