Exploring Own-Door Models of Emergency Accommodation for Homeless Families in Ireland

A Comparative Case Study of Four Models

Neil Haran and Seán Ó Siochrú
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FOCUS
Ireland

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Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.

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Foreword

For most of the 35 years since Focus Ireland was established, family homelessness represented only a small part of Ireland's homelessness problem, but it has always been central to the organisation's work. The main pillars of our response have always been to work with families to prevent them becoming homeless in the first place and, if that proves impossible, to assist them into new stable homes as quickly as possible. But these responses are often not sufficient, and the difficult problem of how to accommodate families while they are homeless for long periods has repeatedly arisen over many years.

During the first family homelessness crisis (1998–2001), local authorities started accommodating families in 'B&Bs' with minimal facilities. Initially this was as an 'emergency response' but it soon became the standard way of dealing with homeless families. Focus Ireland responded by developing a model of support for homeless families in B&Bs, establishing childcare centres and by publishing research on the extent of family homelessness and its impact on mental health[1].

Ten years later, many of these families were still living in the 'emergency response' of B&Bs and lodging houses, often with complex social problems. In 2011, Focus Ireland, in collaboration with the Department of Environment and the Homeless Agency[2], launched Ireland's first 'Social Impact Bond' initiative to support families out of homelessness. The model piloted – and proved the effectiveness of – a model of case management, involving a multi-discipline team with designated child support workers, accommodation finders and settlement support. By the time the most recent crisis emerged, all but five of these 250 families with complex needs had been supported out of homelessness.

The crisis which emerged from 2014, proved to be much greater than the earlier one, with the number of families becoming homeless each month rising from 8 per month in 2013 to 80 per month four years later, with children accounting for more than one in three people in emergency accommodation.

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1 "The mental and physical health and well-being of homeless families living in Focus Point's Transitional Housing" (1999) and "Focusing on B&Bs: The unacceptable growth of emergency B&B Placement in Dublin" (2000).
2 Now the 'Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage' and the 'Dublin Region Homeless Executive'.

The number of families becoming homeless in the following years far exceeded any expectations or preparations, and local authorities and homeless organisations, particularly in Dublin, were involved in a nightly struggle to ensure that families were provided with any shelter at all. During this period families were regularly ferried by taxi late at night to hotels many miles from Dublin, and there were a number of reports of families having to sleep in Garda stations.

Under this pressure, local authorities constructed from virtually nothing a very substantial emergency homeless service for families. Rebuilding Ireland's commitment to end the use of hotels for emergency accommodation eventually led to the establishment of a new form of designed emergency accommodation for families – 'Family Hubs'.

Focus Ireland has made the case, on the basis of our own experience and on international evidence, that there should be much greater emphasis on the multi-disciplinary supports available to families rather than just the physical structure of the emergency accommodation provided. We argued that policy during this period prioritised commissioning ever greater amounts of emergency accommodation rather than investing in prevention, case management, maximising exits – or building more homes. But we also recognise the scale of the daily challenge which was faced and the innovation and commitment from local authority staff that went into delivering the crisis response that families needed.

Since 2019, even before the Coronavirus pandemic, the rise in family homelessness appears to have declined, though settling at a very high level. This should not, in the words of the Minister for Housing, Darragh O'Brien, "give rise to complacency"[3]. But it should give rise to an opportunity for reflection and setting of new goals.

Part of that reflection must involve a review of the measures we took in the depths of the crisis to identify which of them were more successful and which should be discontinued. The purpose of such a review is not to second guess the decisions which were made when over a 100 children needed a roof over their heads in winter, but to plot out where we go from here if we are to bring the nightmare of family homelessness to an end.

Too much of the debate has been oversimplified into an argument 'for or against' Family Hubs or a rationale for Hubs that goes no further than the justifiable claim that they are 'better than hotels'. This debate does not fairly reflect the range of different responses that have been put in place and it does not reflect the expectations the public should have for such a substantial investment of resources[4]. Most importantly it does not reflect the needs of the families and what we know is needed to help change their lives.

This report represents a contribution to changing the debate away from 'for or against' towards a collaborative enquiry into what has worked and what we should invest to do more of. It takes a critical eye to four services in which Focus Ireland, in partnership with local authorities and others, provides emergency accommodation and works with families to support them out of homelessness. It reveals real challenges and gives voice to the understandable frustrations of the families themselves. But it also demonstrates real commitment and innovation.

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3   https://www.fiannafail.ie/ending-child-homelessness-must-remain-a-key-priority-obrien/
4   See 'Focus on Homelessness Vol. 2 (2020)' for discussion on expenditure on homeless services
    https://bit.ly/2WpMlGE

Mike Allen
Director of Advocacy, Focus Ireland

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> Staff of Focus Ireland, both at national and project levels, particularly the project managers and service staff across each of the models reviewed in the study

> Representatives of each of the local authorities and partner agencies that work alongside Focus Ireland in the implementation of the emergency accommodation models reviewed in this research

> Those from local authority and NGO backgrounds who participated in a roundtable discussion, designed to shape the principal policy and practice implications outlined in this document

> The Director of the Dublin Regional Housing Executive who commented on a briefing paper and whose input contributed to this research report

> Representatives from 21 families that had experience of the emergency accommodation models reviewed in this research and whose observations act as critical informants of this document.

About the Authors

Seán Ó Siochrú is a sociologist with over 30 years' experience, dividing his work between Ireland and over 50 countries worldwide, in research, programme and strategy management and design, and capacity building. He is a founder of Nexus Research Cooperative which over its 25 years, has engaged with many studies of homeless issues.

Neil Haran is a freelance research consultant with extensive social sector experience, having engaged deeply over the past 30 years with the public service, education, not-for-profit, and social policy sectors – both in Ireland and overseas. He has a strong track record in undertaking research, evaluation, community-based consultation and strategic planning.

Seán and Neil are regular research collaborators. Collaboration included a 2017 research project on behalf of Focus Ireland into Effective Strategies in the Prevention of Family Homelessness[5].

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5   https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Haran-and-OShiochru-2017-Keeping-a-Home-Full-Report.pdf

Abbreviations

AHB	Approved Housing Body
B&B	Bed & Breakfast
CAS	Capital Assistance Scheme
CBL	Choice-based letting
CRFI	Childers Road Family Initiative
EU	European Union
HAP	Housing Assistance Payment
HAT	Homeless Action Team
HSE	Health Service Executive
LCCC	Limerick City and County Council
NAMA	National Asset Management Agency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PASS	Pathway Accommodation & Support System
PEA	Private Emergency Accommodation
RAS	Rental Accommodation Scheme
SDCC	South Dublin County Council
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SLÍ	Support to Live Independently scheme
SRM	Social Rental Model
TH	Transitional Housing
WCCC	Waterford City & County Council
WEFS	WCCC/Focus Ireland Emergency Family Service
WIHS	Waterford Integrated Homeless Services

1. Introduction

This document comprises the report of a 2020 study into four models of emergency accommodation for homeless families that currently operate in various contexts across the country. The models in question are:

> the Childers Road Family Initiative in Limerick City
> the Social Rental Model, also operational in Limerick City
> the Tallaght Cross Transitional Housing Initiative in Dublin 24
> the WCCC/Focus Ireland Emergency Family Service in Waterford City and County

1.1   Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to consider the potential merits of these emergency accommodation models, particularly when compared with the principal State emergency accommodation responses for homeless families, namely private hotels and B&Bs[6] and communal family hubs. Specifically, the Terms of Reference for the study highlighted three primary areas of concern as follows:

> to describe other models of emergency accommodation for homeless families in the current crisis beyond a simple comparison between hotels and family hubs
> to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the different models in respect of family wellbeing during homelessness and any impact on exits from homelessness
> to promote a more informed discussion and debate on how best to meet the emergency accommodation needs of families in crisis, with a view to reducing the extent and duration of the impact of homelessness on family life

1.2   Focus Ireland

Focus Ireland is a voluntary organisation that has been working to prevent and respond to homelessness in Ireland for over thirty years. Driven by the fundamental belief that the existence of homelessness is wrong, the organisation works with individuals and families who are either homeless or at risk of losing their homes in a variety of locations across the country. Its services include advice and information; tenancy support and sustainment; and

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6   Also referred to as Private Emergency Accommodation in this document.

emergency, transitional and long-term accommodation. The organisation also undertakes a substantial advocacy and research function, seeking to increase understanding of homelessness and advocating for more effective policy solutions to the issue nationally.

This study forms part of the organisation's advocacy and research function. The study was enabled with support from The Housing Agency, a state agency under the aegis of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage[7], focused on supporting local authorities, the Department and AHBs in the delivery of housing and housing services.

1.3   The Context for this Study

Ireland has witnessed a substantial surge in the number of individuals and families entering homelessness in recent years, though reductions have been recorded throughout 2020, influenced by a rent freeze and moratorium on evictions enacted because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Figures from August 2020[8] indicate that:

› 8,702 individuals were identified as homeless and relying on emergency homeless accommodation compared with, for example, a total of 3,258 in July 2014
› of that number, 2,620 or almost one in three, homeless individuals were children
› 1,120 families were classified as homeless, of which 76% were located in the greater Dublin region
› the total number of homeless families in Ireland was 3.25 times higher than the number of families recorded as homeless in July 2014, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Homeless Families in Ireland, July 2014 to August 2020
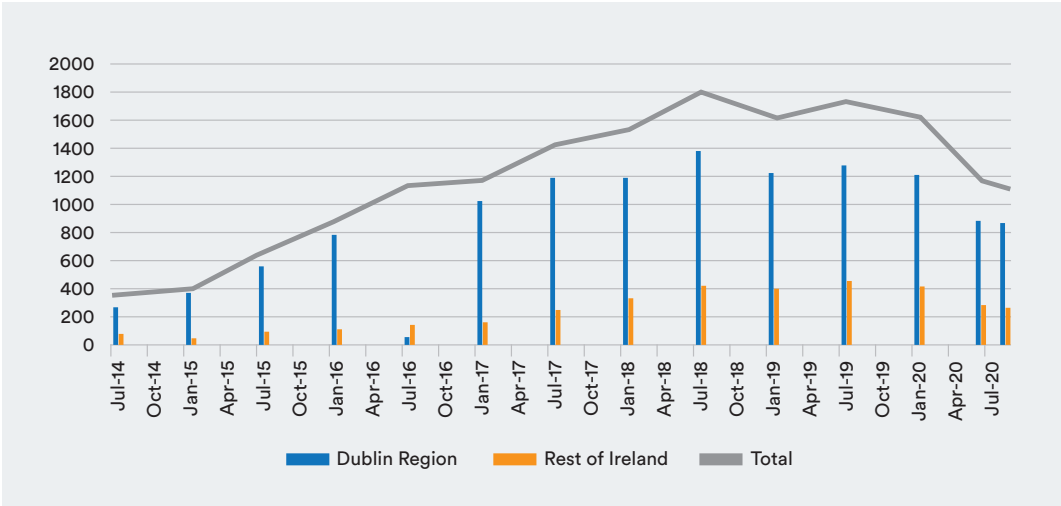
The substantial year-on-year increases in homelessness outlined above have been matched by ongoing increases in public expenditure to address this national crisis. O' Sullivan and Musafiri (2020), for example, highlight a 400% increase in public expenditure to tackle

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7   Previously known as the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.
8   https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/homeless_report_-_august_2020.pdf, accessed on 27th October, 2020.

homelessness between 2013 and 2019[9]. The provision of emergency accommodation accounted for a very substantial portion of that spend: 53% of all expenditure in 2013 rising to 83% in 2019, accounting for nearly three-quarters of all homeless-related expenditure in the seven-year period.

Two primary interventions have characterised the State's emergency accommodation responses for families that have entered homelessness. The most significant of these has involved the placement of homeless families in private accommodation, namely hotels and B&Bs, until such time as families can secure more permanent accommodation. The State's reliance on hotel and B&B accommodation for homeless families over the years has emerged as an expedient solution, stemming primarily from substantial increases in the number of families entering homelessness across the country, particularly in the Dublin region, and from the absence of available, relevant social housing stock to meet the accommodation needs of those families.

Since March 2017, the State has also made significant investments in communal-hub facilities: purpose-built or adapted co-living centres which, in addition to accommodation, provide homeless families with shared cooking and laundry facilities, on-site support workers and, in some cases, play and homework facilities for children. The State has viewed these hubs as an integral feature of its policy for accommodating homeless families and an important means of reducing State reliance on PEA.[10]

Much of the public narrative therefore centres on these two approaches to emergency accommodation for homeless families and, as will be highlighted in later sections of this report, both approaches have been the subject of considerable critique.

Simultaneously, local authorities and NGOs across the country have developed alternative emergency accommodation models: locally-developed models that have emerged as local responses to local contexts relevant to family homelessness. As noted earlier, the purpose of this study has been to consider the potential merits of four of these emergency accommodation models, particularly when compared with the accommodation of families in PEA and communal family hubs.

The data on homelessness outlined in the previous page reflect the number of individuals and families in:

› PEA: including hotels, B&Bs & other residential facilities used on an emergency basis
› Supported Temporary Accommodation: including hostels with onsite professional support
› Temporary Emergency Accommodation: with no (or minimal) support

An unspecified number of families who are homeless and placed in 'own-door' units, that is, self-contained accommodation, is not included in these figures. This clarification is important given that each of the four models of emergency accommodation reviewed in this study provide self-contained, own-door accommodation to families.

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9 While public expenditure to tackle homelessness stood at nearly €54.9 million in 2013, the total for 2019 was €226.2 million.
10 Holland, K. (2019) *It's our fourth homeless Christmas, our third in a 'family hub*. No Child 2020: Irish Times, accessible https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/it-s-our-fourth-homeless-christmas-our-third-in-a-family-hub-1.4116749

1.4 Report Structure

The remainder of this report is presented as follows:

Section 2 of the report presents a short overview of the methodology employed in undertaking this research and outlines how the principal conclusions of this research report were reached.

Section 3 conducts an examination of literature pertaining to emergency accommodation for homeless families from Irish, European and American perspectives. It sets out to offer context to this research project, locating the four models under review within a broader framework of national and international policy and practice.

Section 4 presents case studies of each of the individual models reviewed in this research and is by extension, the most substantial section of the report.

Section 5 examines the unique features of the accommodation models described in Section 4 while also considering their shared strengths and challenges under a range of subheadings: the living conditions they offer; their potential to reduce the impact of homelessness experienced by families; their capacity to reduce the duration of family homelessness; and their cost-effectiveness.

Key conclusions are drawn, with a series of practice and policy implications considered in relation to emergency accommodation for homeless families in *Section 6*. Particular attention is devoted to considering the role of emergency accommodation in firstly, reducing the impact of homelessness on family life and secondly, reducing the duration of homelessness experienced by families. The section ends with some concluding remarks, drawing this document to a close.

2. Methodology

2.1 Comparative Case Studies

The purpose of this review exercise was to examine and consider the potential merits of models of emergency accommodation for homeless families operating in various contexts across Ireland, models other than communal family hubs and private hotels/B&Bs. The merits of the specified models were to be considered under a variety of key indicators, namely:

> the living conditions facilitated by the named models
> the capacity of the individual models to reduce the impact of homelessness on families whilst homeless, most particularly in areas such as family and child wellbeing, including child development, family autonomy, and family functioning
> the capacity of accommodation models to expedite families' exit from homelessness
> cost-effectiveness when considered against available data on the cost implications of models such as family hubs and private hotels/B&Bs

The remit of the review also included examining the challenges of implementing the models with a view to identifying a series of recommendations which would be of relevance to the homelessness sector.

Against this backdrop, the Terms of Reference for the study suggested that the review be undertaken by employing a comparative case-study approach. This enabled recognition of local contexts and variations of each model, while also offering comparison with PEA and congregate family hub accommodation models.

2.2 Mixed Methods Approach with Qualitative Emphasis

The emphasis on the development and presentation of a series of comparative case studies highlighted the need to adopt a mixed-methods research approach, including a review of national and international literature, an analysis of project-related documentation for each of the four models and a series of interviews with relevant stakeholders. It was understood that *primary attention* within the review would be devoted to qualitative engagement with relevant stakeholders across the four specific emergency-accommodation models, inclusive of engagements with Focus Ireland services staff, representatives of Focus Ireland's project partners, and, where possible, families.

A primary concern of the research was to deepen understanding of the factors that enabled positive impacts on families in emergency accommodation. The emphasis on a qualitative consultative research approach was therefore considered key in tapping into the knowledge, experiences and insights of key stakeholders involved in designing, developing and delivering models of provision. It was also critically important in engaging the insights of families who had experienced the services and supports of those models.

2.3   Research Phases & Activities

The research was delivered over three phases, comprising a preparatory phase; a consultation phase and an analysis and report-writing phase. It is worth noting that the consultation phase was significantly delayed by the public health measures enacted as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and consultations, which had originally been envisaged as being conducted face-to-face, ended up being undertaken remotely. Conducting consultations remotely, however, had no adverse impact on the quality of information secured.

2.3.1   Preparatory Phase

The preparatory phase involved review and analysis of national and international literature pertaining to emergency accommodation for homeless families. This review of literature was undertaken to offer context to the research project and to locate the four models under review within a broader framework of emergency accommodation provision. A number of Irish sources are quoted, offering critique of both PEA and family hubs as emergency accommodation responses. The international literature referenced is drawn primarily from European and US sources, and offers insight into varied understandings of, rationales for, and approaches to emergency accommodation for families. Section 3 below identifies the key conclusions from the review of literature.

Administrative documentation was also gathered and examined during this phase to deepen understanding of the models under review. Narrative on the nature of provision was made available to the researchers by Focus Ireland along with service statistics relating to families accessing and later exiting accommodation in each of the models selected for review.

Informed by the objectives of the study and building on the contextual information referred to above, the preparatory phase also involved the preparation of two frameworks to guide subsequent consultations with stakeholders. The first of these pertained to consultations with local staff representatives of Focus Ireland and other project partners involved in the design and delivery of individual models, while the second pertained to consultations with families who had experience of being accommodated in those models. Both frameworks are appended to this document as Annex I and Annex II respectively.

2.3.2 Consultation Phase

Phase 2 involved conducting structured interviews with a range of stakeholders from across each of the four models and constituted the most significant phase of the research. As outlined above, interviews were undertaken with local services staff and management of Focus Ireland, representatives of agencies partnering with Focus Ireland on the various models and families who had lived experience of each of the models under review. Interviews were informed by the objectives of the study and were guided by the relevant consultation frameworks mentioned above.

An overview of the number of consultations undertaken with each of these interest groups is presented by project location in Table 1 below. The numbers of interviews undertaken in each location varied, reflecting the different partnerships involved in individual accommodation models. They also reflected some of the challenges faced by the study in accessing and interviewing certain partner agencies and families who had experienced the support of each of the accommodation models[11].

Table 1: Overview of Consultation Interviews undertaken by Interest Group

	Childers Road Family Initiative	Social Rental Model, Limerick	Tallaght Cross Transitional Housing Initiative	Waterford Local Authority Transitional Housing Initiative	Total
Focus Ireland Services Staff & Management	5	5[8]	4	2	16
Partner Agencies	2	2[9]	1[10]	4	9
Families	9	5	4	3	21
Total	**16**	**12**	**9**	**9**	**46**

Interviews with Focus Ireland Staff Members and Representatives of Partner Agencies

Interviews with staff members of Focus Ireland and partner agencies centred on the following:

› generating understanding of the background and context to the design and development of each of the models under review

› examining the nature of accommodation and case management supports provided to families in each model

› investigating the strengths and challenges associated with each model

› comparing selected models with communal family hubs and PEA

› analysing the costs associated with delivering each model

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11 See section on Strengths and Limitations of the methodology below.

12   Two of whom were also interviewed in respect of CRFI.

13 Both of whom were also interviewed in respect of CRFI.

14 Túath provided a written response from several staff members to questions put to them.

Interviews with Focus Ireland staff members and representatives of partner agencies in most cases preceded interviews with family representatives and offered additional context to the consultations with families which ensued.

Interviews with Families

The research team set an initial target of interviewing between ten and twelve families in each of the four project locations and, to ensure the application of ethical procedures in the research, sought the assistance of Focus Ireland service staff in accessing family participation. It had been initially hoped that two out of every three families engaged in the consultation would have exited their respective model of emergency accommodation and moved on to more stable housing while the remainder would comprise families still accommodated in the emergency model.

Practically, these targets proved difficult to achieve and the number of family interviews outlined in the table above reflects what was possible across each of the individual locations and accommodation models. Locally-based Focus Ireland staff struggled to secure the targeted numbers of family participants in almost all of the project locations. It was noted that, once families had moved on from their emergency accommodation, many simply wanted to get on with their lives and therefore did not maintain contact with Focus Ireland beyond the period of their involvement in emergency accommodation.

Even in cases where families had agreed to be interviewed, follow-up by the research team did not always result in family interviews being completed. For example, seven families who had experience of being accommodated in Tallaght Cross agreed to participate in the study. Yet, in spite of repeated efforts to complete all seven interviews, a total of four family interviews was ultimately undertaken.

Family interviews were conducted with the head of household, that is, the primary family contact with Focus Ireland. Interviews typically lasted between thirty to forty-five minutes and covered the following key topics:

› gathering a family profile
› understanding the family's experience of entering homelessness and its impact on the family
› examination of the family's experience of emergency accommodation, including the model under review and other forms of emergency accommodation
› examining the impact of emergency accommodation on family functioning and the family's capacity to exit homelessness
› where relevant, understanding how and when the family had exited homelessness and the family's current accommodation status

Participating families were provided with a small retail voucher as an acknowledgement for contributing their time and sharing their respective stories with the study.

