Pathways Towards Stable Housing

for Parents & Children Exiting Residential Services

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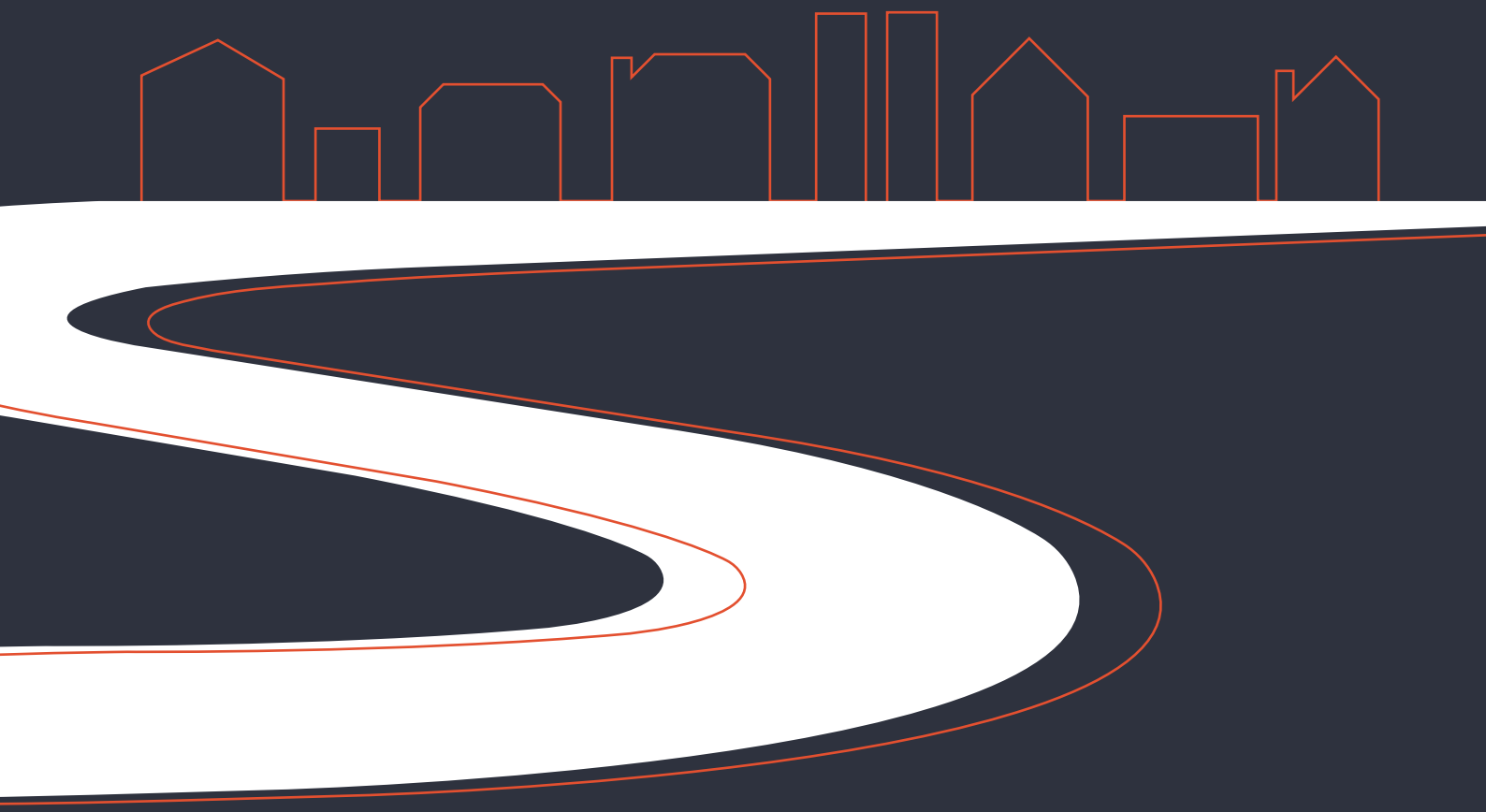
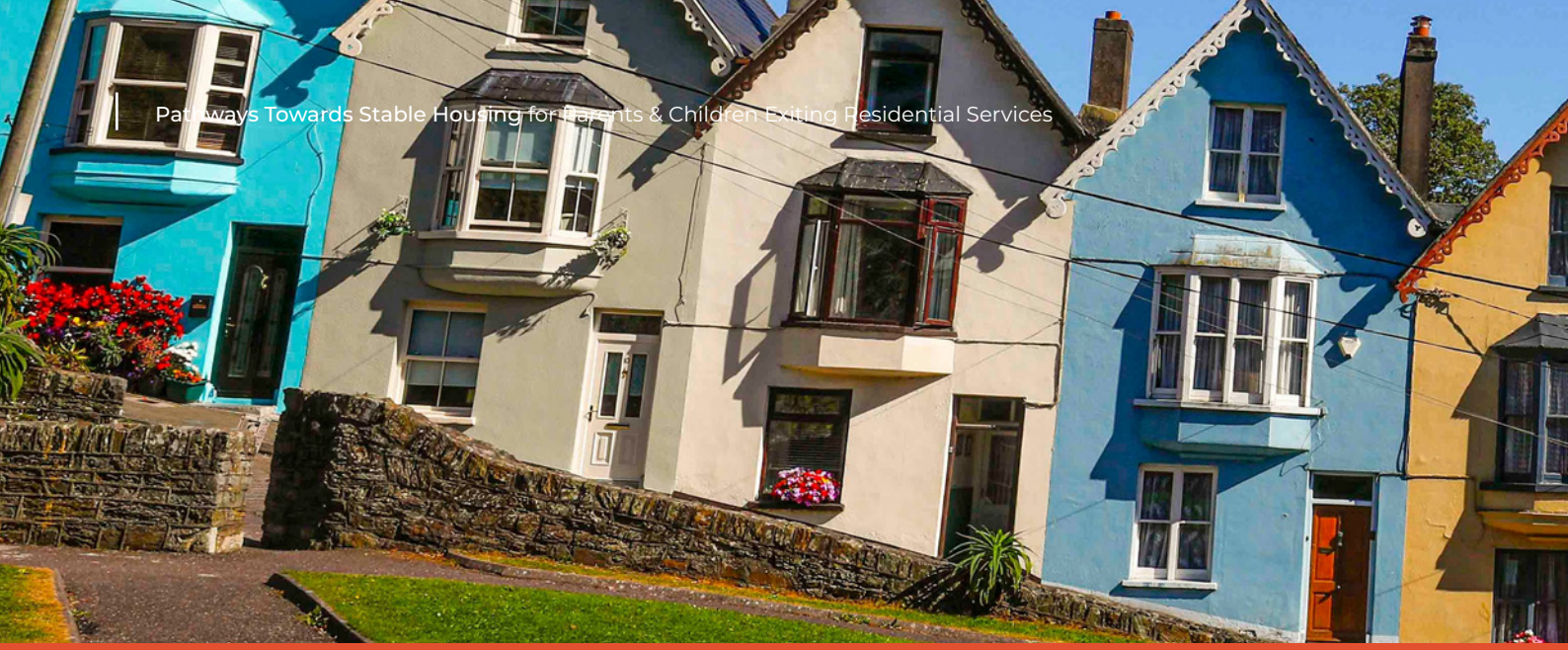


School of Applied Social Studies and Institute for Social Science in the 21st Century (ISS21), University College Cork. Funded by The Housing Agency, Ireland as part of its Research Support Programme.



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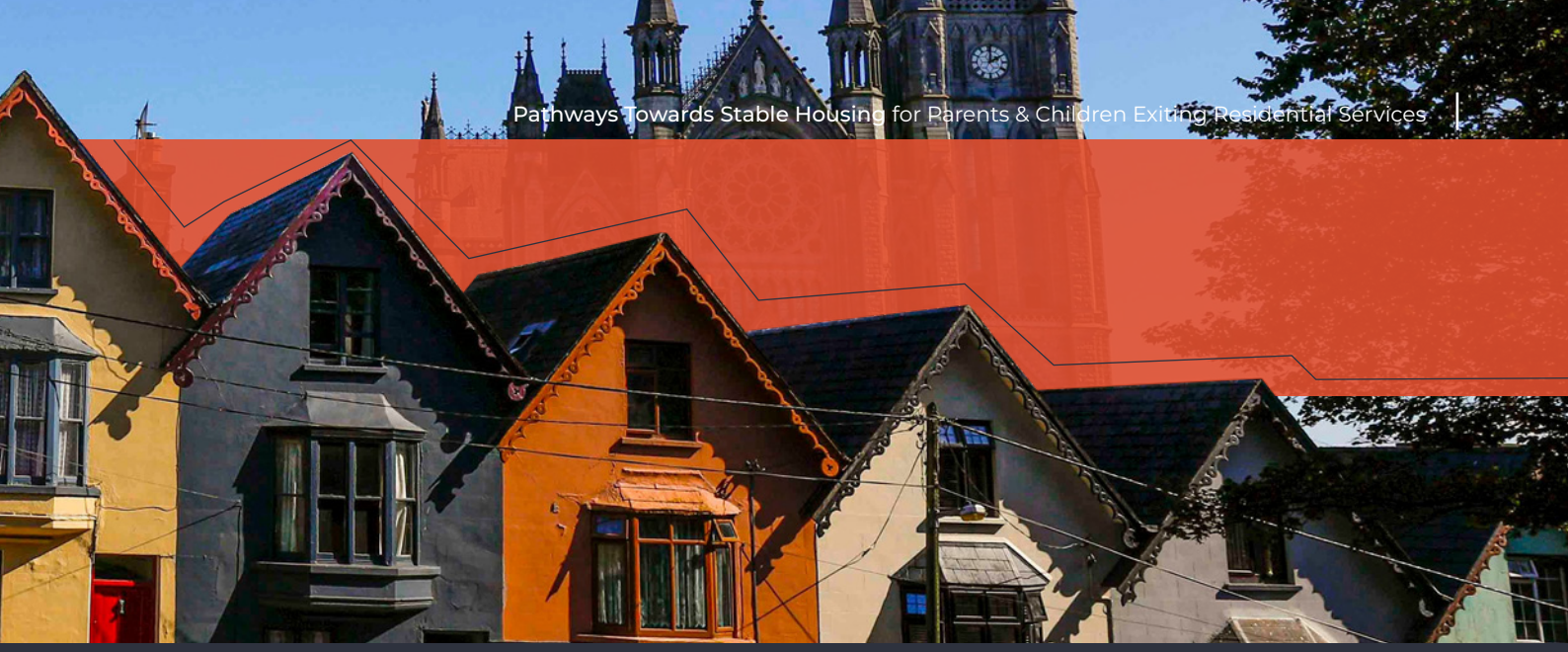

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An Ghníomhaireacht Tithíochta
The Housing Agency

The Housing Agency's purpose is to provide expertise and solutions to help deliver sustainable communities throughout Ireland. A strategic objective is to support stakeholders with evidence informed insights and data to develop a sustainable Irish housing system. In this vein, the Research Support Programme funds research projects which respond to key topical issues in housing and have the potential to impact on housing policy and practice. The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of The Housing Agency.

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Research Support Programme – The Housing Agency, for funding this project, but also for their support throughout. We would also like to thank all of those who contributed to this research, including the interview participants drawn from services users, staff in Childhood Matters, staff in NGOs and staff in Local Authorities, for their time and insights. Lastly, we would like to thank Lorna Bermingham for highlighting this issue amongst service users in Childhood Matters and bringing the idea for this research to us.

1. Introduction

This report is the result of the research project Pathways towards Stable Housing for Parents and Children Exiting Residential Services, which was funded by the Housing Agency Research Support Programme. This research was conducted in collaboration with Childhood Matters in the Bessborough Centre throughout 2022. Childhood Matters is a residential support and assessment service for parents with infant children.

While living on the unit, parents take part in a **parenting assessment** while also engaging in a programme of therapeutic support and key working tailored to meet their individual needs. Multidisciplinary assessments of parenting capacity are provided throughout using a framework that is underpinned by Infant Mental Health and Parenting Development. Parents and children **live on site for sixteen weeks**, before transitioning back into the community. The lack of appropriate, accessible housing results in many parents being discharged to homeless services either with their children or alone, with many of the children being placed in foster care due to their parents' living situations. **The lack of access to suitable accommodation** places parents and children at significant risk, both in the short-term and longterm. This issue is not isolated to people leaving Childhood Matters in the Bessborough Centre and can be observed in a number of different residential settings.

This research documents the necessity of including parents and children exiting tertiary services, who are facing homelessness and housing instability, in future policy development. A viable and practical model for successful transition from residential services to living in the community is needed in Ireland. Currently, **there are few pathways available to people**, and particularly families, who are exiting residential settings and facing housing precarity, instability or homelessness.

Through gathering the views of service users (both past and present) in the Parent and Infant Unit in Childhood Matters, Local Authority staff in Homeless Services, staff in NGOs, and combining with data of homeless service use, housing supports and Childhood Matters, a picture emerges of possible routes towards accessible, suitable and stable accommodation options. Amalgamating these findings with the economics of homeless services, a model for supported housing aimed at assisting families, who may have complex needs, exiting residential settings into accommodation in the community was developed.

Developing viable approaches to addressing homelessness is a policy priority in Ireland.

According to Housing for All (2020: 50),

> **"Government is committed to a housing-led approach as the primary response to all forms of homelessness.**

Unfortunately, a meaningful housing-led approach has not yet been fully realised. While this research initially set out to identify whether or not a housing-led approach for families exiting Childhood Matters could be established in Cork City, once the needs of many of the families were established it became clear that for a number of families ongoing support for a medium duration was needed. Supported housing, as proposed in this report, hopes to bridge the gap that exists for families exiting residential settings and returning to the community.

1.1 Research Aims & Objectives

This research aims to:

- **Document the current housing policy position, at a local and national level, for parents and infants exiting tertiary services for families.**
- **Investigate the implications of the lack of housing options for infants, children, and parents exiting residential settings.**
- **Identify a viable model for successful transition from residential services to living in the community.**
- **Evaluate the economic feasibility of providing supported housing for families exiting tertiary services.**

1.2 Research Scope

In terms of the scope and limitations of this research, it should be borne in mind that the aim of this research is to investigate if a viable and practical model for supported housing for infants, children, and parents exiting residential settings can be established. This study focuses on parents and children exiting Childhood Matters services at the Bessborough Centre in Cork, and therefore the scope of this research is limited to the experiences recorded from this specific group of service users. However, the results may be generalisable to other cohorts. For example, parents and children who are experiencing homelessness or housing precarity but are not associated with a tertiary service.

1.3 Research Methods

The research involved a participatory mixed-methods approach, using both primary and secondary research.

