

Summary

**Results of a  
Pilot Project to  
prevent family  
homelessness  
in Dublin 15**

**FOCUS**  
Ireland

**Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.**

[focusireland.ie](http://focusireland.ie)

# Results of a Pilot Project to prevent family homelessness in Dublin 15

## Summary

In June 2016, in order to identify the most effective measures to tackle the family homelessness crisis, Focus Ireland launched a pilot project aimed at preventing homelessness among families living in Dublin 15.

An effective homeless prevention campaign must achieve a number of goals:<sup>1</sup>

- › to engage with households which are at risk of homelessness sufficiently early in their crisis.
- › to avoid becoming overwhelmed with households that, while experiencing hardship, are not in fact at risk of becoming homeless.
- › to provide an intervention, or range of interventions, capable of tackling the factors which are likely to cause homelessness.

To overcome these challenges, the Dublin 15 pilot project utilized a range of innovative approaches both during the engagement campaign and during the subsequent support phase. The project also involved a 3-month follow up interview to ascertain the impact of the intervention.


- › There was effective engagement with the target group of families living in private rented accommodation and at risk of homelessness. Among the range of communication channels deployed in the 4 week engagement campaign, one innovative approach was cited by 85% of the 165 families that contacted the services as the trigger for making contact. This was a direct mail from the Department of Social Protection to all 2,500 families in receipt of Rent Supplement in the target area, containing a letter from Focus Ireland.
- › There was little duplication with other prevention campaigns. 75% of the families that contacted the service had not contacted any State-supported prevention service prior to responding to this project.

---

<sup>1</sup> Culhane, D.P., Metraux, S. and Byrne, T., 2011. A prevention-centered approach to homelessness assistance: A paradigm shift? *Housing Policy Debate*, 21(2), pp.295–315.



- Few of the households contacting the service were deemed by Focus Ireland staff to not need the service because they were at low risk of losing their homes (6%).
- In the 3 month follow-up survey, of 87 families who were residing in the private rented sector and at risk of homelessness at time of first contact, 89% (n=77) were still in tenancies, while 11% (n=10) were living in emergency homeless accommodation.
- Of those who were effectively prevented from becoming homeless, 82% were in the same tenancy, while 18% had found new tenancies: 11 found alternative rented accommodation, 6 of these with assistance from the Homeless HAP scheme; 3 had moved into Local Authority housing.
- The families which had avoided homelessness reported a high degree of continued feeling of housing insecurity. This may be a reflection of the general precarity of the rented sector, and the increasing number of people leaving the sector and entering homeless services.
- A strong majority of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of service and advice received from Focus Ireland staff (72%). However, a small number of respondents (n=5) said they received no assistance from Focus Ireland after contact was made.
- Even with a high percentage supported to avoid homelessness, a majority of respondents reported that their concerns upon contacting Focus Ireland were unresolved at the time of the survey (n=51, 64%). Respondents residing in private rented accommodation reported unresolved concerns mainly in respect of notice of terminations, rent increases, and finding alternative accommodation.
- A significant proportion of the families in the follow up survey were of non-Irish origin, though a significant proportion were recent Irish citizens. This reflects the high proportion of migrant households living in private rented accommodation and the proportion of migrants in Dublin 15 generally. Communications problems with some of this group had implications for the data collection processes and have implications for prevention services generally (ie. consideration should be given to translation services).



I hope the rent  
doesn't go up again.

**IF YOU'RE  
WORRIED ABOUT  
YOUR FAMILY HOME  
CALL US  
WE CAN HELP**

FREEPHONE:

**1800 819 370**

ADVICE. ANSWERS. SOLUTIONS.



**FOCUS  
IRELAND**

PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY



This project was supported under a three year strategic partnership between Focus Ireland and Bord Gáis Energy aimed at helping to prevent family homelessness.

**Focus Ireland  
Head Office**  
9-12 High Street  
Christchurch  
Dublin 8

Tel 01 881 5900  
LoCall 1850 204 205  
Fax 01 881 5950  
Email [info@focusireland.ie](mailto:info@focusireland.ie)  
[focusireland.ie](http://focusireland.ie)

Registered charity  
CHY 7220

**Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.**

[focusireland.ie](http://focusireland.ie)

**FOCUS  
Ireland**

**Results of a  
Pilot Project to  
prevent family  
homelessness  
in Dublin 15**

**FOCUS**  
Ireland

**Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.**

[focusireland.ie](http://focusireland.ie)

# Results of a Pilot Project to prevent family homelessness in Dublin 15

---



February 2017

# Pilot Project to prevent family homelessness in Dublin 15

---

## Summary

In June 2016, in order to identify the most effective measures to tackle the family homelessness crisis, Focus Ireland launched a pilot project aimed at preventing homelessness among families living in Dublin 15.

An effective homeless prevention campaign must achieve a number of goals<sup>1</sup>:

- to engage with households which are at risk of homelessness sufficiently early in their crisis.
- to avoid becoming overwhelmed with households that, while experiencing hardship, are not in fact at risk of becoming homeless.
- to provide an intervention, or range of interventions, capable of tackling the factors which are likely to cause homelessness.

To overcome these challenges, the Dublin 15 pilot project utilized a range of innovative approaches both during the engagement campaign and during the subsequent support phase. The project also involved a 3-month follow up interview to ascertain the impact of the intervention.

- There was effective engagement with the target group of families living in private rented accommodation and at risk of homelessness. Among the range of communication channels deployed in the 4 week engagement campaign, one innovative approach was cited by 85% of the 165 families that contacted the services as the trigger for making contact. This was a direct mail from the Department of Social Protection to all 2,500 families in receipt of Rent Supplement in the target area, containing a letter from Focus Ireland.
- There was little duplication with other prevention campaigns. 75% of the families that contacted the service had not contacted any State-supported prevention service prior to responding to this project.
- Few of the households contacting the service were deemed by Focus Ireland staff to not need the service because they were at low risk of losing their homes (6%).
- In the 3 month follow-up survey, of 87 families who were residing in the private rented sector and at risk of homelessness at time of first contact, 89% (n=77) were still in tenancies, while 11% (n=10) were living in emergency homeless accommodation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Culhane, D.P., Metraux, S. and Byrne, T., 2011. A prevention-centered approach to homelessness assistance: A paradigm shift?. *Housing Policy Debate*, 21(2), pp.295-315.