Of the 21 family representatives interviewed as part of this research the following should be noted:

> Gender of family interviewees: Female, 20 (95%); Male 1 (5%)
> Age profile: Under 25 years, 1 (5%); 26-35, 11 (52%); 36-45, 7 (33%); 46-55, 1 (5%); No response, 1 (5%)
> Family status: Two parents, 10 (48%); Parenting alone, 11 (52%)
> Number of dependents: 2 children or fewer, 12 (57%); 3 or more children, 9 (43%)
> Nationality: Irish National, 17 (81%); EU citizen, 2 (10%); Non-EU citizen, 2 (10%)
> Principal Income Source: Working P/T, 3 (14%); Partner Working P/T, 1 (5%); Partner Working F/T, 3 (5%); Social Welfare, 11 (52%); No response, 2 (14%)
> Duration of family homelessness: Up to 12 months, 4 (19%); 13-24 months, 3 (14%); 24-36 months, 6 (29%); 36 months+, 8 (38%)
> Duration of family stay in transitional accommodation model: Up to 3 months, 3 (14%); 4-6 months, 3 (14%); 7-12 months, 4 (19%); 13-25 months, 5 (24%); 25 months+, 6 (29%)

A detailed profile of family interviewees, including a breakdown by project location, is appended to this document as Annex III.

2.3.3 Analysis and Report-Writing Phase

Upon completion of the stakeholder consultation phase, the research team reviewed and analysed all data collected across research activities. A thematic analysis approach was applied to the analysis of the data, and to identifying the priority conclusions and recommendations that emerge in this report. All themes emerging in this report were examined and analysed to ensure that their subsequent presentation gave an accurate reflection of the data gathered and to ensure their relevance to the overall research purpose outlined in Section 1 of the report.

The report was initially produced in draft format and shared for comment with representatives of both Focus Ireland and the Housing Agency. A briefing paper was also prepared, focused on outlining the principal conclusions of this research process and detailing the principal practice and policy implications emerging.

Thereafter, it was agreed to host an online roundtable discussion in early October to review and comment on the content of the briefing paper. Invitees to the roundtable event included representatives from Limerick, South Dublin and Waterford Local Authorities, representatives of Tusla and the Ombudsman for Children, and regional managers of Focus Ireland involved in some of the models under review in this study (see Annex IV for further details). The core findings of the research were interrogated with participants during the discussion. A subsequent interview was held with the Director of the Dublin Regional Housing Executive and the outcome of both this interview and the roundtable discussion led to a series of final edits to this research report.

2.4 Ethics

In undertaking this study, the research team committed to ensuring the highest level of research ethics in its engagement with all research participants, particularly participating families. Central to this commitment was the research team's adherence to the Ethical Protocol of Focus Ireland, ensuring that all research engagements were underpinned by the following principles:

> Informed consent
> Privacy
> Confidentiality
> Fairness and equity
> Avoidance, prevention or minimisation of harm to others
> Professional competence
> Integrity
> Respect for human rights, diversity and equality
> Social responsibility

Participants were advised before all interviews that they were under no obligation to participate in the study and that they could withdraw from the process at any time. Their consent to taking part in the interviews was sought after the purpose of the research was fully explained to them and after they were informed of what would happen to the information they provided. Procedures for recording interviews were also agreed with participants prior to the commencement of interviews. Only issues of relevance to the research were explored during interviews and the anonymity of participants has been protected.

2.5 Strengths & Limitations of Methodology

There were a number of clear methodological strengths and limitations to this study.

A Qualitative Approach

The most important strength was the use of a qualitative approach as the primary mechanism for gathering data. A central tenet of this study involved capturing learning from those involved in the design, development and delivery of four own-door models of emergency accommodation for homeless families whilst also connecting with the experiences of families who had benefitted from being accommodated in each of the models. This capture of learning was best enabled through the employment of a qualitative methodology. The adoption of a qualitative interview-based approach allowed for a full and frank reflection on the supports provided through the reviewed accommodation models by local authorities, Focus Ireland and other project partners. It facilitated a deeper exploration of the strengths and challenges of each model while also facilitating comparison with the primary State responses to emergency accommodation, particularly the accommodation of families in hotels and B&Bs.

Two primary limitations influenced the delivery of this study, though their impact was minimal. The most significant pertained to the research team's difficulty securing the desired participation of families who had experience of residing in the reviewed models of accommodation. A further limitation related to gaps in the international literature on the provision of emergency accommodation for homeless families.

Securing Interviews with Families

Initially it was anticipated that up to ten interviews could be secured with families in each of the four accommodation models under review, with a particular emphasis on interviewing families that had progressed from each model to longer-term accommodation. However, despite efforts by Focus Ireland and in some cases, local authority staff to secure agreement from a considerable number of families, the final number overall came to just 21. Many declined to participate and several others who had initially agreed to participate proved impossible to contact. Although no definitive explanations were found, a number of factors are likely to have accounted for this, varying between the different models. To avoid 'cold calling', the families targeted for contact were those who had had a personal relationship with the Focus Ireland or local authority support staff, who made initial contact with them. Since some staff in this category had left or moved post, the potential number of such families was low. Many families had also, in effect, moved on to a new life and were looking forward to putting the past behind them. The fact that the research was carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic may have also meant that some families were preoccupied, with little time and space to participate.

However, the research team does not believe this substantively affected the research findings. This is because the family interviews were never expected to provide quantitatively valid results. Rather they were to provide qualitative material illuminating the experience of families. Furthermore, although more interviews would have further filled out the qualitative experience of families, those that were completed suggested a high degree of commonality regarding key elements of their experience, both within and even between the different models.

Limitations of the Research Literature

In undertaking an examination of the international literature, it had been hoped that prior research would shine a spotlight on acknowledged best practice pertaining to the provision of emergency accommodation for homeless families. Similarly, it had been hoped that such research would identify specific models of best practice against which comparisons could be drawn with both the State's primary models of emergency accommodation and the models reviewed in this study.

As will be noted in greater detail in Chapter 3 below, literature concerning emergency accommodation of homeless families has many limitations. It illustrates different conceptualisations of emergency accommodation across jurisdictions but, perhaps most importantly, fails to identify exemplary models of emergency accommodation provision.

3. Emergency Accommodation for Homeless Families: National and International Policy and Practice

3.1 Responding to Family Homelessness in Ireland: The Current Policy and Practice Context

Reference was made above to the State's reliance on PEA as its primary response to accommodating families entering homelessness. The absence of relevant social housing to meet the demand of growing numbers of homeless families has, in recent years, led local authorities to depend on local hotels and B&Bs as their primary emergency accommodation resource for homeless families. In *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* published in 2016, the Government made a commitment that hotels accommodating homeless families would be used only in "limited circumstances" by mid-2017. Furthermore, the Minister for Housing at that time, Simon Coveney, announced that there would be a rapid-build programme to "take many families out of hotels and put them into temporary social housing until we provide a permanent home"[15]. What followed was a steady expansion and opening of 'family hubs', a name given by the Minister to congregate emergency settings for families.

By the end of 2019, there were 31 such hubs in operation, with 24 in Dublin alone (7 hubs were operated by private providers with the remainder operated by NGOs)[16]. The then Housing Minister, Eoghan Murphy explained in April of that year that family hubs had the capacity to accommodate approximately 650 families[17].

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15 https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/coveney-launches-homelessness-pillar-under-rebuilding-ireland-action-plan

16 Holland, K. (2019) It's our fourth homeless Christmas, our third in a 'family hub. No Child 2020: Irish Times, accessible at https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/it-s-our-fourth-homeless-christmas-our-third-in-a-family-hub-1.4116749

17 McMorrow, C. (2019) 'Family hubs not intended as housing solution, says Murphy', Available at https://www.rte.ie/news/politics/2019/0418/1043384-dail-ireland/

A significant amount of public money has been committed to the development and expansion of 'family hub' type emergency accommodation. For example, in 2017, Dublin City Council projected expenditure in the region of €70 million over four years to convert city properties into family hub facilities and sheltered accommodation[18]. Local authorities across the country spent a total of €14.8 million on the operation of the family hub programme in the first nine months of 2018[19]. There are plans to build more. Yet despite this expansion, local authorities continue to rely heavily on PEA providers, that is hotels and B&Bs. According to August 2020 Homelessness Statistics[20], 54% of all homeless adults remain living in PEA accommodation.

3.1.1   Critique of PEA and Family Hubs

While recognising the considerable efforts made by frontline service providers, particularly at local authority level, to respond to the accommodation needs of homeless families, there is by now an established consensus that hotels or private B&Bs are a far from an ideal solution to accommodating families: PEA is both extremely expensive for the Exchequer and, as is clearly evidenced in research, highly inappropriate and harmful for families. Walsh and Harvey (2015) for example, emphasise the considerable overcrowding and instability experienced by homeless families in hotel and B&B accommodation. They cite examples of homeless families having to move on numerous occasions and at short notice to accommodate hotel pre-bookings, a point reinforced frequently during interviews with families whilst undertaking this study.

Share and Hennessy (2017) shine a spotlight on the negative impacts of PEA on families' daily food habits and quality of diet and by extension, on the physical health of family members[21]. They argue that prolonged family stays in emergency accommodation potentially undermine family autonomy and resilience, contribute to 'institutionalisation' and can make successful exiting from homelessness to independent living more difficult.

The policy discussion concerning emergency accommodation for homeless families has tended to concentrate on the living conditions which they provide: some commentary concentrates on the extent to which family hubs provide better conditions than PEA, but there is also considerable focus on the inadequacies of those family hubs. Hearne and Murphy (2017) offer a particularly robust critique of communal family hubs, suggesting comparisons with direct provision centres and describing them as a form of 'therapeutic incarceration' that is neither socially nor politically acceptable:

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18 Power, J (2017) Council to spend €70m on family hubs and conversions: Irish Times, accessible at https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/council-to-spend-70m-on-family-hubs-and-conversions-1.3251418

19 Ombudsman for Children's Office (2019) No Place Like Home: Children's views and experiences of living in Family Hubs, Dublin: OCO

20 See https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/homeless_report_-_august_2020.pdf, accessed on 27th October, 2020.

21 A point also echoed in interviews that were conducted with families during this study.

> "The real risk and danger of family hubs as 'temporary' solutions is that they will become a permanent feature with homeless families left for years in inappropriate and potentially damaging accommodation. The experience of direct provision centres – now in existence for almost two decades – demonstrates the likelihood that these institutions, once formed, will not be easily dismantled. This threatens the human rights of these families, particularly children, with conditions likely to do significant harm to families and particularly to the wellbeing of children who stay any length of time in emergency accommodation (Hearne & Murphy 2017:3)."

These observations are supplemented by research undertaken by the Ombudsman for Children's Office (2019) which articulates concerns raised by children in respect of family hubs. Among others, these include: inadequate living space or privacy; excessive noise; an inability to host visitors; and feelings of shame and embarrassment associated with living in hub accommodation.

A further shortcoming of the core emergency accommodation responses is that there is no detailed data available about the exit rates of families from emergency accommodation, and so no information about whether different forms of accommodation (or different facilities) are more successful in supporting families out of homelessness than others. There is no published evidence to indicate that families accommodated in family hubs transition to longer-term accommodation quicker than families in hotels. Indeed, it is not clear that faster exit from homelessness is a policy expectation for family hubs.

3.1.2 Alternative Models of Emergency Accommodation for Homeless Families

While the 2019 Ombudsman for Children report called for an independent evaluation of family hubs, the subsequent Oireachtas Reports from the Joint Committee on Housing Planning[22] and Local Government and the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs[23] set their recommendations for an independent review of hubs in the wider context of 'all family emergency accommodation' and the 'overall effectiveness of the responses to family homelessness'.

This framework better reflects the fact that the range of emergency accommodation responses to family homelessness is not well described simply as a dichotomy of 'hotels/B&Bs' and 'family hubs'. A number of different approaches have been developed within these broad groupings and some local authorities have taken different approaches entirely. As noted previously, the core purpose of this document is to explore four such Irish models operating in different contexts, each of which is presented in detail in Section 4 of this report.

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22 See https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_housing_planning_and_local_government/reports/2019/2019-11-14_report-on-family-and-child-homelessness_en.pdf

23 See https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_children_and_youth_affairs/reports/2019/2019-11-14_report-on-the-impact-of-homelessness-on-children_en.pdf

3.2 Responding to Family Homelessness: The International Picture

How does Irish policy and practice compare to that of other jurisdictions? What does literature reveal about policy priorities in respect of emergency accommodation for homeless families internationally and what insight does it offer into models of good practice?

As previously noted, the international literature pertaining to best practice in the provision of emergency accommodation for homeless families has several limitations. Many of the studies undertaken in the late 1990s and early 2000s for example, focus on interventions and services that contributed to the housing stability of homeless *individuals*, with less attention devoted to the needs of homeless *families* (Bassuk and Geller, 2006; Bassuk et al. 2014). Equally, studies on what works in addressing the housing needs of families with additional or complex needs, for instance, families experiencing housing difficulties and also engaged with the child welfare system, have also been limited (Farrell et al. 2010).

3.2.1 Needs of Families Experiencing Homelessness

Perhaps the most important starting point in considering effective models of emergency accommodation for homeless families involves building a robust understanding of the characteristics of families entering homelessness and the diverse needs with which they present[24]. The causes, experiences and diverse needs of homeless families are increasingly well documented across international research. The European Observatory on Homelessness (2017), for example, drawing on information from across fourteen member states of the European Union (EU) including Ireland, highlights that homeless families are generally not a high-need group. Whereas high rates of drug and alcohol misuse, severe mental illness, criminality, poor physical health and poor access to emotional support are often associated with lone homeless adults and young homeless people, these characteristics are largely absent from adults in homeless families.

In contrast, domestic violence and relationship breakdown are frequently-reported causes of family homelessness. Family homelessness is highly gendered, with disproportionate rates of lone female parents and their children entering homelessness (Ibid).

Research across Europe also indicates that there is a direct relationship between family homelessness and experiences of poverty, and a broad association between inadequate affordable housing and increases in family homelessness. Membership of minority social groupings also increases risk of homelessness (Ibid).

For the majority of families entering homelessness in the United States, the experience is a temporary one (Shinn 2020). Bassuk et al. (2010) offer a detailed profile of homeless families by stating:

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24 A further limitation of many early studies into the support needs of homeless families involved an assumption that all homeless families had the same needs and therefore needed a consistent package of intervention. Alternatively, they focused on particular subgroups perceived as having 'special needs' (Bassuk and Geller, 2006).

> **"The typical or average homeless family – comprising approximately 80% of all homeless families – has ongoing support and service needs that may wax and wane over time; may be episodic in nature; and will vary in intensity with life circumstances, transitions, and stressors. However, overall this indicates the need for ongoing supports and some level of services over the family's lifetime. This paradigm is not so different from the lives of many middle-income families, many of whom access supports and services such as counselors, specialized health care, and educational resources in raising their children (Bassuk et al. 2010: 36)."**

The remaining 20% of families that enter homelessness fall largely into two categories:

› 10% of families who need only basic services and transitional support to assist their exit from homelessness

› another 10% of families that need lifetime income supports and high levels of intensive services, not only to support their exit from homelessness, but also in order to maintain their families in permanent housing following exit from homelessness (Ibid)

Against this backdrop, Bassuk et al. (2010) offer a useful three-tier framework for considering the varied needs of families experiencing homelessness and, by extension, the range of supports and services required by homeless families in their respective contexts. In addition to housing support, they suggest that:

› **Tier 1** supports are designed to offer *transitional* supports to families. In the context of Tier 1, supports "should be mobilized when a family is homeless and remain in place until the family is fully connected to community supports and services. The goal is to support connection to natural supports as well as more formal mainstream services and supports when necessary and to prevent future homelessness (Ibid: 37)."

› **Tier 2** services and supports focus on the 80% of homeless families referred to above. These families should have access to all of the supports available to families in Tier 1, as well as additional *ongoing* services. These may include education and employment support opportunities; services for traumatic stress and mental health; family support services that assist with effective family functioning particularly where concerns regarding the welfare of children exist; and additional support services for children which may include access to quality mental health screening and treatment, attention to special physical and/or developmental health needs, special educational services, and more (Ibid).

› **Tier 3** services are concerned with supporting homeless families with the highest levels of need, most of whom have some combination of a serious medical, mental health and/or substance misuse problems. Necessary supports include the provision of continuous income supports as well as "lifelong ongoing, often intensive, services and supports in order to maintain their families in housing and ensure the wellbeing of all family members (Ibid: 39)."

Central to the three-tiered framework posited by Bassuk et al. (2010) is the belief that, in addition to housing supports, families require additional support services, in accordance with their respective needs, to facilitate their future housing stability and family-functioning capacity.

3.2.2 Terminology

One of the complexities of comparing policies and practices internationally is that terminology used, and what is meant by that terminology, varies from country to country. Studies for example, make reference to *emergency accommodation*, *temporary accommodation*, *supportive and transitional housing* and the varied terms can lead to a certain degree of confusion.

The European Observatory on Homelessness endorses this viewpoint in its 2018 Comparative Study on homeless services across 16 EU states, noting:

> **"There was not a clear distinction between emergency and temporary accommodation with the terms being used interchangeably in some cases. For example, what was 'emergency' accommodation in Ireland was referred to as 'temporary' accommodation in the UK (European Observatory on Homelessness, 2018)."**

The observatory makes a similar statement in its subsequent study on the regulation and quality of homeless services, stating that:

> **"It is difficult to make a distinction between emergency shelter and temporary accommodation services in several European countries, as the same services may be used for both functions (European Observatory on Homelessness, 2019)."**

Typically, temporary accommodation models are enacted as a response to situations in which there is simply not enough housing available to rapidly rehouse homeless families. Provision is generally designed to facilitate homeless families to secure a more sustained stay than would be available, for example, in emergency shelters. Therefore, temporary and emergency accommodation models tend to offer service users a greater range of facilities and increased levels of privacy than might be the case in shelters and hostels (Ibid).

The terms supportive housing and transitional housing are more common in research pertaining to homelessness-related interventions in the United States. Farrell (2010:147) outlines the purpose of transitional housing as facilitating "the movement of homeless individuals and families to permanent housing" through "supportive services that enable them to live more independently". The goals of transitional housing are the stability, independence, and self-determination of homeless families within the context of a short term or temporary intervention (Ibid).

The concept of transitional housing is rooted historically in support-service provision targeted at former prisoners and patients of mental health institutions, and pre-dates its application in homeless services by decades. Transitional housing was initially envisaged as a means of easing the transition to regular housing of former prisoners and patients of mental health institutions. Its later application in the homeless sector has also tended to operate from a philosophy of building individuals' and families' housing readiness and has predominantly been targeted at 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 2006:2)[25]

3.3 International Practice

3.3.1 The European Experience

The European Observatory on Homelessness (2017) notes that models of temporary/emergency accommodation for homeless families across EU countries are extremely varied and include models such as hotels, shelters[26], hostels, congregate supported housing, temporary homes for families, regular flats without rental contract, low-rent accommodation, and emergency housing facilities. It points out that, across a number of European countries, housing shortages and increased housing costs have pushed homeless families into temporary accommodation arrangements for longer periods of time than would be considered desirable (Ibid).

Emergency/temporary accommodation in certain countries including Ireland, is considered to be of a comparably high standard with additional intensive case management[27] supports also offered to families (European Observatory on Homelessness, 2018). NGOs are heavily involved in this form of service provision, "with local government also taking an important role, sometimes through direct provision of services or – more often – through commissioning emergency and temporary accommodation from NGOs (Ibid:8)."

Research suggests significant shortcomings in the monitoring and recording of family outcomes among many emergency and temporary accommodation services in Europe (European Observatory on Homelessness 2019). Similarly, there is no standard definition of *quality* in emergency/temporary accommodation across Europe with ideas of quality more likely to reflect local perspective rather than objective measurement:

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25 It is important to point out that the idea of 'housing readiness' is strongly contested by the Housing First approach, which has been adopted by the Irish Government, albeit that it has only been applied to single homeless adults to date.

26 Principally for survivors of domestic abuse.

27 Case management refers to an ongoing process of engagement between support service staff and client families. It generally involves the provision of an integrated package of supports in keeping with the needs of individual families and, among others, includes services such as advice and information, assistance with forms and applications for benefits, and advocacy.

> "There are serious challenges in developing a set of universal quality standards at European level. One issue is the variation in resourcing that homelessness services have available, because many services cannot offer very high standard or extensive supports, as they simply do not have the resources available to do so. Setting a standard that, for example, expected emergency or temporary accommodation to offer private bedrooms would be feasible in some countries, but simply unobtainable in others. Another issue is that ideas about what constitutes a 'good' homelessness service are not universal, while some advocate user-led, co-productive models that include ideas like Housing First, others think that services should be more directive, intervening to change the behaviour of homeless people (Ibid: 9)."

Aligned with the absence of shared quality standards and outcome measurement, there are also significant gaps in data pertaining to homeless families across Europe (European Observatory on Homelessness 2017). Consequently, identifying European models of best practice in the provision of emergency accommodation, in accordance with the varied needs of homeless families, is not feasible.

3.3.2   The Experience of the United States

There exists a larger volume of literature on what constitutes supportive and transitional housing, and associated services in the United States. In the context of family homelessness, policy in the United States has prioritised "increasing access to safe affordable housing; rapidly rehousing families experiencing homelessness; and targeting intensive housing options and services to families with urgent and complex needs" (Bassuk et al., 2014:458).