The initial research design proposed that two focus groups with service users would be convened as part of the participatory element of this research. However, after consultation with the Parent and Infant Aftercare Coordinator, it was decided that service users would likely be more comfortable in **a one-to-one setting rather than in a focus group setting.** As a result, the research design changed slightly to a focus group consisting of staff in Childhood Matters who have involvement with the Parent and Infant Unit and one-to-one interviews with past and current service users. The research was divided in three phases of fieldwork and data collection.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by University College Cork's Social Research and Ethics Committee and a Data Protection Impact Assessment was also conducted. Each participant was emailed or sent information sheets and consent forms prior to meeting with the Principal Investigator and Research Assistant. The information sheet was also read to the participant in person, prior to the beginning of the focus group and interviews, and informed consent (both written and verbal) was obtained.

Phase 1

The first phase of research involved a focus group consisting of seven staff members in Childhood Matters. The purpose of the focus group was to collate the experiences, opinions and observations of staff in Childhood Matters regarding available housing options and the impacts of housing instability and precarity on people who are exiting Childhood Matters. The focus group was convened on-site and in-person in Childhood Matters and was conducted with both the PI and Research Assistant present.

The themes that were addressed included:

- **reliance on the voluntary sector;**
- **the importance of stable accommodation;**
- **long-term impacts of housing precarity on children and parents;**
- **cooperation between statutory bodies and NGOs;**
- **economic feasibility of housing-led approaches;**
- **trauma informed education;**
- **supported housing**

Phase 2

The second phase of research consisted of semi-structured interviews with services users and stakeholders. Recruitment of service user participants was undertaken by the Parent and Infant Aftercare Coordinator in Childhood Matters. The interviews of service users were conducted onsite and in-person in Childhood Matters and were conducted with both the PI and Research Assistant present. There were seven participants, aged between 18 and 30. Five of the participants were current service users and two were past service users. The themes explored, apart from the service users' personal experiences, included:

- **emergency accommodation for families;**
- **the relative lack of available information for service users;**
- **the experience of being unable to locate suitable accommodation;**
- **and the importance of secure accommodation.**

Semi-structured interviews were also undertaken with stakeholders. The insights gleaned from the focus group, as well as the interviews with service users, were utilised in designing interview schedules intended for stakeholders who either provide an associated service, are in an administrative position, or in a statutory position. The interviews conducted were with a key informant in a statutory body and two with key informants in a non-governmental organisation.

The themes explored in these interviews included:

- **services available to homeless families;**
- **supported housing;**
- **economics of housing supports;**
- **interagency cooperation;**
- **the issues facing families exiting tertiary services.**

The focus group and all 10 of the interviews were audio recorded and subsequently manually transcribed. A thematic inductive analysis was then carried out on the transcribed data. The data was organised, and patterns were identified in the transcribed data, which forms the basis of the qualitative data in this report.

Phase 3

The final phase of fieldwork was a quantitative analysis of the data held by the Parent and Infant Unit in Childhood Matters in the Bessborough Centre. Anonymised biographical data (age and gender), length of stay, use of aftercare services and current housing situation was analysed to establish the housing trajectories of those exiting residential services.

Only information in relation to age, gender, length of stay and use of aftercare services was utilised. The data had been previously anonymised by staff in Childhood Matters, with all identifying information being removed and comprised of numerical data only. No identifying information (e.g. name, address) was utilised. This research did not require (and the researchers did not seek) access to personal information of service users.

The economic cost of the cost of building social housing in Cork City, HAP, RAS, Housing First, homeless services and supported housing in Cork City was then examined. The data was extracted from financial statements of NGOs, Annual reports, Cork City Council Annual Budgets, National Expenditure Figures from the DHLGH and previous research projects. This analysis may provide a continuation to the investment made in engaging families in residential settings.

1.4 Report Structure

Following the introductory chapter of this report, chapter two provides a profile of Childhood Matters at the Bessborough Centre. Chapters three and four present a literature and policy review exploring family homelessness in Ireland and the role of housing-led policy approaches to tackle homelessness. Chapter five documents the research findings from focus groups and interviews. Chapter six presents the proposed model of supported housing. Chapter 7 documents an economic analysis of social housing, housing supports and supported housing. Chapter eight outlines the conclusion and recommendations of this report.

2. Profile Of Childhood Matters at Bessborough Centre

2.1 Profile of Childhood Matters

Childhood Matters at the Bessborough Centre provides a number of child and family services in the Cork city region.

Childhood Matters is a not-for-profit organization focused on providing high quality care, enabling positive family and community development.

Childhood Matters provides multidisciplinary assessments of parenting capacity within a residential setting, underpinned by the framework of Infant Mental Health, Parenting Development and Trauma-Informed Care. The Parent and Infant Unit provides **onsite residential services for sixteen weeks**, before parents and children transition back into the community. The aftercare Team at Childhood Matters provide support services to parents and children during this transition period.

The services provided by Childhood Matters range from residential support such as the Parent and Infant Unit to community-based supports such as the Limetree Project and the Teen Parents Support Programme. The services offered by Childhood Matters enable families experiencing complex needs to **receive specialist support and advice**, in the hope of enabling positive family development and when possible, family unity.

In 2020, **24 adults and their children engaged with the service offered by the Parent and Infant Unit** in Childhood Matters. Of the 24 adults who engaged with the Parent and Infant Unit, 12 (or 50%) were also engaged with homelessness services, with 14 of the adults having also been in state care during their own childhood. In addition, 18 parents presented with a combination of at least two of:

- **addiction**
- **mental health issues**
- **domestic violence, and**
- **impaired cognitive ability.**

50% of adults engaged with homelessness services.

In 2020, through the interventions and assessment offered by the Parent and Infant Unit, ten families were kept together. Each family required a degree of support after their discharge from Childhood Matters, ranging from high level support, through medium, and down to low levels of support.

Unfortunately, and for various reasons, it was determined that five children's needs would be best met in foster care, with recommendations in place for parents in order to support reunification in the future.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Family Homelessness

3.1.1 Contextualising Family Homelessness within the Irish Context

The current Irish housing crisis has led to increased rates of homelessness, including a dramatic increase in family homelessness (Hearne, 2020). The most recent statistics obtained regarding homelessness in Ireland, relative to the timing of this report, is the First Homeless Quarterly Report of 2022. It states that 'there were 1,238 families accessing emergency accommodation at the end of Quarter 1 2022', a **35.6% increase in family homelessness** compared to numbers recorded in the first quarter of 2021 (DHLGH, 2022:2). The marked increase in family homelessness in just 12 months represents not only **a lack of impetus in policy provision and implementation**, but also a myriad of **short term and long-term impacts**, that may extend to lifetime intergenerational consequences.

1238 families accessed emergency accommodation at the end of Q1 in 2022.

The statistics published on the rates of homelessness (by both statutory bodies and non-governmental organisations) capture a glimpse of the levels of homelessness and housing insecurity experienced in Ireland. The reality of the rates of homelessness cannot truly be measured using rates of emergency accommodation service usage, as they fail to account for those who experience homelessness but have not availed of Section 10 funded homeless emergency accommodation, often referred to as **'hidden homelessness'.**

According to the Royal College of Physicians Ireland (2019), hidden homelessness

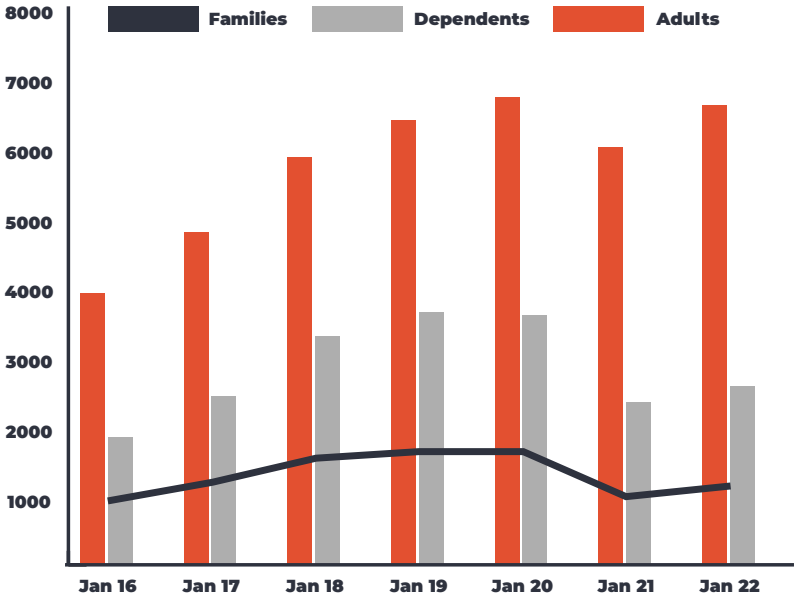
> **"encompasses those who live in inadequate or unsafe houses/mobile homes/caravans and those with insecure tenancies. It also includes those who are staying with family and friends on a temporary basis and those who are 'couch-surfing.** (RCSI, 2019:10)

While aggregate data and statistics are illuminating in terms of the high rates of family homelessness and housing instability in Ireland, they are also potential indicators of childhood poverty, as seen in 2020 when **210,313 children were exposed to living below the poverty line** and '**one in four children**' in Ireland were

> **living in households experiencing deprivation**
> (Social Justice Ireland, 2021).

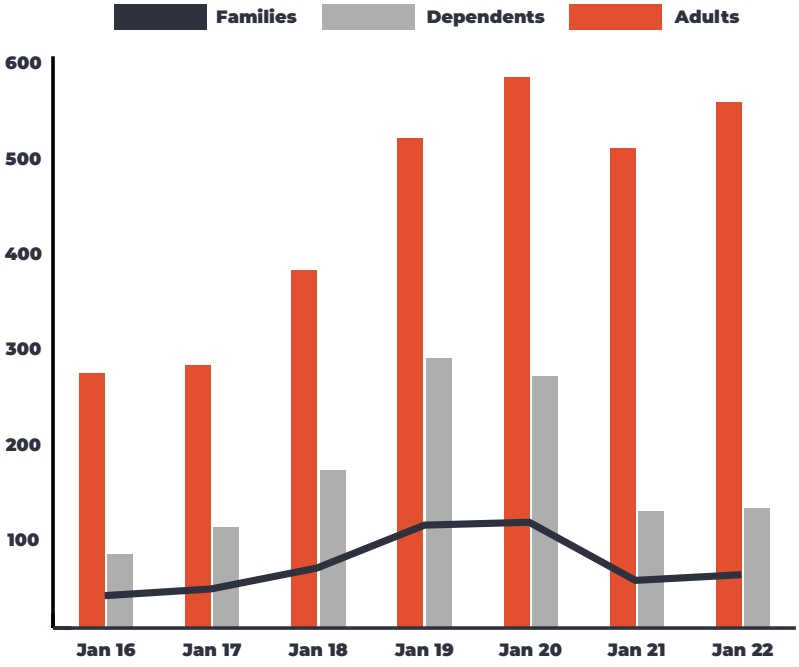
Graph 3.1 below illustrates the increasing rate of homelessness from 2016 to 2022, with a reduction in 2021, which can be attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic. It should be noted that Graphs 3.1 and 3.2 only represent individuals and families accessing emergency accommodation that is managed by local authorities and NGOs who receive Section 10 funding, as such service users are included on PASS and reported in the monthly and quarterly homeless figures.

Graph 3.1 – Number of Adults and Dependents Accessing Local Authority Managed Emergency Accommodation Nationally, 2016-2022



Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Various years

Graph 3.2 – Number of Adults and Dependents Accessing Local Authority Managed Emergency Accommodation in the South-West Region, 2016-2022



Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Various years

Graph 3.2 represents the number of individuals, dependents and families accessing emergency accommodation in the South-West Region. The majority of the people represented here are **resident in Cork City and County** (as opposed to Kerry) (DHLGH, Various Years). Discussions on family homelessness have been ongoing since the onset of the current housing crisis. The majority of media coverage has focused on families experiencing homelessness or housing precarity in Dublin. The issue of family homelessness in the South-West Region has not been highlighted to the same degree. While the urban centres in the South-West Region, in particular Cork City, do not have the same population volume as Dublin, the proportion of family homelessness is still a cause for concern.

The rhetoric that formed around the housing crisis in Ireland has increasingly involved the issue of family homelessness and the importance of housing led initiatives in tackling homelessness. Family homelessness in Ireland has been referred to as a

> **national emergency and social catastrophe.**
> (Hearne, 2020:6)

Homelessness is an emergency, in that it **violates basic human rights, and places structural and social barriers** on those who may already be vulnerable in society. Some of the most vulnerable and impressionable individuals in society are children, therefore, the need to provide adequate, secure, and safe housing is a necessity, to allow for healthy childhood development. The structural barriers to housing in Ireland such as housing shortages, in particular lack of social housing, as well as over dependency on the private housing market, has resulted in the exposure of families to adverse circumstances. Wang (2017) describes the breach of human rights affiliated with homelessness, stating that

> **Homelessness is a severe form of poverty that leads to increased vulnerability to traumatic life experiences.** (Wang, 2017:2)

Families who require specialist support are more vulnerable to the impacts of the current housing crisis in Ireland. Although the expansion of housing development in Ireland, outlined in the national housing plan 'Housing for All' published in 2021, is widely welcomed, the provision of an initiative for families experiencing complex circumstances and possible subsequent homelessness is a policy area that requires further development.

3.1.2 Approaches for Families with Complex Needs in Ireland

While this research attempts to construct a supported housing model for parents and children who are exiting residential settings, rather than an expansion of Housing First, it is helpful to discuss the Housing First initiative. Homelessness policy in Ireland has broadly shifted towards the ambition of an integrated and 'housing-led' model in the last two decades, with Housing First being the most well-known initiative. Housing First originated in New York in the 1990's, developed by the clinical psychologist Dr. Tsemberis, and has evolved into 'a specific evidence based model of housing-led homeless services for adults with significant histories of homelessness and complex support needs' (Greenwood et al., 2020: 354). This housing-led approach:

> **provides housing as a basic human right, not as a reward for attaining sobriety.**
> (Pleace, 2016: 7)

Housing first primarily provides housing and support to homeless singles, although it also accommodates brothers, mother and child, couples who started as a single, single people reconnecting with a partner and children and those wishing to be housed with family on exiting prison (Kenny, 2023). This research pertains to families, many with complex needs, who are exiting tertiary services. Rather than suggesting an expansion of Housing First to families, a supported housing model is suggested. Baptista et al (2022) note that Housing First and housingled services are most effective in addressing homelessness when solidly embedded into a wider network of support services (which includes mental health services, addiction services and social services), but that there are

> **circumstances in which fixed site supported housing may be the best option.**
> (Baptista et al, 2022: 93)

Transitional housing, according to Haran and Ó Siochrú (2020), facilitates homeless people and families moving towards permanent housing through services which support them in living more independently. Stability, independence and self-determination for families are the goals of transitional housing. Transitional housing tends to be targeted towards households **'with serious enough barriers to getting or keeping housing that a period of stabilization, learning, and planning appear needed if they are ultimately to leave homelessness and stay housed'.** (Burt, 2006, p. 2 as cited by Haran and Ó Siochrú, 2020, p. 30). Transitional housing is associated with

the concept of **'housing readiness'**, which is contested by Housing First. Accommodation for families should be prioritised, with additional services, where needed being provided thereafter. However, one of the issues with the transitional housing model is that, in Ireland currently, there is limited accommodation into which families could transition to.