- Of those who were effectively prevented from becoming homeless, 82% were in the same tenancy, while 18% had found new tenancies: 11 found alternative rented accommodation, 6 of these with assistance from the Homeless HAP scheme; 3 had moved into Local Authority housing.
- The families which had avoided homelessness reported a high degree of continued feeling of housing insecurity. This may be a reflection of the general precarity of the rented sector, and the increasing number of people leaving the sector and entering homeless services.
- A strong majority of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of service and advice received from Focus Ireland staff (72%). However, a small number of respondents (n=5) said they received no assistance from Focus Ireland after contact was made.
- Even with a high percentage supported to avoid homelessness, a majority of respondents reported that their concerns upon contacting Focus Ireland were unresolved at the time of the survey (n=51, 64%). Respondents residing in private rented accommodation reported unresolved concerns mainly in respect of notice of terminations, rent increases, and finding alternative accommodation.
- A significant proportion of the families in the follow up survey were of non-Irish origin, though a significant proportion were recent Irish citizens. This reflects the high proportion of migrant households living in private rented accommodation and the proportion of migrants in Dublin 15 generally. Communications problems with some of this group had implications for the data collection processes and have implications for prevention services generally (ie. consideration should be given to translation services).

## Introduction

Ireland is experiencing record levels of family homelessness, with an average of over 80 families a month presenting as newly homeless in the first six months of 2016. The majority of families entering homelessness had their last stable accommodation in the private rented sector.<sup>2</sup> Key factors leading to the increased numbers becoming homeless included low incomes, rising rents and the decision not to increase the Rent Supplement or Homeless Assistance Payment levels in line with rising rents.

Focus Ireland has been designated as the Family Homeless Action Team (HAT) by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE), and is funded to actively support families which are homeless to find new, secure accommodation. In addition to this work, Focus Ireland has long argued that the family homelessness crisis in Dublin can only be tackled when there are effective measures in place to prevent so many families losing their homes in the first place. Helping families hold on to their existing homes requires integrated collaboration between voluntary organisations and a range of State agencies at national and local level.

---

<sup>2</sup> Dublin Region Homeless Executive (2016) *Reasons for families becoming homeless at: <http://www.homelessdublin.ie/reasons-families-becoming-homeless-january-2016>*, Focus Ireland Family Insights at: <http://bit.ly/Flresearch>



In June 2014, the DRHE led a homeless prevention campaign targeting families which were renting and worried about losing their home.<sup>3</sup> This campaign involved a range of voluntary and statutory organisations as partners, including Focus Ireland. As part of this initiative a Tenancy Protection Service (TPS), including a Freephone service, was provided by Threshold on behalf of the four Dublin local authorities. The needs of families contacting the Freephone were assessed within 24 hours of contact. Where the key issues were rising rents for tenants on Rent Supplement, the Threshold 'Tenancy Protection Services' (TPS) could refer tenants to the Department of Social Protection in line with a new protocol which could result in an increased level of rent supplement to sustain the tenancy.

A substantial public awareness campaign was also launched, which included posters provided to services and displayed in prominent locations and on public transport. The success rate for the new TPS prevention service was impressive, with a large number of families receiving higher levels of Rent Supplement to reflect their rising rents, and so retaining their homes<sup>4</sup>.

Nevertheless, the number of families becoming homeless continued to rise rapidly.

Like all organisations concerned with rising homelessness, Focus Ireland was interested in investigating the reasons for this continued rise, and what could be done about it.

Since 2015, Focus Ireland has received support from Bord Gáis Energy through a three year strategic partnership aimed at helping to prevent family homelessness. It was decided to use some of the resources available from this partnership to run a structured campaign to identify the most effective forms of communication in reaching at risk families and detect the most appropriate interventions required. This pilot project was designed to track outcomes so that key lessons could then be shared with other voluntary and statutory agencies.

The pilot was carried out in the Dublin 15 area because Focus Ireland analysis indicates that a significant number of homeless families had previously been living in this area.<sup>5</sup> The high number of families becoming homeless from Dublin 15 is not surprising as it one of the fastest growing urban areas in Ireland, with a large number of households which are privately renting and in receipt of rent supplement. For instance, 43.2% of people in Dublin 15 rent from a private landlord, compared to only 6.1% who rent from a local authority.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.homelessdublin.ie/renting-and-worried-about-losing-your-home>

<sup>4</sup> Threshold (2016) <http://www.threshold.ie/publications/dublin-tenancy-protection-service/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Insight-into-Family-Homelessness-No-1-2016-Snapshot-Profile-of-Children-residing-in-Emergency-Accommodation-in-Dublin-Region.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Information from Census 2011: <http://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2011reports/>

## Structure of the Pilot

### ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN PHASE

The campaign was specifically targeted at families living in the private rented sector who were at risk of losing their homes. However, experience of working with families that have become homeless suggested that families under housing stress tend not to respond to messages referring to 'homelessness' until their circumstances have deteriorated – by which time it is frequently too late to avert loss of the home. Equally, images and messages which emphasise stress and anxiety can be blanked out by people who are actually experiencing those feelings.

Accordingly it was decided to adopt a broad, positive campaign message and achieve more exact targeting through the placing of the message. The campaign used the key message: "If you are worried about your family home, call us – we can help".

Contact was made with the community organisations in the area, primarily through the local Area Partnership. Not only did this act as a way of communicating the message, but the input from these local groups also contributed to the design and delivery of the campaign.

The campaign used a range of communication channels to contact the target audience:

- A four week posters and billboard campaign in train stations, bus shelters, and in shopping centres. (Actual cost: €13,000. Full commercial rate: €30,000)
- Posters sent to community groups in the area. (€500)
- Online advertising (using Facebook and Twitter)
- A press release sent to local media, with follow up calls
- A direct mail letter to recipients of rent supplement in the area (€2,500)

The campaign received considerable coverage from local media and was strongly supported by local community organisations.