The provision of emergency or temporary accommodation to families in Europe has principally evolved as a result of inadequate housing availability to facilitate rapid re-housing of families. In contrast, supportive and transitional housing (TH) in the United States has largely been underpinned by the assertion that certain families have additional and more complex needs that negatively impact their capacity to sustain stable accommodation and, therefore, require more than housing supports:

> "Households receiving TH should have significantly more barriers to getting and keeping housing than the average household coming through emergency shelters. "Just" being homeless should not be a sufficient criterion for TH eligibility. The household should also have issues for which it needs the intensive supports offered by TH programs. These issues might include, alone or in combination, recovery from addictions, reunification with children and assumption of appropriate parental roles, or stabilization of mental illness (Burt 2006: 5).

Burt continues:

> "The housing can be project-based (in a single building or complex of buildings) or tenant-based (scattered-site)… TH projects may provide a wide array of services, depending on the needs of the population being served. Service configurations are flexible, including on-site by program staff, on-site by partner agencies, off-site at other agencies, off-site at client homes, multi-agency teams, and other approaches. Program administration ranges from simple to extremely complex. Some agencies manage all aspects of their TH programs, from capital development (if relevant) to building maintenance and operations, to services and supports. At the other extreme, some TH projects involve multiple organizations—for instance, a community development corporation could have renovated the building, a for-profit management company could do the maintenance and operations, the agency that "officially" runs the TH could do the case management, and one or more other agencies could have partnering agreements to provide on-site services such as health care, child care, or after-school activities" (Ibid: 3).

A fundamental feature of transitional housing involves the provision of varied support services to families. These include "case management, tenant stabilization, building support systems, assisting with food and clothing, help securing housing and public benefits, and training in daily-living skills, conflict resolution, budgeting, and money management (Ibid:44)." Other commentators however, contend that the nature, intensity, and frequency of services are often insufficiently described in research literature, particularly in terms of the types of services and supports required by specific subgroups of families and children (Bassuk et al., 2010; Bassuk et al., 2014).

Others question the relevance, appropriateness and value of support services to families experiencing homelessness (Culhane, 2004; Shinn, 2004; Shinn and Baumohl, 1999; Shinn, 2020), arguing that greater emphasis should be placed on providing affordable housing both to the entire homeless population and to homeless families in particular. Shinn et al. (1999; 2020) also contend that most homeless families do not need services and can adequately address their housing needs through housing subsidies.

That said, there is considerable evidence across US literature to suggest that housing supports[28], alongside other support services, result in positive outcomes for families across a range of outcome indicators. From a study of 53 transitional housing programmes with support services, Burt (2006) observed that on average, three out of every four families successfully exited the programmes. Successful exits were understood as referring to families having a stable place to live and the requisite income to keep paying for it following their exit from transitional housing.

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28 Including subsidised, supportive and transitional housing.

In a systematic review of empirical studies[29] investigating the effectiveness of housing and service interventions for American homeless families, including transitional supportive housing with intensive case management and other services, Bassuk et al. (2014:457) observed that, compared to their homelessness at enrolment, "the housing circumstances of families generally improved at exit from these programs; that is, families were no longer literally homeless, but many were not residentially stable. Furthermore, their work status was slightly improved, but most families were not earning a liveable wage."

In an effort to generate greater understanding of the dual complexities of housing instability and family engagement with the child welfare system, Farrell (2010) conducted research into the characteristics and outcomes of 1,720 families referred to a Supportive Housing for Families programme over a 10-year period, as well as researching family outcomes at discharge. The study reported that positive shifts in employment and housing were evident across the entire sample with better family outcomes aligned to greater length of engagement in the programme. Farrell asserts that results from the study endorse the essential utility of the supportive-housing model, a cross-system collaboration between housing and child welfare. Similar research into the impact of supportive housing on families in the child welfare system (Pergamit, 2019) also contends that supportive housing overwhelmingly improves housing outcomes for families, particularly in terms of housing stability. It also leads to improved child welfare outcomes with increased reunifications among children in out-of-home care.

Transitional housing programmes have tended to offer accommodation to families for a maximum of 24 months alongside the aforementioned mix of support services designed to help families make the transition to permanent housing. This can include the option that services continue for up to six months after families transition to more permanent accommodation (Burt 2006)[30]. Studies contend that families need an average stay of approximately fourteen months in supportive or transitional housing to achieve the types of positive family outcomes outlined above (Ibid). By extension, families with a length of stay of less than six months in a supportive/transitional housing programme are less likely to experience success in securing permanent housing than those remaining longer (Farrell, 2010).

In summary, therefore, reviewed literature from international sources consistently asserts that the provision of emergency or temporary accommodation to families experiencing homelessness, coupled with case management and other important support services[31], acts as an essential stepping stone in enabling families to exit homelessness. The literature does not offer comparison of models or approaches to emergency accommodation and therefore it is not possible to identify or prioritise specific exemplary models of good practice.

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29 From 2006 to 2013.

30 Burt (2006) also noted that in 47% of the Transitional Housing Programmes studies, families had access to own-door accommodation.

31 In accordance with the respective needs of individual families.

4. Own Front Door Models of Emergency Accommodation in Ireland: Four Case Studies

4.1 The Childers Road Family Initiative, Limerick City

Background and Context

The Childers Road Family Initiative comprises a block of 30 apartments[32] and offers 'own door' transitional accommodation to families experiencing homelessness in Limerick. The apartments are the property of Limerick City and County Council while the initiative is managed fully on behalf of LCCC by Focus Ireland.

As an initiative, CRFI commenced operation in the final quarter of 2017. Interviews with representatives of Focus Ireland and LCCC indicated that, at that time, large numbers of people were presenting to Homeless Services in LCCC and were being placed in PEA. There were particular concerns locally about the increased number of families presenting as homeless, as evidenced by a comparison between the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government's Homelessness Reports for September 2016 and 2017. See Table 2 below:

Table 2: Figures for Households Accessing Local Authority Managed Emergency Accommodation in Limerick and the Mid-West[33], September 2016 and September 2017

	September 2016	September 2017	% increase in homelessness
› Homeless Adults in Mid-West	237	363	53%
› Homeless Adults in Limerick	217	315	45%
› Homeless Families in Mid-West	33	81	145%
› No of Dependents in Homeless Families in Mid-West	67	152	127%
› Single-Parent Homeless Families in Mid-West	26	47	81%

Source: https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data
Accessed 5th June 2020

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32 Of which, 26 are two-bedroom apartments and four of which are one-bedroom facilities.
33 Incorporating counties Clare and Limerick

CRFI therefore emerged as a cost-effective and comprehensive emergency response to the rise in family homelessness that was being witnessed in the latter stages of 2017. LCCC needed a property of this scale to avoid placing families in PEA, while also seeing the longer term potential of its purchase, particularly in terms of ultimately transitioning the apartments to longer-term housing if the pressure on emergency provision were to subside. During interviews, LCCC representatives participating in this study referred to CRFI as an "important cog in the wheel" among a suite of supports and interventions[34] to counteract the impacts of family homelessness in Limerick. Once purchased, LCCC sought a partner NGO to deliver an emergency accommodation project on its behalf and Focus Ireland was the chosen partner.

The CRFI Model

CRFI represents a partnership between LCCC, as the property owner and co-ordinator of services for homeless families, and Focus Ireland, the organisation commissioned to manage the property and provide case management support to families in their efforts to exit homelessness. The partnership is governed by a service-level agreement (SLA) between both parties. Through that SLA, LCCC provides annual funding in the region of €350,000 to Focus Ireland to manage the initiative. Funding covers three primary inputs:

> key worker staff who provide support services to families[35],
  approximately 38% of budget
> full-time security in CRFI, approximately 50% of budget
> service charges and property maintenance, approximately 10% of budget

This operational budget translates as an average cost to the exchequer of €11,666 per unit of accommodation in CRFI. It is understood from research interviews that non-occupancy of individual apartments happens rarely, usually in the case of a recently-vacated apartment being readied for the next client family.

Representatives of both LCCC and Focus Ireland engage in regular operational and review meetings[36]. These involve focusing on the allocation of families to CRFI; on collaboratively addressing the support needs of families in the setting; and on onward transitions for families into longer-term, more stable housing.

Families are referred to CRFI by the HAT in Limerick, a joint response to homelessness, co-ordinated by the local authority co-ordinator of homeless services and involving staff from LCCC, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the community welfare officer of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Larger families tend to be prioritised by HAT because of the apartment accommodation provided in CRFI[37], while a large proportion of families accommodated in CRFI are households headed by single parents. While Focus Ireland ultimately works directly with families referred to CRFI, it has no involvement in the selection of families.

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34 Including PEA and communal family hubs.
35 See section on Case Management below.
36 Approximately every six weeks.
37 i.e. to avoid larger families being accommodated in the limited space of PEA and smaller communal family hubs operating in the city. That said, it is recognised by both LCCC and Focus Ireland that, for certain families, CRFI apartments are also inadequate.

The Families

The profile of families accessing the services of CRFI is varied and local stakeholders suggest that its client-base reflects the diversity of Irish society. Family need and capacity varies across client families. Research interviews suggest that many of the families accommodated in CRFI simply have a housing need and require little in the form of key worker support. On the other hand, a significant minority of families has additional needs that undermine their capacity to sustain a stable tenancy and therefore, require lengthy and significant case management. Among others, additional needs include factors such as mental health difficulties, addiction, child welfare concerns, and the need for budgeting, money management and home management supports.

As of June 2020, CRFI has accommodated 91 families in total since its inception in late 2017. Focus Ireland records reveal that, from a maximum of 30 families accommodated in CRFI at any one time, 22 families exited the facility and transferred to longer-term housing options in 2018, while a further 23 families moved on in 2019. It is unusual for client families of CRFI to progress to tenancies in the private rental market, though a number transition to the Social Rental Model[38], which acts as a significant stepping stone towards those families securing full tenancies from private landlords. Table 3 illustrates the transitions facilitated in 2018 and 2019.

Table 3: Family Transitions from CRFI, 2018 & 2019

	Families 2018	Families 2019	Total 2018-19	Percentage
Local Authority	11	9	20	44%
Focus Ireland Social Rental Model	2	4	6	13%
Other Approved Housing Bodies	3	4	7	16%
Focus Ireland Long-Term Accommodation	2	2	4	9%
Rental Accommodation Scheme	3	3	6	13%
Private Rented/HAP	1	1	2	4%
Total Number of Families	**22**	**23**	**45**	**100%**

The partners involved in CRFI have also facilitated considerable family movement in the first half of 2020. By June 2020, ten families had transitioned from CRFI, with particular success noted during the period of restricted movement imposed by government arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. LCCC was able to acquire additional properties during the lockdown of March to May and this facilitated eight families to exit CRFI during that period, with a similar number of families then removed from PEA and accommodated in CRFI apartments. A critical feature of CRFI is its capacity to accommodate new families quickly once existing families have transitioned into longer-term housing. Focus Ireland suggests that the average turnaround time between a family exiting the facility and a new family taking up residence is one week.

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38 Which will be explained in greater detail as the next case study.

Nature of provision

CRFI is referred to as a family hub but with significant differences to the communal facilities discussed in earlier sections of this document. Firstly, it provides each family with furnished, own-door, self-contained apartment accommodation, inclusive of private kitchen and bathroom facilities. This facilitates families to conduct key family functions, such as cooking, washing clothes, doing homework, and so on, in the privacy of their own units. Similarly, it is possible to carry out all key worker supports within the privacy of each family unit while a separate play-room is also located in the building for direct work with children. Because CRFI enables 'own-door' accommodation, families are free to come and go as they please, with no expectations of having to be in the premises by a designated hour.

Each family in CRFI is issued with a licence agreement from LCCC. Because the families are involved with homeless services, they are not entitled to tenant rights and therefore are issued with a licence and not a tenancy agreement. Typically, it is anticipated that each family will be accommodated in CRFI for 12 months. However, there is no specified maximum or minimum duration of stay, with some families remaining in CRFI for longer or shorter periods in accordance with their respective needs and capacities, and in accordance with the availability of appropriate longer-term accommodation to match those needs and capacities.

Central to the licence agreement with families is the expectation that families will meet their respective key worker on a regular basis and adhere to the case plan produced with the key worker[39]. Families are expected to respect the property and the privacy of other families in the apartment block. They are also required to pay differential rents, based on their respective incomes, and a service charge. These monies are paid to Focus Ireland and are used by Focus Ireland to supplement its budget for maintaining the property.

Because families are accommodated in an apartment block and given the size of the building, Focus Ireland contracts 24-hour security services at CRFI. Some of the families accommodated in CRFI have particularly complex needs and the presence of security staff on-site is viewed as giving all families peace of mind. In the further interests of security, CRFI operates a no-visitor policy. While this is experienced as very difficult by families, particularly in terms of the loss of family and social supports and children being unable to have friends to visit, this policy exists to ensure confidentiality and the protection of all families.

Case Management

Focus Ireland employs two key workers, referred to as family support workers within the project, each with a worker-to-family ratio of 1:15. A child support worker is also employed specifically to address identified additional needs of children within families. Following entry to CRFI, Focus Ireland staff carry out assessments and co-produce individual case plans with each family. These case plans outline the priority actions to be addressed by each family whilst accommodated in CRFI, actions designed to strengthen their capacity to exit homelessness and secure a long-term tenancy elsewhere.

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39   See Case Management section below for further detail on case plans.

The core function of the family support workers is to support their client families in accordance with their agreed case plans. A significant part of the family support worker function involves motivating families in their search for long-term tenancy options and building family capacity to advocate for themselves with LCCC and AHBs. Similarly, the family support workers link families with the services of other agencies in accordance with their respective needs, services such as Tusla[40], mental health support services, addiction support services and others. The family support workers seek to engage weekly, on average, with each family. However this can be more frequent, depending on family need. A key strength of CRFI is that family engagements can take place in the privacy of each family's own apartment, ensuring confidentiality of support.

Focus Ireland views the child support worker role as a significant value-addition of CRFI that is not available in PEA and/or family hubs. The child support worker works with individual children identified by the family support workers as requiring additional support. The nature of support provided to children is guided by the nature and level of individual child need. Amongst other supports, the work of the child support worker can involve providing a parent and child some space apart from one another; providing one-to-one individual support to a child, for example, in the form of free play in a specific-purpose playroom located on-site in CRFI. The role may also involve supporting a family to link their child into existing community services, such as a parent and toddler group or local crèche. As above, the frequency of the child support worker's engagements with individual children is informed by the nature of need within an individual family.

In addition, Focus Ireland supports children accommodated in CRFI to participate in Easter and summer camps. A Christmas party is organised in the building in December, inclusive of a visit from Santa Claus.

Family Experiences of CRFI

Interviews were held with an adult from nine families who, at the point of interview, were either accommodated in CRFI or had recently moved on to longer term accommodation[41]. The purpose of these interviews was to explore family experiences of CRFI and to understand the manner in which CRFI, as a model of emergency accommodation, impacted on the functioning and wellbeing of families and on their capacities to progress to longer-term accommodation.

A number of significant issues emerged consistently across family interviews pertaining to CRFI.

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40 In respect of child welfare concerns

41 Ten families agreed to be interviewed for the research. However, it didn't prove possible to engage one of the families. It is also worth noting that four families that were interviewed in the context of the SRM model below also had prior experience of being accommodated in CRFI and their views and experiences are also noted in the content of this section.

Relief in Exiting Hotel Accommodation

Almost all of the families consulted in this study had experiences of PEA prior to being admitted to CRFI. As will be noted in greater detail in Section 6, family experiences of emergency accommodation in hotels were extremely difficult, with interviewees finding little positive to recount of their families' time spent in hotels. The following quotes from three interviewees clearly express the views of families on their experiences of being accommodated in PEA whilst homeless:

> **"We stayed in different hotels. It was awful."**
>
> **"The hotel was a terrible experience."**
>
> **"It was terrible. I hated it; the kids hated it."**

Therefore, at the point of entry, the majority of families who progressed to CRFI apartments from hotel accommodation felt an overwhelming sense of relief and gratitude, particularly as a result of the private and increased space offered by having their own apartment. Statements in this regard included:

> **"It was the best thing that ever happened; we had our own space. The kids were settled. We had stability. Everything was in the one place."**
>
> **"When I first got offered the place, I was happy out. I was grateful to have an apartment in the hub[42]."**
>
> **"It was a huge difference. Just the breathing space. The only space in a hotel was going to the toilet but you still came out to everybody in the room. There was a huge difference in having an apartment. It was a bit more relaxed. I was delighted to have my own apartment, a cooker and washing machine."**
>
> **"The apartment was a delight compared to the hotel."**
>
> **"They are big apartments so we were grateful.... We were very grateful to have our own space."**

Families also expressed satisfaction at being able to carry out basic household tasks in the privacy of their own accommodation, tasks such as washing clothes and cooking family meals. The capacity to undertake these tasks had been completely undermined while accommodated in hotels.

All spoke highly about the generosity, commitment and helpfulness of their respective key workers, and on the levels of support provided to them by Focus Ireland staff, especially during very difficult times.

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42   Most families referred to CRFI as 'the hub'.

Challenging Environment for Families

Though better than hotel accommodation, all interviewees observed that living in CRFI presented families with many challenges. Challenges consistently cited during interviews included limitations of space and the intensity of continuous shared space with family members; the need to get out of the apartments as frequently as possible, coupled with a number of families feeling frightened of the area in which the apartments are located; and a feeling of isolation from family and support networks. For example:

> "CRFI is tough. You are in each other's faces 24/7, unless you can get out of the apartment. It's especially hard in the summer months. The only freedom is out by the shops."
>
> "If my partner and I argue, there's nowhere for either of us to go to get a bit of headspace. There's a lot of butting heads in this place."
>
> "The area is not great. I barely leave the apartment. I only go out to Aldi."
>
> "It was hard going, especially for the kids because they couldn't play outdoors. They could see the garden of the Maldron Hotel but couldn't go out and play in it."
>
> "I take my kids to my mum's at the weekend just so we can all get a bit of space. It's harder in the summer with the fine weather. I'd love to take the kids out locally but there's nowhere around here that you'd want to take them."

Though the rationale for its application was understood by all families, the no-visitor policy in CRFI was experienced as particularly burdensome:

> "Not being able to have visitors is very difficult. One of my children has a disability. He couldn't go to other houses to be with friends so it would have meant him having a friend over. But he couldn't have visitors over because of the policy."
>
> "The block on visitors is hard…. We still get to mix with people outside but we can't have anybody in."
>
> "It's very isolating here. We are allowed no visitors. It's very lonely."
>
> Because we couldn't have visitors, I used to take the kids with me to friends and family. We needed a break from the place. But there were times when I thought I must be pestering those people. I was saying to myself they must have enough of us."

Many of these challenges had significant impacts on family functioning and on the wellbeing of family members, particularly children[43] and more specifically on children that were ill or had additional needs. Parents in particular referred to their children becoming withdrawn, spending more time on their own and, in some cases, self-harming.

Getting On with Life in CRFI

For most families, the experience of being accommodated in CRFI wasn't something they liked. Rather, living in CRFI was something they simply had to get on with:

> "I get on with it. It's better than a hotel but it's still not great. It's not a house with a garden for your children to play in."

Another interviewee spoke of family-life being on hold, referring to her experience of CRFI as a period of hoping and waiting:

> "The hub is a place of waiting and hoping. We've got on with life in the hub as much as we could but I've always felt my life was on hold. It was like we were constantly waiting for life to change. It was always going to happen in the future sometime."

Duration of Stay

The most significant issue, raised consistently throughout interviews, related to families' length of stay in CRFI and to the negative impact of the length-of-stay on family wellbeing. While families appreciated that CRFI offered secure, own-door accommodation and was vastly superior to being accommodated in hotels, it was nevertheless understood by all as a transitional arrangement and all interviewees aspired to a long-term tenancy that would provide stability for their family members. Upon entry to CRFI, most anticipated that they would be accommodated in their respective apartments for between three to six months but four of the nine families interviewed remained in CRFI for more than one year.

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43   And teenage children in particular.

Facilitating long-term tenancies for homeless families is complex, particularly in situations where families have needs additional to their need for housing[44] and particularly in an environment with considerable shortages of social housing. That said, families experienced their ongoing accommodation in a transitional setting as demoralising:

> "When you go to Childers Road you have to realise that you'll be there for a year or so. I was told I wouldn't be here long. After three to six months, you begin to feel down."
>
> "We started out here relieved to have a place together. But staying here so long has had a big impact on us as a family."
>
> "It's[45] had a massive impact on my mental health. I've ended up drinking way more in here than I would normally."
>
> "The hub is so much better than hotels but, after six months, it feels like you are stuck and left here."
>
> "Childers Road sounds great before you move in here. You think you have a roof over your head, a stop-off place before you get somewhere to live. But then reality kicks in."

There is little doubt that CRFI, as a model of emergency accommodation, has many advantages over PEA and communal family hubs. It provides families with increased and private living space, enabling them to conduct basic family functions that were neither possible nor permissible within hotel accommodation. Unlike the instability associated with hotel accommodation, CRFI offers families stability of accommodation in the knowledge that the apartment in which they reside will be their home until a longer-term alternative can be secured.

But as outlined above, family experiences of the model are challenging, and concerns about the length of time needed to transition from emergency into longer term accommodation are considerable. While the transition into CRFI from PEA offers peace of mind to families, concerns related to the length of time required to transition out of CRFI negatively impacts that initial peace of mind.