The Finnish model of Housing First has not remained faithful to the original American model. While the central tenets of Housing First have been maintained, the Finnish Homelessness Reduction Programme (Paavo I and II) was designed to deliver new accommodation, as well as supported housing places (Pleace et al, 2015). It is understood that each person is unique and that everybody has differing levels of need. According to the Y Foundation, for some people 'the best model for independent living is an ordinary rental apartment, for others it is a supported housing unit where support is available around the clock' (Y Foundation, 2018: 15). **The Y Foundation is Finland's largest non-profit provider of Housing First accommodation**, affordable rental accommodation and supported housing. As of June 2023, they had provided 18,688 apartments for 26,505 residents in Finland. Pleace et al (2015) note that in Helsinki alone in 2013, there were 2,086 supported apartments and an additional 905 supported apartments sub-let from the Y Foundation. Supported housing here offers an open-ended lease (effectively permanent housing, unless the person wishes to leave) in a mixture of large communal units and scattered site housing. Pleace et al (2015) note that scattered site supported housing in Helsinki appears to have had better result for people who are long-term homeless, particularly those with addiction issues, than the larger communal units. The outcome of Paavo I and II (2008-2015) has been a reduction in long-term homelessness by 35 per cent (Y Foundation, 2018).

18688 apartments provided for 26,505 residents in Finland as of June 2023.

An organisation which has supported families for over 20 years in Ireland is Sophia Housing. **Sophia Housing is built on a person-centred approach to addressing homelessness by providing 'a home for people first and with that home the [...] holistic supports needed to break the cycle of homelessness'** (Sophia Housing, 2022).

Sophia Housing provides supported housing with by holistic supports for not only individuals, but for families across Ireland. Both Housing First and Sophia Housing exemplify models that emphasis the necessity of providing stable accommodation, followed by varying levels of support that cater to specific individual needs. The success of a supported housing model such as Sophia Housing can be seen in recorded levels of housing programme retention rates, such as a housing stability rate of 99% in 2020, as stated by Sophia Housing's Annual Report (2021).

99% housing stability in 2020 was reported

Multiple research reports have found that Housing First, compared to traditional staircase approaches to homelessness, not only reduce rates of homelessness, but are shown to be more cost effective. (Pleace, 2016; Greenwood et al., 2020; Ly and Latimer, 2015; Peng et al., 2020; McLaughlin, 2011). The Finnish approach to Housing First includes both Housing First and supported housing, where it is deemed to be beneficial to the people, and according to Luomanen (2010) who analysed the outcomes of Paavo I, significant annual savings were made via supported housing. Supported housing models such as those delivered by Sophia Housing in Ireland provide families and single people with **secure accommodation and holistic supports that promote family unity, aiding in the reduction of children's entry into the foster care system.** Research conducted in the US has repeatedly found that supported and transitional housing for families is a cost-effective model, resulting in a decrease in family separation and considerable increase in savings (Lenz-Rashid et al., 2017; Harburger & White, 2004).

The benefits of supported housing to service users include:

- **the feeling of safety, community (particularly a community of people in similar situations),**
- **social supports,**
- **time to recover from trauma,**
- **time to plan and rest**

(Krueger et al, 2022; Abramovich and Kimura, 2019; Clark et al, 2018; Fotheringham et al, 2013).

In terms of long-term housing outcomes for people who have lived in supported or transitional housing, Lenz-Rashid (2018) evaluated the outcomes for Bay Area Youth Center's Real Alternatives for Adolescents (RAFA) transitional housing program in California, which provides transitional housing for young people who have aged out of the foster care system. She found that of the **55 people who had exited, 96 per cent were living in stable accommodation after between 1 and 8 years of exiting** (Lenz-Rashid, 2018). While this study pertained to young people who had aged out of the foster care system, the outcomes in terms of stable accommodation are encouraging.

Services provided to families with complex needs, such as the 'Parent and Infant Unit' established by Childhood Matters at the Bessborough Centre, are integral to family unity and positive family development. Although these services play a necessary role in society, the work and progress made within these programmes may be compromised by a lack of affordable housing in Ireland, exacerbating the struggles experienced by families with complex needs. Safe, supported accommodation in a community setting would assist in consolidating the skills and knowledge families have accumulated in Childhood Matters, while also allowing some time to rest and to plan.

3.2 Factors that hinder family development and access to stable housing

3.2.1 A Lack of Affordable and Adequate Housing

A lack of affordable housing supply can hinder the ability of families, such as those exiting tertiary services at the Bessborough Centre, to access housing. The structural barriers presented by the Irish Housing system have the potential to undermine the progress made by families. When families who require supports such as the 'Infant and Parent Unit' programme at the Bessborough Centre, are faced with sourcing accommodation in a housing crisis, the work and progress made as part of these family services can be compromised by immediate struggles associated with housing insecurity and possible homelessness.

Family services in Ireland have documented the resulting strain on the ability to progress and utilise services due to housing shortages. A project located in Cork known as Young Knocknaheeny,

which implements early intervention services to reduce child poverty and provide family support, has highlighted the impacts of the housing crisis on families in Ireland. Martin and Curtin (2019) state that members of the Young Knocknaheeny team 'frequently report that housing related issues create barriers to engagement with the full offering of the YK Infant Mental Health Home Visiting Programme' and

> **"the team were concerned that for many families, poor housing conditions were undermining the potential positive outcomes for their children's development.**
> (Martin and Curtin, 2019:10)

When vulnerable families are experiencing homelessness or inadequate housing, the ability of family services to provide support is limited, which place additional disadvantages and obstacles on families who may have existing complex needs.

3.2.2 The Privatisation and Commodification of Housing in Ireland

Irish Housing Policy commentators, in recent years, has focused on the residual role of the State in providing affordable quality housing, leaving the private housing market as a key provider of housing. O'Sullivan (2020, p. 14) notes that since 2013 there has been a **'virtual cessation of the construction'** of social housing by local authorities, this combined with a reduction in the number of new builds by approved housing bodies, has resulted in a dearth of available social housing. While the rate of social housing construction has been slowly increasing in recent years, the demand far outstrips supply (O'Sullivan, 2020). While a lack of available social housing is a recognised issue, O'Sullivan (2020) further discusses households in emergency accommodation, the number of which increased by **150 per cent between 2014 and 2019.** He notes that the largest initial driver for households accessing emergency accommodation during this time-frame was the unaffordability of rent increases in the private rental sector and the termination of tenancies (O'Sullivan, 2020). While rent pressure zones have been introduced under Rebuilding Ireland to certain areas to help in addressing the issue of increasing rents, as well as an increase in the notice period for tenancy terminations, O'Sullivan (2020, p. 76) notes that these changes do not 'fundamentally disrupt the structural failings of the system'. Dukelow and Considine (2017) describe how the Irish state has treated housing as a commodity, resulting in rising homelessness, particularly, rising levels of family homelessness. The dependency of the state on the private rental sector to provide housing has resulted in tenure insecurity among many families, as well as a housing system that is economically inefficient.

150% increase in the amount of families in emergency accommodation between 2014 and 2019.

The Irish government have introduced various housing subsidies as a policy response to high rental costs. There have been numerous criticisms on the functioning of housing subsidies in Ireland, such as the **Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)**, as they **fail to provide adequate housing and security of tenure.** Hearne (2020) describes how HAP 'does not provide the resource of a home with long-term security of tenure that enables families to develop networks of support and provide stability and security for their children' (Hearne, 2020:176).

The failure of housing supplements to provide housing security is reflected in the difficulties faced by families attempting to secure housing under the HAP scheme. Focus Ireland (2019) found that 'Respondents reported extreme difficulty finding properties under the HAP Scheme' as well as determining that '61% (n=111) of those surveyed had applied to over 20 properties.' (Long et al, 2019:3). **Focus Ireland highlighted the risk of homelessness to lone parents,** in particular single mothers, who headed the majority of lone parent families. The stigma attached to lone parents, homelessness, poverty, and those who require specialist services such as mental health supports, places families with complex needs at a disadvantage when attempting to access accommodation. The inability to access secure, affordable, and adequate housing may have subsequent negative impacts that hinder positive family development, placing additional burdens of stress on already vulnerable individuals.

The difficulty arising from the responsibility placed on families experiencing homelessness to find accommodation, is reflected in the emergence of Homeless HAP in 2015, first introduced in Dublin. **Homeless HAP was introduced as a response to increasing family homelessness, targeting families in emergency accommodation.** Murphy (2020), describes the tainted philosophy that encompasses the Homeless HAP scheme, based on supposed motivation to find accommodation that ultimately leaves homeless families responsible for sourcing housing.

> **"Policy makers believe families in dire circumstances will be more motivated to find housing solutions' resulting in homeless families taking on the responsibility of 'sourcing accommodation to exit emergency accommodation.** (Murphy, 2020:258)

The Placefinders scheme is in place to help families in sourcing accommodation, although it should be noted that this service is under severe pressure due to the scarcity of housing. It is unrealistic to expect families, particularly families with complex needs, to take responsibility for accessing housing during a housing crisis. The stressors and disappointment associated with attempting to find accommodation in a housing system that fails to supply adequate housing and policy that protects the rights of tenants, may have negative impacts on the progress made by families with complex needs while receiving support by family services such as Childhood Matters.

3.3 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Associated with family Homelessness

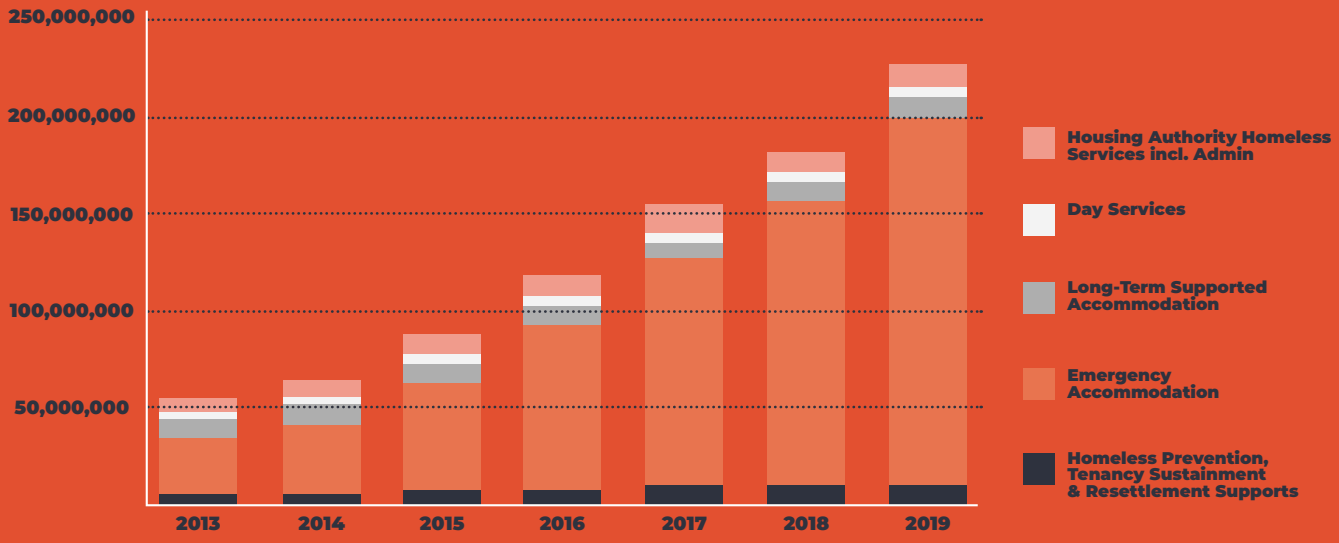
3.3.1 The Role of Emergency Accommodation and Family Hubs

The current Irish housing model places families experiencing homelessness in emergency accommodation services, that can result in strain on family unity and child development. Research focused on child development has found that there are many negative impacts associated with childhood homelessness, in particular research has found that **emergency accommodation can have adverse impacts on children's emotional, social, and psychological development.** Hearne (2020) describes how and why homelessness impacts family wellbeing, stating that emergency accommodation 'can have a detrimental impact on babies, as lack of space impedes their natural curiosity for exploration and this delays or inhibits meeting developmental milestones such as crawling. It can also affect toddlers and school children who have **no suitable place to play or complete homework**, as well as older children who have **no privacy for sleeping or study**' (Hearne, 2020:218).

The negative impact of homelessness on families, has been proven to be **detrimental to infants and children's emotional, social, and intellectual development.** The Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (2019) describe the negative health outcomes associated with childhood poverty and subsequent homelessness. Parpouchi et al. (2021), in researching the long-term consequences of experiencing homelessness in childhood or youth, found that experiencing homelessness in childhood or youth is associated with greater likelihood of experiencing housing instability in adulthood. They found that if a person experiences homelessness under the age of 25, they are almost **50 per cent more likely to experience housing instability in adulthood**, when compared to people experiencing homelessness over the age of 25.

The use of emergency accommodation as a solution to rising rates of homelessness is inadequate and inefficient both socially and economically. The 'Spending Review 2021' published by the Government of Ireland describes how emergency accommodation accounts for the majority of expenditure on homeless services each year, with expenditure consistently increasing since 2016. **Emergency accommodation accounted 'for 83% (€188m) of total homelessness expenditure (€226m) for Local Authorities' in 2019**' (Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service, 2021:8). The expenditure on emergency accommodation in Ireland could be directed to a more cost-effective solution to homelessness, such as increased social housing and the development of supported housing models with wrap around supports for families experiencing homelessness that may have additional support needs.