The last of these communication channels is the most innovative in relation to previous homelessness prevention campaigns in Ireland. The hypothesis behind the approach is that, while it would be wrong to assume that all recipients of rent supplement are at risk of homelessness, evidence suggested that a high proportion of the families who become homeless had received rent supplement at some stage prior to entering homeless services. A direct mail to all rent recipients might engage them in a way which 'broadcast' messages were unable to do.

However, there was a concern, shared both by Focus Ireland and the Department of Social Protection that an 'official letter' from the Department might cause anxiety rather than trigger a request for assistance. On the other hand, it was clearly not possible, for data protection reasons, for the DoSP to hand over to Focus Ireland the names and addresses of families in receipt of rent supplement. The local DoSP office and Family HAT came up with an innovative approach, with Focus Ireland providing a draft letter on Focus Ireland branded stationery which was mailed out by the DoSP, with a short explanation from the Department explaining why they were sending the mail. The cost of this mail-out was covered by Focus Ireland as part of the costs of the pilot.<sup>7</sup>

The engagement phase started with the poster campaign going up on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2016, with the direct mail dropped on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016. The poster campaign ended after four weeks, although some posters would have continued to be displayed beyond that date. An additional week of clinic appointments occurred. It is worth noting that where there was not an immediate resolution to issues, staff worked towards a resolution outside the timeframe. For example, over 20 cases required sustained staff support until September 2016.

#### SUPPORT PHASE

All communication channels urged concerned families to call a Freephone number which was specially put in place for the pilot and was staffed by Focus Ireland's trained homelessness prevention workers. Customers could also email or text the service.

A range of support interventions were available

- Telephone advice and information consultations with our trained homelessness prevention staff.
- Referral arising from this consultation to other Focus Ireland services.
- Referral arising from this consultation and additional interventions to outside services e.g. Threshold TPS, local authority, DoSP.
- Face to face 'clinics' which Focus Ireland staff set up in the area throughout the period of the pilot with the support of the local authority.

Staff developed a query sheet on which to record information provided by customers. This was primarily a service tool, but was also used in the analysis which follows.

Access to the support phase continued for one week after the four week engagement phase was completed. A number of callers required more sustained casework, and these cases necessarily continued beyond the pilot stage. The phone line remained operational, with callers being directed to our on-going Advice & Information line. However, households that called the number after the end of the campaign are not included in the analysis of the campaign outcomes.

Five staff were involved in delivering the clinics and telephone support, at a total cost of €5,638

---

<sup>7</sup> Provided by sponsors Bord Gáis Energy

## FOLLOW- UP PHASES

Following completion of the project, research was undertaken to evaluate the pilot as a prevention model. This research consisted of two stages:

- Initial contact data: this data was collected by analysis of the query sheets compiled by the services staff at the time of initial contact.
- Three months follow up data: this data was compiled through telephone surveys conducted with customers who had provided consent for this follow-up. These surveys were conducted three months after the pilot concluded and consisted of a 14 item questionnaire designed to ascertain the impact of the initiative.

## Key Findings

### THE ENGAGEMENT PHASE

The initial contact data shows that 165 individuals contacted the service over the 5 week period of the campaign.

*Table 1: Households contacting the service*

Household Type	Number	Percent
Family	138	83.6
Single	10	6.1
Total	148	89.7
Unknown	17	10.3
Total	165	100.0

During the initial contact phase, customers were asked how they are heard about the service. The direct mail from the DoSP was cited by the overwhelming number of the respondents.

*Table 2: Communication which triggered contact with service*

Where households heard about campaign	Number	Percent
DOSP Staff	2	1.5
Facebook	1	.8
Family	1	.8
FCC	1	.8
Friend	1	.8
DOSP Letter	112	84.8
Poster	2	1.5
Unknown	12	9.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Declined consent	33	

It is possible that awareness of the public advertising campaign increased the effectiveness of the letter, but there is no evidence for this.

In designing a pilot project of this scale, staff sought to ensure that only those who actually needed assistance would seek it. At the preliminary review, staff assessed that only 8 (6%) of those who contacted the service were deemed not to need assistance.

One of the concerns about campaigns of this nature is that they may duplicate existing services, so that the same households end up making contact with a range of services broadly offering the same response. Focus Ireland was interested in ascertaining whether the households contacted any other services prior to calling our Freephone number.

Of the 132 cases, 33 reported that they had made contact with Threshold before calling our service. 2 individuals reported that they had contacted the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS).

While 57 individuals noted that the main threat to their accommodation was related to their rent or their social welfare payments, only 21 people reported that they had already contacted the rents unit or the community welfare office.

## The Support Phase

The initial contact data includes a record of the interventions which Focus Ireland staff recorded in relation to the contact from each household.

According to this initial contact data, the most common response was to refer or link in with another agency, 63 cases, with Dublin Place Finders (DPF) and Threshold (TPS) being the most common agencies for referral/linking in. It is worth noting that staff did not simply advise customers to contact a different service. Case work was required to link them in effectively.

*Table 3: Agencies and Services to which customers were referred/linked*

Agency/Service	Number	Percentage
Dublin Place Finders	18	28.5
HAP	6	9.5
Residential Tenancy Board	3	4.7
Tenancy Sustainment Service	4	6.3
Rents unit	7	11
DRHE homeless services	3	4.7
Legal	2	3
Threshold (TPS)	12	19
MABS	7	11
Society of St Vincent De Paul	1	1.5
<b>TOTAL REFERRED/LINKED</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Initial Contact Data

A significant number of callers required more in-depth advice than could be provided over the phone. In response, Focus Ireland staff scheduled one-to-one 'clinic' appointments of 20 minutes duration for those who required them. Clinics took place in the Fingal County Council offices in Blanchardstown.

For some, a clinic appointment was deemed necessary because their case was particularly complex. For others, language barriers made communication over the phone difficult. For this cohort, staff reported that many attended clinic appointments with relatives, including children, who were able to translate on their behalf.

In total, clinic appointments were held with 104 unique customers.

In the three month follow up interview respondents were asked how Focus Ireland staff assisted them after contact was made. The responses from this source differ in several respects from the administrative records, arising from different interpretations of interventions and recall after 3 months. Nevertheless this information gives a useful insight into how customers perceived that support was delivered.