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44 It wasn't possible to examine the extent to which those families remaining in CRFI for in excess of a year had additional or more complex needs than those progressing to longer-term accommodation in a shorter timeframe.

45 that is, the length of time spent in CRFI.

4.2 The Social Rental Model, Limerick City

SRM is a form of transitional accommodation provided to families experiencing homelessness in Limerick City. Under SRM, Focus Ireland leases properties from landlords in the private rental market on the understanding that the organisation will, with the full consent of the property owners, then sublet these properties to homeless families.

SRM in Limerick evolved from a successful, small-scale pilot of the model in Cork, which was conducted by Focus Ireland in 2013. Its operation in Limerick commenced in 2015 with the housing of eleven families during that year[46].

Background and context

Records of homelessness in the Mid-West for the second half of 2014[47] reveal a consistent growth in individual and family homelessness across the region during that period. As of December, 2014:

> there were 278 homeless individuals in emergency accommodation in the Mid-West in contrast, for example, to an April total of 230, an increase of 21% in that period

> of that 278 persons in emergency accommodation, 230 were located in Limerick, 83% of all homeless persons in the Mid-West

> 30 families, inclusive of 58 dependents, were in emergency accommodation in the Mid-West compared, for example, to July of that year when 25 families were homeless in the region, inclusive of 63 dependents

> of the 30 families homeless in December 2014, 27 (90%) were single-parent-headed households

The difficulty of accommodating increasing numbers of homeless families in Limerick in late 2014 was compounded by significant rent increases at that time in the private rental market. Simply put, there were growing numbers of families unable to access accommodation in the city in spite of the availability of private rental properties. There emerged a need to expedite the resettlement of homeless families in the city while also increasing the volume of social housing available, and SRM was viewed as providing a cost-effective solution in both regards.

A Partnership between Focus Ireland and LCCC

Drawing on learning from the SRM pilot in Cork, SRM emerged as a partnership project involving LCCC and Focus Ireland. Through an SLA, LCCC commissions Focus Ireland to manage and deliver SRM as one of its portfolio of emergency interventions centred on homeless families, providing funding to enable Focus Ireland's management of the project.

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46   Three families were also accommodated in SRM provision in County Clare at that time, bringing the number to fourteen across the Mid-West.

47   Information sourced from https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/breakdown-homeless-persons-emergency-accommodation-during-week-22-28-december-0, accessed on 9th June, 2020.

How SRM works

Under SRM, Focus Ireland invites private landlords to lease properties for one year to the organisation. Thereafter, in agreement with the landlords, Focus Ireland sublets those properties to homeless families[48]. Under this arrangement:

> ❯ Focus Ireland provides support to tenant families while also taking care of the day-to-day management of the properties leased, inclusive of responsibility for minor day-to-day repairs[49]

> ❯ Property owners are responsible for white goods, and for the maintenance and repair of the systems, structures and exteriors of their respective properties

> ❯ Families accommodated through SRM receive a normal tenancy contract for a 12-month period, with the same expectations of any family renting from a private landlord[50]. Tenant families pay their HAP to Focus Ireland as rent, while Focus Ireland then supplements that rent with additional monies to meet the full market rents demanded by landlords

While SRM secures social housing for an initial 12-month period, a further goal of the model is to transition properties into longer-term leases. Whereas the model was initially conceived as providing an emergency solution to family homelessness in Limerick, it is now also being viewed as a longer-term housing solution. Participating landlords are therefore now being encouraged, as a pre-requisite of their engagement in SRM, to commit to:

> ❯ long-term leasing of properties after the initial 12-month period[51], thereby enabling families to continue to rent-in-place directly from the landlord and independently of Focus Ireland

> **or**

> ❯ signing up to the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)[52], thereby also enabling participating families to remain in their existing accommodation

There are occasional cases where landlords may choose not to enter into longer-term leases. In these instances, Focus Ireland staff provide LCCC with advance notice of family tenancies coming to an end and look to the local authority to assist in finding solutions. Neither LCCC nor Focus Ireland wants to see an SRM family return to homeless services and, as will be illustrated below, Focus Ireland records indicate that such occurrences are extremely rare.

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48 Focus Ireland searches for and secures properties that match the needs of each individual family at the time of their presenting as homeless, recognising that needs (e.g. in terms of family size) can change whilst accommodated.

49 Focus Ireland carries out a minimum housing standard checklist before taking any property on, thereby ensuring that families are accommodated in appropriate accommodation.
The maintenance and repair function is undertaken on behalf of Focus Ireland by its sister organisation, Focus Housing Association.

50 Given that each family has its own-door accommodation located in the community, none of the CRFI policies pertaining to security and visitors apply in the context of SRM.

51 Assuming that the initial 12-month tenancy has been trouble-free.

52 RAS is an initiative designed to provide a sustainable social housing option for those with a long-term housing need. Under RAS, a local authority takes out a long-term lease with a landlord and sublets that property to a family, similar to the model operated in SRM.

SRM can also be used to support CAS (Capital Assistance Scheme) purchase of properties. Under CAS, Focus Ireland can secure and accommodate a family in a property, in agreement with the landlord through the SRM model, while waiting for the purchase through CAS to conclude. These longer-term opportunities remove SRM from the concept of a pilot initiative and establish the model as a long-term social housing solution with real potential to reduce the incidence of family homelessness in Limerick City.

As a model of accommodation, SRM is considered to benefit multiple stakeholders:

› homeless families benefit from being housed in secure accommodation for a minimum of one year, gaining the opportunity to establish a positive tenancy record and increasing their opportunities for future long-term housing security
› the local authority benefits from having a wider array of social housing at its disposal to counteract the incidence of family homelessness
› landlords benefit by leasing their properties for a minimum of one year at full market rent while having tenancies managed on their behalf by Focus Ireland, and they also benefit from having the opportunity to extend leases into the longer term[53]
› the Exchequer benefits by reducing emergency accommodation costs relating to homeless families[54]

Cost of delivery

The total cost of delivering SRM in Limerick for the 2019 calendar year was €651,435. Amongst other items, this sum covered three primary cost items:

› rent of properties for 32 families[55], comprising 56% of all costs
› employment of three key workers responsible for accessing SRM properties and supporting families, accounting for 24% of budget
› property maintenance, accounting for 12% of all costs

It is important to note however, that Focus Ireland was able to recover 46% of costs associated with SRM through participating families paying their HAP to the organisation in the form of rent[56]. Therefore, the actual cost of delivering the model in 2019 stood at €350,248. This translates into a unit cost to the Exchequer of just under €11,000 per annum per family.

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53 Both LCCC and Focus Ireland representatives involved in this research commented on the manner in which landlords have shared the benefits of SRM, by word of mouth, among themselves. This has led to increased interest among landlords in becoming involved in SRM, increasing the stock of social housing available in the city.
54 See section below.
55 Inclusive of 38 adults and 70 children.
56 In addition to costs recovered through families paying rent to Focus Ireland, LCCC also issued a grant of €209,000 through the aforementioned SLA to assist project-delivery.

Families

As in the case of CRFI, families are referred to SRM by the HAT in Limerick. While Focus Ireland ultimately works directly with families referred to SRM, it has no involvement in the selection of families.

Families allocated to SRM tend to be *houseless* rather than *homeless*. In other words, they require low-to-medium case management supports, with fewer families presenting with complex needs than would be the case, for example, in CRFI. In fact, a considerable number of families have progressed into SRM provision from CRFI, with the project partners viewing this option as an important capacity-building step for certain families in their exit from homelessness.

As illustrated in Table 4 below, Focus Ireland records reveal that 63 individual families have been accommodated in SRM in Limerick city since 2017[57].

Table 4: Homeless Families Accommodated through SRM Jan 2017-June 2020

	Total Families in SRM at Year Beginning	New Families	Closed Cases	Total Families Year End
2017	33	14	12	35
2018	35	9	18	26
2019	26	6	9	23
2020	23	1	12	12

As of June 2020, 12 families were being accommodated in SRM properties in Limerick while LCCC had earlier in the year requested Focus Ireland to secure an additional ten properties.

Of the 51 families whose SRM cases were closed between 2017 and 2020, it is worth noting that 45 (88%) resulted in a successful outcome, that is, with each family securing a long-term tenancy. Six families had unplanned closures or unsuccessful outcomes to their participation in SRM.

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57 SRM has been operational in Limerick and Clare since 2015. During 2015 and 2016, Focus Ireland recorded families in SRM jointly in Clare and Limerick before separately recording family numbers for each location from 2017. Organisational records demonstrate that a further 23 families received SRM accommodation across Limerick and Clare during 2015 and 2016.

Progression Routes

Families exiting SRM progress to varied tenancy options. A review of a sample of 42 closed SRM cases in Limerick from the end of 2016 to 2020[58] reveals the following:

Table 5: Tenancy Progression of Sample (n=42) of Closed SRM Cases in Limerick 2016 – 2020

Tenancy Progression Path	No. of Families	% of Families
› RAS[55]	8	19.0%
› Local Authority Housing	7	16.7%
› AHB Housing	7	16.7%
› Focus Ireland Long-term	7	16.7%
› Private Rented Accommodation	4	9.5%
› HAP	4	9.5%
› Unknown	3	7.1%
› Returned to Family	1	2.4%
› Returned to Homelessness	1	2.4%
Total	**42**	**100%**

Case Management

Three key workers are assigned by Focus Ireland to SRM. While their primary function relates to sourcing houses from landlords that can be sublet to families in homeless services, the key workers also provide tenancy support and follow support plans agreed with individual families in accordance with respective family need. This can include supporting families to address issues such as budgeting or money management, home management, issues related to addiction or mental health, and can also include referring families to the services of other agencies and organisations.

A fundamental aspect of the key worker role is to support each family in successfully managing their tenancy and, by extension, demonstrating to each family's landlord that they have the capacity to manage a longer-term lease independently of the organisation.

Family Experiences of SRM

As part of this study, interviews were held with an adult from five families who, at the point of interview, were either accommodated in an SRM tenancy or had completed an SRM tenancy. The purpose of these interviews was to explore family experiences of SRM and to understand the manner in which SRM, as a model of emergency accommodation, impacted on the functioning and wellbeing of families and on their capacities to progress to longer-term accommodation.

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58 Information drawn from key worker reports.

59 Interviews with Focus Ireland staff indicate that a significant number of families exiting SRM go on to RAS. As HAP rental caps don't reach the rents being asked by private landlords, RAS offers a more stable housing option for families.

Critical Issues Emerging from Family Interviews

Feedback from families on their experiences of SRM is remarkably positive. The positive impact of SRM on family-life is probably best appreciated through a comparison of family experiences of SRM with prior experiences of hotel and CRFI accommodation. While CRFI was viewed by families as providing a much better home environment for families compared to hotels, SRM was also identified by interviewees as a substantial step up from CRFI.

Comparison between Hotel and Hub Experiences

As noted above, three of the five SRM interviewees had experience of being accommodated in hotels whilst homeless; four of the five had spent time in CRFI prior to entering SRM.

Similar to interviewees in the previous case study, none of the SRM interviewees had positive feedback on their experiences of living in hotel accommodation. One interviewee noted:

> **"It provided a roof over our head. That's about it."**

Limited space, the frequency of family arguments[60], difficulties related to keeping and preparing food, and in particular, high levels of instability caused by frequent movement from hotel to hotel were consistently referenced across family interviews. One interviewee, who had been pregnant while accommodated in hotels highlighted:

> **"I didn't want my child to be born and brought back to a hotel only for her to be moved around week on week."**

The strengths and challenges of CRFI, as expressed by families in the previous case study, were repeated by SRM interviewees. Those who had progressed to CRFI from hotel accommodation referred to their relief at having their own private accommodation and having increased space for all family members. They referred to the simple pleasures of being able to carry out everyday family functions such as washing clothes and cooking family meals. And they highlighted the significant relief they felt at being able to unpack their belongings and remain in the one place as a family for a prolonged period of time.

These benefits were multiplied for families once they entered SRM provision. Whereas CRFI provided greater family space to families compared to hotel accommodation, SRM offered further opportunities in this regard and this was viewed as impacting particularly positively on children:

> **"The house has its own back garden. All of us have own bedrooms; the kids have a playroom. We all have our own space."**

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60 Among adults and children.

> "We had much more freedom. I didn't have to worry about kids playing in the garden. In the hotel I was afraid they'd interfere with the person in the next room. They could be children again."

> "A big issue was that the kids had their own space. In hotels, the whole family was in the room together. Now the kids had their own space to play, to do homework, to live their lives like other children."

All interviewees referred to the increased stability offered by SRM, each family knowing that they had secure accommodation for a minimum of a year and, if all went successfully in that period, the possibility of a longer term tenancy into the future:

> "Being in the house with Focus Ireland's support gave us all great peace of mind."

Being in SRM accommodation was viewed by interviewees as normalising life for families:

> "We had our own front door and we are able to have visitors again to our home."

> "We could cook and eat the kind of meals we wanted."

> "We have privacy."

> "Now that we have the accommodation sorted we can start to think about a few other things we need to deal with for the family."

As noted above, four of the five families have now left SRM provision and are in accommodation independent of the support provided by Focus Ireland. The fifth is in the process of transitioning from SRM into RAS. All feel confident in their abilities to sustain their tenancies into the longer term.

Appreciation of Support Provided by Focus Ireland

Interviewees consistently expressed gratitude and appreciation for the support provided to them by Focus Ireland whilst in SRM. While SRM families tend to have lower support needs than other homeless families, interviews with family representatives clearly indicated that these families were appreciative and maximised the supports provided to them. Notable comments from family interviews included:

> "I just want to say a big thank you to Focus Ireland; they were really amazing. They stood by us. They were there for us. If anything was wrong with the house they dealt with it straight away."

> "Focus Ireland rang me every week and visited every week. They made sure everything was going well for me; they were checking I was keeping the place well and they helped me with my payment. If I had a question about accommodation, they'd help me straight away. After about 8 months to a year, they began to call less often and I knew I was doing ok."

> "I am not renting from Focus Ireland anymore. I have a private rental tenancy. It's a great sense of achievement. It's great to have my own independence. I didn't do it on my own but it was up to me. Focus Ireland were a great support in the last few years. They still check in with me to make sure all is going well. They are very supportive."

> "The big thing is how Focus Ireland treat you; they always treated me with respect."

In conclusion, all stakeholders who offered input to this examination of SRM, that is, families, representatives of Focus Ireland and representatives of LCCC alike, spoke of the considerable value and impact of SRM. As one interviewee stated:

> "SRM is a no-brainer. For me, it's a no brainer in terms of what it offers families."

4.3   The Tallaght Cross Model in Dublin 24

Background and context

The Tallaght Cross apartment development began providing transitional emergency housing in May 2015 as a response to the growing homelessness crisis in the Dublin region. Between July 2014[61] and May 2015[62] the number of homeless families increased from 271 to 490, a rise of 81% in eleven months. SDCC and the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE)[63] were increasingly concerned with the available options for emergency accommodation, especially the use of PEA, and were seeking alternatives. Blocks 8 A and 8 B in Tallaght Cross, part of a larger complex of apartments covering four streets in the centre of Tallaght village, were under NAMA administration. The two inter-connected blocks comprise 65 own-door apartments[64], offering a mixture of one, two and three bedrooms. With an already high concentration of social housing in Tallaght, SDCC

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61 See https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/breakdown-homeless-persons-emergency-accommodation-during-week-22-28-december-0 accessed 11/08/2020

62 See https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homeless-persons-december-2015 accessed 11/08/2020

63 DRHE is managed by Dublin City Council as the lead statutory local authority responding to homelessness across all three local authorities. It pursues a shared-service approach across SDCC, Fingal County Council and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown.

64 Of which 64 are allocated to families while the remaining apartment provides office space to the Focus Ireland support team.

decided to reserve the development exclusively for use as transitional housing and the two Tallaght Cross apartment blocks were designated as Transitional Accommodation under the Residential Tenancies Act 2014.

The Tallaght Cross Model

Several organisations are involved in the relatively complex management structure of the Tallaght Cross Model.

Túath Housing, an Approved Housing Body, holds a 21-year lease on the apartments from NAMA, under a National Asset Residential Property Services (NARPS) agreement[65]. Under the agreement with SDCC, the two blocks are dedicated to emergency transitional housing and Túath both acts as landlord and is contracted by SDCC to provide services to tenants.

SDCC contacts Túath to nominate a family listed on the DRHE homeless list in the SDCC area and who is residing in hotels and B&B's. Nominations are sent through to Túath as properties become vacant and Túath interviews the nominee. If the tenancy criteria are met, the families and Túath sign an 18-month Transitional Tenancy Agreement and arrange a suitable sign-up date.

Túath acts on behalf of NAMA as the Owners' Management Company (a separate entity) and manages the tenants and the accommodation. Túath pays NAMA a monthly rental, retaining additional funds to cover the service-charge fees, reclaiming the leasing costs from the Department of Housing via a Payment & Availability Agreement based on 85% of the open market rental values (reviewed every four years).

Túath, as a housing provider, also sought to work with a care provider to provide a full service to families to be housed in Tallaght Cross on a temporary basis. SDCC already worked with Focus Ireland, and the arrangement was established and approved by the Department of Housing and SDCC.

Focus Ireland's Family Homes Action Team[66] provides social care support (see below) through its case workers, whose office is on one of the apartments.[67]

Focus Ireland also engages a monitoring service onsite from 6:00pm to 8:00am through a third-party monitoring company (JK Monitoring) at a cost of about €2,000 a month, to respond to issues arising for families. The service is based in the Focus Ireland office in Tallaght Cross and each night regularly tours the apartment complex documenting all incidents including anti-social behaviour and other issues arising. Focus Ireland emails *Túath Housing* and SDCC a report each morning.

The researchers did not succeed in securing an interview with an SDCC representative. However, the following extract from a report delivered in response to a Motion from an SDCC Councillor outlines their understanding of the goal and duration of stay at Tallaght Cross, and the role of Focus Ireland:[68]

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65 NARPS was established under NAMA in July 2012 to expedite social housing delivery.

66 Tallaght Cross is just one of 24 hubs and emergency housing centre across Dublin supported by the Family Homelessness Action Team.

67 This was originally located on the top floor, but relocated to the ground floor to be more accessible to families and closer to services.

68 Report on Motion No. 3 to South Dublin County Council. January 9th 2017 http://www. sdublincoco.ie/ga/Meetings/ViewDocument/54358 Accessed 11/08/2020

> **"The transitional accommodation available in Tallaght Cross provides medium-term accommodation along with on-site support from Focus Ireland to assist families in their search for permanent accommodation. Families residing in Tallaght Cross are advised and encouraged from the outset of their tenure to engage with Choice Based Letting (CBL) and the Housing Assistance Payment Place Finder services provided by the Council to source more stable and secure accommodation tenures with residents nearing the completion of their 18 month tenure also having access to Homeless HAP."**

The overall arrangement at Tallaght Cross is thus complex, involving several core partners: NAMA, Túath, SDCC and Focus Ireland, as well as the owners' management company and the subcontracted monitoring service.

Specific Services and Case Management

Under the agreement with SDCC, Túath provides all tenancy management services in relation to the apartments. This includes the tenancy agreement and collecting rents, addressing breaches of the tenancy and house rules, following up on reports of anti-social behaviour, and internal repairs and maintenance of the apartments. Túath liaises closely with the owners' management company in reporting and following up on any communal area issues in the block such as cleaning, life safety systems and door access systems, and provides a weekly block-cleaning service additional to that of the owners' management company. Túath also meets SDCC on a quarterly basis to review the services and receives an additional payment from SDCC to cover extra-ordinary costs for this type of scheme due to its transitional nature.

The maximum tenancy of 18 months is related to a family qualifying for Part 4 tenancy rights under the 2015 Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act. While there have been cases where Túath Housing was obliged, under the tenancy agreement[69], to issue a notice of termination to families, no evictions have taken place, and nor are they likely to.[70] Under a revision to the Tenancy Agreement, families must be actively seeking permanent accommodation under the HAP scheme.

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69 "It has been confirmed that from a legal perspective Túath must serve Notices of Termination on all tenants residing in Tallaght Cross Transitional housing units coming up to an 18 months to ensure Part 4 rights are not acquired. … Where a family is served a Notice of Termination, the Council will provide accommodation by means of another placement or self-accommodating option. The resulting vacancy will be offered to another family in homeless services." Report on Motion No. 3 to South Dublin County Council. January 9th 2017 http://www.sdublincoco.ie/ga/Meetings/ViewDocument/54358 Accessed 11/08/2020

70 The following is reported in the Irish Times December 5th 2018, in an article on families that received eviction letters from Tallaght Cross. "Under the 2004 Residential Tenancies Act "transitional housing" is exempt from part four of the Act, which provides for the security of a six-year tenancy. Though it does not state what happens if a resident stays longer than 18 months, "the inference is that this exemption may no longer apply, and the security of tenure rights may then accrue for the tenant", said a spokeswoman for the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB)." It also reports that the then Minister for Housing, Eoghan Murphy, made a commitment in the Dáil on the same day that no family would be evicted into homelessness after the 18 months is up." Accessed 12/08/2020

Focus Ireland provides support to the families through its case workers, also known as key workers. When referred, the key workers complete an assessment form with the family, recording its demographic details, housing history and options, and medical, legal and social support needs. From there they offer support to ensure that their local authority housing application is properly completed and up to date, and that they receive assistance if required to apply for RAS. After a few weeks, the key worker works with the family to obtain support under the HAP scheme, including accessing the HAP Place Finder service from SDCC (which supplements HAP with the deposit and the first month's rent). It also includes practical assistance such as searching for accommodation on daft. ie and other online platforms, and preparing them to view and interact with landlords; and sometimes assisting them to engage with Túath Housing. The key worker may help them to apply for a range of social services and entitlements such as medical cards, social welfare payment, crèche and education, and legal advice. Families with additional needs may also be assisted after settlement through the Support to Live Independently (SLÍ) scheme.[71]

SDCC, Túath and Focus Ireland, hold a monthly operations meeting to discuss each family's progression and other issues.