Graph 3.3 – Expenditure on Homeless Services



(Source: Focus Ireland, 2021)

The negative impact that living in emergency accommodation was having on family life was one of the reasons for the creation of a new **'Family Hub Model' of accommodation**, in 2017. Hearne and Murphy (2017) describe how emergence of Family Hubs in Ireland were introduced on the basis of limited research or knowledge of their effectiveness and impact on family homelessness. Since the implementation of Family Hubs began in 2017, there has been widespread criticism of how these hubs operate, and there are suggestions that they reflect Ireland's history of institutionalisation (Hearne and Murphy, 2017). Gambi and Sheridan (2020), state that 'emerging qualitative research suggests that time spent in emergency 'family hubs' with supports does little to help families in crisis, runs the risk of institutionalising families, whilst normalising a phenomenon which could otherwise be averted' (Gambi & Sheridan, 2020: 103). Families experiencing homelessness face adverse impacts on family and childhood development. The negative impacts of homelessness can be further magnified when placed on families with complex needs. **A key example of the adverse outcomes associated with childhood homelessness are the high levels of intergenerational homelessness.**

3.3.2 The Intergenerational Impact of Family Homelessness

The impacts of family homelessness can be **intergenerational.** Addressing the issue of family homelessness may not only reduce current levels of homelessness but could have the potential to reduce future rates of homelessness (Forchuk et al, 2013; Cronley et al, 2015; Cobb-Clark et al, 2017). Like Parpouchi et al (2021), Flatau et al (2013) found that among individuals receiving homeless support services, 'around half of all respondents (48.5%) [...] report that their parents were also homeless at some point in their lives' (Flatau et al., 2013:2). This connection between current rates of family homelessness and future rates of homelessness highlights the vital preventative role of housing led approaches and interventions. **Without housing policy approaches that protect families from housing insecurity, children are exposed to adverse circumstances that may have consequences into adulthood.**

Likewise, Parpouchi et al (2021) found that for families who were able to access housing-led accommodation from homeless services, and so housing stability, had a number of improved outcomes such as:

- **reduced percentage of families separated,**
- **fewer school absences,**
- **reduced behavioural problems**
- **increased food security**

A literature review on 'the psychological impact of childhood homelessness', found that the impacts of childhood homelessness were intergenerational and associated with 'risky behaviours' as well as 'increased anxiety, depression, and aggression' (D'Sa et al, 2020:413). Housing security, along with adequate housing policy and family support services, can negate the negative long-term outcomes associated with childhood homelessness.

D'Sa (2020) describes the importance of self-esteem as a protective factor from the adverse impacts of childhood homelessness. In order to achieve high self-esteem, confidence, positive mental and physical wellbeing, and community connectedness, individuals require the security of a home. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory identifies that basic needs must be met, such as stable housing, before the ability to engage in psychological and social development. Lewis (2019) outlines how

> **"housing affects many points in the Maslow pyramid. At the most basic level shelter sits alongside food and clothing as a core requirement. It is important for safety and security as well as being a critical support for the fulfilment of higher order needs such as self-esteem.**
> (Lewis,2019:109)

Supported housing may provide the ontological security necessary for people experiencing homelessness **to avail of services that aid their recovery process.** This supported housing model, if implemented for families with complex needs, could have multiple beneficial outcomes for parents and children experiencing homelessness in Ireland.

4. Policy Responses to Housing and Homelessness in Ireland

4.1 Housing and Homelessness Policy in Ireland

Housing Policy in Ireland has a long history, dating back to the 19th century, with the introduction of the Labourers (Ireland) Act 1883. This act focused on the rights of labourers in rural parts of Ireland through

> **"general provisions for the construction of local authority cottages.**
> (Dukelow and Considine, 2017:280)

Housing continued to be one of the main policy foci of the Irish state throughout the late 19th century and into the early 20th century, first with the Housing of the Working Classes Acts. The role of NGOs and charitable organisations in the funding and operation of policy initiatives such as social housing began in the 19th century and continues today. Since Ireland's Independence, **an increased emphasis on home ownership as the ultimate housing goal** came to the fore and persists today. Ó Broin (2019) describes how housing policy which ostensibly focused on social housing, still placed a substantial emphasis on home ownership. A Plan for Social Housing 1991 **'also included a range of measures to promote even greater level of owner-occupation'** (Ó Broin, 2017: 60). Furthermore, the short policy framework Building Sustainable Communities 2005, outlined the 'preferred option' of home ownership rather than social housing, which meant a decline in social housing being built and therefore an increase in dependency on subsidies for private renting. This dependency on the private rental sector and an emphasis on home ownership, meant that those experiencing poverty and housing instability were even more vulnerable due to fluctuations in social housing output. This has been mirrored by an **increase in homelessness** throughout the late 20th and early 21st century.

During the 1980s, with dramatically increased rates of homelessness, the issue came to the fore and was widely debated. Previously, homelessness was seen as an **individual issue** rather than structural in nature. The first policy introduced that began to recognize the structural failing that led to homelessness was the Housing Act 1988 which

> **"specified the local authority as the statutory agency with responsibility for the homeless.**
> (O'Sullivan, 2005:248)

The development of homeless policy greatly evolved throughout the early 2000s, with the introduction of policy plans such as **Homelessness-An Integrated Strategy (2000), and The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008-2013.** The introduction of Homelessness – An Integrated Strategy policy plan states that it marked 'the semblance of a coherent policy approach to the needs of homeless households' becoming 'apparent for the first time in the history of the Irish State' (O'Sullivan, 2005:257). This policy plan was **first of its kind to tackle homelessness** in Ireland using an integrated response, with emphasis on the importance of health supports and adequate housing. Housing and homelessness policy further developed throughout the early 2000s with a focus on housing led approaches that provide housing security for those experiencing homelessness. This housing led response to homelessness was mirrored in the policy plan entitled **The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland**

20082013. This policy reflected the understanding of homelessness as a result of structural issues rather than personal or individual choice and suggested an increase in social housing as a policy response to tackling increasing rates of homelessness. The implementation of this policy plan was **heavily stunted by the economic recession in 2008**, and with a period of austerity in Ireland following, public spending on projects (such as social housing building and development) was restricted (Allen et al, 2020). However, it was **progressive in nature and outlined the vital role of social housing development in Ireland.**

4.2 Recent Policy Developments in Ireland

An increase in homelessness since the 1980s has not been isolated to the Irish context, as rates began to rise throughout Europe, the US and Australia. Research began to highlight the structural issues causing such high rates of homelessness, leading to the development of models that were housing led rather than a staircase approach to tackle homelessness. Compared to Treatment First approaches to homelessness that focus on the individual being **'housing ready',** 'Housing led policies **provide permanent affordable housing solutions as a first response to people who are homeless or threatened by homelessness**' (FEANTSA, 2012:5). The emphasis of a housing-led approach to tackling the issues of homelessness in Ireland was highlighted by Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government's (DECLG) publication of the Homelessness Policy Statement (2013). This publication outlined the essential role of housing led responses to tackling homelessness as well as stating

> **"a reliable supply of secure, affordable accommodation is vital to ending long-term homelessness.** (DECLG, 2013)

Housing-led models such as Housing First and supported housing models, such as those provided by Sophia Housing have been shown to play a key role in providing safe and secure accommodation in Ireland for those who are experiencing homelessness or housing precarity. **The Housing First Manual for Ireland (2020)** outlines the introduction of Housing First in Ireland as a pilot scheme in 2011 and based on its successful implementation 'government policy since 2013 **has supported a Housing First approach to ending rough sleeping and long-term homelessness'** (A Housing First Manual for Ireland, 2020:4). The housing policy plan Rebuilding Ireland, introduced in 2016, played a role in the increased provision of Housing First tenancies and stated the importance of this model in tackling the issue of homelessness in Ireland.

The current Housing First National Implementation Plan 2022-2026 has **set a target of providing 1,319 additional Housing First tenancies in Ireland.** Although the implementation of Housing First in Ireland has successfully achieved its national targets thus far, regional targets have not been met in terms of Housing First tenancy output. The main reason for national targets being met is excess provision of Housing First tenancies in areas such as Dublin. The Housing First National Implementation plan 2018-2021 **outlined targets to provide 40 tenancies in Cork city and 14 in Cork County.** The target for Cork City was achieved, but Cork County fell short of their target in providing 4 (as of October 2021).

However, it should be noted that under the Housing First National Implementation Plan 2022-2026, Cork County is performing better than most rural Local Authorities. Housing First tenancies in Cork County increased to 14 and Cork City Housing First tenancies increased to 44, as of June 2023 (Lowth, 2023). Although Housing First does accommodate brothers, mother and child, couples who started as a single, single people reconnecting with a partner and children and those wishing to be housed with family on exiting prison (Kenny, 2023), family homelessness specifically is a further policy area that could greatly benefit from this particular housing led approach. Homeless organisations in Ireland, such as Focus Ireland, have expressed **the need for a model of housing for families in Ireland that supports families with complex needs who are vulnerable to homelessness and housing insecurity.**

Rebuilding Ireland (2016), while increasing the emphasis on **housing-led approaches** to tackling the homelessness crisis, does not contain a commitment to ending homelessness (Allen et al, 2020). Rather than building more social housing, this policy plan decided to focus on what was referred to as **'Social Housing Solutions'**, in other words, a dependency on the private rental market for housing while increasing the use of subsidies such as HAP.

This residual role of the state contributed to a rising rate of housing insecurity and family homelessness. Hearne and Murphy (2017) claim that

> **"the most significant indication that Rebuilding Ireland is not working is the growth in family homelessness and the development of family hubs.**
> (Hearne and Murphy, 2017: 13)

Treating housing like a commodity, as Irish housing policy has done, exposes housing prices and availability to economic fluctuations, impacting heavily on those who are vulnerable to housing insecurity and instability.

The increase in rates of homelessness has been recognized as the structural result of over reliance on the private sector and ultimately lack of available housing, prompting a new approach in the most recent Irish housing policy plan Housing for All published in 2021. This recent policy plan is focused on increasing housing supply **with the goal of providing 'over 300,000 new homes by 2030'**, 90,000 of which are to be social homes, 'including an average **annual new-build component of over 9,500 social housing homes** to 2026, the highest number in the history of the State' (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021: 14).

Although this policy move towards increased housing input is welcomed, **fundamental issues still remain** within the Irish housing system, such as continued reliance on the private housing sector and issues related to family homelessness, particularly families with complex needs. The policy plan outlines the goal of eradicating homelessness by 2030, however

> **"the strategy does not seem to provide a solution to the large number of households becoming homeless because their landlords are evicting them to sell the premises, unless this is resolved, there is a real risk that homelessness will rise rather than come to an end.**
> (Mac Namara, 2021)

Furthermore, the Housing for All 2021 policy plan states the important role of the private market delivering housing, reflected in the projection of new build private rental and private ownership homes estimated at 24,000 in 2030, compared to 10,200 social homes being built that same year. The government is continuing to place emphasis on home ownership and failing to regulate the private rental market, claiming that central to achieving the goals of this plan will involve 'working with and enabling the private sector to deliver on housing' (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021: 17).

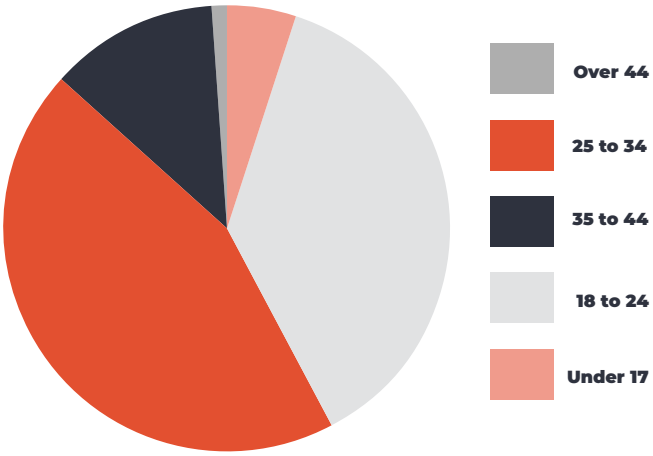
Housing policy and supports are continuing to evolve in Ireland. However, thus far, there is very little provision for supported housing, for families with complex needs or for those exiting residential settings. Currently, the main providers of supported housing in Ireland are NGOs. Families with complex needs who are exiting residential settings require a safe, stable and supportive environment.

5. Findings

5.1 Demographics and Profile of Service Users of Childhood Matters

The ages of parents attending the Parent and Infant Unit in Childhood Matters between 2018 and 2022 has quite a wide range spanning those aged under 17 to those aged over 44. The majority of adults (approximately 80 per cent) are aged between 18 and 34. Graph 5.1 below illustrates the approximate breakdown of age cohorts of parents attending Childhood Matters.

Graph 5.1 – Age Cohorts of Adults Attending the Parent and Infant Unit in Childhood Matters



(Source: Childhood Matters, 2022)

While there are no 'typical' service users who attend the Parent & Infant Unit, some parents do present with ongoing issues. These ongoing issues include (but are not limited to) mental health issues, addiction issues and domestic violence. The incidence of the presentation of the 'Toxic Trio' in service users in Childhood Matters is relatively common. The 'Toxic Trio' refers to the presentation of a combination of two or more of the common issues. For example, a person may present who is suffering from a combination of mental health issues, addiction issues and domestic violence (Skinner et al, 2021). Some service users in Childhood Matters may also have cognitive impairments.

In addition to the above personal issues that residents may be struggling with, many also may be withstanding the effects of structural disadvantage. For example, being known to child protective services themselves as children, and the intergenerational transmission of poverty, essentially meaning that poverty is transmitted from one generation to the next. If one generation do not have access to means, or indeed social or cultural capital, then it is more likely (but not definite) that their children will also suffer the effects of poverty. Some parents may also not have had opportunities in terms of education or employment. Many are socially vulnerable due to trauma and abuse they have suffered, as well as social exclusion. One participant, who works in a related NGO, described the service users in Childhood Matters as 'so resilient yet so vulnerable'. A number of the people who access services in Childhood Matters are living with trauma that they have suffered through structural issues, familial issues

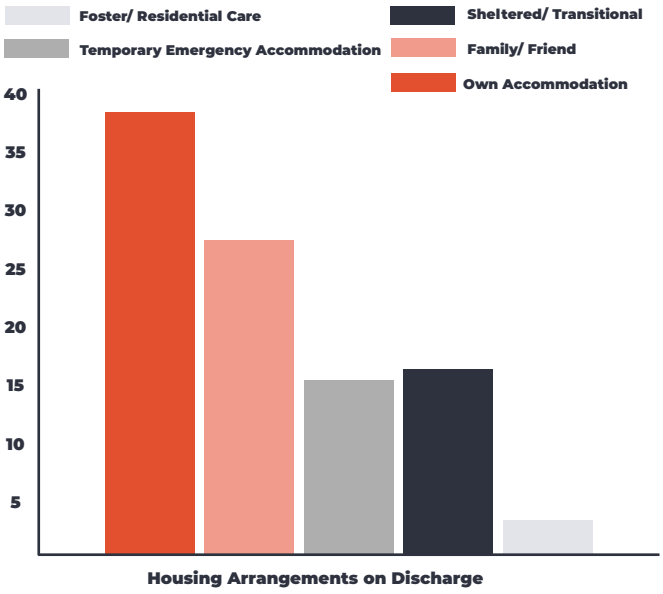
and addiction or mental health issues, as well as not having had opportunities, such as attending school regularly, or in having a stable support network. Due to the above issues, housing is not a panacea. One NGO participant said: 'if you were to put some of these families into a house tomorrow, they wouldn't be able to handle it'. Another participant from an NGO expanded on this point stating that 'it's not about getting a house, it's about the keeping of it… many were never taught things such as managing money'.

While this description is not generalisable to all of the service users in Childhood Matters, many of the service users are dealing with one or more of the issues outlined above. In this regard, a supported housing model would appear to offer advantages, as a feasible possible pathway towards independent living in stable accommodation for the residents.