Information and advice was the most reported form of assistance (n=78, 88.6%) with a considerable proportion of respondents reporting that they also attended a clinic meeting with Focus Ireland staff (n=21, 23.9%).

This recalled figure for clinics (n=21) is less than 20% of the total number of such clinics recorded by staff (n=104) at the time. The low level of reported attendance at clinics may be explained by the question format, by the language barrier that existed in a number of cases, or by respondents understanding 'info & advice' as pertaining to in-person meetings as well.

13 respondents were assisted with applications for the HAP scheme (14.8%). Further detail is provided in the table and graph below.

*Table 4: Types of assistance offered by Focus Ireland staff (more than one type possible)*

	Frequency	Percent
Info & Advice	78	48.4%
Clinic Meeting	21	13.0%
HAP Application	13	8.1%
Sourced Accommodation	12	7.5%
Referral to Local Authority	10	6.2%
Referral to Threshold	9	5.6%
Wrote letter/s	7	4.3%
No Assistance	5	3.1%
Rent Supplement Assistance	5	3.1%
Made phone call/s	1	.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Three month follow up interviews

## The follow up phase

A total of 113 of the 165 individuals who had contact the service gave consent to be contacted for the 3 month follow up interview (68%).

Three attempts were made to reach each participant who had given consent for follow-up, using the phone contact details provided. 21 participants were deemed unreachable after three failed attempts at contact.

As a result it was possible to conduct follow up interviews with 92 individuals – i.e. with 56% of the total number who made contact with the service.

Of these, 87 (95%) had been living in private rented accommodation when they first made contact with Focus Ireland, while the remaining 5 (5%) were homeless at the time of first contact.

Of the 5 who said they were experiencing homelessness at first contact, 3 were in emergency accommodation and 2 were residing with friends or family. By the time the survey was conducted, 3 months after the pilot campaign, the 2 who were residing with friends or family remained in that position. Of the 3 who had been in emergency accommodation, 1 had moved into a HAP tenancy and the other 2 remained in homeless services.

As the pilot project was designed to assess effectiveness at preventing homelessness among families at risk of homelessness, the main analysis below relates only to the 87 families that were at risk of homelessness at the time of first contact. The five households that were homeless at the time of first contact were supported by the pilot, and some information about them is included at the end of this report.

### WHAT WAS THE FAMILY'S STATUS WHEN THEY FIRST CONTACTED THE SERVICE?

All 87 households analysed for this section of the report were living in private rented accommodation at the time of making first contact with Focus Ireland. They made contact with Focus Ireland in response to the 'if you are worried about your family home' message and were assessed by Focus Ireland staff as being at risk of losing their home.

Nevertheless, 14 (16%) reported that they did not consider themselves to be 'at risk of homelessness' at the time of contacting Focus Ireland. This can be seen as highlighting the more inclusive response to the question: 'are you worried about losing your home' as opposed to 'are you worried about becoming homeless'. In a recent poll carried out for Focus Ireland by nfpSynergy 12% of respondents said that they were worried about losing their homes, but of these only 48% said that they were worried about becoming homeless, with 38% said they would be able to stay with family or friends and 18% saying they 'did not know'.<sup>8</sup> This has implications for the most effective messaging of homeless prevention campaigns. Of the 14 who said they were not at risk of homelessness, 13 were residing in private rented accommodation when the survey was conducted,

---

<sup>8</sup> nfpSynergy (2017). Online fieldwork took place between 10<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> November 2016. A nationally representative sample of 1,000 (online) adults aged 16+ in Ireland.

and 1 was residing in local authority housing. 12 of the 14 said that had been in their current accommodation for over 2 years and 1 had been there less than 6 months. 1 respondent did not answer the question. Of the 14, 6 said they had received a rent increase and 7 said they needed assistance sourcing alternative accommodation.

#### WHAT WERE RESPONDENTS' HOUSING CIRCUMSTANCES THREE MONTHS LATER?

Of the 87 families that were at risk of homelessness when they contacted Focus Ireland, 77 (89%) were still in tenancies after six months, while 10 (11%) had become homeless and were living in emergency homeless accommodation.

Of those who avoided homelessness, 14 households (18%) had changed accommodation. Of the 14 who changed accommodation, 5 moved to private rented, 6 moved to private rented with Homeless HAP support and 3 moved to local authority housing. All of these respondents reported that they had left their private rented accommodation after receiving a notice of termination.

17 households were supported to obtain 'uplifts' in their rent supplement payment. Increases in the rent payable were arranged in a timely manner by the Department of Social Protection using Article 38.<sup>9</sup>

*Table 5: Housing Type Changes over three month period for all*

Type of accommodation	Frequency	%
Same Private Rented	63	72.4
New Private Rented Tenancy	5	5.7
Private Rented (HHAP)	6	6.8
Local Authority	3	3.4
Emergency Homeless Accommodation	10	11.5
Total	87	100.0

#### HOUSING STABILITY

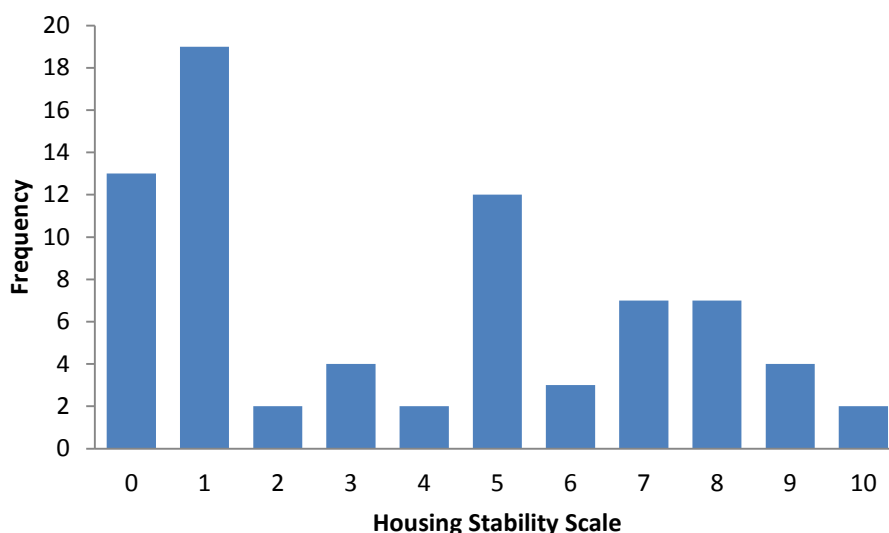
The respondents who avoided homelessness were asked how stable they felt in their current accommodation on a scale of 1-10 (1 being very unstable and 10 being very stable).