There is evidence from a SDDC Report that, at least early on, some families were reluctant to move on to private accommodation with support from the HAP scheme and were instead hoping to secure a local authority house:[72]

> **"Increasingly families in the facility and indeed other homeless facilities are reluctant to seek accommodation under the HAP Scheme and instead will hold out for a Social Unit with the Council. This is being said very openly and is being reported back to the Council. Furthermore, there has been one instance recently whereby a family who were served a Notice of Termination as they were coming up to 18 months were offered local authority housing appropriate to their needs and in their area of preference but refused this offer."**

According to those interviewed, this issue is less prominent now.

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71 This is a scheme of the DRHE, delivered through the Dublin Simon Community, Peter McVerry Trust and Focus Ireland. It is a visiting support service to assist those with low or moderate needs to integrate into their communities after leaving homeless services.

72 Report on Motion No. 3 to South Dublin County Council. January 9th 2017 http://www.sdublincoco.ie/ga/Meetings/ViewDocument/54358 Accessed 12/08/2020

The Families

The 64[73] apartments are almost always occupied, with a short period of vacancy when a family leaves. Between January 2019 and April 2020, a total of 62 families are recorded as having transitioned to permanent accommodation of different kinds.[74] Of these, 47 (79%) are single-parent families and overall, the number of children per family is 2.5.

Although this could not be confirmed directly with SDCC, according to others interviewed including NGO staff most families nominated by them for Tallaght Cross, especially in the early stages of the scheme, came directly from PEA. Interviews with other partners and data on the destination of families moving on suggest that a large proportion of families, at the time they are allocated a unit in Tallaght Cross, are ready to move to a local authority house or to HAP. Thus they tend not to present with needs that would prevent them from moving on to these options. At the same time, there is also some evidence that a significant number of families present with complex social needs, the nature of which does not prevent them from moving on.

Interviews with staff also confirm that future preferences of families vary significantly. Some are keen to find accommodation under the HAP, while others would prefer to stay as long as possible in the hope that they will be allocated a local authority or other approved body home. Some even would prefer to be permanently housed in Tallaght Cross. Some families are concerned that if they can move to HAP-supported private accommodation, their tenancy will be less than secure and/or that the landlord may change their minds in the future regarding accepting families supported by the HAP payment. Such contrasting orientations towards Tallaght Cross may influence the dynamics between families, with some keeping very much to themselves and others actively engaging with their surroundings.

The Table below shows the destinations of these 62 families after leaving Tallaght Cross.

Table 6: Family Transitions from Tallaght Cross, January 2019 to April 2020

	Number	Percentage
Local Authority	26	42%
Other Approved Housing Bodies	24	39%
Private Rented with HAP	12	19%
Total Number of Families	**62**	**100%**

A total of 25 of the 62 families (40%) also received support under the SLÍ scheme.

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73 The total is 65 but the Focus Ireland office occupies one.

74 There is no data available on a small number of families that have moved on. A few have moved to alternative emergency transitional accommodation and a few have moved back in with families, both groups without informing Focus Ireland.

Family experiences of homelessness and contrasting views of Tallaght Cross

Despite efforts made by Focus Ireland, particular difficulties were encountered in securing interviews with families, and just four were completed. Three families are in permanent accommodation and one remains in Tallaght Cross.

All four families emphasised the positive aspects of their experience but all also raised issues.

The experience of each is outlined in sequence. These cannot be seen as representative of the experience of all families, but rather as illustrative of the problems that some families encountered.

Family 1

This was a single-parent family of two children. The mother had been in an abusive relationship and had reached the end of a maximum three-month period in a safe house in Tallaght. Of the safe house, she said:

> **"The house was perfect. It was beautiful but it was a very rough area – drinking, drug dealing, burned out cars. I had no sense of security in what was meant to be a safe house. I was kind of devastated there."**

Through the Council or Focus Ireland (she could not recall which) she was given a two-bed apartment in Tallaght Cross. The immediate impact was very positive:

> **"It was a fantastic feeling moving in. It felt like we were moving on to something better. The apartment was beautiful, great quality and there was a park just outside. I have nothing bad to say about Tallaght Cross… the staff are excellent and the security are doing their best"**

Soon they encountered a serious problem:

> **"…my family and I have been the victims of a lot of bullying from one family. Not just me, this family has been intimidating a lot of other families. I've checked with other families and they said they were intimidated by this family as well. This family came to Tallaght Cross a month after us and they have been a constant annoyance. I've been bullied. My kids have been bullied.**

She says she told security about them ("who did their best"), and called the Gardaí, but the problems were not resolved. She continued:

> **"Don't get me wrong. Tallaght Cross was a good place to live. I love Tallaght and would be happy living here. In Tallaght Cross, the apartment was fantastic and it was close to all the shops. I know the kids loved being beside the Square as well. But the worst part for me was the non-stop bullying. It's incredible how one person can impact on your life".**

After 18 months there, she expects to be moving soon outside of Dublin, on a long-term lease with an AHB.

The other three families' experience immediately prior to moving to Tallaght Cross was of being housed in hotels. All found it extremely difficult.

Family 2

This family lost their home in September 2016 when the landlord decided to sell. With six children, and despite looking in Clondalkin (where their children were at school), Lucan and Tallaght, they were unable to secure accommodation of any kind. After declaring themselves homeless, they began a period of having to move from one hotel to another, allocated two rooms in each:

> **"I was in a separate room to my husband with my girls and he was with the boys. We were trying to keep the kids quiet, afraid that if they made noise playing we'd be asked to leave. They were only kids. The kids never wanted to stay in hotels. They were always asking if they could sleep over at a friend's house. It seemed like we were always hanging out at somebody's house. We just didn't want to be in hotels. I sometimes don't know how my husband stuck it, why he didn't call it a day. There were days when life really got on top of you. Winter was very hard in the hotels. You're sitting in a room trying to entertain six kids."**

After a year of this, they found a hotel in Naas where they could stay for six or seven months.

> **"They were really good to us. They closed down at Christmas and they had two little bungalows outside. They gave us one for Christmas. They brought toys for the kids. They never looked down on us to say we were homeless."**

Not surprisingly, Tallaght Cross was a hugely welcome improvement for them, in many ways:

> "I was delighted when I got the call to go to Tallaght Cross [in August 2017]. I was so happy to have somewhere to cook and to clean, to do what we wanted. I was really happy when we got it… Life was grand to have our own front door."

Over time, the family began to experience problems of overcrowding associated with a family of six children living in a three bedroom apartment, but the relief was such that "at this stage it didn't bother me. I was delighted to be out of hotels". But issues began to arise:

> "we had neighbours that made life difficult. There was a case of the guards coming in to the building one day armed. Another time a guy was out of his mind on drugs. The ambulance crew advised me not to go down. We had one fob, so I had to get up when my husband was going to work to let him out and then hold it for the day so I could get the kids to school and so on. The place was wild that same day. Another day our front door was kicked in. There was a Muslim family. They were treated so badly by neighbours that they were happier to go back to hotels… the place was full of drugs. It was filthy, not because there were no cleaners. A lot of families just don't mind their children. It was especially bad at weekends."

Nevertheless she says:

> "We were fine in Tallaght Cross and we got on with life… So I kept to myself pretty much while we were there. I said hello and goodbye to the neighbours and that was it. The younger kids had friends from other families staying there. My older kids generally were happier to hang out with their friends from school in Clondalkin."

She concluded:

> "Tallaght Cross was much better for the kids than the set-up in hotels. The younger ones had friends. We were able to have a Christmas tree in a family home. We were fine there. It was more the environment around us that affected us – other families who didn't keep the rules."

Although delayed by Covid-19, this family is now settled in a council house in Citywest managed by Túath Housing, and is happy there. The main drawback is getting children to school in Clondalkin.

Family 3

The third family, also of six children (when first made homeless, it was five), had to leave the mother's family home due to issues arising from extreme overcrowding. Two of their children have special needs, which made their initial experience of hostel accommodation particularly difficult. Also difficult was that since the couple were unmarried, the children's father was not allowed to stay with them. This continued after they were moved to a hotel in Leopardstown for six months. Despite some support, from Cosán's Lifestart Programme and a Leap card[75] from Focus Ireland, daily life became a struggle:

> "My partner did his best to come out to us from Tallaght every day but we couldn't keep spending the money on travel. As it was, I had to travel every day to Dundrum to get food and supplies. We had to budget the money which was really hard. We had two kids in school in Tallaght so we were up early every morning to get the Luas and get them to school. Hotel life affected my mental health terribly. I had no support whatsoever. I felt like this was never going to end. I was crying all the time."

The impact on the children was huge:

> "The kids were so confused. We tried to make it like it was a summer break. I was bringing them off on day trips to Bray and Howth. I had to keep lying about their dad having longer hours in work. It impacted on the children. They weren't outgoing or lively anymore. My child with kidney disease cried non-stop and my child with autism had lost her sensory room when we moved out of home and she withdrew hugely. It was horrific."

SDCC had approved their application for HAP but despite the family's efforts they failed to find anywhere. With the support of Focus Ireland they received legal assistance in making a case to SDCC.

> "My child with kidney disease picked up an infection in the hotel and she had to spend a week in hospital. The hospital provided letters to the solicitors and that was the basis for my case."

They were offered a place in Tallaght Cross, and moved into a three-bedroom apartment in August 2019. Again, there were problems with her partner moving in with them as they had lost all documentation while moving.

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75   The Leap Card is a contactless smart card for automated fare collection used on public transport services in Ireland, particularly on public transport services in the greater Dublin area.

> "The Council had nothing to do with him on file. I went ballistic so we were told that he could stay a couple of nights a week. He ended up mainly staying at weekends. I felt really sorry for him. He was working, getting down to Tallaght Cross to get kids to school, having to leave only to come back again later and leave again. It was really exhausting."

Yet the move brought many benefits:

> We certainly had more freedom in Tallaght Cross. It was a much better location than Leopardstown, close to my kids' school and close to the shops. And we were more able to be together as a family. We were able to wash clothes.

Unlike the other families, they found serious shortcomings with the apartment:

> Look, it was way better than the hotel but the apartment I was put in was in an awful state. I had been told it would be done up before I moved in but it wasn't. The family in the apartment before me thrashed the place. The floors were all cracked, the balcony door was broken, safety locks on the windows were broken – which meant my kids were at risk. The rain got in frequently through damaged windows. The bathroom lights never worked so we had to use phone lights to go to the bathroom. The alarm was being pulled every night – security wasn't doing the job they were meant to be doing. Lifts were often broken and I often had difficulty bringing my baby's pram up to apartment. We ended up being flooded after a boiler or something got damaged. So we all ended up sleeping in the sitting room while that was being sorted.

Regarding support, she feels she did not get much from the Focus Ireland key worker, apart from the Luas card, but also says she did not need much. She concludes:

> "We got on with life in Tallaght Cross. As I say it was way better than the hotel. I didn't get too involved in the place as I knew from the word go that I'd be leaving soon."

In February 2020, SDCC provided them with a four-bedroom house, where all the family can finally live together.

Family 4.

The fourth family is a single-parent family with two sons, one over 20 and one in his mid-teens. The mother had been receiving the HAP payment when her landlord decided to sell. Unable to find suitable accommodation for the family, she presented as homeless to SDCC in April 2017. The family spent 10 months in the hotel and found it difficult.

> **"I was going to friends' houses to cook. I sometimes cooked on Friday and kept the food in a friend's house because there was nowhere in the hotel to store it... Sometimes we had two rooms but most of the time my sons and I slept in one room. We were all in one spot with nothing we could do. We just watched TV and lay down on the bed. I would often have to wait until my son finished work before we went to the hotel. That could be as late as 9 o' clock some evenings. I was living in stress there.**

In Tallaght Cross, they were given a two-bedroom apartment. Life changed for the better immediately.

> **"I was so excited, I was so happy. Tallaght Cross was like I had a home. There were so many good things about Tallaght Cross. I could cook whatever I liked whenever I liked. We felt very safe. I am late going to sleep. I was seeing the security people out checking the corridor. I felt good about this... And my boys liked living beside the shopping centre. Tallaght Cross was very central. "**

She was also positive about the Focus Ireland staff.

> **"I was very pleased with Focus Ireland staff and the support they gave. They were always very kind... and helpful...It was a good place for us, especially after 10 months in a hotel."**

Her only concerns were about the amount of rubbish discarded in the building, including in the lift, and small incidents of vandalism.

In June 2020, SDCC provided her with a home on Clondalkin, and the family is happily settled there.

The Tallaght Cross Model and the Environment

Túath points to the benefits to families, as they can:

> **"... enjoy their own space in a less stressful environment. We have seen some positive impacts on families where they have been successful in securing HAP tenancies. ... Another positive impact would be a number of tenants securing employment."**

All four families interviewed regarded the move to Tallaght Cross as positive, though to differing extents and in different ways.

The three families coming from hotels all experienced relief, two of the families experiencing extreme relief, in finally having their own door, cooking and living facilities. The response of the third was tempered by the poor conditions of the apartment, the only one who had made any negative comment on the quality and conditions of the apartment.

Three were very satisfied with the support they received from Focus Ireland, and the fourth family found it adequate.

The key problem emerged around anti-social behaviour in the apartment complex. There was some indication (this was also mentioned in interviews with support staff) that the situation was worse in one of the two blocks. On the evidence of the family interviews, there are issues around bullying, intimidation, incidents of violence, illegal drug consumption, and unsupervised children. These significantly impacted on the experience of three of the four families.

The question here is the extent to which these are related to the specific Tallaght Cross model of providing transitional emergency accommodation. This points to a few interrelated questions:

> Are there physical characteristics associated with these two apartment blocks that would make them more susceptible to these kinds of problems?
> Is it a good idea to concentrate together a large number of families who have experienced the trauma of homelessness (and less than adequate approaches to addressing it, such as hotels)?
> Is a relatively large proportion of these families, prior to homelessness, coming from complex situations and/or facing multiple problems?

The answer to these questions may shed light on whether there is a problem with the model itself, though the evidence from this research is insufficient to answer them here. Perhaps also the fact that a spokesperson for SDCC was not available to be interviewed for this research points to a set of deeper issues that would be difficult to examine objectively: that is, whether the features and dynamics of the model in an abstract sense would be difficult to distinguish from the impact of its specific wider environment and from decisions taken outside the parameters of the model that nevertheless influence how it works in practice.

A deeper study would also be required to assess whether the complexity of the Tallaght Cross model, with three partners and a couple of sub-contractors, is a contributory factor, perhaps through hindering more effective coordination of different services, in the issues that have been encountered.

Nevertheless, a clear message emerges that the own-door apartment, of good quality, is hugely welcomed by all families who have previously been accommodated in hotels.

4.4 WCCC/Focus Ireland Emergency Family Service (WEFS), Waterford City & County

Background and context

Waterford City and County Council is the lead local authority responsible for addressing homelessness in the South East, its Homeless Section supporting all local authorities in the region. Though from a relatively low base, by early 2018 the region had seen a significant rise in the numbers in emergency accommodation in the previous two years, especially of families, and the WCCC was offering emergency accommodation in the form of private B&Bs to a growing number of families. Table 7 compares the official January 2016 and January 2018 figures.

Table 7: Number of Households Accessing Emergency Accommodation in the South-East, January 2016 and January 2018

	January 2016	January 2018	% increase in homelessness
Homeless Adults in South-East	260	354	36%
Homeless Adults in Waterford	96	119	24%
Homeless Families in South-East	12	44	267%
Dependents in Homeless Families in South-East	24	64	167%
Single-Parent Homeless Families in South-East	7	24	243%

Source: https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data
Accessed 11/08/2020

WCCC had been block-booking 11 rooms in two B&Bs in Waterford City and County dedicated to emergency family use, a number considered at that time to be sufficient to cope with periodic unanticipated rises in demand, and the rooms were often fully occupied. Each unit accommodated two-to four-person families, and two of the rooms had an adjoining door for use if, as sometimes happened, there were five or more family members.

In May 2018, the Homeless Section added two additional professional staff as social care workers to the Homeless Services Team (until then it comprised just a single homeless placement officer). But it was quickly becoming clear, supported by the evidence nationally, that the B&B arrangements were highly inappropriate and harmful to families, and to be used only in specific limited circumstances. Social care workers reported that the living circumstances of families in B&Bs were so physically confined, and lacking in such basic items as cooking facilities, eating or table space, that the parent(s) lacked the time and the emotional energy needed to actively seek accommodation. The physical circumstances also made it extremely difficult for the social care worker to develop mutually agreed care plans, part of the package of services provided to the families.

The B&B approach was also costly: in 2018 the service cost WCCC €324,902 for the year, and €268,156 for the nine months up to September 2019.

The WCCC Homeless Services manager was also seeking to avoid an existing model being rolled out across the country, that of the 'Family Hub', a form of congregated emergency accommodation for multiple families. As an alternative, the idea emerged of setting aside a number of local authority-owned houses specifically to accommodate families presenting as homeless. The process of 'banking' local authority houses as they became vacant began in late 2018. Normally such houses would, after a period for renovation and refurnishing, be offered to families on the local authority housing list; now they were to be offered to homeless families as emergency accommodation.

By mid-2019, a mixed portfolio of nine properties had been banked and readied for use[76]: seven in Waterford City, three apartments and four houses; and two in Dungarvan, both houses. To have a mix of accommodation was a deliberate decision: they include different locations, types (houses/apartments) and sizes, as well as a couple in a new housing estate and in locations that, on the basis of limited interest shown in the CBL process, are less desirable. In June, WCCC signed a draft Memorandum of Agreement with Focus Housing Association, a subsidiary of Focus Ireland, for the latter to manage the properties on their behalf.[77] The first family moved in August 2019. By September 2019, WCCC had fully terminated its use of B&Bs and hotels.

A parallel development around the same time enabled a more streamlined and 'wraparound' service to be offered to those facing homelessness. In February 2019, in a partnership between WCCC, the HSE, Focus Ireland and South East Simon Community, the Waterford Integrated Homeless Services centre (WIHS)[78] was launched in Waterford City. It houses staff from all the agencies and acts as a 'one-stop-shop' for those experiencing homelessness. The centre is managed overall by the WCCC Homeless Services manager.[79] This integrated approach has facilitated the coordination of all involved in this model of emergency accommodation.

The WCCC Homeless Services Team now comprises the lead manager, a local homeless services coordinator, three social care workers, the house assistance payment place finder (designated to support families onto the special HAP Place Finder scheme) and two administrative staff. Supporting the WEFS model is one of several responsibilities of the team.

Focus Ireland also provides a range of other housing services in Waterford, including a supported family housing development in Grange Cohan where their regional office is located. Staff include a project leader, case managers (project workers), contact workers[80] and a property manager. The case managers divide their time between the main Focus Ireland office in Grange Cohen and WIFS.

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76 Focus Ireland and Tinteán Housing Association also made available two houses from their own housing stock. For simplicity, only the nine from the local authority are considered here.

77 The final version of the MoU was not signed until May 2020, but no substantive changes were made.

78 Frequently referred to as the 'Homeless Centre', for short.

79 The formal title is Local Authorities Homeless Lead. For more see http://www.waterfordcouncil.ie/departments/housing/homeless-services.htm

80 Contact worker is an entry-level position for a person qualified in social work, whose role is to ensure that the physical accommodation needs are met on an ongoing basis, such as utilities and facilities.

The WCCC/Focus Ireland Emergency Family Service[81] (WEFS) Model

The WEFS Model covers the seven banked properties in Waterford City and the two in Dungarvan. The specific roles and responsibility of WCCC and Focus Ireland[82] are detailed in a Memorandum of Agreement between the two with the current agreement to run for two years until May 31st 2021.

In brief, the responsibilities are divided as follows.

WCCC's Homeless Services identifies the families, develops individual support plans that link to other social services, works with families to secure long-term accommodation using the HAP or HAP Place Finder schemes, and supports them to settle in. Focus Ireland prepares and manages the physical and financial aspects of the emergency accommodation, including the rent supplement using the RAS scheme and if required, continues afterwards to support the family.

Comparing Costs of WEFS and B&B

According to figures provided by Focus Ireland, the costs over the year from August 2019 to August 2020 were approximately as follows:

› Per unit, the once-off fit-out costs, which includes flooring, furniture, electrical appliances, windows blinds and other items, comes to an average of €7,627 each, or a total of €68,643
  › On the assumption that these are adequate for three years' use, this comes to a total annual cost of €22,881
› The annual average cost of management was €666 per unit, a total of €5,994
› The annual cost of maintenance per unit (responding to ongoing problems, maintaining empty building and cyclical costs) came to €2,751, or a total of €24,759
› The annual cost of services per unit was a further €1,000, or a total of €9,000
› Half-time salary of support staff, including travel and phone, came to €22,116

Thus, the ongoing annual cost for nine units totalled €84,750.

The average income (leaving out the RAS) per unit was about €82 for each week it was occupied. The houses were occupied for a total of 700 nights, or 100 weeks, yielding €8,200. Thus the net cost for the nine houses, and the Focus Ireland support, was approximately €76,550, or €8,500 per unit.