5.1.2 Residents and Homelessness

Between 2018 and the first half of 2022, there were 73 adults and 64 children who interacted with homeless services or were facing housing precarity during their stay in the Parent and Infant Unit. 38 per cent of parents over the period 2018 to 2022 were able to secure their own accommodation (either social housing or private rental) prior to discharge. The remaining 62 per cent of parents were discharged from the unit to the home of family or friends, temporary emergency accommodation, sheltered or transitional accommodation, or foster or residential care.

Graph 5.2 – Housing Arrangements on Discharge for those unable to secure Accommodation



(Source: Childhood Matters, 2022)

Graph 5.2 above illustrates the destinations of people who exited Childhood Matters and could not secure accommodation prior to discharge between 2018 and 2022. The largest proportion (27 per cent) exited to the home of a family member or friend, the majority of service users in this situation were in need of their own accommodation but were unable to source any. Temporary Emergency Accommodation refers to hostels, B&Bs and family hubs. Sheltered/ transitional housing refers to other NGOs. The small number of people who exited to foster or residential care were under the age of 18 on discharge.

5.2 Profile of Service User Participants

During the second phase of research, semi-structured interviews with service users were undertaken. The participants were recruited by the Parent and Infant Aftercare Coordinator in Childhood Matters.

There were seven participants who either were or are service users in the Parent and Infant Unit in Childhood Matters. Of the seven participants, at the time of interview, five were current service users and two were past service users. The service user participants were aged between 18 and 30 and all had had experience of both housing precarity and homelessness.

Table 5.1 – Service User Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Past/Current Service User
John	28	Current
Mary	24	Past
Louise	27	Current
Laura	21	Current
Jill	29	Current
Maria	30	Past
Kim	19	Current

Each of the service user participants were originally from Munster, with four being based in Cork (either City or county) and three from other counties in Munster. Three of the participants were care leavers who had spent significant time in residential care. According to the Childhood Matters Annual Reports, approximately 79 per cent of adults who engage with the services were themselves known to Child Protection Services when they were children. Of the seven service user participants, three were homeless at the time of interview (although at the time of interview, residing in Childhood Matters, but facing homelessness upon discharge), two were private renting under the HAP Scheme and two had secured social housing, which they had planned to move to upon discharge, but it was unsuitable due to additional needs of family members. It should be noted that the current service users were actively seeking to secure accommodation into which they could move upon discharge.

The themes explored, apart from the service users', personal experiences, included:

- **emergency accommodation for families;**
- **the relative lack of available information for service users;**
- **the experience of being unable to locate suitable accommodation;**
- **and the importance of secure, supported accommodation.**

5.3 Experiences of Homelessness and Housing Precarity

The participants in this study (service users, NGO staff working in the homeless sector, staff in Childhood Matters and staff in local government) all have either direct or indirect experience of both housing precarity and homelessness. While each service user participant had unique experiences of attempting to secure stable accommodation, some commonalities became clear. Each service user had experience of staying in hostels, of the Choice Based Letting system, of interacting with local authorities and of an ever-present feeling of insecurity. One service user respondent spoke of the feeling of never having felt a level of security in her accommodation, as she had been through the care system and subsequently experienced homelessness and housing precarity. The feeling of insecurity was further exacerbated by the need to now care for her baby:

> **Do you know what it is, I have never, like, I was in like twenty-six care places in three years. I have never had somewhere where, like, I had the security of it and its mine and not constantly feel like I am moving from one to the other. Whereas if I go in there, I know I have my bed and it's just a bit of security for me. A bit of security for [baby].**
> (Mary, Service User)

The insecurity that accompanies homelessness and housing precarity can hamper and setback progress made in Childhood Matters in terms of mental health (of both parents and children) and addiction. The environments that people may find themselves in upon discharge (e.g. in a hostel) can have very negative impacts on both parents and children. One staff member in Childhood Matters said

> **Inevitably then they will fall back into old ways because they have not been able to access services or accommodation.**

Another staff member elaborated on the possible impact on parenting abilities and the possible consequences to the family unit:

> **We have had people who it would be a major trigger for their mental health to be back in homeless accommodation, so, of course that is going to impact on parenting of the child.**

This then raises the possibility that children may be removed from their parents care and placed in foster care as a result of their parents' poor mental health, which in turn is a result of homelessness and housing precarity. In terms of the service users' experience of homelessness, two service user participants recounted their experiences of sleeping in tents prior to entering Childhood Matters.

> **I was out in tents and whatever, things like that, and that was hard like because it was coming into the Winter time, and it used to be lashing. The tent used to be soaked and sure, you barely have no money because every bit of money you are spending and, barely no showers, unless you find someone that will leave you go for a shower.... [In an NGO] I would be begging, begging, to get my phone charged even, and then they'll be like 'Oh yeah we got you a B&B'. I would be all excited, get all my stuff from the tent, whatever, drag them with me, lashing rain, I go to the B&B and they would be like 'no, no'. That happened to me twice like, twice. Bad times in my life, two times. Like, I was ready to actually go and put a rope around my neck.** (Laura, Service User)

> **I was homeless before I came in here. I was homeless a year before that, and it was from July to when I came in here, I was in a tent for, I think it was... July to... December and I got pregnant, and I was still in the tent and it was absolutely freezing. We had the worst storms and... I ended up coming up here to Cork and buying like, do you know, a really expensive, tent, do you know that could take like proper winds and the whole lot. And we were in there trying our best with the Council. I got onto TDs. I done the whole lot.**
> (Maria, Service User)

The indignity, the lack of access to basic amenities and the feeling of being 'less-than' that accompanies homelessness was described by participants who had experience of living in tents. The lack of access to amenities such as a toilet or shower facilities has an impact not just on a person's personal hygiene, but also on their feeling of self-worth and in how they believe they are perceived by others.

> **When you are homeless and things like and you are out on the streets, in tents and hostels and all that like, anywhere, like a toilet, a public toilet is like a hotel to you like. It's madness.**
> (Laura, Service User)

> **It's cold, it's like not being able to eat and then like having to spend your money on like chipper food when you don't want to do that. And then like the whole washing, like not being able to wash. I remember my skin just, like I was getting lumps, like I was getting stress rashes and then being pregnant and having to go into the [maternity hospital) in the way that I was. It wasn't nice like and they would be all looking at you.** (Maria, Service User)

While residing in a hostel is better than sleeping in a tent, additional issues present themselves in that situation. Three of the service user participants discussed their experiences of living in a hostel either while pregnant or with a small child.

> **...until I was seven months pregnant, I was in a hostel, like. It was a bad hostel now as well, it was called [name]. There was no lock on my door, there was all men there, they were partying, taking drugs, overdosing, popping, Guards coming, people trying to get into your room...**
> (Laura, Service User)

> **In with all these bad people again like. It's not ideal for, especially young women like, do you know? A man could like, I'm not even being sexist or anything, a man could handle it more, like. A girl with a child is very stressful like.** (Jill, Service User)

One service user recounted her experience of being referred to a hostel in Cork City, which was a wholly unsuitable environment for her or her child.

> **I was here in Bessborough, I think it was last year for four months. I had to stay a little longer over not having a place to go. When we left here, they were going putting us into a hostel. [aftercare worker] brought us out and we went to the door, and I was like 'oh God', I was like 'oh no'. Went in there, fella answered the door covered in tattoos, he had his top off. You could smell weed inside there. They were doing tattoos in the parlour. [...] There was a small man there and he was like, 'oh I had people in here last week, I hope you don't take drugs, I hope you don't drink. I had to throw them out of here because they were drinking and taking drugs'. So, [the aftercare worker] was like 'so you have that here?' and he was kind of 'yeah, but I will get rid of the people that do it'. So, I was really scared, like. I was just, I didn't want to go from the comfort of [Childhood Matters] and knowing that you are safe to somewhere like that. We went up into the room and it was bunk beds, no television. Like you went in, up the stairs and there was like a small corridor, [...] if an argument started here, we would literally have to stay in the room. We wouldn't have been able to get out or try to get past it without getting involved. So, I was like no. I went back out to the car; my partner was there with [child's name] and, I was like, I just started crying. I was like 'I can't, like I am not able' so [Childhood Matters] said we could come back.**
> (Maria, Service User)

Luckily for this service user, Childhood Matters were able to extend their stay until more accommodation in a hotel was sourced for them. While living in a hotel, even temporarily, is in no way ideal, it was a better situation than that described in the hostel. One staff member in Childhood Matters highlighted **an issue with small children's development when they are living in confined spaces, such as hotels or hostels.** They stated that they have seen 'babies just beginning to walk and that is all being impacted because they are living in this confined space'.

Two service user participants had secured private rental accommodation under the HAP scheme and a third had been approved for HAP and was seeking private rental accommodation. Unfortunately, at the time of interview, the search for housing was not going well. She found that a number of landlords she had met did not wish to have a HAP tenancy, the respondent also thought that perhaps the fact that she had a small child may have hindered her chances of securing a tenancy.

> **Well, like I used to, I lived in house shares before with my friends which was quite easy because I was working full time and everything and, I suppose it's easier to find housing when you don't have a child. But, when I have tried to go to viewing and stuff, with [baby's name] they say they won't take HAP, which is difficult. And then as soon as they find out I have a young child they are going 'oh no' and they kind of make a lot of excuses as to why. So it's very difficult.**
> (Louise, Service User)

Another service user managed to secure a tenancy. Having all but given up the search, her time in Childhood Matters had been extended due to the lack of available accommodation that would take a HAP tenant.

> **We were just like trying to sort out housing and get on to like, we had to get on to like hundreds of landlords and um, we are just kind of applying for everywhere. Well at the very last second like, I had to, after my placement was extended (in Childhood Matters) then like right before I was actually about to leave like I would have been going into like a hostel and then I finally got a HAP placement.** (Kim, Service User)

A third service user was in private rental accommodation under the HAP scheme. Unfortunately, the accommodation was not ideal, but she moved into the accommodation on the basis that it was better than the alternative, which was a hostel.

> **We'll make it do, it's fine and we took it. And your man was really, really nice. Took our money, moved in that day. We had no working fridge, no washing machine for a year. He put up my rent without giving me valid rent increases three times. HAP think I am paying fourteen hundred. I think now the final increase is to eighteen fifty.** (Mary, Service User)

This service user was nervous about informing the local authority about successive rent increases and the actual amount she was paying in rent. She felt that she could not complain in case she and her child were evicted.

Two of the service users had secured a house through an Approved Housing Body. The house that they were renting was a two-storey house. Regrettably, one family member has additional needs and the house was unsuitable for them.

> **I have to get a bungalow, like. [Due to additional needs]. We need a bungalow and with five kids. Only in a three-room house, like, three bedrooms. And I am staying downstairs the last five/ six months [...]. And, um, they did nothing for me, just put a bed in the sitting room. And that was it. It was impossible.** (John, Service User)

This service user is currently on the housing list for their local authority, but does not have much hope that they will be transferred to more suitable accommodation in the near future.

Another service user spoke about her experience with the Choice Based Letting system and the decision she had between remaining in an urban setting and attempting to secure a HAP tenancy or moving to a rural area with the possibility of securing social housing.

> **I have been bidding on houses and everything but what they have said to me is that like I could potentially get a Council house like, in [rural areas]. If I want to stay in the city then I have to get a HAP property. But I really want to stay in the city because [baby's name] is used to the city and the creche is up here and everything. I would like to potentially go back to college, and it wouldn't be ideal living in [rural area].** (Louise, Service User)

Each of the service user participants interviewed have had experience, in some cases for extended periods of time, of homelessness. Each must contend with navigating the immensely complicated housing and homelessness system in their search for stable, safe accommodation.

In addition to working through their own struggles; be it addiction, mental health issues, familial problems or attempting to deal with the trauma of their own childhood experiences. All while trying to care for small children and babies.

5.4 Issues Facing Some Families Exiting Tertiary Services

As mentioned previously, there are a number of issues and problems facing families exiting Childhood Matters in addition to securing accommodation. While the lack of secure, stable, safe accommodation looms large in the lives of the families, additional issues present ongoing struggles for many families. These ongoing issues include (but are not limited to) mental health issues, addiction issues and domestic violence. In addition, many also may be withstanding the effects of structural disadvantage. One respondent from an NGO which works with families who have exited Childhood Matters discussed this issue.

> **You just need to take everybody as they are and assess them. You know, some might need support around schools or educational engagement, counselling, some behavioural issues.**
> (NGO Respondent A)

This respondent further elaborated on the **ongoing support work that is needed when people exit tertiary services**, such as Childhood Matters. They stated the importance of meeting 'them where they are at, not where we expect them to be' throughout engagement with supports. Reaching the level of independent living for some, however, is not easy.

> **But that's not always achievable and you can't achieve everything. You can't change everything in six to twelve months. So, as much as they gain skills, I am sure going through Bessborough they do [...] they might need a little more continued support afterwards. You know, whether it's budgeting, running a household, you know, that reality.**
> (NGO Respondent A)

In terms of **the level and type of support needed**, this respondent noted the **uniqueness of each individual**, and the need for supports and support workers to adapt to the needs of individual people.

> **It can really vary, you just, you don't know, you have to see what they come to you with. What you observe. And sometimes unfortunately there is active misuse going on.**
> (NGO Respondent A)

A staff member in Childhood Matters concurred with the opinion of NGO Respondent A concerning supports that some families require after discharge from Childhood Matters.

