

15th December 2010

MakeRoom Contribution to Political Manifesto

Ending Homelessness in Ireland Still a Realistic Goal with your Political Support

MakeRoom, the campaign alliance of Focus Ireland, the Simon Communities of Ireland, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and Threshold was founded in 2006 with the aim of securing Government and public support for ending homelessness in Ireland.

In recent years, progress has been made towards achieving this goal and the National Strategy "*The Way Home: A Strategy to address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008-2013*" coupled with the *National Implementation Plan* continues to offer a unique opportunity to actually tackle homelessness in Ireland in a sustainable way.

MakeRoom urges all political parties not to give up on good previous work and to commit in their manifestos to follow through on the Implementation of the National Homeless Strategy and its six strategic aims, including:

1. Preventing Homelessness
2. Eliminate the Need to Sleep Rough
3. Eliminate Long-Term Homelessness
4. Meet Long Term Housing Need
5. Ensure Effective Services for Homeless People
6. Better Coordinated Funding Arrangements

One of the biggest barriers for implementing the strategy has been the lack of move on options, with the appropriate support, for people who are homeless. Many people are forced to stay in emergency homeless accommodation for longer than necessary which is expensive for the state and is unsuitable for meeting people's needs.

We therefore call on all political parties to commit to the following goals:

- **Introduce the statutory obligation for Local Authorities to ring-fence a proportion of social housing for the accommodation of people experiencing homelessness.** Ending long term homelessness requires the provision of sufficient and adequate housing to people who are currently homeless across the state and in particular in the Dublin area. Housing should be provided through voluntary and local authority housing, the Rental Accommodation Scheme and Leasing Scheme.

- **Introduce dedicated funding to provide support for people who are homeless¹, specifically:**
 - a. **Dedicated funding for ongoing housing support from the Department of Environment to people who have been housed and who have additional support needs.** For some people, the provision of these forms of housing and tenancy support can be critical to sustain their housing.
 - b. **Dedicated funding for health and care support from the Department of Health and Children (HSE) to support people who are homeless with additional health and social care needs to move out of homelessness and to prevent homelessness from recurring.** This should include support in the areas of physical and mental health, drug and alcohol use, dual diagnosis or a combination of these. Specialist services working in conjunction with mainstream services have proved to be very effective in this context.
- **Reduce the length of time one must be on rent supplement to become eligible for the Rental Accommodation Scheme from 18 to 6 months.** The rent supplement programme, originally designed as an emergency intervention, has expanded into a housing payment for a great many people who had spent several years in receipt of rent supplement. The introduction of the new Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) was a welcome move in the right direction. Where a claimant is deemed by a Local Authority to be eligible for RAS (Rental Accommodation Scheme) they may retain Rent Supplement and work in excess of 30 hours eradicating a poverty trap. MakeRoom believes that households should be able to transfer more smoothly onto the RAS scheme. If one is on rent supplement for six months, it is reasonable to assume that the housing need is not short term.
- **Provide for an annual count of people who are homeless using the *Counted-In* methodology.** Current estimates of the number of people who are homeless in Ireland are unreliable due to the lack of up to date, comparable and national data. The *Counted-In* surveys currently represent the most robust figures for homelessness but they only cover the major urban centres in the country, such as Dublin, Limerick, Galway and Cork. The only way to establish a reliable figure of people who are homeless nationally and monitor progress towards ending homelessness would be to conduct an annual and state-wide *Counted-In* survey.

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¹ Health services and local authorities are the lead statutory bodies with responsibility for addressing homelessness and the needs of people who are homeless in Ireland. The Health Act 1953 imposed a duty on health boards (now Health Service Executive (HSE)) to provide assistance and shelter to people who are homeless. Under the Child Care Act, 1991, health services have a responsibility to provide for the care, welfare and accommodation of children and young people aged who are homeless. Under the Housing Act 1988 local authorities are empowered to respond to homelessness, including housing people who are homeless directly, by funding voluntary and co-operative bodies to house them, by providing advice and information to them, and by providing them with financial assistance to access private rented accommodation.