Figures provided by WCCC indicate that the cost of block-booking 11 rooms in B&Bs for homeless families came to just under €300,000 in 2018. Comparing this to the €76,550 net spending on the houses suggests very good value for money. This assumes that the staff costs of the Homeless Section are the same, which is reasonable since the same level of support is provided to families in both types of accommodation provision.

However, an accurate comparison is difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at. For instance, the figures above for the WEFS model do not take into account the capital cost of the housing (which, however, has long been written down since these houses are not new). There is also the question of the opportunity cost of allocating the housing

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81 This is the name given to the model in the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS system). WEFS is used for short.
82 Legally the accommodation is signed over to the Focus Housing Association.

to this purpose, that is, they could instead be allocated to families on the housing list. Furthermore, the above does not take into account the fact that the cost per unit would diverge in the two models depending on the rate of occupancy.

That said, the huge cost difference between the two approaches still strongly suggests that the WEFS model offers significant savings over the provision of B&Bs.

Case Management

Families present themselves as homeless at the Home Centre, on their own initiative or directed there from other social and local authority services. A social care worker from the Homeless Services team is straightaway assigned to them and will usually remain as their key worker until they secure appropriate long-term accommodation. The options available for families are usually two-fold: single-parent families with a woman as the head of household may be offered one of five units reserved at the Oasis Centre[83]; while the WEFS accommodation is available to all families. Even families regarding which, when presenting as homeless, there is evidence of multiple needs, are initially offered one of these options. Later on, following further assessment, such families may be moved to supported accommodations (as was the case with one family accommodation under WEFS-see below.)

Over a period of a few hours, the care worker and family go through several standard processes associated with registering as homeless and assessing the level and nature of needs.[84] A service contract (or code of conduct) agreement is then signed between WCCC and the parent(s) as the service user, outlining the kinds of support offered during emergency accommodation and the service user's responsibility to care for the accommodation and participate in the support process.

The service contract commits the family to actively take part in developing plans and seeking accommodation, to fully engage with the care worker and other agencies and never to leave the house vacant at night. Visitors are allowed, though not for overnight stays. The ultimate goal is stated as: "to work on an exit from homelessness and secure private rented accommodation".

At this point, the social care worker contacts the Focus Ireland representative who accompanies the family to their emergency accommodation. The proximity of the service providers within the building is useful, easing the handover for the family and personalising the link between all the parties.

The social care worker's support resumes after a few days to allow the family to settle in. Working together with the family, a tailored support plan is designed and agreed. Thereafter, the family and the care worker meet on a weekly basis working in parallel with other service providers seeking to address the issues affecting the family and their ability to maintain a long-term tenancy. The family is encouraged, coached and assisted to seek and identify rental accommodation using the HAP scheme and, if necessary, the

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83 Oasis House Women's Centre is a respite centre for domestic and gender-based violence. WCCC have an agreement to reserve up to five units for emergency accommodation for women-headed single-parent families facing homelessness.

84 These include the Initial Assessment Placement Form which is related to the national Pathway Accommodation and Support System; the Vulnerability Index to assess the family's current level of vulnerability; and a Risk Assessment Form to assess the risk from the service provider's side.

HAP Place Finder scheme. Social care workers have developed a close relationship with a number of letting agent teams in the city and county, which in several cases facilitated the rapid identification of appropriate accommodation.

The role of the Focus Ireland team begins when a property becomes available. Once they have vacant possession, they assess its basic structural adequacy, install furniture and fittings, and connect the utilities.[85] An amount of up to €2,000 per house is provided by the local authority to cover all this. When first introduced to the family at the Homeless Centre, the Focus Ireland case manager explains the terms of a licence agreement to be signed by the head of the family[86] and of a consent form on the use of their data. the maximum stay permitted is six months, through some flexibility will be shown in extenuating circumstances (an example being the Covid-19 epidemic).

A few days later the case manager returns to ensure that the accommodation satisfies their needs and assists them to complete the application for the RAS to supplement rent paid by the family. Their role in relation to the family is entirely supportive including, should the need arise, advocating on their behalf. A priority is to access the RAS, and the completed application is submitted directly by the case manager to WCCC. The latter calculates rental due based on the means-tested scheme.

The Focus Ireland contact worker undertakes ongoing property maintenance, and ensures that services such as refuse collections are available and that a weekly health and safety check is carried out. Although the Focus Ireland role does not extend to helping to secure accommodation, occasionally a family may be identified, due to multiple and complex needs, by the case worker as not yet ready to manage a permanent tenancy, and may be recommended for the Focus Ireland supported accommodation in Grange Cohen for a period of 12 to 18 months. The final decision on this is made by the local authority Homeless Services Team. Contact between families and Focus Ireland staff is very frequent and some families tend to relate to Focus Ireland staff as support workers, raising support issues during interactions. This can pose a problem at times, as it raises the issue of role boundaries between the Focus Ireland case manager and the social care worker.

The families

The number of families accommodated in the nine houses between the 15th of August 2019 and 13th of December 2019 was 13[87], of which five were still in residence on the 11th August 2020.[88] The relatively small number reflects a drop in the number of families presenting as homeless, from a high of 44 in January 2019 (see Table 7) when the model was conceived, to 11 in January 2020[89]. One of the houses (located in Dungarvan) has

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85 This is undertaken by the Focus Ireland South East Property Management Team leader.

86 A breach of a Licence Agreement with Focus Housing Association "will result in the immediate withdrawal of homeless accommodation and supports and no alternative accommodation or supports will be offered by the Council."

87 In fact, 14 families were accommodated but one was for two days following flood damage in a local authority house.

88 By the 4th of October 18 families (27 adults and 43 children) had been accommodated but this included the two units contributed by Focus Ireland.

89 https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/homeless_report_-_january_2020_1.pdf Accessed 8/0

yet to accommodate a family. Seven of the 13 were single-parent families, and the total number of children was 34. Thus, the total number of people accommodated under the WEFS was 53.

So far, five of the 13 families have found permanent accommodation under the HAP scheme, after an average stay of 24 days. The shortest stay was a single night, and the longest 63 days. Another family, after a stay of 197 days (technically exceeding the 6 months due to the Covid-19 restrictions), has been housed in long-term Focus Ireland supported accommodation.[90] And the seventh family no longer in the scheme was served a notice of termination due to serious anti-social behaviour and alternative transitional accommodation was found for them.

The six families still in residence in August 2020 have been there an average of 113 days, the longest being 180 days, and the shortest just one day. However, Covid-19 has postponed transition for several months. Of these families, the expectation is that three will be given a local authority social allocation (off the housing list) and three will be accommodated under HAP.

The table below reflects *both the actual and the expected* allocation.

Table 8: Family Transitions from WEFS, Actual and Expected, 2019

	No of Families	Percentage
Local Authority	3	23%
Focus Ireland Long-Term Supported Accommodation	1	7%
Private Rented/ HAP	8	62%
Other	1	7%
Total Number of Families	**13**	**100%**

In April 2020 the service was broadened for the duration of Covid-19 restrictions to include single persons and seven WCCC apartments have been committed to the service. Since September 2020, the project has been also been expanded to include Tinteán Housing Association which provides two emergency units and more intensive support for families with higher complex needs. Further expansions for families with more complex needs are under consideration.

Family Experiences and Critical Issues Emerging

Three of the thirteen families were interviewed during the course of the research, two still in transitional emergency accommodation and one in permanent accommodation who was receiving the HAP payment. Such a small sample cannot be considered as representative of all families, but it nevertheless offers insights into the experience from the families' perspectives in relation to how they came to be in the WEFS accommodation and of the central features of this model.

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90 This was funded under the Government's Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), and is available to address a special need.

Previous Circumstances

The three families found themselves homeless, all for the first time, as a result of having to leave private-rented accommodation that was put on the market. Each has a unique story on how they came to be in the transitional accommodation.

One, a family with six children with both parents unemployed, had been in a very a low-rent house in what they described as a "rough area", in effect minding it for the owner who then decided to put it on the market. They were given a month's notice, but were having no success at all in finding alternative accommodation. They were on the housing list but had no idea how long it might be before they would be offered a house.

A second family, about to have a child, was given a month's notice to leave after nearly three years, though due to complications around the pregnancy and birth this was extended to three months. One parent was a mature student and the other unemployed. They were already in receipt of HAP, but despite several months trying, they could not make up the difference between what the HAP (the upper limit was €660) and what was being sought in rent, the lowest was over €900 a month for a two-bedroom apartment (which is a requirement under HAP for a family with one child).

> **"It was extremely difficult, expecting a baby and while she was in hospital we were being asked to leave … She had pregnancy difficulties and was hospitalised afterwards. It was very frightening for us."**

What both families had in common was a fear that declaring themselves homeless would result in them living in a B&B. The second family said:

> **"the HAP section … said go to Homeless centre in Parnell street. There they said you have to come back on the exact day you were homeless. They told me to keep looking. I was really stressed; I could not find anything. They said it was the way it works. I thought that there might be B&B for us. I had a friend and they were in B&B and there is no cooking facilities, or even enough to clean bottles for the new baby. I heard horrible stories. I was really worried."**

Despite their fears, this family took the advice and went to the WIHS Centre. They secured transitional accommodation the day they were to move out of their previous apartment.

However, the other family took desperate measures to avoid contacting the homeless services.

> **"A family I know went down [to the Homeless Centre] and they were in a B&B and I did not want to be there. They said it was terrible and had a terrible effect on the children. I was really scared of that."**

Instead they moved into a caravan owned by a relative, with no running water, toilets or electricity and in an unauthorised location.

> "By then we were very anxious, very anxious, stressed out. It was a very bad feeling. Husband all stressed out. The smaller children were excited because they were going into a caravan. The older ones knew. They would not have showers, no toilets, no nothing."

After a week, with the arrival of bailiffs imminent, and with the mediation of a supportive teacher and social worker, they agreed to declare themselves homeless at the Centre.

> "When I went to the Centre I thought: I could even end up in a B&B. But the caravan was terrible. It was a very rough week. But we decided to go down."

They were advised that they would have to leave the caravan and arrange to have it removed.

> "I was told: 'If you move caravan and come back tomorrow we will have an emergency four bedroom house for free' … I couldn't believe it. I walked out and told my husband and he was shocked too. We were delighted; the children were over the moon. The relief was incredible. … I filled out some forms. We moved in the next day."

The third family, a single parent with four children faced a different problem. The found themselves homeless in 2016 when the apartment they were in was sold. The mother approached the WCCC for a house but was advised she was too far down the housing list. She found a private-rental house in good conditions with three bedrooms, but the landlord would only accept cash and insisted that she must not inform WCCC. "If I said I was there, he would have put me out." She thus received no rent support. She lived there, working on minimum wage as a cleaner in a local hotel (who, she said, were very supportive), in extremely difficult circumstances for over three years until December 2019.

> "I don't know how I survived it. I worked throughout except when by youngest was born. Every day was a struggle, even to get small things. I don't remember it now - I blank it out."

Finally, she approached Focus Ireland. They advised her that she would be entitled to HAP if she could provide proof of her landlord's rental conditions. This she managed to do (in a phone text), and when she asked if he would accept the HAP payment, she was issued a month's notice to leave. She went to the Homeless Centre, who arranged transitional accommodation for the family a few days before her notice ran out.

Despite their concerns and hesitations, all three families, while acknowledging that there were many lengthy forms to be completed, found their first encounters with the Homeless Centre services very positive.

Quality of the transitional accommodation and support

Beyond the relief felt as a result of escaping very difficult circumstances, all three expressed satisfaction with the quality of the accommodation.

> "It is a fine big house, better and bigger than we had. It is a town house, on the street. I had no furniture so it was all there, and everything was spotless. It was newly painted. New washing machine, cooker, fridge. We had taken only clothes, shoes and the telly."
>
> "The apartment was good. It had everything. Very clean, really well looked after."
>
> "You walk in and you need nothing at all. Everything was there... Front and back garden."

Some reservations were expressed about the location:

> "It is on the main street, next to nightclubs. It is a bit noisy. I use the back door, onto a cul-de- sac lane at the back. I do not want small children to go into main road. The back yard is tiny. Would love to have a bigger one for children. But the house is excellent."

Another said it would not have suited them in the long term, and they found secure long-term appropriate apartment with HAP support within a month of arriving there:

> "It was on the ground floor– the noise late on was quite bad, and the people outside were often drunk on the street. But it was handy to be able to go out the back door."

The third said:

> "The location is not great – it's a bit worse than before.. Not a nice housing estate... I had been in a house in the middle of nowhere, but now I am in an estate."

Given that the maximum time they expected to be there was six months, and the circumstances that they were leaving, this was not a serious issue for any of them.

The services of both agencies, the WCCC Homeless Services team and Focus Ireland, were greatly appreciated, though none of the families had special needs.

"The Focus Ireland man comes once a week and makes sure everything is safe for the family. They are always ringing to make sure everything is OK. Very nice"

"Focus Ireland are very nice and helpful people... Sometime being nice is the best thing you need. When they call, they help with the forms - I am not good at reading and writing. They are not judgemental, and we had not dealt with anyone like that before... 'You are homeless and we are here to help.' I was insecure at first... but when I realised they were out to help I felt good."

"The local authority lady offered us several apartment options from the internet. Some were too expensive, one in an unsafe area I had lived in before. Then she told us of one, that she got through an agency, she called and gave us a viewing date. It was cheap enough and just right for us. We have a balcony, lift, free packing and a good landlord... The people at the Homeless Centre and Focus Ireland are all equally helpful. We are really grateful to them all."

Where additional issues did come up, they were addressed. For instance, the care worker successfully appealed the case of one family who had been removed from the housing list several years earlier on the basis that they had no official address (as the landlord had been paid in cash). The family was reinstated with no loss of priority.

All three families interviewed found the quality of the accommodation to be high and that the support services provided them with everything they needed. The relief at not being allocated a B&B was enormous for two of the families. WCCC and Focus Ireland staff report that families coming directly from B&Bs are always hugely relieved and grateful to move to a home in a community. The sole concern of two of the families centred on the location of the houses, although given that the maximum stay was six months, this was not a major issue for them (a factor that had been taken into consideration by WCCC when selecting these units for inclusion in the WEFS scheme).

5. Unique and Common Features of the Four Models

The case studies presented in the previous section outline the significant merits of each of the four own-door models of emergency and transitional accommodation for homeless families, especially when those models are contrasted with the limitations of PEA as expressed by homeless families. A requirement of this study was to consider those merits under a variety of key indicators, namely:

› the living conditions facilitated by the named models;
› the capacity of the individual models to reduce the impact of homelessness on families whilst homeless, most particularly in areas such as family and child wellbeing, including child development, family autonomy and family functioning;
› the capacity of accommodation models to expedite families' exit from homelessness;
› cost-effectiveness, especially when considered against available data on the cost implications of other models such as family hubs and private hotels/B&Bs.

The review was also to explore the challenges of implementing these models, with a view to identifying a series of recommendations which would be of relevance to the homelessness sector.

This section therefore sets out to consider the *common* strengths and challenges that underpin the four models of emergency accommodation reviewed in this study. Before doing so however, it takes some time to acknowledge the fact that each of the models operates within a unique local context and, therefore, contains a number of distinct features.

5.1 Unique Features of Individual Models

The varied or unique features of individual models are grouped under three primary headings, as outlined in Table 9 below: family need, nature of provision and duration of accommodation.

Family Need

As noted throughout Section 4, the respective local authorities[91] are responsible for the referral of families to the accommodation models reviewed in this study. While each of the models is targeted at families experiencing homelessness, different choices are made in individual models about the type of homeless families that are directed, in practice, to the accommodation provided. In other words, in some of the models, simply being homeless does not guarantee a family access to the accommodation available [92].

In the context of Tallaght Cross, for example, there is evidence to suggest that a large proportion of families targeted for accommodation in this facility are drawn (especially at the early stages) from those in PEA, who demonstrate a capacity and readiness to progress to local authority housing or to HAP, should the opportunities be available to them. Most do not present with needs that might prevent them from availing of these options. There is also evidence however, that Tallaght Cross also accommodates a significant minority of families with additional and complex needs that undermine their potential to sustain a tenancy.

Table 9: Key Features Differentiating Reviewed Models of Emergency Accommodation

	Families Prioritised	Nature of Provision	Duration of Stay
CRFI	› Larger families › Single-parent families › A significant minority of families with complex needs additional to housing need	› Self-contained apartment accommodation in a block comprising 30 emergency accommodation apartments	› No specified maximum or minimum duration of stay, though envisaged as 12 months.
SRM	› Primarily families with housing need	› Mainly houses in accordance with family need	› Initial 12-month tenancy with potential to rent in place thereafter through RAS or HAP
Tallaght Cross	› Primarily families drawn from those in PEA › Families with the capacity and readiness to progress to local authority housing or to HAP › A significant minority of families with additional and complex needs, though these do not appear to greatly affect their potential to sustain a tenancy	› Self-contained apartment accommodation in two apartment blocks, comprising 64 emergency accommodation apartments in total	› Maximum of 18 months
WEFS	› Any family entering homelessness (though female-headed single-parent families may be offered another option)	› A mix of house and apartment accommodation	› 6 months

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91 Or, more specifically, the HAT under the leadership of the local authority.

92 No written policies in this regard were seen by the research team, and the processes of how families are allocated homes under different models were expressed verbally to the team.
It is important to highlight the potential of inconsistencies arising from undocumented policies, as well potential risks to the rights of individual families.

The allocation process in Waterford differs to Tallaght Cross. There is no grading of families according to need in the WEFS and WCCC views its banked properties as a speedy opportunity to accommodate families at the point of their declaring themselves homeless (An exception is female-headed single-parent families, who may instead be offered one of several units reserved in a refuge). Families with exceptional needs are then identified after they are accommodated and referred forward for additional support as appropriate.

The other two models examined in this study, CRFI and SRM in Limerick, form part of a local authority strategy for accommodating families experiencing homelessness in Limerick, alongside other interventions such as PEA and communal family hubs. Larger families tend to be prioritised for accommodation in CRFI because of the apartment accommodation provided, while a high proportion of families accommodated in CRFI are also single-parent-headed households. A significant minority of families allocated to CRFI has needs additional to housing that undermine their capacity to sustain a stable tenancy and these families tend to require lengthy and significant case management. Additional needs include, but are not limited to, mental health difficulties; addiction; child welfare concerns; and the need for budgeting, money management and home management supports.

Families accommodated in SRM properties tend to be *houseless* rather than *homeless*. By extension, they require low-to-medium case management supports, with fewer families presenting with complex needs than would be the case, for example, in CRFI. In fact, a considerable number of families have progressed into SRM provision from CRFI, with LCCC viewing this option as an important capacity-building step for certain families in their exit from homelessness.

Nature of Provision

Both Tallaght Cross and CRFI provide self-contained apartment accommodation to homeless families in apartment-block settings. There are 64 apartments across two blocks in Tallaght Cross while CRFI comprises a block of 30 apartments. Project partners note that both facilities are generally fully occupied. Because of the collective nature of apartment blocks, both facilities require monitoring or security, while CRFI operates a no-visitor policy. This places certain limitations on families accommodated in both facilities which do not apply in the context of WEFS and SRM.

In comparison, WEFS provides both individual apartment and house accommodation to families accessing its service. These units are dispersed in the community: seven are located in Waterford City, three apartments and four houses; and two in Dungarvan, both houses. Unlike the high occupancy rate in both Tallaght Cross and CRFI, one of the WEFS properties[93] had yet, at the point of completion of this study, to accommodate a family.

SRM properties are predominantly, though not exclusively, houses. Every effort is made through SRM to secure a property that matches the presenting needs of each family at the time of their entry into SRM. SRM properties are community-based, enabling families to establish links in the communities in which they are accommodated[94] and normalising life for families that have gone through the trauma of homelessness.

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93 A house located in Dungarvan.
94 And in which, if their SRM tenancies are successful, they are likely to remain accommodated.

Case-management supports are provided by Focus Ireland key workers in all of the models. The nature and extent of case management is dependent on the respective needs of individual families and the supports provided by other partners. A unique feature of CRFI involves the employment of a dedicated child support worker who provides specific inputs to children where additional needs have been identified.

Duration of Family Stay

Each of the four models reviewed has a different expectation regarding the length of time an individual family can, and will, remain in the accommodation provided. In Tallaght Cross for example, the maximum tenancy is 18 months, since after that, families would qualify for Part 4 tenancy rights under the 2015 Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act. The limit of an 18-month tenancy may explain the apparent prioritisation in Tallaght Cross of families with the capacity to sustain a tenancy, on the one hand satisfying the immediate need to accommodate these homeless families, while ensuring good prospects for onward progression to longer-term tenancies on the other.

Families accommodated in WEFS receive a licence agreement specifying that they may remain for a maximum period of six months. From the outset, each family is encouraged, coached and assisted to seek and identify private rental accommodation using the HAP scheme and, if necessary, the HAP Place Finder scheme. WEFS is thus viewed as a short-term transitional model of accommodation, designed to provide families with a temporary stepping stone towards longer-term tenancies in the private rental market or in some cases, towards supported accommodation.

Residents of CRFI are also issued with a licence agreement. Typically, it is anticipated that each family will be accommodated in CRFI for approximately 12 months. However, a maximum or minimum duration of stay is not specified and families remain in the facility for longer or shorter periods in accordance with their respective needs and capacities, and depending on the availability of appropriate longer-term accommodation to match those needs and capacities. The absence of a defined maximum period of stay in CRFI perhaps reflects the fact that a significant minority of families accommodated in the facility present with needs additional to housing, some of which are complex and acute.