The average (mean) score on the 1-10 scale of housing stability for those 68 respondents who remained in private rented accommodation was 4. This is a subjective score which may reflect the general perception of precarity in the private rented sector in Ireland.

<sup>9</sup> Of Statutory Instrument No. 412 of 2007



Figure 1: Housing stability of 77 who avoided homelessness (frequency)



The large majority of those who stayed in the same private rented accommodation had been living in their current homes more than 2 years (n=58, 93.5).

Table 6: Length of time in current accommodation (those who retained original tenancy)

		Frequency	Percent
	6-12 months	1	1.6
	1-2 years	3	4.8
	2 years +	58	93.5
	Total	62	
	Unknown	1	
Total		63	

### HOUSEHOLDS WHICH ENTERED NEW TENANCIES WITH HOMELESS HAP SUPPORT

Of the 6 respondents who moved in to a HAP-assisted tenancy, all were referred to Dublin Place Finders by Focus Ireland staff except one respondent who was first supported to get assessed for HAP by the local authority.<sup>10</sup> All had dependent children.

All 6 respondents recalled being provided with advice and information by Focus Ireland, whilst 5 recalled specific assistance with a HAP application. 3 respondents in this cohort were from a NON-EU country, 2 were Irish, and 1 was from the EU region.

<sup>10</sup> From information provided by Focus Ireland staff.

*Table 7: Families which secured HHAP tenancies*

No.	Age	Gender	Nationality	S/C	Children	Housing Type at First Contact
1	26-40	F	IRISH	SINGLE	3	PRIVATE RENTED
2	> 40	M	IRISH	COUPLE	3	PRIVATE RENTED
3	18-25	M	EU	COUPLE	7	PRIVATE RENTED
4	> 40	M	NON-EU	COUPLE	3	PRIVATE RENTED
5	> 40	M	NON-EU	COUPLE	1	PRIVATE RENTED
6	> 40	F	NON-EU	SINGLE	2	PRIVATE RENTED

### HOUSEHOLDS WHICH BECAME HOMELESS

Of the 10 respondents who became homeless after first contact with the service and were living in emergency accommodation at the time of the follow up, 9 recalled receiving advice, information and support from Focus Ireland whilst 1 participant felt he received no assistance.

In terms of nationality; 5 respondents were Irish, 4 were from a NON-EU country, whilst 1 participant was from the EU region. All of the respondents have dependent children.

*Table 8: Households who had become homeless over the three months*

No.	Age	Gender	Nationality	S/C	Children	Housing Type at First Contact
1	26-40	M	IRISH	COUPLE	5	PRIVATE RENTED
2	> 40	F	NON-EU	COUPLE	4	PRIVATE RENTED
3	26-40	F	NON-EU	SINGLE	2	PRIVATE RENTED
4	> 40	F	IRISH	SINGLE	4	PRIVATE RENTED
5	> 40	M	IRISH	COUPLE	5	PRIVATE RENTED
6	26-40	F	NON-EU	SINGLE	4	PRIVATE RENTED
7	> 40	F	NON-EU	COUPLE	2	PRIVATE RENTED
8	> 40	F	IRISH	COUPLE	5	PRIVATE RENTED
9	26-40	F	EU	SINGLE	2	PRIVATE RENTED
10	> 40	M	IRISH	SINGLE	3	PRIVATE RENTED

### PERCEIVED IMPACT OF THE SUPPORT SERVICE

The 87 respondents who were residing in private rented accommodation were then asked about their concerns at time of first contact with Focus Ireland. Participant responses to this question could be categorised in to several groupings by the survey administrator as the question was a multi-response item. The most prominent concerns for respondents related to notices of termination (n=50, 57.5%), finding alternative accommodation (n=35, 40.2%), and rent increases (n=35, 40.2%). Further detail is provided in the table and graph below. The categories of landlord selling (n=21, 24.1%) and bank repossession (n=4, 4.6%) are sub-categories of notice of termination but are included to highlight the frequency of these events.

Table 9: Concerns at first contact

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		Frequency	Percent	
	Notice of termination	50	30.9%	57.5%
	>Landlord Selling	21	13.0%	24.1%
	>Bank Repossession	4	2.5%	4.6%
	Rent Increase	35	21.6%	40.2%
	Social Welfare Issues	2	1.2%	2.3%
	Finding Accommodation	35	21.6%	40.2%
	Accessing Rent Supplement	8	4.9%	9.2%
	Rent Arrears/Debt	7	4.3%	8.0%
Total		162	100.0%	186.1%

#### WERE THESE CONCERNS RESOLVED DURING THE COURSE OF THE PILOT PROJECT?

Respondents were asked whether their concerns were resolved since they contacted Focus Ireland.

Overall, 64.6% of respondents reported that their concerns were unresolved. The results of this question largely mirror our experience assisting individuals through Focus Ireland's general Advice & Information services. They also reflect the current difficulties in the housing sector. It is worth noting that where there was not an immediate solution available, staff continued to work towards a resolution outside the timeframe of the pilot.

#### ATTRIBUTION OF OUTCOMES

A key issue in assessing the impact of prevention programmes is the attribution of positive effects across the range of services which households may contact during their crisis.

As one insight into this, the 3-month survey included two questions to explore the subjective experience of customers. Two statements were read out to respondents relating to the extent to which they believed that Focus Ireland helped them to (a) avoid homelessness and (b) to find housing.

Unfortunately both of these statement items had a low response rate (43.5%) due to language barriers (the level of English of many respondents was poor and they could not follow the statement instructions coherently) or due to factors of non-applicability (e.g. a cohort of respondents were neither at risk of homelessness or looking for housing).

