



Focus Ireland 2016 Christmas FM Campaign Report

General Info

Focus Ireland supported a record number of 14,000 people in 2017 who were homeless or at risk. There were 7,148 people homeless at the end of 2016. Every 1 in three people homeless in Ireland is a child.

However, thanks to the support of Christmas FM listeners who raised €360,000 in 2016, the men and women working for Focus Ireland helped over 1,000 households to move on from homelessness across in Dublin, Kildare, Waterford, Carlow, Tipperary, Kilkenny, Clare, Limerick, Cork, Sligo and Monaghan in 2017. This is really life changing as all these families and children now have a place to call home and can move on in life.

Focus Ireland helps families through a range of supports which include providing essential advice and information to families that are homeless or worried about becoming homeless, through our Family Homeless Action Team who work with families in crisis who need emergency accommodation or who are living in hubs and hotels, and through the provision of transitional and long term housing and support.

No matter what level or kind of support is needed behind every number is a human story or stories; a man, a woman, a family who are now in a home – or never even became homeless in the first place because of the work of Focus Ireland. Your support really does make a huge difference to the lives of those being helped by Focus Ireland. Read some of Focus Ireland's customer stories below.

Case Studies

1. Laura Mum with two children



We worked with a family, Mum Laura is a well-educated gentle woman, quiet in nature, thoughtful with her two children, Ella and Jim. They had come from their own home, a two income family and then, a marital breakup, no job, no rent. Forced into homelessness.

Laura was walking with both children piled into a buggy, for an hour and a half every day to make sure her son accessed school. Homelessness was taking a huge toll on her both mentally and physically. We were able to allocate her a case manager and offer her both emotional and practical support to keep her going. We helped her to get all her documentation together and in order. We arranged some therapeutic support for her and her children. We applied for free travel for her and the children to be able to use public transport to get to school. We supported her in finding a childcare place for her younger child, which would give this child time away from the situation, and would give mum some much needed time also to allow her to attend meetings to help her to progress out of homelessness. We gave her time and space to talk about how she was feeling. Every problem that arose, we supported her with and helped her to work it out. We advocated, made phone calls and attended meetings with her until she got the one phone call that she had been waiting for, an offer of a house.

And now, there is a home where a little girl holds tea parties with her teddies and tells her brother that today she is a mermaid butterfly....and where her brother makes super contraptions from tape, playdoh and imagination, weaving a future as an astronaut, a poet, an engineer and just a boy.

Sharon – Mum with four children



I worked with a mother of four children who had entered homeless services following a stay in a women's refuge. The refuge had to ask her to leave as they could only accommodate her for a short period of time. When I began working with this lady she had no idea how to navigate the various services, her housing application was incomplete and her social welfare payments were stopped because she didn't know she had to notify a change of address. She was incredibly stressed and couldn't believe she had ended up in this situation. I supported her with all these administrative processes to ensure that housing options would then open up to her, and that she would her social welfare payments re-established. Once this paperwork was sorted, we were able to look at housing options for her. We started making connections with landlords and arranged viewings. She attended four viewings however was not chosen by the landlords. She had begun to give up hope and I had to work intensively with her to keep her motivated, and to coach her for subsequent viewings to maximise her chances. On her fifth viewing she was successful in securing a tenancy. Last month this lady contacted me to say that she had been in this tenancy for a year. She told me that her children have never been happier and she was now studying to be a primary school teacher. She said that if it wasn't for the help and support of Focus Ireland she didn't know what she would have done.

Anne – Mum with three children.



Last year I worked with a family who had become homeless after experiencing severe domestic violence. Mum, Anne, was determined to provide a safe home for her daughters. Anne had battled with addiction many years ago but she had overcome it before her youngest two were born. She had an elder daughter who had gone to live with relatives during this time. As we explored her housing options together it became apparent that the domestic violence she had experienced over a long period of time had severely knocked her confidence to the extent that she struggled with even the thoughts of managing her own household. She had become isolated also during this abusive timeframe, and as a result did not have a support network. I provided her with lots of emotional support, building on her strengths of what she could do rather than focusing on what she couldn't do. I arranged access for some Family Fun days to enable the family to experience fun together, and to begin creating new memories. I also set the wheels in motion for her to begin counselling, to slowly pick apart and tackle the pain that was deep down inside her. I ensured that the children were receiving all the support that they needed. Simultaneously, a vacancy became available in a Focus Ireland long term supported housing project and I filled in the application form with Anne. Following interview, the family were offered a tenancy. Before moving into their new home I advocated that the eldest child would be added to the family's housing application, meaning that when she moved into that home it was with all of her children. This was something that both mum and daughter wanted, and this was supported by the social workers involved and the extended family. I supported the family to pack up and organized a taxi to move them and their belongings into their new home. I helped her in getting her documentation together to apply for funding to kit out the house with the various bits and pieces that she needed, as she had come from a hotel room, and had nothing but a few bags of clothes. We did a comprehensive handover with her new housing

support worker, and in conjunction with Anne, we identified the areas where she wanted and needed support. I visited the family again shortly after they moved in. I sat in the kitchen having a cup of tea with Anne and listened to her talk about how happy she was to have all her daughters with her again under one roof, in a safe home.