While SRM is envisaged as a transitional housing arrangement for homeless families, it is also designed as a strategy to increase the longer-term social housing stock available to families in Limerick. Therefore, families are issued with a 12-month tenancy for the duration of their SRM accommodation in the expectation that successful SRM tenancies will result in families being able to rent-in-place directly from the landlord or via RAS.

5.2 Common Features Across Reviewed Models: Shared Strengths & Challenges

Living Conditions

Examining common features of the models reviewed, it is evident that, compared with PEA and congregate family hubs, each offers families experiencing homelessness substantially improved living conditions. Most notably, the accommodation models provide families who, it must be remembered, are emerging from experiences of instability, uncertainty and often severe distress with:

› own-door private accommodation, affording families the comfort and privacy to live as a family
› facilities to do their own cooking and washing and other basic household functions
› increased space, particularly when compared to whole families having to reside in one or, in some instances, two hotel rooms
› stability through the provision of a transitional home for a prolonged period until such time as a more permanent housing solution can be secured

While each of the four models offers families own-door accommodation, it is important to note that both Tallaght Cross and CRFI provide accommodation in apartment blocks. Given the concentrated nature of apartment accommodation, anti-social behaviour is not uncommon and a security presence exists in both facilities. Similarly, as a means of ensuring the safety of residents, CRFI operates a no-visitor policy. While transitional apartment accommodation goes a considerable way towards normalising family-life for residents in both facilities, security-related policies can unintentionally contribute to feelings of isolation:

> "It's very isolating here. We are allowed no visitors. It's very lonely." (Family interview in respect of CRFI)

Security-related issues also led to fewer social contacts:

> "So I kept to myself pretty much while we were there. I said hello and goodbye to the neighbours and that was it." (Family interview in respect of Tallaght Cross)

Interviewees from both CRFI and Tallaght Cross made reference to certain families not adhering to policies, while also commenting on the manner in which non-adherence to policies impacted on their families' experiences. Reference was made to family members being bullied and intimidated by other families and to the inability of security in both facilities to address these matters:

> **"Security keeps an eye on comings and goings in and out of the building. They are down at the entrance. But they don't see or hear what goes on in individual apartments or up on the landings" (Family interview in respect of CRFI)**

Particular concerns were expressed about the prevalence of drug-taking and other forms of anti-social behaviour. Interviewees from both facilities noted that they simply remained as much as possible within their own family units and within the security of their own-door accommodation, interacting little with other families in the premises.

Therefore, while families appreciated being accommodated in their own private apartments in CRFI and Tallaght Cross, it was apparent from interviews that the environment surrounding them was frequently inhospitable and negatively impacted on their abilities to live comfortably. While interviewees complained about a failure by the authorities to sanction families who did not abide by policies, it is difficult to envisage how such sanctions might operate. For example, any decision to evict families for inappropriate behaviour from either CRFI or Tallaght Cross would only result in additional cases of family homelessness.

This points to another potential issue. Becoming homeless is, in some cases, associated with families that face multiple disadvantages. The experience of PEA can lead to further traumatisation. Concentrating a significant minority of such families in an apartment block may be a factor in the anti-social and self-destructive behaviour experienced there by many of those interviewed in Tallaght Cross and CRFI. This raises questions regarding the balance of family need to be accommodated in transitional housing in apartment blocks, mindful particularly of the existing stresses associated with family homelessness.

Reducing the Impact of Homelessness

By affording families own-door accommodation with cooking and washing facilities, increased personal and family space, and greater stability, each of the reviewed models contributes to mitigating the long-term trauma of homelessness on families. In particular, interviews with family members as part of this study noted that families had greater capacity and autonomy in these accommodation models to:

> carry out everyday family functions that were neither possible nor permissible in PEA, basic functions that most families would simply take for granted such as cooking food, keeping food in a fridge, washing clothes, children being enabled to complete homework comfortably and in the case of WEFS, SRM and Tallaght Cross, hosting visitors

> improve family diet, cook the food they desired and rely less on take-out meals which were both less healthy and extremely costly

> allow their children to be children, to be noisy and play freely[95]

> engage more effectively with care planning and personal supports offered by key workers, activities that could now be accessed in the privacy of one's own accommodation, thereby enhancing the confidentiality of service.

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95 A number of parents interviewed during the study expressed concerns about their children making noise in hotel rooms and their fears of that noise impacting on other hotel guests, thereby risking their continued accommodation in those facilities.

However, interviews with family members during the study indicated that some, if not all, of these gains were likely to be undermined the longer a family remained in emergency accommodation. For example, some families noted during interview that the self-confidence they had gained through enhanced living conditions had diminished as they remained in transitional accommodation for periods longer than anticipated. They suggested that this reduction in confidence increased their sense of despair and impacted negatively on their capacity to seek out sustained, long-term accommodation.

Reducing the Duration of Family Homelessness

A core concern of this study involved examining whether the reviewed models played any part in expediting family exits from homelessness.

The research team found some evidence to suggest that the type of emergency accommodation provided influenced the speed with which a family might exit homelessness. Specifically, the WCCC social care workers found that the conditions for families living in B&Bs were so constrained and confined that it was extremely difficult to develop care plans with parents. Furthermore, parents were so physically and mentally drained by the experience of managing a family in these circumstances that they lacked the time and emotional energy needed to seek and secure accommodation[96]. In contrast, a core feature of the WEFS model was that it offered families the breathing space necessary to seek out long-term accommodation and thereby exit homelessness within the six-month timeframe prescribed by the model.

A similar argument might be made relating specifically to SRM. This model offers families an opportunity to progress from supported transitional housing to longer-term tenancies within a twelve-month period. Basically, if an SRM family can demonstrate within the twelve months that it is capable of sustaining a longer-term tenancy, then it is likely to exit homelessness at the end of the period. Furthermore, since most families allocated to SRM accommodation require low or, at most, medium case management supports, many are likely to have that capacity or to be able to exercise it during the period.

However, in practice some families allocated to SRM in Limerick arrive after lengthy experiences of other forms of emergency accommodation, most notably, in hotel accommodation followed sometimes by accommodation in CRFI. Of the five families interviewed in respect of SRM, two had been in homeless services for between 25 and 36 months, while three had been in homeless services for longer than 36 months (all including the period in SRM accommodation). It is thus not necessarily a quick-fix for all families.

This research finds that two separate though inter-related factors primarily influence the speed with which families can exit emergency accommodation and homelessness.

The first is family capacity. This may seem self-evident. Families presenting with a need only to be housed are likely to experience fewer barriers in exiting homelessness than families presenting with additional and complex needs such as mental health difficulties, addiction, child welfare concerns, prior difficulties sustaining a tenancy, money and home

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96 A similar argument may apply to hotel accommodation, though no direct evidence was obtained of this.

management concerns and so on. Families with additional needs require additional case management supports, as well as interventions from a range of statutory and community-based services essential to strengthening their capacity to sustain long-term tenancies. One public sector manager suggested during interview that homeless families with additional complex needs inevitably remained longer in emergency and transitional accommodation. This interviewee recommended that significant research be undertaken in Ireland into effective models of supporting such families, highlighting the need to increase the efficiency with which these families can transition from emergency to longer-term housing arrangements. Readers will recall from Section 3 that transitional housing in the United States is largely targeted at families with needs additional to housing. Studies[97] contend that such families need an average stay of approximately fourteen months in supportive or transitional housing to achieve stable housing outcomes. By extension, families with a length of stay of less than six months in a supportive/ transitional housing programme are less likely to experience success in securing permanent housing (Farrell, 2010).

A sequence of transitional accommodation provision may be required by certain families in order to build their capacities to sustain tenancies, similar for example, to the sequencing described in the context of CRFI and SRM in Limerick[98]. Inevitably however, this sequencing process involves a lengthier stay in emergency accommodation for those families.

The second key factor and perhaps the more significant, concerns the availability of appropriate longer-term social housing to match the needs and capacities of individual families. In the same way that the absence of social housing has led to increased State reliance on PEA as emergency accommodation, so too the inadequate supply of social housing across the local authority, AHB and private rental sectors emerges as the most significant obstacle to the long-term resettlement of homeless families.

A critical challenge in accommodating families through SRM for instance, relates to affordability of rental properties that can be used initially as emergency accommodation and later, as longer-term social housing. While many landlords are keen to engage with Focus Ireland through SRM, increased property rents in the private market impact on what can be offered to families through SRM and later through HAP. As a Focus Ireland representative noted during interview:

> "Obtaining properties for SRM is the biggest challenge. Three-bed houses in Limerick can come at monthly rents of €1,400-1,500. And many of our families are large and need bigger homes. HAP won't adequately cover those kinds of rents."

Delays in moving families out of emergency accommodation are most often caused by the limited availability of suitable longer-term accommodation. Among others requirements, this might include suitable accommodation for larger families or families in which a family member may have a disability, or accommodation in which ongoing supports are required by families with more complex needs. Securing and subsequently preparing

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97 See Burt (2006).

98 This approach could be seen as applying a revised form of the 'staircase model' to families with complex needs and would need further elaboration to reconcile with a Housing First approach.

accommodation that matches family need frequently takes time. Very positive relations nurtured by WCCC with some local estate agents have also proven to be of assistance in building trust and ultimately in securing accommodation.

A further situation exists relating to families' interest in certain and very limited circumstances, in prolonging their stay in emergency accommodation provision. This is perhaps most evident in Tallaght Cross, where the size and quality of apartments, coupled with the centrality of the location[99], can act as an incentive for people to remain beyond the allocated 18-month timeframe. While most families accommodated in Tallaght Cross actively seek private-rental accommodation with assistance from HAP or are sufficiently high on the housing list to secure a house through CBL, discussions with Focus Ireland staff suggest that a few families make concerted efforts to remain beyond 18-months so as to secure Part 4 tenancy rights there, while others threaten to exceed the 18-month time limit so as to put pressure on SDCC to provide them with social housing. Such circumstances are exceptional however, contrasting with those of most families who are determined to exit emergency or transitional accommodation at the earliest opportunity but are hampered from doing so by their own needs and capacities, and by of the absence of appropriate social housing to match their needs.

Cost-Effectiveness

Stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of each of the four models and who were interviewed as part of this study pointed to the cost-effectiveness of each of the models of accommodation. Most contended that the operation of own-front-door models of emergency accommodation resulted in savings to the exchequer when compared with the costs associated with accommodating families in PEA.

Assessing the cost-effectiveness of the four models reviewed in this study requires that comparison be drawn with the costs of other forms of emergency accommodation; drawing such comparisons is neither straightforward nor precise. For instance, a comparison of costs of own-door accommodation models with PEA must be made on a like-for-like basis. For the exercise to be robust, the comparison would need to demonstrate clearly any cost advantages using the same measurement basis. Given that processes to compile expenditure data were not consistent across the four models, this like-for-like comparison was not possible in this research. The absence of data on capital costs and opportunity costs also undermined any effort to examine cost-effectiveness in a rigorous fashion.

Furthermore, available data pertaining to the State's overall spend on emergency accommodation, and most notably its spend on PEA, do not distinguish between the allocation of State resources to the accommodation of families as distinct from homeless individuals. The availability of such data is a prerequisite to comparing the cost-effectiveness of various emergency accommodation approaches to family homelessness and this emerges as a critical weakness nationally in facilitating a better understanding of cost-effectiveness.

Yet, there is evidence to suggest that at least three of the reviewed models represent excellent value for money.[100]

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99 e.g. in close proximity to shops, public transport, etc.
100 Insufficient data was available regarding Tallaght Cross.

Setting aside the initial capital costs associated with the individual accommodation models, annual operational costs for 2019 suggest the following unit costs for WEFS, CRFI and SRM, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Annual Operational Costs of One Unit of Accommodation

Accommodation Model	Unit Cost (€)
CRFI	11,666
SRM	11,000
WEFS	8,500

O'Sullivan and Musafiri (2020) note that nationally, expenditure on emergency accommodation accounted for 83% of all expenditure on homeless services in 2019, totalling in excess of €180 million. Expenditure on emergency accommodation provided by private-for-profit providers[101] stood at €122.9 million in 2019, nearly two-thirds of all spending on emergency accommodation nationally. Further analysis by O' Sullivan and Musafiri (ibid) indicates that the average annual cost of maintaining households in emergency accommodation in 2019 (that is, the average number of households, families and individuals, in each year divided by the expenditure on emergency accommodation only) stood at €31,000[102].

Comparing the annual operational costs associated with one unit of accommodation[103] under each of the reviewed accommodation models with the average costs of maintaining households in emergency accommodation in 2019 nationally, presents a very favourable picture of the cost-effectiveness of the four models. However, as noted above, such a comparison is not robust and therefore, cannot be considered conclusive.

Project partners in various locations have undertaken certain locally-based calculations which may shed additional light on the cost-effectiveness of the individual models. For example, in 2018 WCCC spent just under €300,000 on block-booking 11 units of PEA for homeless families, an average of €23,000 per unit of accommodation. These had a high occupancy rate that year.

Similarly, in July 2019 Focus Ireland examined the costs of accommodating a family[104] in a local Limerick hotel for one week. The recorded cost in a mid-range hotel, one used by the local authority for the emergency accommodation of homeless families, was €964. This compares to an annual unit cost of €11,000 to provide SRM accommodation to one family; and just €8,500 in the WEFS houses.

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101 i.e. hotels and B&Bs.

102 In Dublin, the average was €37.7k while outside Dublin the average cost was €22.2k.

103 And, by extension, one family per unit of accommodation.

104 One adult and three children.

6. Conclusion for Policy and Practice

This research identifies eight distinct, but inter-related, implications for national policy. These are outlined in this final section of the report with a view to promoting a more informed discussion and debate on how best to meet the emergency accommodation needs of families in crisis.

6.1   Policy and Practice Implications

Reducing the Impact of Family Homelessness: The Importance of Reducing Reliance on PEA

Family representatives who participated in this study highlighted that the experience of family homelessness is highly traumatic for adults and children alike. The loss of a family home, with no clarity regarding secure future accommodation, brings with it considerable stress, uncertainty and instability for all family members.

Local authorities across the country strive not only to accommodate homeless families as efficiently as possible, they also provide essential capacity-building supports to assist families to seek out and secure sustainable tenancies. These essential supports are largely provided by the NGO sector in the form of case management and wraparound supports, as well as through provisions such as HAP and HAP Place Finder. A central concern of all these efforts is to support families in a manner that reduces the impact of homelessness on their capacity to function, thereby enabling them to overcome the housing predicament facing them.

While the provision of case management and other supports to families is hugely important in reducing the impact of homelessness on families, the evidence from this study suggests that the type of emergency accommodation provided to families at a time of immense vulnerability also has a significant role to play. In particular, evidence garnered through interviews with family representatives indicates that being accommodated in hotels and B&Bs can further exacerbate the feelings of stress, uncertainty and instability that are felt by families whilst homeless. A flavour of that stress is offered in the quotes below[105]:

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105   It is important to note that these quotes are reflective of the feedback from family interviewees from across the four reviewed accommodation models.

"In one week, I was in four different hotels." (Family Interview in respect of CRFI)

"It was crazy. We used to have to hang a bag out the window to keep butter and milk fresh. Your fridge was literally a window to keep food fresh and you then had to take them in before the sun came up so they wouldn't be spoiled." (Family Interview in respect of SRM)

"In hotels, we needed two rooms because of the size of our family. So I ended up in one room with our daughters while my husband slept in a different room with our boys. I'd have to keep an eye on both rooms then when he'd go off to work early in the morning. Hotels were awful. Sometimes we'd spend hours in the car just waiting to get into a hotel." (Family Interview in respect of Tallaght Cross)

"Hotels caused a lot of arguing in the family. There's no breathing space in one room." (Family Interview in respect of CRFI)

"Then there was the weekend of big matches in Dublin. Hotels would be booked out solid and we couldn't get anywhere. Once we drove to Wexford for the weekend of a big game and stayed in friend's mobile home. It was horrible. We were trying to keep the kids quiet, afraid that if they made noise playing we'd be asked to leave. They were only kids." (Family interview in respect of Tallaght Cross)

"We had no cooking facility and so we were living on sandwiches and wraps. We tried takeaways for a while but they were costing us a fortune. We had to ask friends of ours to do washing for us. There's no real privacy when you have to ask friends to wash personal items." (Family interviews in respect of SRM)

Ireland has been in the grip of an unprecedented homelessness crisis in recent years. Owing to an absence of available social housing for emergency accommodation purposes, locating families in PEA and communal family hubs has emerged from the need to match the significant demand of providing emergency accommodation to homeless families. However, as noted in the testimonies of family representatives above, PEA appears to result in as many burdens to families as it does benefits.

Clearly, alternative and more appropriate models of emergency accommodation are required, models that can more readily facilitate a greater reduction in the levels of stress, uncertainty and instability experienced by all family members. The models of accommodation reviewed in this study provide endorsement of the value of own-front-door models in reducing the impact of homelessness, particularly in the areas of family wellbeing and family functioning.

However, reducing reliance on PEA and increasing family access to own-door models of emergency and transitional accommodation can only be realised through concerted and creative efforts to increase the supply of social housing for emergency accommodation purposes. Through WEFS, WCCC and Focus Ireland have banked a number of social properties, setting them aside exclusively for emergency accommodation purposes. Through SRM in Limerick, LCCC and Focus Ireland have succeeded in bringing private-rental properties into social housing and have placed them at the disposal of homeless families.

These models demonstrate the capacity and willingness of local authorities to innovate, but further innovative measures are required. Another innovative option for example, might involve a policy commitment to ensuring that an agreed percentage of all newly-built social housing would be retained for emergency accommodation purposes, similar to the banking of properties in Waterford. Equally, increased involvement by AHBs in leasing properties[106] for the provision of emergency and transitional accommodation to homeless families would offer new opportunities for the generation of additional social housing stock.

Reducing the Impact of Family Homelessness: The Importance of Child Support Workers

A critical feature of the case management provided to families in homeless services focuses on supporting the capacity of parents to seek out and secure longer-term accommodation. However, during discussions with local authority and NGO representatives on this subject, concern was raised regarding the levels of supports provided to children, and to the significant challenges faced by children as they adapt to the insecurity of not having a home.

Multi-agency involvement in the provision of wraparound supports to families is considered critically important in the reduction of trauma experienced as a result of entering homelessness. Wraparound supports are provided to families through Homeless Action Teams and in the case of Waterford, the Waterford Integrated Homeless Services.

In acknowledging the role and importance of these integrated structures, local authorities and NGOs emphasise the need for greater investment in resources to minimise the impacts of homelessness on children. Targeted supports are provided to children in Tallaght Cross and WEFS, while as noted in the context of CRFI, a child support worker is employed specifically to address the needs of children. However, there is a strong belief among frontline providers that current resources targeted at the needs of children in homelessness are inadequate.

A Suite of Emergency Accommodation Measures

Over the last decade, Ireland has seen a growing recognition across the public sector of the need for services to be evidence-based, outcomes-focused and needs-based. This is particularly important in the context of this research. It acknowledges that families entering homeless are not a homogenous group and present with varying levels of need and complexity. For some, the issue is simply one of not having access to secure accommodation. For others, the absence of accommodation is symptomatic of other family needs and the allocation of secure accommodation must be coupled with tailored supports that match respective family needs.

Reference is made in Section 3 of this report to a 3-tier framework developed by Bassuk et al. (2010). This provides a useful basis for considering the varied needs of families experiencing homelessness and by extension, the range of supports and services required by them in their respective contexts. In addition to the provision of accommodation, they suggest that Tier 1 families, comprising approximately 10% of

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106   Both on a long-term basis, similar to Túath's involvement in Tallaght Cross and on a short-term basis, similar to Focus Ireland's involvement in SRM.

homeless families, require only transitional supports until such time as they are connected to community supports and services. As above, in addition to accommodation, Tier 2 families, comprising approximately 80% of homeless families, are more likely to require occasional supports that should be available on an ongoing basis, including supports related to education and employment, and mental health and family support. Tier 3 families, representing approximately 10% of homeless families are likely to require lifelong and often intense supports to reduce the risk of their re-entry into homelessness. This 3-tier framework provides a useful lens through which to consider the needs of families entering homelessness and, by extension, to inform appropriate emergency and longer term responses.

Essential to such a framework is a primary commitment to *Housing First* principles, to ensuring that the accommodation of families is prioritised and that other supports are provided thereafter in accordance with their respective needs. Security of accommodation gives families the stability to address other issues in their lives and avoids the stigmatisation of the 'staircase' model of supports that previously characterised service provision for homeless individuals. Also essential to such a framework is an acknowledgment of the importance of diverse provision to match diverse need. In this regard, the development of local solutions to local manifestations of family homelessness, as illustrated in Section 4, should be viewed as extremely positive.

In fact, the development of a suite of interventions relevant to specific family needs and capacities in particular locations, similar to the development of CRFI and SRM in Limerick[107], for example, is to be welcomed and encouraged. The Limerick experience also demonstrates that a sequence of transitional accommodation provision from a portfolio of interventions may be required by certain families as their capacities to sustain tenancies is built. Such an approach not only responds to the primary accommodation needs of individual families, it also reduces the risk of families re-entering homelessness. A sequenced approach will inevitably mean that some families will remain in transitional accommodation longer than others. The rationale for this needs to be clearly explained to those families[108], with local authorities also needing to ensure that case management and other supports are effectively applied to the respective needs of those families.