> **I suppose the big issue is that [...] them coming to us, getting a lot of support and a lot of guidance, but then going into homeless accommodation. Now (NGO) have been really good and I know that they offer support there, but it would not be the same support that they would get from here or that we feel that they would need, and certainly to be able to parent their children at home in stable accommodation would be a lot easier and a lot better.**
> (Focus Group Participant 1)

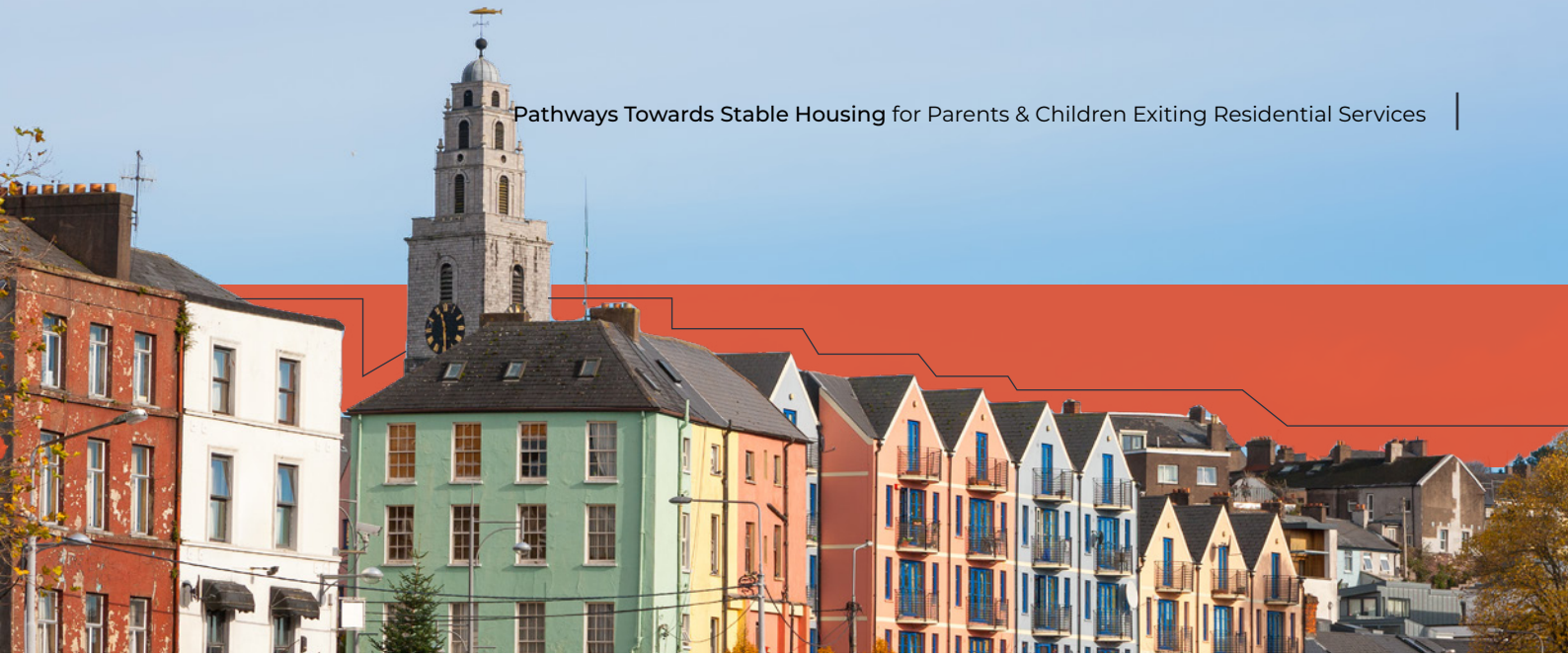
Another staff member in Childhood Matters agreed with the level of supports required, in addition to the housing and accommodation needs, stating that 'it is not just the house is the issue for us it is all the supports' (Focus Group Participant 2). At times, the type of accommodation has actually hindered staff in Childhood Matters providing aftercare supports, with one focus group participant recounting an incident in which they were unable to enter the accommodation a family was in:

> **... one family in particular that I have come across that they moved into hostel accommodation, but I was not allowed enter the hostel accommodation because they said they would be at risk of being evicted. That they are only allowed into it, so then you could not actually support them to the same extent. So, you would have to meet them outside or else ask them to come out (to Childhood Matters).** (Focus Group Participant 3)

This participant was referring to the rule in that hostel whereby **residents are not allowed to have visitors in their rooms**. This rule also extended to aftercare workers who were attempting to support families in their transition back into the community.
Having exited Childhood Matters, structural and familial issues can either become or re-establish themselves as barriers to people's progress and in maintaining the skills that they have acquired in Childhood Matters. Focus Group Participant 3 said that a number of the families that they have worked with 'have less stable families in the community that they could potentially go and live with'. The intergenerational transmission of poverty and disadvantage can be evident in the lives of a number of service users, with one NGO respondent noting that behavioural issues can sometimes be a result of the service user's own childhood experiences.

> **That sometimes they don't have the capacity, the awareness the ability to put the needs of their children before whatever needs they have themselves. They were often not parented themselves**
> (NGO Respondent B)

A focus group participant elaborated on the point around intergenerational transmission, but also outlined a difference between intergenerational transmission of poverty and disadvantage and the current trend of homelessness that they are observing.



> **I think the cyclical, transgenerational pattern is mental health, adverse childhood experiences, history repeating itself. And, um, as you know for the ACE's study, all of those give you greater vulnerability to homelessness. So, where there is transgenerational patterns perhaps in the last generation, because I think accommodation may not have been so scarce, community factors were in place, and the world was a different place, you know, twenty, thirty, forty years ago, housing was not such an issue and communities rolled in together and sometimes carried people like that. That is no longer the case and we do not have that community, secure base, network, and I think that is what creates the likelihood of these people now becoming... So, I think there is a new generation of homelessness rather than it is transgenerational patterns.** (Focus Group Participant 4)

Due to the issues facing many of the service users in Childhood Matters (trauma, structural issues, familial issues, addiction, mental health issues, as well as intergenerational poverty and disadvantage) housing is not a panacea. While these issues cannot be ascribed to all of the service users in Childhood Matters, many of the service users are dealing with a number of issues which require support post-discharge. Good quality, secure supported housing would contribute to well-being and provide a stable base for dealing with some of the issues described above.

5.5 Long-term Impacts of Homelessness and Housing Precarity on Children

As discussed in Chapter 2, the long-term impacts of homelessness and housing precarity can be immense. Homelessness and housing precarity in early childhood can have psychological impacts, adversely affect development, adversely impact physical health and there are documented impacts on educational achievement (D'Sa et al, 2020). The negative impact of homelessness and housing precarity on children was discussed by staff in Childhood Matters.

> **Our framework here is trauma informed and it is also on infant mental health in the parent and infant unit particularly. And I think it is very hard sometimes to advocate for smallies, for babies, and toddlers, and children because we do not see the visible impact of homelessness or of the ACE's that we speak about because most of the stuff is happening silently.**
> (Focus Group Participant 4)

This participant continued that attention tends to be paid to these issues much later on in a child's life when the impacts of trauma suffered become obvious - 'good and strong and symptomatic, and it is screaming'. Another participant agreed with the long-term impacts of homelessness and housing precarity, stating that the children they are seeing experiencing adverse childhood experiences today 'are the people that twenty years later are homeless again because the trauma of being homeless has created mental health problems, addiction problems' (Focus Group Participant 5). In this regard, addressing potential problems, through stable supported accommodation, before they manifest appears to be the sensible course of action. As identified by Carnemolla and Skinner (2021) in their systematic review, improvements in physical health, mental health, well-being and service use have been observed when people are provided with stable accommodation, as stable accommodation provides a base which allows people to make plans for the future.

5.6 Difficulty Navigating the System

Each of the service users interviewed discussed the daunting task of navigating the complex housing and homelessness system in their search for stable, safe accommodation. One service user discussed their experience with the social housing list in their local authority. Having spent three years believing that they were on the housing list, when they were in Childhood Matters a staff member enquired about their application and discovered that they did not have an active application.

> **We just weren't on it, like. I was in the Council and all and I brought in everything I needed to do it like, show my ID and all. Never heard nothing back and I thought we were on it. I was saying to [partners name] 'ah sure I'm on the list nearly three years, there should be something out there. Nothing'. And we wouldn't have known until we came in here and talked to [staff member] about it. They just left us, without telling us, never even came out around. Imagine going on being there five or six years, ten years waiting, and you think you are still on it, and you weren't on it. That's just, that's shocking like.**
> (John, Service User)

Fortunately for one service user, they managed to secure social housing. Having spent time sleeping rough and residing in hostels, this service user was understandably overwhelmed when they secured safe, suitable accommodation.

> **A house, yeah. So, when I went in there I was like 'am I sharing this with someone else?' and they were like 'no, it's all for you', I was like [gasp] because it is absolutely gorgeous. It's really nice.**
> (Maria, Service User)

When it comes to the Choice Based Lettings system, one service user did not have much faith in the possibility of securing accommodation through it. Noting that while it may work for some, it does not work for everybody. Another service user agreed saying that they had been bidding on houses through CBL, but was unsuccessful using the system.

> **I just find it very useless, like, to be honest. I know people like who have loads of kids and things and they would be bidding on that for, I have actually seen, like ten years or more and they have nowhere. It's very lucky and unlucky like. Like I could go with one kid and maybe after like a month, a couple of months I could nearly get myself a house and then there would be people with three bidding for years like.**
> (Laura, Service User)

> **They were just like if you are on CBL, you know the Choice Based Letting. Bidding on houses. I was doing all that but sure, nothing was coming up.**
> (Maria, Service User)

When it comes to navigating the housing and homelessness system, all of the service users have had interactions with local authorities. Some of the interactions have been positive, while others were negative. One service user, who secured accommodation via an Approved Housing Body, stated that 'the Council were not really any help to be honest, like' (Jill, Service User).

Local Authorities are bound by eligibility criteria. Determining eligibility for access to homeless services and accommodation is not always a straightforward task and is not necessarily simply related to a person's current living situation. One local authority respondent outlined some of the criteria that must be reached in order for the person presenting to de deemed eligible.

> **You need a local connection to (region) to apply for housing and our homeless office then manages anyone who presents as homeless within the boundary of (region). [...] So, the minute someone steps foot inside our services, I am then working on a plan to get them exited. If they don't have a clear Garda check, it's not going to be a local authority property. You will go down the route of Peter McVerry, Focus, or HAP. [...] There are all those barriers to exit. So, local connection, clear Garda checks...**
> (Local Authority Respondent A)

One service user who was l**iving in a hostel while pregnant** spoke about her frustration with the local authority.

> **I was pregnant like, so I was sober when all this was going on like. And then, I would be around the Council like begging, begging them to like move me. And they just like having none of it, none of it. So, like the council didn't even get me into (NGO), it was a Guard that got me into (NGO).**
> (Laura, Service User)

Unfortunately, it would appear that the local authority having to satisfy the local area connection rule for eligibility played a significant role in this service user's (and a number of other service users') poor experience in attempting to secure accommodation through the local authority.

> **I had a bit of an issue with them when they kept saying I had no connections to the city after being in Bessborough for four months and like all my aftercare was up here, because I had like a mother and baby group in the city and the support with the infant mental health specialist, I still have to see them and also the parenting for [aftercare worker name]. Like, I kept saying 'isn't that enough connections?' and they were saying 'no like that could all be, like I could do all that in [region]' and they don't even have any of that in [region] so it just didn't make much sense.**
> (Louise, Service User)

Much of the **funding of temporary emergency accommodation and support services** falls to the **local authority** in a particular district. Given that there are few places available, priority is given to people who are from the particular locality.

> **You need a local connection to (region) to apply for housing and our homeless office then manages anyone who presents as homeless within the boundary of (region). Where we have come from problems in the past is people coming from (NGO) wanting to go to (NGO) and they could be from anywhere in the country. That council doesn't fund (NGO), they don't have their own stand-alone services. They don't have their own stand-alone, temporary emergency accommodation. They don't have them.**
> (Local Authority Respondent A)

The local authority respondent certainly **recognised the frustration** and perception that the eligibility criteria, particularly the local connection element, serves to block access to services. However, it was highlighted that because of restricted funding and procedure

> **in some cases we have to actually pave the way for our own homeless but it is a balancing act.**
> (Local Authority Respondent A)

This respondent also outlined how local authorities are 'thinking outside the box' in order to help people because there are situations where 'the red tape wouldn't guide me' (Local Authority Respondent A). As an example, this respondent talked about the case of a woman who had suffered domestic violence, had serious addiction issues, was five months pregnant and was sleeping rough. Due to previous issues, the respondent was unable to homeless accommodation. Eventually the respondent managed to locate a B&B that was willing to accommodate the woman and additional supports could be put in place for her. Staff in local authorities are working to the best of their abilities to accommodate people and to put people in touch with available services. They are, however, limited to what they can do by the eligibility criteria, funding and other restrictions.

One service user, who has had extensive experience with multiple local authorities and the HAP scheme mentioned **her long-term housing goal.**

> **And, like, I'm not asking for a free house, I just want a couple of months to kind of like breathe, get money together and buy. Like, I don't even want a Council house, to be honest with you. I just want to buy a house. Something that's mine. And no one else can come in, because I am sick of people going 'oh you have this' and then they are taking it away. I'm just fed up with all that. So, like, that's kind of where, I just want somewhere that is safe for [baby].**
> (Mary, Service User)

5.7 The Feasibility of Supported Housing

Given all of the challenges faced by many of the residents in the Parent and Infant Unit, not just homelessness and housing precarity, the solution cannot simply be comprised of locating suitable accommodation and moving the parents and infants in upon discharge. The additional needs of this group must also be addressed. When asked their opinions on the possibility of establishing a supported housing model, the service user participants were positive.

> **Yeah, like I see places like (NGO), there should definitely be more places like that, definitely.**
> (Laura, Service User)

> **But if they were given like one block of flats and they were allowed to put their people in there. Even if it was six months to a year, like, that would give the Council a bit of a breath way to go 'ok, now where can we put this person or what suits this person.**
> (Mary, Service User)

> **Well, I think it would be a lot of pressure like taken off the people in here like.**
> (Jill, Service User)

> **I think, yeah. Like if it was suitable for their needs like, you know. […] I think they do need to be doing that more like, suiting, you know to leave here and have the right circumstances like. That's what people need.**
> (John, Service User)

> **Yeah, I would say something like that, if they had a support worker to check in with them every week and to have a plan in place, you know?**
> (Louise, Service User)

> **I hope it would work because… I would hope so.**
> (Maria, Service User)

> **Yeah, no, I think that would work, sounds great. When can I move in?**
> (Kim, Service User)

Throughout the interview and focus group process, the proposed model of supported housing for people exiting Childhood Matters was also outlined to staff in Childhood Matters, staff in NGOs and staff in local authorities. Regarding the benefits to service users of a supported model whereby independent living is encouraged with the help of support workers, all of the respondents were positive in their feedback.

> **I think that is a good idea to look at the model because in a sense really for everything to take place or for development of any kinds, we need a base.**
> (Focus Group Participant 4)

> **So, I absolutely see the need and I see this fulfilling a need, this kind of a model because sometimes Bessborough, obviously we all are limited in our resources, so Bessborough have to have certain programmes and they are very good for doing extensions and I know that. The families I have worked with in the past have got extensions there. But they do need to move on, and you are not going to solve everything so if it buys more time for you to address independent living skills. And I suppose as well it gives the team an opportunity to go in, set them up with the Council,**

> **making sure their application is up to date, setting them up with other resources, access to housing and stuff like that in the community.**
> (NGO Respondent A)

> **… or even a block of apartments or… like, I know you don't want to brand them, but you are still in the community, you are still getting visiting supports and it is transitioning them too, as opposed to… like going to (NGO) is sending someone… you are going back to homeless services, you are homeless.**
> (Local Authority Respondent A)

> **It is certainly the way that we would see forward to help people. You don't want to disempower either. You don't want to hold them forever.**
> (NGO Respondent A)

In terms of maintaining and growing skills and techniques that service users have worked to obtain in Childhood Matters, a focus group participant outlined the possible benefits of a supported housing model:

> **If you can prolong what they are getting in the unit for a substantial amount of time, then maybe they can, kind of, be able to engage more in other services, link in with a lot of different areas to see where they want to live and kind of branch out, because, it is like sixteen weeks they are going through such an intense time. If they knew they were going into this housing, then maybe they will engage more.** (Focus Group Participant 3)

A theme emerged during the focus group and throughout each of the interviews with staff in Childhood Matters, in NGOs and in local authorities when discussion turned to the proposed model. Initially, the response was very positive and supportive, but quickly turned to a discussion of the practicality of securing housing stock for such a project. As a respondent from the local authority succinctly put it 'but the stock isn't there'.