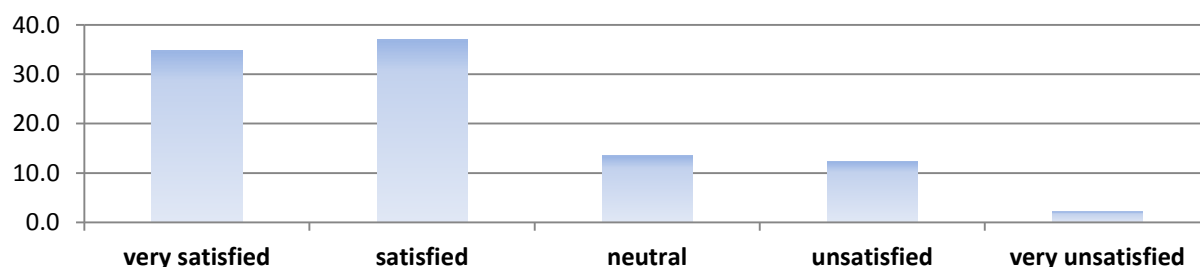
Of the 77 cases where homelessness had been avoided, only 28 responded to the survey question about the role played by Focus Ireland services. 71% (n=20) of the respondents attributed the positive outcome to the Focus Ireland intervention, but the low level of response means this result cannot be relied upon.

Table 10: Attribution of avoidance of homelessness

I was able to avoid homelessness because of the advice from Focus Ireland					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	20	26.0	71.4	71.4
	Neutral	1	1.3	3.6	75.0
	Disagree	7	9.1	25.0	100.0
	Total	28	36.4	100.0	
Missing		99	49	63.6	
Total		77	100.0		

In respect of quality of service, there was a much higher response rate (97%), and participant feedback was generally positive with 64 respondents reporting to be either satisfied (n=33, 37.1%) or very satisfied (n=31, 34.8%) with the assistance provided by Focus Ireland staff. 11 respondents reported an unsatisfactory experience (12.4%), whilst 2 respondents reported a very unsatisfactory experience (2.2%). However, when asked to either agree or disagree with the statement 'I would recommend Focus Ireland to a friend who needed support' 72 respondents (92%) agreed with the statement.

Figure 2: Quality of service (percentage)



Most of the respondents had disengaged from Focus Ireland services. When asked if they were receiving current support from Focus Ireland staff a large majority of respondents reported that they receive no current support (n=81, 89%).

## Detailed Findings of Follow up Survey

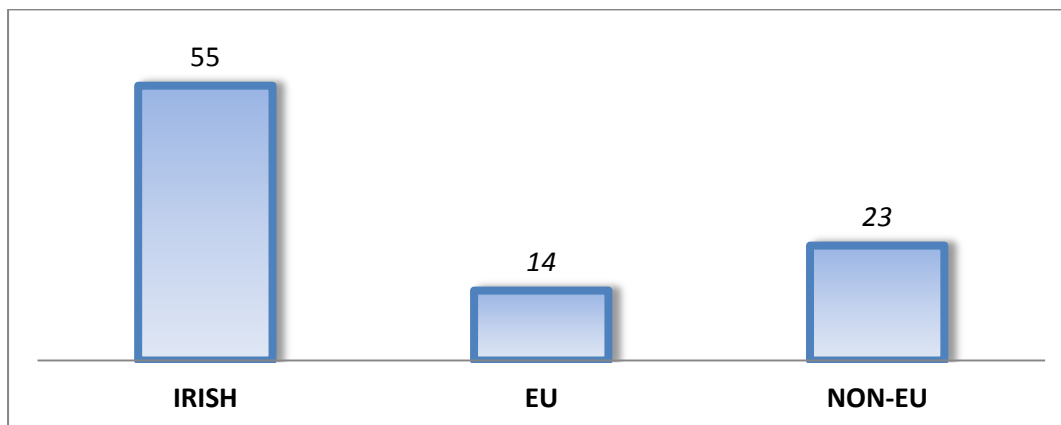
The data below includes all 92 respondents i.e. including both the 87 who were at risk of homelessness at the time of first contact and the 5 who were homeless at that time (3 in emergency accommodation and two living with family and friends).

## NATIONALITY

In terms of nationality, respondents were categorised as either Irish (n=55, 59.8%), EU (n=14, 15.2%) or non-EU (n=23, 25.0%).<sup>11</sup>

The high number of migrant respondents reflects other studies conducted by Focus Ireland in relation to family homelessness, it also reflects other data concerning the number of migrant households living in private rented accommodation and the proportion of migrants in Dublin 15 generally. In telephone surveys of families who presented as homeless during March and June 2016, researchers found that 34% and 51% percent of the respective samples were originally born outside of Ireland (Focus Ireland, 2016a; 2016b).

Figure 3: Nationality (frequency)



## DEMOGRAPHICS

The gender of survey respondents was 55 percent female (n=51) and 45 percent male (n=41). 98 percent of respondents had dependent children (n=90). Of those with dependent children, 45 percent reported as single (n=41) and 53 percent reported as a couple (n=49). The average amount of children per household was 3. Of those parenting alone, women represented the majority (n=32, 78%).

---

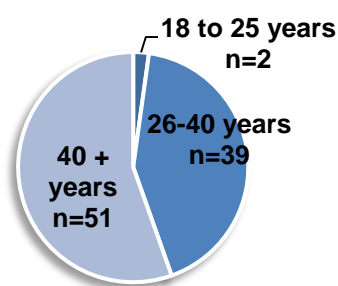
<sup>11</sup> Respondents were asked where they were 'originally from'. It is important to note that many of the non-EU respondents were now Irish citizens. The rationale for distinguishing them from the Irish cohort was to understand whether structural disadvantage or discrimination could play a role in homeless pathways. Several respondents who reported themselves as 'Irish' by nationality had mentioned becoming an Irish citizen relatively recently.

Table 11: Family demographics

	Frequency	Percent
Single, without children	2	2.2
Couple, with children	49	53.2
Single, with children - Male	9	9.8
Single, with children - Female	32	34.8
Total	92	100.0

A majority of respondents were over the age of 40 (n=51, 55.4%). The second largest group were those in the 26-40 age-brackets (n=39, 42.4%). A small number of respondents were in the younger age bracket of 18-25 (n=2, 2.2%) while there were no recorded respondents below the age of eighteen.