The WEFS model in Waterford, also exemplifies this approach of accommodating families while acknowledging different levels of need. It does so not by offering an initial set of options to those presenting as homeless, but through accommodating families in own-door accommodation, conducting individualised follow-up needs assessment and where appropriate, relocating a family to provide a higher and more sustained level of support elsewhere.

Revising Policy on Homelessness

In March 2018, the then Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government altered the manner in which data on homelessness were recorded, excluding those in 'own-door' accommodation. Given that each emergency accommodation model reviewed in this

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107 Alongside the use of PEA and communal hubs.

108 Many of the families interviewed during this study claimed that they did not understand why they remained in emergency accommodation for protracted periods and felt that they were inadequately informed about their respective situations.

study affords families own-door private accommodation, there is a risk that occupants residing in those models are not officially recorded as homeless.

However, none of the families supported through these models of provision could, during their placement, be considered as anything other than homeless. None had the guarantee or security of a long-term tenancy and, while each of the models provided a stepping stone towards more secure housing, it was clear to families that their accommodation in these models was a temporary and transitional arrangement.

At a practical level, such an approach to recording homelessness does not impact on service provision to homeless families. Local authorities are quick to highlight that they deal with all families in homeless services on a case-by-case basis and that all families are supported irrespective of the type of accommodation provided to them.

And yet, the exclusion of certain homeless families from national records of homelessness highlights anomalies in policy and practice, a point endorsed by participants at the roundtable event organised to inform the recommendations of this study. It was suggested that current policy on housing and homelessness continues to draw its inspiration from the 1988 Housing Act[109], which needs revision to reflect the current crisis affecting the country.

In addition to concerns relating to the accommodation of those in homeless services and supporting their exit from homeless services, attention was drawn to the policy and resource implications of preventing homelessness and of supporting families to sustain housing once they have exited homelessness. While most families require limited supports once they have secured stable accommodation, a significant minority of families require ongoing supports to reduce the considerable risk of their re-entering homelessness.

An observation of this research has been that local authorities and their AHB partners are both creative and innovative in their efforts to prevent and respond to family homelessness. They are also extremely supportive of families as required, once families have exited homelessness. While these levels of local creativity and innovation are to be welcomed, it would be preferable if there were a legislative framework in place that fully reflected the scale of need and the range of supports provided to homeless families.

Understanding the Supports Required by Families with Particularly Complex Needs

There exists a significant minority of homeless families with complex needs, additional to their housing needs. It was suggested during research interviews that the families remaining longest in emergency accommodation were those with the most complex needs. As noted previously, this may seem self-evident. Families presenting with a need only to be housed are likely to exit homelessness earlier than families presenting with additional and complex needs including, but not limited to, mental health difficulties, addiction, child welfare concerns, prior difficulties sustaining a tenancy, and money and home management concerns.

It was suggested during interviews that limited research evidence exists concerning best practice in supporting the efficient transition of such families from emergency to sustained accommodation. Achieving success with these families would greatly reduce

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109 http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1988/act/28/enacted/en/html

the demands on local authorities in respect of supports to homeless families. Undertaking a rigorously-evaluated pilot programme, applying a Housing First approach alongside a dedicated multi-disciplinary team to address the complex support needs of families at greatest risk of re-entering homelessness, would increase levels of understanding of what works in effectively supporting such families in both the immediate and longer-term.

Ensure Balance in the Allocation of Families to Emergency Accommodation in Apartment Environments

Two of the models considered in this study are located in apartment blocks operated specifically for the purpose of accommodating homeless families: Tallaght Cross and CRFI. While the accommodation in both is generally of a high standard and is experienced as a significant improvement compared to being accommodated in PEA, interviews with family representatives in both settings highlighted negative experiences of bullying, intimidation and exposure to other forms of anti-social behaviour.

This document has already referred to the importance of emergency accommodation in contributing to a reduction in the traumatic effect of homelessness on families. Yet frequent exposure to anti-social and destructive behaviour in an emergency accommodation setting can impact considerably on families' experiences and capacities, even when the accommodation provided is stable and high quality.

This points to another potential issue. Becoming homeless is, in some cases, associated with families that face multiple disadvantages. The experience of PEA can lead to further traumatisation. Concentrating a significant minority of such families in an apartment block may be a factor in the anti-social and self-destructive behaviour experienced in that setting by many of those interviewed in Tallaght Cross and CRFI. The testimonies of families with experience of both settings raise questions regarding the balance of family need to be accommodated in transitional apartment blocks. They also highlight the risk of an excessive concentration of homeless families with complex needs in condensed settings such as apartment blocks, mindful particularly of the existing stresses associated with family homelessness.

While the findings of this research do not provide sufficient evidence to enable detailed recommendations in this regard, it is suggested that attention be paid to considering a balance of family need when allocating families to apartment block settings.

Invest in Innovative Ways to Increase Social Housing Stock

Getting the nature of emergency accommodation provision right is one challenge. Reducing the length of family stay in emergency accommodation is another. Reference has been made in earlier sections to the negative effects on family wellbeing of prolonged stays in emergency accommodation, a point consistently reinforced in family interviews during this research. The longer the stay in emergency accommodation[110], the more negative the impacts on parental self-confidence, mental wellbeing and the wellbeing of children. It was not unusual for families involved in this study to have been homeless for longer than 36 months.

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110   And this includes the models examined in this study.

There are several avenues available to local authorities to enable them reduce the duration of time spent by families in emergency accommodation. It is important to note the role of HAP, HAP Place Finder and RAS in supporting homeless families to progress from homelessness to longer-term housing in the private rental market. Schemes such as these are essential enablers of family progression.

However, the length of time in emergency accommodation is frequently predicated on the absence of appropriate and affordable social housing that matches the needs of families. Current State efforts to build more social housing remain inadequate to meet demand and must be matched by innovative ways of bringing existing housing stock into social purposes. Models such as SRM and RAS not only provide short-term emergency or transitional accommodation to families, they also provide longer-term social housing opportunities. These and other similar models require recognition of their long-term potential to increase housing stock for social purposes. More importantly, they require State investment to enable the expansion of effective, solutions to both emergency and long-term accommodation concerns.

Improve the Accuracy of Data on State Expenditure

Current recording and reporting of State expenditure on emergency accommodation for homeless families are inadequate in a number of ways and do not facilitate analysis of its cost effectiveness.

As outlined in Section 5, while available data illustrate the State's overall spend on emergency accommodation and most notably, its spend on PEA, they do not delineate the allocation of State resources to the accommodation of families as distinct from homeless individuals. The availability of such data is a prerequisite to comparing the cost effectiveness of various emergency accommodation approaches to family homelessness.

Detailed demographic data are currently collected by the Homeless Action Teams of local authorities on households presenting as homeless. It therefore should not be particularly burdensome or complicated for the State to accurately collate and report expenditure on various forms of emergency accommodation separately for homeless families and separately for individuals.

A second useful set of data, though somewhat more complex to gather, relates to the average cost per unit of providing different specific types of emergency accommodation, including PEA as well as other models such as those examined in this study. Once again it would be important that these data would be differentiated by homeless individuals and homeless families. Such data gathering methodologies would require careful design to maximise comparability, for instance, by including costs incurred by all partners while avoiding double-counting, taking into account opportunity cost, and allowing for different levels of occupancy. Full and complete accuracy and especially comparability will never be possible, but the limited data available to this study suggests that such an exercise would generate a valuable input to policy choices.

An alternative, and one which is favoured by local authorities, would involve recording data on savings that accrue to the Exchequer from implementing own-door models of accommodation compared to PEA. Local authority representatives argue that it is easier to calculate such savings and by so doing, they are able to demonstrate optimal return on State investment.

While recognising the views expressed by local authority figures, it is nevertheless important to highlight the paucity of data on expenditure on emergency accommodation provision. Similarly, it is important to stress the need for consistent approaches to recording expenditure, thereby facilitating analysis of the cost effectiveness of particular accommodation models.

6.2 Concluding Remarks

The overall conclusion of this research is that models of own-door emergency accommodation for homeless families are more appropriate and effective in reducing the impact of homelessness, and in mitigating the long-term damage that homelessness can cause, than PEA and congregate family hubs. A critical feature of these models is that they provide families with stable accommodation, more spacious living conditions, and the facilities to carry out everyday family functions that were neither possible nor permissible in PEA. In addition, they enhance the capacity of families coming from PEA to seek long-term accommodation. They also emerge as cost-effective solutions to family homelessness, making substantially lower demands on the public purse than the State's current reliance on hotels and B&Bs.

The provision of more appropriate accommodation is supplemented by the care and attention of key workers from Focus Ireland and other agencies, which in the words of families that have experienced their support, demonstrate immense generosity, dedication and respect to homeless families.

As Ireland continues to experience disturbingly high levels of family homelessness[111], it is apparent that there is a need for a greater supply of relevant and appropriate emergency transitional accommodation along with a supply of social housing that will expedite family exits from homelessness.

It is the view of this research that the development of local emergency and transitional accommodation solutions to local manifestations of family homelessness should be both welcomed and encouraged. The models examined in this study address diverse family needs and capacities using different locally-generated approaches, while being underpinned by a commitment to providing families with self-contained accommodation coupled with case-management supports.

It is also the view of this research that the development of a suite of emergency accommodation options in individual local authority areas provides a relevant, appropriate and efficient approach to addressing the specific accommodation needs of homeless families whilst in tandem, taking cognisance of their respective support needs as they progress towards stable accommodation. Apart from the models included in this study, the research is not in a position to recommend particular models, or the sequence of their application in any given area. It is the principle that is important.

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111 Albeit that there have been notable decreases during 2020.

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Annex I: Consultation Framework (Focus Ireland and Partner Agencies)

Consultation with Local Management and Staff Representatives of Focus Ireland

Background and Context

- When was this model established?
- Can you describe the family homeless situation in the area that led to the establishment of this emergency accommodation model for homeless families?
- What were the distinct needs that this model was designed to address?
- How was the model conceived? Was this an initiative of Focus Ireland or the local authority or another organisation?
- Why and how was this model considered a potentially good fit for the local circumstances?
- Are there common characteristics to the families accessing the services of this model – e.g. in terms of age; family status (and by extension, gender); nationality, cultural or ethnic background; employment status/main source of income; family size; pathways to homelessness?
- Are there common additional needs with which families present when accessing this model, e.g.; parental mental health concerns; parental addiction; domestic abuse?
- What number of families have been accommodated through this model since it was established?
- If this model is being delivered through a partnership with other agencies, can you describe the respective roles and responsibilities of each partner organisation?
  - What is the distinct role of Focus Ireland?
  - Is this partnership approach effective? If yes, in what ways?
  - How does the partnership approach enhance the needs and opportunities of homeless families?

Nature of Provision

> What is the tenancy agreement with families in this model of accommodation? Is there a contract, as such, with families? Is there a maximum length of stay in the accommodation, for example?
> What is expected of families?
> Describe the emergency accommodation model in terms of:
> > Physical facilities – what is provided to each family? What has informed decisions regarding the physical facilities provided?
> > What additional supports are provided to families and by whom, e.g. case management; advice and information; onward Tenancy Support services?

Strengths and Challenges of the Model

> What are the strengths of this model? What positive impacts does this approach to emergency accommodation for homeless families have on: (look for practical examples)
> > Family functioning
> > Parent wellbeing – physical, mental, emotional;
> > Child wellbeing, particularly in terms of ability to participate fully in school and community-based activities; child mental health; additional needs, etc.?
> > Family capacity to exit homelessness? What is the average family length of stay? Is there a minimum length of stay that you would advise?
> How does Focus Ireland monitor and record impact on family functioning, and parent and child wellbeing?
> What constitutes successful exit for families? What level of monitoring takes place after families exit the model and what support is available to families post-exit?
> In 2018 and 2019, what number of families progressed into secure tenancies? Do you know if those families are still in secure accommodation? Were there families who dropped out of the process or had to be removed?
> What are the most significant challenges:
> > In terms of working with families
> > In terms of partnership arrangements with other agencies
> > Other?
> How has Focus Ireland addressed and overcome these challenges?

Comparison with Hubs and Hotels/B&Bs as Approaches to Emergency Accommodation for Homeless Families

> How aware are you of the nature of provision for families in family hubs and private emergency accommodation such as hotels and B&Bs?
> How does this model differ to those models in its provision of service to homeless families?
> What are the comparative advantages of this model over hubs, hotels and B&Bs, particularly in terms of:
> > Family functioning
> > Child and parent wellbeing
> > The pace of families exiting homelessness?

The Costs Associated with the Delivery of the Model

> What does it cost to deliver this model in full over one year?
> What do those costs cover?
> What is the average cost of provision per family?

Any other issue you feel that is important that we haven't covered?

Consultation with Project Partners Involved in the Design and Delivery of models

Nature of Partnership

> Can you describe the role of i) your organisation/agency in relation to family homelessness and ii) your own role in relation to the operation of this model of emergency accommodation for homeless families?
> How, when and why did your organisation/agency get involved?
> Was your organisation/agency involved in the conception of this model? In what way?
> Why and how was this model considered a potentially good fit for the local circumstances?
> What are the strengths and challenges of a partnership approach involving your organisation/agency and FI in the operation of this model?
> What is your understanding of the situation relating to homeless families in this area? What are the critical accommodation and other support needs of homeless families? Which families are most vulnerable?
> How does this model of emergency accommodation address those needs and target groups?

Strengths/Challenges of Provision

> What are the strengths of this model? In your experience, what positive impacts does this approach to emergency accommodation for homeless families have on:
>   > Family functioning
>   > Parent wellbeing – physical, mental, emotional;
>   > Child wellbeing, particularly in terms of ability to participate fully in school and community-based activities; child mental health; additional needs, etc.?
>   > Family capacity to exit homelessness?
> How does your organisation/agency monitor impact of this model of emergency accommodation and your involvement in it?
> What in your organisation/agency constitutes successful family exit from homelessness? Is this model effective in contributing to that success? Cite examples where possible.
> What are the most significant challenges:
>   > In terms of working with families
>   > In terms of partnership arrangements with other agencies
>   > Other?
> How has your organisation/agency, in partnership with Focus Ireland, addressed and overcome these challenges?

Comparison with Hubs and Hotels/B&Bs as Approaches to Emergency Accommodation for Homeless Families

› How aware are you of the nature of provision for families in family hubs and private emergency accommodation such as hotels and B&Bs?
› How does this model differ to those models in its provision of service to homeless families?
› What are the comparative advantages of this model over hubs, hotels and B&Bs, particularly in terms of:
  › Family functioning
  › Child and parent wellbeing
  › The pace of families exiting homelessness?

The Costs Associated with the Delivery of the Model

› What are the cost implications for your organisation/agency in the delivery of this model in full over one year?
› What do those costs cover?
› What is the average cost of provision per family?
› How does that compare to costs associated with accommodating families in hotels/B&Bs?

Any other issue you feel that is important that we haven't covered?

Annex II: Consultation Framework (Families)

Theme	Possible Questions
1. Family Profile:	1.1 Family structure (i.e. households involving two partners **or** lone parent households) *1.1.1 If parenting alone, parent is male or female* 1.2 Family size (i.e. those with two or less dependent children **or** those with in excess of three children) 1.3 Nationality and Ethnicity 1.4 Employment status 1.5 Age profile of head of household
2. Context for approaching Focus Ireland	2.1 When did you and your family first become homeless? 2.2 Can you describe the sequence of events that led you and your family to become homeless? 2.3 Where had you been living at that time? 2.4 How did the experience of becoming homeless impact on your lives as a family – physically, mentally, emotionally? Were you or your partner (if applicable) experiencing stress or anxiety? Was this situation impacting on your children? If so, how? 2.5 Had you or your family ever been homeless before?
3. Response to becoming homeless	3.1 What did you do once you and your family had become homeless? 3.2 Where did you all live after becoming homeless? 3.3 Who did you approach for support? 3.4 Can you describe how you and your family ended up in this accommodation? 3.5 When did you move into this accommodation? How long were you and your family homeless before you were accommodated here?
4. Current accommodation	4.1 Can you describe the accommodation you and your family members are now living in (flat/apartment/house; number of rooms; heating system, etc)? 4.2 Can you describe your tenancy agreement for this accommodation, e.g. in terms of rent, length of tenancy, other conditions? 4.3 Apart from the accommodation provided, what other supports are made available to you and your family, e.g. advice and information, tenancy support, child-support worker, other?

Theme	Possible Questions
5. Impact	5.1 Apart from providing you and your family with a secure place to live, in what other ways does the work of FI/County Council/Other support you and your family? For example: ❯ Impact on physical, mental, emotional health of parent(s) and children ❯ Impact on ability of family to function as a family ❯ Impact on children's schooling and on their ability to take part in community-based activities ❯ Impact on your ability to look for more permanent accommodation ❯ Other 5.2 What is more important to you, the secure accommodation that you now live in or the range of services and supports that are provided to you by Focus Ireland? Could the supports work if you weren't living in secure accommodation?
6. Challenges	6.1 What are some of the difficulties or challenges you face as a family when living in this accommodation? 6.2 How do difficulties impact on your family? For example: ❯ Impact on physical, mental, emotional health of parent(s) and children ❯ Impact on ability of family to function as a family ❯ Impact on children's schooling and on their ability to take part in community-based activities ❯ Impact on your ability to look for more permanent accommodation ❯ Other
7. Other models of emergency accommodation	7.1 Have you had any experience of living in a family hub or a hotel/B&B while homeless? 7.2 If yes, can you describe that experience? 7.3 How does that experience compare to your family's experience of living in this accommodation (e.g. advantages/disadvantages of this accommodation compared to hotel/B&B)?
8. Next steps	8.1 What next for you and your family in terms of securing more permanent accommodation? 8.2 Are you currently searching for more permanent accommodation? 8.3 What supports do you need to enable you and your family to make the transition from emergency accommodation to more permanent accommodation? 8.4 Do you feel you are receiving that support? 8.5 Do you feel you will need any support after you get more permanent accommodation? If yes, what kind of support would you like?

Annex III: Profile of Family Interviewees by Project Location

Sex

	Childers Road Family Initiative	Social Rental Model, Limerick	Tallaght Cross Transitional Housing Initiative	Waterford Emergency Family Services
Female	9	5	4	2
Male	0	0	0	1

Age

	Childers Road Family Initiative	Social Rental Model, Limerick	Tallaght Cross Transitional Housing Initiative	Waterford Emergency Family Services
Under 25 years	1	0	0	0
26-35	5	3	1	2
36-45	3	1	2	1
46-55	0	0	1	0
55+	0	0	0	0
Unanswered	0	1	0	0

Family Status

	Childers Road Family Initiative	Social Rental Model, Limerick	Tallaght Cross Transitional Housing Initiative	Waterford Emergency Family Services
Two Parents	5	1	2	2
Parenting Alone	4	4	2	1

Number of Dependent Children

	Childers Road Family Initiative	Social Rental Model, Limerick	Tallaght Cross Transitional Housing Initiative	Waterford Emergency Family Services
2 children or less	7	3	1	1
3 or more children	2	2	3	2

Nationality

	Childers Road Family Initiative	Social Rental Model, Limerick	Tallaght Cross Transitional Housing Initiative	Waterford Emergency Family Services
Irish National	8	4	3	2
EU citizen	1	0	0	1
Non-European	0	1	1	0

Principal Source of Income

	Childers Road Family Initiative	Social Rental Model, Limerick	Tallaght Cross Transitional Housing Initiative	Waterford Emergency Family Services
Working (P/T)	0	0	2	1[108]
Partner Working (P/T)	1	0	0	0
Partner Working (F/T)	0	1	2	0
Social Welfare dependent	6	3	0	2
Unanswered	2	1	0	0

Duration of Family Homelessness

	Childers Road Family Initiative	Social Rental Model, Limerick	Tallaght Cross Transitional Housing Initiative	Waterford Emergency Family Services
Up to 12 months	0	0	1	3[109]
13-24 months	3	0	0	0
24-36 months	2	2	2[110]	0
36 months +	4	3	1	0

Duration of Stay in Reviewed Model of Emergency Accommodation

	Childers Road Family Initiative	Social Rental Model, Limerick	Tallaght Cross Transitional Housing Initiative	Waterford Emergency Family Services
3 months or less	2	0	0	1
4-6 months	0	0	1	2
7-12 months	3	0	1	0
13-24 months	2	2	1	0
25 months +	2	3	1	0

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112 In a Covid-19 related allowance but expecting to return to work.

113 One family had been three years in a rented house, paying cash with no lease, supports or legal rights.

114 This included a long period in a refuge and safe house.

Annex IV: Participants in the Roundtable Discussion

Name	Organisation
Mike Allen	Focus Ireland
Sinead Breathnach	Waterford County Council
Anne Byrne	Dublin South County Council
Fiona Campbell	Dublin South County Council
Kevin Connolly	Waterford County Council
Haley Curran	Focus Ireland
Neil Haran	Research Consultant
Daniel Hoey	Focus Ireland
Caroline Jordan	Tusla
Niamh Lambe	Focus Ireland
Rob Lowth	Limerick City and County Council
Aoife McNamara	Ombudsman for Children
Triona O'Connor	Limerick City and County Council
Sean O'Siochru	Research Consultant
Gerard Spillane	Focus Ireland

FOCUS
Ireland

focusireland.ie

Head Office
9–12 High Street
Christchurch, Dublin 8
D08 E1W0

T   01 881 5900
LoCall 1850 204 205
F   01 881 5950
E   info@focusireland.ie

Registered Charity
CHY 7220