Story 4:

Louise and John – couple with five children



This family have been homeless since August 2017, and had previously accessed homeless services in 2015 and 2016. The family were linking in for support with accessing emergency accommodation as there were on going issues with the local authority accepting this family as homeless and they were having to pursue legal support regarding this also at this time. The family reported that on 3 occasions when accommodation could not be sourced that they slept in their car.

The eldest child has a medical condition and attends Crumlin hospital for treatment. She also takes daily medication and mum reports that as her daughter is susceptible to infections which can have severe consequences, she is not able to attend school. She has not attended school since primary.

The other children were not attending school either due to the family moving around each night. We supported them to register with a primary school in the city centre which would be more easily accessible for them, and supported them in getting uniforms and the necessary supplies. We helped the family to make a plan to enable them to get the children to school everyday. This would give the

parents more time to attend meetings in trying to resolve their current crisis. It would also give the children time away from the stress.

The children were often asleep in their car before accommodation was sourced, and then after a drive to their accommodation for the night, they were then woken up to get into a new bed, and new environment, often travelling long distances back and forth. It was also causing them significant difficulty at school, leaving at 7am, attending without breakfast, and tired.

The three youngest children, all attending primary school, are all attaining levels in school well below their peers having missed significant time in school in previous years, requiring a great deal of individual support to help them to bridge the gap.

The youngest son, in 6th class struggles to settle into class. The school report his behaviour as 'challenging and difficult', often because he is tired or distressed, and he is acutely aware of the family's circumstances.

The children need consistency, routine and structure. Despite the family's living situation, the children's attendance at school was excellent, only missing one day. Aside from the challenges and difficulty with school, the lack of a stable home was impacting in a number of other ways. The children do not have friends to play with after school, nor could they join sports clubs or afterschool groups, or sit down to a family dinner.

The eldest daughter would like to be a hairdresser. The two boys would like to be a Garda, and the younger girls just want to join dancing. The eldest boy is a keen boxer, and has boxed at competitive levels. He wanted most to be able to train, but again this was not something the family could manage as the priority was having somewhere to stay on a nightly basis.

From my first meeting with this family, mum and dad presented as loving parents, who clearly wanted the best for their children, and agreed to make every effort to engage with me as a Child Support Worker.

They spoke adoringly about their 5 children, describing each as a unique individual, with their own specific needs and interests.

Appointments were set up, with a view to meeting with the children. Over the course of a few weeks, it became apparent that despite their need and want for support, the family's situation proved difficult to keep appointments. The immediate priority for this family was to source stable accommodation.

I did manage to meet with the children. The older children were slower to engage, and told me that everyone asks them questions but no one ever helps them, but gradually they began to open up a little.

Christmas proved particularly difficult for the family, where they had to leave their accommodation in the morning, and spend all day together in their car. We organised a day out at the pantomime over Christmas which the children thoroughly enjoyed, and they attended a Christmas party in Croke Park which we organised, where they got to visit Santa. Vouchers for Jump Zone were also

given so they could have another day out over Christmas. The team continued to advocate and work on their case, so that housing options could become available to them.

Unfortunately, the living situation became too much for the youngest boy, age 12years, and he tried to take his own life. He was admitted to Temple Street Children's Hospital. I went to the hospital to support the family who were understandably very distressed. The medical social worker spoke with me and said they could not allow him to go home, as the family did not have a stable address source a stable booking at the very least for this family as a matter of urgency. Following a number of emails and calls a stable more booking was confirmed for the family and we could now look at various housing options for them. Their son was discharged and we ensured there was referral made to the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services. We referred the family to a supported housing project and I attended with the family in a support role. The family were successful in their interview, and moved into this supported housing project the following day.

I spoke with mum following their move and arranged to call out to visit the family, and do a closing piece.

The family appeared very settled. Mum was cooking dinner, something she had been unable to do, the youngest child was in her pyjamas, and told me she was having a 'jammie day'. There were clothes on the line, the fire was lighting, and the family said they were so happy in their new home. Mum spoke about sitting down together as a family, doing a grocery shop, the school and bedtime routine, and the classes they have planned in the supported housing project, including cooking, and afterschool. Dad spoke about the warmth in the house, and the two youngest girls showed me the posters they had put up in their bedroom. They spoke about having their own beds, and having their toys to play with.

Aside from the stability this home has offered, the family are now receiving support around developing skills, including budgeting, literacy, and cooking. The children are receiving support with homework, and hobbies. Home schooling is being sourced for their eldest daughter, and their son is attending his sessions weekly.

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