> **And it is just housing stock, like, you hear it every day, don't you? There is nothing there, there is nothing available, so. So, then is that about building more houses, or, like, your plan sounds really good but where are these houses for these people, you know?**
> (Focus Group Participant 1)

Although the reality of the current housing market weighed heavily on these conversations, respondents did come up with their own ideas of how the model might work. Local Authority Respondent A was particularly insightful in drawing out the practicalities of the model. It was suggested that a ten or twelve unit building or number of buildings be identified and earmarked for families exiting Childhood Matters. One important aspect that was identified was that in addition to support workers, a staff member with a responsibility for housing would also be involved to ensure that people would not exit supported housing to homelessness. Another suggestion came from NGO Respondent A, was that there needs to be staff on-site in order to address any potential issues, should they arise.

Funding the potential model is another issue which came under discussion, with one focus group participant asking 'how will we ever get funding really? You know the adequate, the funding to build the model'. (Focus Group Participant 4). While the initial outlay and potential ongoing costs of running the model may seem prohibitive, in the long-term it could actually reduce costs associated with support services. As two focus groups participants said:

> **I mean, if you invested in those early years and in families and in parenting then, like, you know, you are preventing so much damage and so much money, you know, that the government would save if kids did not have to experience the trauma of being homeless and what the knock-on impact of that, you know, then.**
> (Focus Group Participant 1)

> **We do not often talk about the actual economic cost of what sixteen and twelve weeks cost here in terms of a team input. And then to have people go back out into a homeless environment, it makes it, it really relays a challenge to the economic cost of what we have put in place here and how we dilute that so much if we do not have a secure base and I suppose, it is just, sometimes the naming it in, you know, in euros and in economic terms for the government to realise we are putting in this work, that we need the follow up.**
> (Focus Group Participant 4)

The cost of ongoing social care supports via third sector bodies is immense, as is the cost of homelessness and housing precarity. As noted by O'Sullivan (2020) the expenditure by the Department of Housing and local authorities on family homelessness nationally increased by 250 per cent between 2014 and 2019, from €71.5 million to €251 million respectively. These figures pertain to the provision of emergency accommodation for families, and does not include the ongoing cost of social supports. The cost of the provision of social supports is discussed in Chapter 7.

6. A Suggested Model

6.1 A Suggested Model

The proposed model to address the issue of homelessness and housing instability for parents and children exiting Childhood Matters is based on **supported housing**. Supported housing, in this instance, refers to **secure accommodation for families with on-site support services** available to them. Supported housing helps people to build the **skills and knowledge needed to maintain a home**, it can also help in addressing issues that the family may have which may make the prospect of long-term independent housing untenable. Supported housing provides support services to families, which can take the form of

- family support;
- mental health support;
- addiction services;
- life skills training;
- personal planning and support;
- and navigating the housing system.

The proposed model is that **10 apartments be earmarked** (and sourced either via building or acquiring) for families who are exiting Childhood Matters. A small block of apartments would be preferred as all of the families would be in one building. The purpose of having a single building is **not to stigmatise the families**, but to ensure that onsite staff be available should any of the residents need them at any point. Ownership of the properties could be either wholly owned by Cork City and/or Cork County Council, or they could be a joint investment between local authorities and third sector bodies. While the majority of this report has focused on Cork City, there is a large number of families exiting Childhood Matters who are resident in Cork County and as such do not come under the remit of Cork City Council. A joint initiative between the councils could mitigate this factor.

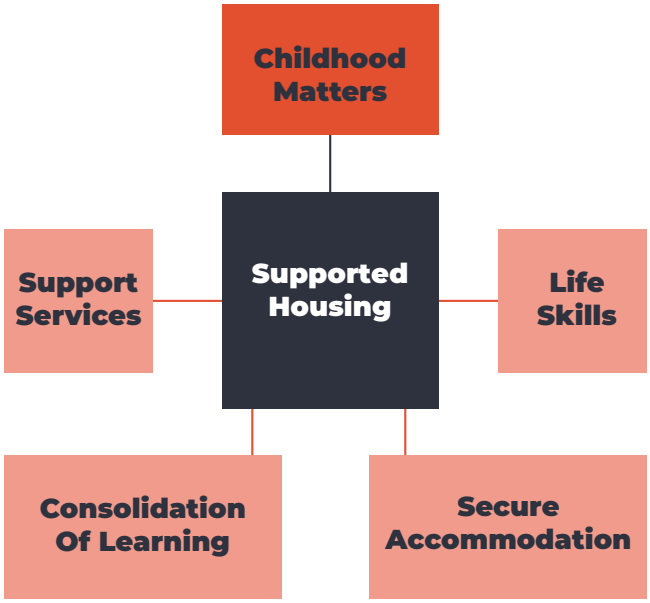
It is envisaged that 10 apartments would suffice given that, on average over the past four years (2018 to 2022), **18 families have been discharged into homelessness.** On-site staff would include:

- keyworkers (a family support worker and a child support worker)
- security staff
- an accommodation specialist who has a working knowledge of the housing system.

While in other supported housing models the family support worker also acts as a support in locating accommodation and navigating the housing system, given the current housing crisis, it would be better to have one staff member for whom this was their only role.

18 families on average were discharged into homelessness, over the past four years.

Image 6.1 – Proposed Model for Families Exiting Childhood Matters



6.1.2 Envisaged Benefits

There are multiple envisaged benefits of this model for families who are exiting Childhood Matters. Seven benefits, which are expanded on below, are;

- Stability;
- Supports;
- Self-sufficiency;
- Reduction in Stress;
- Safety;
- Mental Health;
- Time.

Providing stability: supported housing provides a stable living environment for families who are experiencing homelessness. This stability can help families focus on consolidating and putting into practice the skills they have accumulated during their stay in Childhood Matters and improving their financial situation.

Access to supports: this model will include access to on-site support services, such as addiction counselling, mental health counselling, and educational programs. This could also be enhanced through cooperation with other services available to families, such as Bruac (the educational and training centre operated by Good Shepherd Cork). This could help families get back on their feet and achieve their goals.

Increasing and encouraging self-sufficiency: The support services offered through supported housing would help families become self-sufficient and prepare them for a transition to independent living, if they wish.

Reduced Stress: this model could help to reduce the stress and anxiety families face when they are homeless. The safety and security of a home can help families to focus on consolidating their skills and on their children.

Safety and security: it will provide a safe and secure living environment for families, which is particularly important for families with children who need a stable and secure place to live.

Mental Health: the lack of constant stress and fear associated with homelessness can help to reduce depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues.

Time: this model will allow families the time necessary to adjust to independent living and the time to work with a specialist keyworker.

In addition, it is envisaged that this model would help to **reduce the rate of family homelessness in Cork.**

6.2 Established Examples

The Childers Road Family Initiative, Limerick City
The Childers Road Family Initiative consists of 30 apartments in a single block (26 two-bedroom apartments and four one-bed apartments), which is owned by Limerick City and County Council and managed by Focus Ireland. It is an own door accommodation model for families experiencing homelessness in Limerick. In 2017, when it opened, there were 315 homeless families in Limerick who were presenting to Limerick City and County Council and were accommodated in private emergency accommodation (PEAs). The CRFI operates as a partnership between Limerick City and County Council and Focus Ireland, with Limerick City and County Council providing €350,000 per annum to Focus Ireland. This figure can be further broken down as €11,666 per unit per annum. Families are referred to CRFI by the Homeless Action Team in Limerick. A large proportion of the families accommodated are single parent families. Table 6.1 below, adapted from Focus Ireland (2020), details the number of families who exited CRFI in 2018 and 2019 and what type of accommodation the families relocated to.

Table 6.1 – Families Exiting from CRFI in 2018 and 2019

	2018 and 2019	Percentage
Local Authority	20	44%
Focus Ireland Social Rental Model	6	13%
Other AHBs	7	16%
Focus Ireland Long-term Accommodation	4	9%
RAS	6	13%
Private Rented/ HAP	2	4%
Total	45	100%

Each apartment is self-contained with private kitchen and bathroom facilities. This privacy not only allows families to carry out family functions and activities, it also allows privacy when families are working with and talking with keyworkers. A licence agreement is issued to each family from Limerick City and County Council, and the anticipated length of stay is twelve months, although this can be extended or shortened depending on the availability of alternative, longterm accommodation. One of the main elements of the licence agreement is that families meet with keyworkers on a regular basis and that the case plan that keyworkers produce is adhered to. Families are expected to respect the privacy of other families and the property itself. Families also pay a differential rent, which is calculated based on their incomes. Security staff are on-site at all times, and there is a no-visitor policy in place (Focus Ireland, 2020).

Family Support Workers are employed by CRFI, as well as Child Support Workers. Plans are produced with families which outline the key areas to be addressed with actions aimed towards exiting homelessness. Family Support Workers support families in navigating the housing system and locating long-term accommodation, as well as forging links with other support organisations should they be needed. For example, Tusla, mental health support services and addiction support services. Meetings occur on a weekly basis, or more frequently if needed. The support offered to children is based on the identified needs of individual children and parents. According to Focus Ireland (2020) the CRFI is a cost-effective response to family homelessness.

With staff in Limerick City and County Council being quoted as saying that the CRFI is an ‘important cog in the wheel’ of supports for family homelessness.

While the **CRFI model** is slightly different to the proposed model of this study, there are many elements which could be replicated. The CRFI model accommodates homeless families who are referred by the HAT in Limerick. This proposed model would be **solely for families who are exiting Childhood Matters**, and as such, would be on a smaller scale (one-third) than CRFI. Using the cost to Limerick City and County Council as an example of operational annual cost with the initiative, an approximate estimate can be deduced. The budget for CRFI is listed in 2018/19 as €350,000 (or €11,666 per unit per annum) and broken down further as: 38% allocated for support staff, 50% for security and 10% for maintenance (Focus Ireland, 2020).

Using the same metrics for this proposed model, and allowing for inflation, the cost of one family support worker, one child support worker, a housing support worker and security staff, at an average salary of €35,000 would be €140,000. On-site, 24-hour security would cost an estimated €100,000, and maintenance approximately €30,000. An approximation therefore, of annual operational costs is €270,000 per annum for a staffed, ten apartment complex for families who are exiting Childhood Matters. The mentioned €270,000 is exclusive of any differential rents which are paid by the families. When differential rents are included, if €30 per week is taken as the average differential rent paid by families, this equates to €15,600 per annum in rent paid by tenants.

In the following chapter, an examination of the economics of homelessness, social housing and transitional housing is detailed.

7. The Economics of Homelessness, Social Housing and Supported Housing.

Homelessness in Cork City, as well as in other cities, has a significant economic impact. The cost of providing emergency shelter and support services for homeless individuals and families can be high. It is crucial for government and community organizations to work together to address homelessness and the needs of those experiencing homelessness. **The cost of homelessness can include emergency shelter and support services, and healthcare costs for untreated physical and mental health conditions.** According to a study by the Dublin Simon Community, the cost of homelessness in Dublin was estimated to be €53,808 per person per year in 2018. This figure also takes into account the cost of emergency services and healthcare. While the cost of homelessness in Cork City is less than in Dublin, as discussed below, it is still not insignificant. The cost of ending homelessness includes the cost of providing long-term housing solutions, such as social housing and supported accommodation, for those who are experiencing homelessness, as well as housing supports such as HAP and RAS. This chapter details the cost of building social housing, HAP, RAS, Housing First, homeless services and transitional housing in Cork City.

7.1 Cost of Building Social Housing

According to statistics released by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, by Q3 of 2022 in the year-to-date, Cork City Council had 72 new social housing builds (almost twice the average for all Local Authorities in Ireland). There had also been 46 Approved Housing Body new builds, 14 Part V new builds and 14 acquisitions. A total of 146 new (or newly acquired) properties which will form new social housing stock.

€53,808 per person The cost of homeless in Dublin in 2018, according to a study by Dublin Simon Community

According to the Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2021[1], there were 4,501 households on the social housing waiting list for Cork City.

146 new properties (or newly acquired) will form new social housing in Cork.

1 At the time of writing, the Summary of Social Housing Assessments for 2022 was not yet available.

This figure is broken down by family composition, as outlined in Table 7.1 below.

Table 7.1 – Household Composition of Households on the Social Housing Waiting List for Cork City Council in 2021

Household Composition	Number of Households
1 Adult	2,425
1 Adult and 1-2 Children	998
Couple and 1-2 Children	396
Couple	217
Couple and 3 or more Children	122
1 Adult and 3 or more Children	82
2 Adults	75
2 Adults with a Child or Children	60
Couple, 1 or more other Adults and 1-2 Children	32
Couple and 1 or more other Adults	35
3 or more Adults	24
Couple, 1 or more other Adults and 3 or more Children	24
3 or more Adults with a Child or Children	11

Source: Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2021 (2022)

Housing Ireland: Trends in Spending and Outputs of Social and State Supported Housing 2001-2020 published by the Parliamentary Budget Office in 2022 outlines an estimated cost of

providing social housing for all households in Ireland via new builds. The estimated cost of building size-appropriate accommodation for all households in Ireland on the social housing waiting list is €14,297,531,943 for 61,880 households (PBO, 2022). Using the cost estimated by the Parliamentary Budget Office, the approximate cost of building social housing for the 4,501 households on the social housing waiting list for Cork City can be estimated as €1,039,967,538. With an additional approximately €17.5 million[2] per annum for maintenance of new and existing properties (Cork City Council, 2022).

Lyons (2022, p.3) in the Daft.ie Rental Price Report for Q3 2022, notes that

> **"Each of the previous ten quarters had brought a new all-time high for the average market rent. This quarter continues that trend.**

Cork City, as of Q3 2022, had experienced a 12.1 per cent increase in the average cost of a private rental property in one year, and a 2.3 per cent increase from the previous quarter. Lyons (2022) notes in his analysis of the cost of purchasing a home in Cork City in Q4 2022, that the average cost is €324,840, an increase of 3.3 per cent from the previous year. In a situation where the cost of either private renting or purchasing a home is prohibitive for many people, the likelihood is that the number of people applying for social housing in Cork City is going to continue to increase. In January 2023, Cork City Council increased the social housing income eligibility limits from €35,000 to €40,000, which may also lead to an increase in the number of applicants.

2 The Cork City Council Budget for 2022 allows €17.5 million for the maintenance and improvement of local authority housing units.

7.2 Cost of Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)

As Local Authority Respondent A, when discussing social housing, put it '...the stock isn't there'. As a result of the low level of available social housing stock and the growing need for social housing, HAP and RAS, as housing supports, have been bridging the gap.