Figure 4: Age profile (frequency)



There was a considerable amount of 'non-Irish' respondents. The percentages for both EU (n=14, 15.2%) and non-EU (n=23, 25%) respondents are substantially higher than the national average of 8.3% and 4.4% respectively.<sup>12</sup>

### What impact did the statutory increase in rent supplement have for respondents?

A question was posed to relevant respondents in the private rented sector relating to rent supplement, specifically asking if they were aware that the government increased rent supplement rates in July 2016. Of the relevant respondents just over half (n=37, 50.7%) said they were unaware of the recent increase in the rate of rent supplement. Of those who were aware of the increase (36 respondents) a clear majority (n=29, 67.4%) said that the increase did not help them in meeting the cost of rent.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2016/>

Figure 4: RS Awareness (frequency)

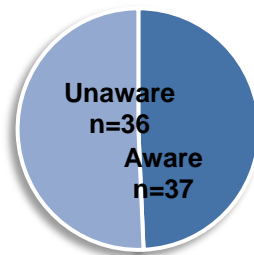
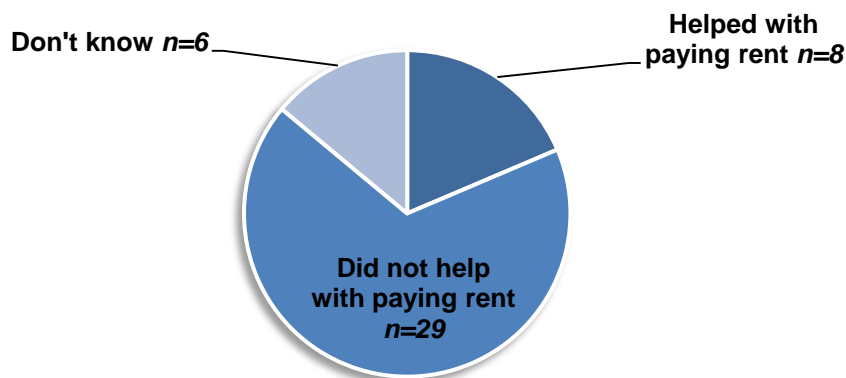


Figure 4a: RS Assistance (frequency)



## Conclusions and Recommendations

A number of elements of the pilot programme proved highly successful in engaging with families which were at risk of homelessness and preventing them becoming homeless. Given the continued large number of families becoming homeless from the private rented sector, there would be real benefits to replicating the campaign in other similar areas with high levels of private rented accommodations e.g. Dublin 22, Dublin 11, Lucan, etc.

The key findings from the campaign and the three-month follow up study include:

- The local Department of Social Protection office mail-out to all families receiving rent supplement in the area, containing an 'unofficial' letter from Focus Ireland, proved to be a highly successful method of engaging with families at risk of homelessness, 75% of whom had not contacted the State prevention service prior to this. Further engagement with the DoSP in similar campaigns would greatly enhance their effectiveness.
- 90% of the families that were at risk of homelessness when they first contacted Focus Ireland still had tenancies 3 months later.

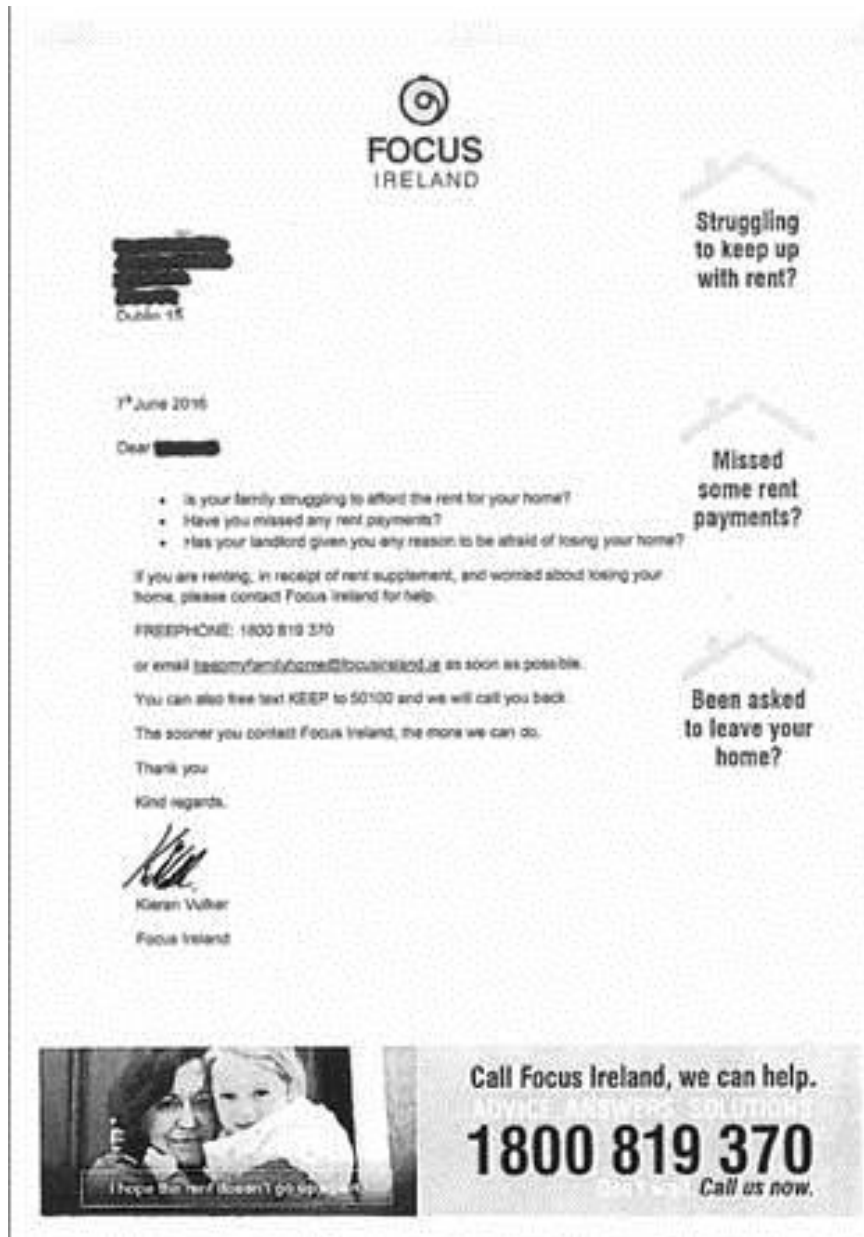
- 17% of the households had averted homelessness by finding alternative accommodation, with the support of Focus Ireland, the local authority, Dublin PlaceFinders and other services. This ‘rapid rehousing’ response to families whose current tenancy cannot be saved through alternative prevention methods is highly effective and should be streamlined for future initiatives.
- The total cost of the five week campaign was €21,708 (Outdoor advertising €13,000; posters €500; direct mail €2,500; staff costs €5,638; Freephone €70). While it is not possible to assess the number of households that would have become homeless without the intervention, at the cost of €1,085 per week to provide emergency accommodation to a family it is likely to be highly cost effective intervention.