The HAP Scheme is available to people who have a long-term housing need and who are on the social housing waiting list. The tenant must locate private rental accommodation, which is within the limits of rent paid by the local authority. Under the HAP Scheme, the local authority pays the landlord and the tenant pays the local authority a weekly differential rent contribution, which is calculated based on the household income and ability to pay. If a household income increases or decreases, so does the rent contribution amount. A HAP tenant is not precluded from increasing working hours or increasing household income. If the household income rises beyond the limits to qualify for social housing, the tenant may continue to receive HAP. Table 7.2 below shows the maximum monthly rent limits for Cork City Council for different household compositions.

Table 7.2 - Maximum Monthly HAP Rent Limits in Cork City Council for different household compositions

Household Composition	Monthly Rate
1 Adult in Shared Accommodation	€300
Couple in Shared Accommodation	€330
1 Adult	€550
Couple	€650
Couple or 1 Adult with 1 Child	€900
Couple or 1 Adult with 2 Children	€925
Couple or 1 Adult with 3 Children	€950

Source: Cork City Council (2022)

There is some flexibility on the rates paid by local authorities, on a case-by-case basis where suitable accommodation cannot be located within the HAP rent limits. As of July 2022, local authorities may increase the HAP limits by 35 per cent for both new and existing HAP tenancies (previously, discretion only allowed 20 per cent above the limits). For example, for a parent and child exiting Childhood Matters, they would be eligible to apply for a HAP tenancy with a monthly rent up to the maximum limit of €900. According to Lyons (2022), the average rent for a two bedroom house in Cork City in Q3 2022 was €1,377. If Cork City Council raised the HAP limit by 35 per cent, that would allow the family to apply for a HAP tenancy with a monthly rent up to the maximum limit of €1,215. A shortfall of €152 per month for a parent and child exiting Childhood Matters seeking stable accommodation.

€1,377 PER MONTH The average rent for a two bedroom house in Cork City in Q3 2022.

The Cork City Council Budget for 2023 (Cork City Council, 2023) states that they are currently supporting **3,019 HAP tenancies with a budget of €331,800 for the HAP Programme** (HAP Operations and Service Support Costs). HAP payments are administered in Limerick through the HAP Shared Services Centre and are paid by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. According to Minister Darragh O'Brien, in Q1 2022, the monthly average (after differential rent contributions) paid in Cork City Council's catchment area to **landlords was €820.20 for 3,119 tenancies** (Dáil Éireann Question, 26 July 2022). According to the DHLGH, at Q4 in 2021, there were 3,185 active HAP tenancies in Cork City Council's catchment area and the 2021 payments for Cork City HAP tenancies amounted to €23,364,599.09 (DHLGH, 2022).

€820.20 PER MONTH The average paid to landlords for 3,119 tenancies in Q1 2022.

The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) is a targeted, means-tested programme. In general, RAS is targeted towards households in receipt of Rent Supplement for 18 months or longer and/ or are assessed as being in need of long-term housing. The local authority agrees with a property owner to

provide housing for a specific amount of time. The local authority then pays rent directly to the landlord or AHB. Rent contributions are calculated using the rents differential rents scheme. When the tenant takes up a RAS tenancy, they are removed from the social housing waiting list as their housing need is deemed to be met. It is envisaged that HAP will eventually replace RAS.

By Q3 2022, according to the DHLGH, there were **794 RAS tenancies in Cork City** (483 private RAS tenancies and 311 AHB RAS tenancies). The Cork City Council Budget for 2023 has approved **€24,954,500 allocated for the RAS programme** (an increase of almost €3.5 million from 2022).

This figure breaks down as:

Payroll:	**€295,500**
RAS Operations:	**€13,613,500**
Payment and Availability:	**€10,725,000**
RAS Service Support Costs:	**€20,500**
Total:	**€24,954,500**

In 2021[3], the total spend for Cork City on both the HAP and RAS schemes was €41,628,099.

7.3 Cost Homeless Services for Families

It can be difficult to discern the number of families who are homeless for particular local authorities as many local authorities are grouped by region. For example, Cork City is listed under the South-West Region, which also includes Kerry and Cork County. However, according to Local Authority Respondent A, in September 2022, there were **42 families who were homeless in Cork City**, a reduction of 57.5 per cent from 2018.

Homeless services in Cork City are provided by a mixture of Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), Cork City Council and charitable organisations. The services available specifically for families are few. **Cuanlee** in Cork City provides emergency short-term accommodation for women and children who are experiencing domestic abuse. It is the only refuge available in Cork City for women experiencing domestic violence. Cuanlee has **six units to accommodate families.** Meaning that only six families can be accommodated at any given point. The families must move to new accommodation quite quickly.

Good Shepherd Cork provide a number of services in Cork City, including

- emergency accommodation
- a family hub
- B&B outreach
- supported housing
- education
- training.

3 At the time of writing, the final figures for 2022 were not yet available.

Edel House, one of the Good Shepherd services in Cork City, is the only service in Cork City to provide emergency accommodation for women and children. Edel House can accommodate **10 families and 18 single women**, with referral made through the Accommodation Placement Service in Cork City Council. According to staff in Edel House, families and women now stay longer in Edel House than previously, with the average stay being 8 months.

The increase in length of time in Edel House is attributable to a lack of private rental and social housing accommodation. While in Edel House, service users are active on the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system, as well as applying for social housing. In 2021, 148 women and children stayed in Edel House. Redclyffe is a family hub, another of the Good Shepherd Services in Cork City. **Redclyffe provides emergency accommodation for up to 17 families (men, women and children) at any one time**. During 2021, 150 families were supported by keyworkers to move on to their own stable accommodation (Good Shepherd Cork Financial Statement, 2022).

In 2021, according to Good Shepherd Cork's financial statements, Cork City Council were responsible for €843,886 of the funding. €315,972 contributed to the operation of Edel House and B&B Outreach and €527,914 contributed to the running of Redclyffe. In 2021, the costs of running Edel House and Redclyffe only (excluding the other services that Good Shepherd provide) was €2,680,360 (€1,934,321 for Edel House and €746,039 for Redclyffe) (Good Shepherd Cork Financial Statement, 2022). In 2019, the DHLGH allocated €7.67 million for the construction of an extension and refurbishment of Edel House, which was completed in 2022 (construction work was delayed by Covid-19). The extension and refurbishment have been a very welcome and much needed addition, however, **Edel House remains at capacity almost all of the time** (Good Shepherd Cork Financial Statement, 2022).

The Cork City Council Budget for 2023 has approved €21,087,000 allocated for the administration and maintenance of homeless services, including temporary emergency accommodation. O'Sullivan and Musafiri (2020) estimate that in 2019 the national average cost to maintain one household in emergency accommodation was €31,000 per annum. When Dublin is excluded, this figure falls to, a not insignificant, €22,200 per household per annum. Cork City Council has been very successful in their implementation of the Housing First programme, which is managed by NGO partnerships. Having achieved the target of 40 tenancies to date, with budget of €600,000 from the Services Reform Fund, the Housing First National Implementation Plan, 2022-2026 has **set a new target of an additional 45 tenancies up to 2026.** 16 tenancies of the new target having already been delivered by October 2022 (Cork City Council 2022).

7.4 Cost of Supported Housing

McLaughlin (2011) conducted a study of 263 homeless individuals in the State of Maine in the US with a view to examining the cost effectiveness of supported housing. The population of Maine is approximately 2.5 times the population of Cork County. He used twelve categories to analyse the economic impact of supported housing. The twelve categories were: health care, mental health care, addiction treatment, community support, prescription costs, ambulance calls, police contact, jail stays, housing costs, stays in temporary emergency accommodation, visits to emergency departments and public transport (McLaughlin, 2011). The data was analysed at 6 monthly intervals, beginning at 6 months prior to being housed, followed by 6 months after being housed and lastly at 1 year after being housed. McLaughlin (2011) found that supported housing saved considerable costs in all categories (with the exception of housing). Table 7.3 below (adapted from McLaughlin, 2011) outline the overall savings at each of the 6 month intervals.

Table 7.3 - Total Cost Savings in All Categories, as outlined by McLaughlin (2011).

Time	Total Service Costs	System Savings
6 Months Prior to Housing	$4,690,382,54	$0
6 Months After Housing	$4,101,366.25	$589,016.29
1 Year After Housing	$4,105,474.84	$584,907.70

Loumann (2010), likewise, analysed the financial impacts of the first phase of the Finnish National Programme to reduce long-term homelessness (Paavo I). 15 people who were homeless for long periods of time and who had mental health or addiction issues were observed for 5 months prior to moving into supported housing and for a further 5 months after moving in. It was found that with additional supports in place, there were annual savings of approximately €211,000. The average savings per person was €14,000. Much of the savings were generated from a reduction in hospital visits and rehabilitation services. She notes that

> **"the savings generated from the reduced use of services covers the salaries of the intensive support staff.**
> (Loumann, 2010: 22)

While the analysis conducted by McLaughlin (2011) and Loumann (2010) both provide compelling evidence of the cost effectiveness of supported housing, it must be acknowledged that both studies took place in other jurisdictions and more than a decade ago.

Examining the economics of Irish models of supported or transitional housing will yield a more applicable picture of the situation. The example that this section will draw on is the Childers Road Family Initiative in Limerick City, as this model is closest to the proposed model of this report (although, the proposed model does not propose a timeframe for exiting). Focus Ireland (2020) highlights the cost effectiveness of the CRFI, especially when compared to the cost of emergency accommodation. Drawing on O'Sullivan and Musafiri (2020), they estimate that 83% of national expenditure in 2019 on homeless services is accounted for by emergency accommodation. The average cost of maintaining a household in emergency accommodation in 2019 was €31,000 per household, with the average in Dublin being €37,000 and, as previously mentioned, outside Dublin the average is €22,200 per household per annum.

Below is an estimated cost per annum per unit or per household in homeless accommodation and transitional housing9.

Table 7.4 - Cost per annum per unit or per household in homeless accommodation and transitional housing

	Cost per Unit/ Household per Annum
Emergency Accommodation	€22,200[10]

Note: costs listed are estimated and approximate. A forensic accountancy exercise is needed for an exact figure of expenditure per unit/ household per annum per service.

Nationally, as estimated by O'Sullivan and Mustafiri (2020).

Edel House & Redclyffe	€18,800[4]
CRFI	€11,666[5]
Proposed Supported Housing Model	€27,000[6]

This chapter has presented the findings of the economic cost of homelessness and housing supports in Cork City. The economic costs associated with family homelessness in Cork City are understandably high, given the quality of services offered (for example, Edel House and Redclyffe offer exemplary services for homeless families). The proposed supported housing model could offer cost-effective pathway out of homelessness, also with high quality supports, for families who are exiting residential services. However, it must be noted here that a direct comparison cannot be drawn between Edel House, Redclyffe and the proposed model, as the models and services offered are different.

4 Based on the 2020 Financial Statements of Good Shepherd Cork and the annual report of Good Shepherd Cork for 2020. The running costs of Edel House and Redclyffe of €2,431,075 with 129 households (this includes single women as well as families).

5 As noted earlier, Limerick City and County Council provided €350,000 per annum to Focus Ireland for the running of CFRI for 30 units.

6 As mentioned previously, the proposed model's estimated annual running cost is €270,000 for 10 units.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1 Recommendations

Families exiting tertiary residential services, like Childhood Matters, face uncertainty, instability and, in some cases, homelessness. While the fear and stress this induces in an individual is almost unbearable, they are amplified when people also must consider their small children. Many of the families who being discharged into homelessness have experience of structural disadvantage, familial issues and addiction or mental health issues, as well as not having had opportunities, such as attending school regularly, or in having a stable support network. In situations such as this, a stable, supportive space is needed.

The key recommendation of this report is to establish a small, 10 apartment complex in Cork in which families who are exiting Childhood Matters can:

- re-group,
- consolidate their skills and education,
- take the time needed to work with keyworkers and support workers and
- be safe and secure.

This can be achieved through an initial outlay to locate and purchase properties, and subsequently through a partnership between either the two local authorities or through a partnership between local authorities and a third sector organisation.

Previous studies have strongly indicated that the social benefits of supported housing are immense (Krueger et al, 2022; Abramovich and Kimura, 2019; Clark et al, 2018; Fotheringham et al, 2013).

Economic analyses, including the economic analysis in this report, of transitional and supported housing have likewise indicated that it is more cost effective both in the short and long-term than providing homeless services (Lenz-Rashid et al., 2017; Harburger & White, 2004; Loumann, 2010; McLaughlin, 2011).

It must, however, be acknowledged that the current cost of housing, construction and the private rental market is daunting when considering starting a supported housing model such as this. However, investigations of the viability of locating, sourcing or building a complex for this purpose would be worth undertaking for the benefits of all concerned. The benefits of this model could be observed in generations to come.

The second recommendation is for Childhood Matters, and indeed any organisation that works with homeless families or individuals, to have a staff member with a working knowledge of the housing and housing support system.

This should be the staff member's sole duty – to work with families in securing accommodation, to help in filling out the requisite forms, to advocate on their behalf, to assist in navigating the CBL system and to help in liaising with local authorities and AHBs. In many organisations keyworkers currently fulfil this duty, along with the other duties associated with their role. While the staff contribute invaluable advice and assistance to families who are facing homelessness currently, it would be of benefit to both the families and the organisations to have a staff member dedicated solely to assisting families in locating accommodation.

The third recommendation stems from the issue of jurisdiction which was discussed in almost every interview and throughout the focus group. The boundaries which exist between Cork City Council and Cork County have caused confusion and frustration amongst service users and staff in attempting to locate accommodation.

While staff in local authorities are undoubtedly working to the best of their abilities to accommodate people and to put people in touch with available services, they are limited in terms of what can be provided by the confines of the local authority boundaries, funding and restrictions. For example, one NGO in Cork City is funded by Cork City Council. Families from Childhood Matters who originate outside the City boundaries are not funded to reside in this NGO and there are very few NGOs of this particular type in County Cork. Therefore, they find it incredibly difficult to access services which they need. There could, perhaps, be greater cooperation between Cork City Council and Cork County Council in funding homeless services in Cork City for families who originate in Cork County.

8.2 Conclusion

While this research initially set out to identify whether or not a housing-led approach for families exiting Childhood Matters could be established in Cork City, once the needs of many of the families were established it became clear that for a number of families ongoing support for a medium duration was needed. Each of the families who are exiting Childhood Matters into homelessness have individual needs, some quite complex. That is not to say that they are unable to live independently, but structural disadvantage, institutionalisation, addiction, mental health issues and sometimes impaired cognitive ability means that some families need a little more support. The work that parents and staff in Childhood Matters invest in improving their skillset and learning to look after themselves and their children can be further consolidated through supported housing. Many of the service users expressed apprehension about the time and effort they have put in while in Childhood Matters when faced with the possibility of homelessness afterwards. As Jill, a service user, put it 'I wouldn't want to better myself like this and then get put into a hostel'.

The proposed supported housing model would not only **be cost-effective**, it would also serve to **reduce the likelihood of families returning to homelessness**, it would help to reduce intergenerational homeless and it would help to improve the lives of families exiting Childhood Matters.

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