The key lessons for improving the effectiveness of future campaigns include:

- Those households which remained in their original homes continued to feel a high level of housing insecurity and many of their original concerns had not been fully resolved. This highlights the need for on-going and re-iterative engagement with at risk households and communities with a high number of such families.
- The significant number of families in which parents had difficulty communicating in English raises a number of issues for future campaigns. Consideration could be given to letters and other engagement materials in different languages. Additional translation support for advice staff should also be considered.
- The services response involving an initial dedicated telephone line and follow up clinics in the local area provided a strong basis for providing effective prevention advice and referral. Some reports of delays in returning calls highlights the need for adequate resources to be allocated given the high level of need identified.
- The age profile of the participants in the 3-month follow up was older than anticipated, with over half being over 40. This does not reflect the profile of the parents in families entering emergency homeless accommodation, and the possibility that the engagement techniques are still failing to reach younger parents needs to be assessed.
- The engagement with the local community organisations was seen as a positive and productive part of the campaign by Focus Ireland. Given the focus of this report on outcomes, local community organisations were not consulted in the evaluation. This report should be presented to local community organisations to get feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of these interactions.
- Collaboration with statutory and voluntary services was crucial to positive outcomes in the pilot, and the collaboration with the DoSP was of central importance. Focus Ireland did not foresee the high number of referrals to Homeless HAP and so did not do sufficient preparatory work with Fingal County Council. The local authority housing Department should be engaged in future programmes at a much earlier stage.



## Appendix 1: Letter sent by Department of Social Protection



  
FOCUS  
IRELAND

[Redacted]  
Dublin 15

7<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Dear [Redacted]

- Is your family struggling to afford the rent for your home?
- Have you missed any rent payments?
- Has your landlord given you any reason to be afraid of losing your home?

If you are renting, in receipt of rent supplement, and worried about losing your home, please contact Focus Ireland for help.

FREEPHONE: 1800 819 370


or email [socialfamilyhome@focusireland.ie](mailto:socialfamilyhome@focusireland.ie) as soon as possible.

You can also free text KEEP to 50100 and we will call you back.

The sooner you contact Focus Ireland, the more we can do.

Thank you


Kind regards,

  
Kieran Walker  
Focus Ireland

Struggling to keep up with rent?

Missed some rent payments?

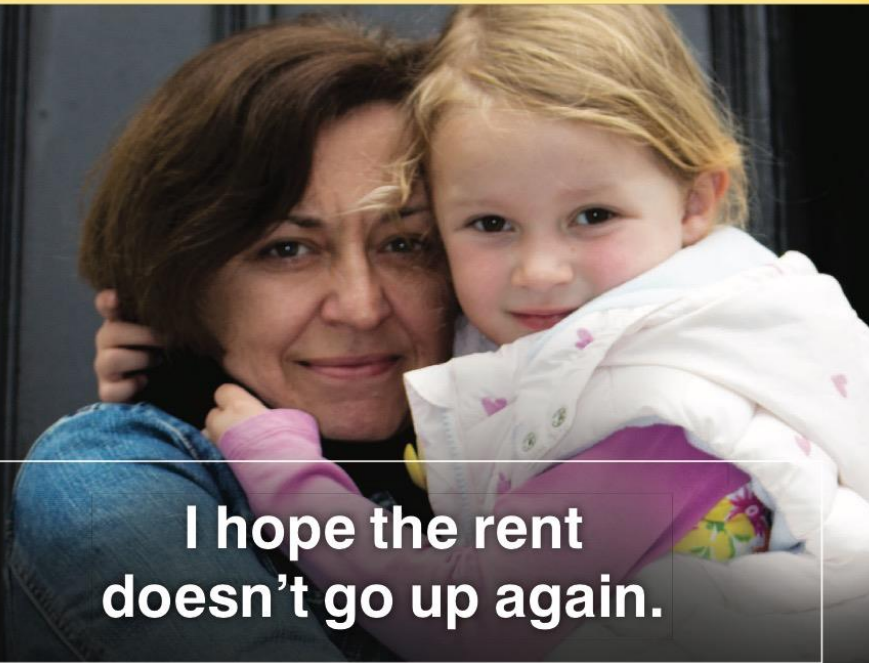
Been asked to leave your home?

  
I hope the rent doesn't go up.

Call Focus Ireland, we can help.  
**1800 819 370**  
Call us now.



*This project was supported under a three year strategic partnership between Focus Ireland and Bord Gáis Energy aimed at helping to prevent family homelessness.*



I hope the rent  
doesn't go up again.

**IF YOU'RE  
WORRIED ABOUT  
YOUR FAMILY HOME  
CALL US  
WE CAN HELP**

**FREEPHONE:**

**1800 819 370**

**ADVICE. ANSWERS. SOLUTIONS.**



**FOCUS  
IRELAND**

PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY



**Focus Ireland  
Head Office**  
9-12 High Street  
Christchurch  
Dublin 8

Tel 01 881 5900  
LoCall 1850 204 205  
Fax 01 881 5950  
Email [info@focusireland.ie](mailto:info@focusireland.ie)  
[focusireland.ie](http://focusireland.ie)

Registered charity  
CHY 7220

**Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.**

[focusireland.ie](http://focusireland.ie)

**FOCUS**  
Ireland