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# Blocked Paths to Housing Stability: Implications for Housing Models and Options for Homeless Youth

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# Youth Homelessness in Europe

## UK (CCHPR, 2015; Watts *et al.*, 2015)

- 83,000 young people (aged 16 - 24) were found to be using homeless services during 2014, with **35,000 young people** being in homeless accommodation at any given time. There has also been an estimated **40% increase in the number of youth sleeping rough** in London between 2012 and 2015.

## Netherlands (FEANTSA, 2017)

- The number of homeless young people (aged 18 - 30) **increased by 50%** between 2015 and 2016, making up 40% (n = 12,400) of the total homeless population (N = 31,000).

## Denmark (Benjaminsen and Hesselberg, 2015)

- Recorded an **85% rise** in the number of young people (aged 18 - 24) presenting as homeless over a 6-year period between 2009 and 2015.

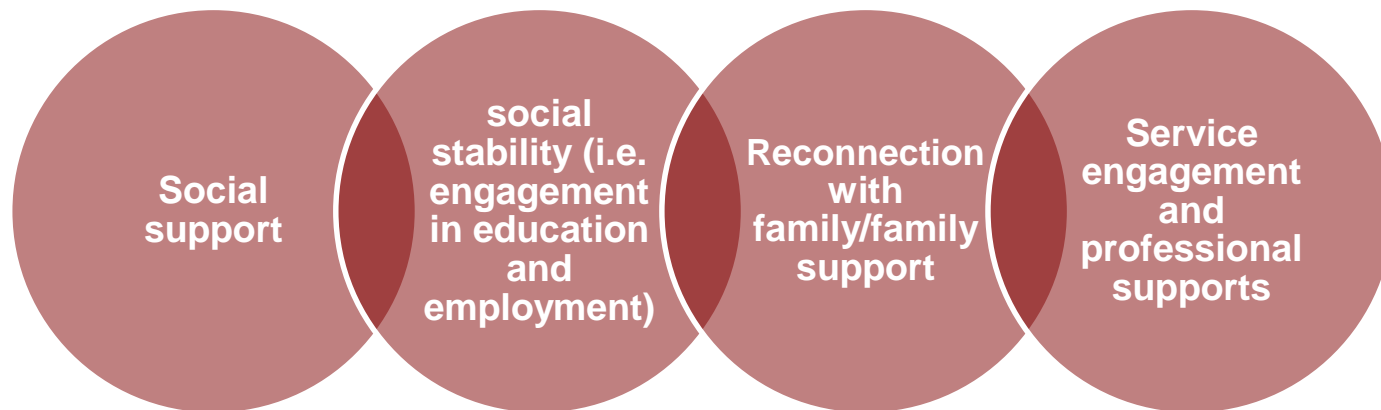
## Ireland (CSO, 2012; 2017)

- Available statistics show that the number of young people (aged 15 - 29) has **increased by 90%** between 2011 (n = 886) and 2016 (n = 1686), making up 23% and 24% of the total homeless population respectively.

# Youth Exiting Homelessness: What we Know

**Longitudinal studies have bolstered understanding of the dynamics that shape young people's routes out of homelessness:**

- Housing availability – rather than individual behaviour – has become a key driver of homelessness among youth (Cheng *et al.*, 2013)
- The transition time from homelessness to housing can be relatively short for young people (Milburn *et al.*, 2007, 2009; Braciszewski *et al.*, 2016)
- Key factors that support exits from homelessness include:



# Policy Responses

**Access to affordable and sustainable housing is a critical first step to the resolution of homelessness among young people:**

- Housing First has become central to strategic responses to homelessness in many countries in Northern Europe, with reported retention rates of 80-90% reported in some countries.
- Discussion/debate about Housing First models for youth only evolving at present.
  - The knowledge base on Housing First for youth is underdeveloped.
  - Lack of consensus on what precisely Housing First for youth ought to 'look like'.

# Policy Responses

**Access to affordable and sustainable housing is a critical first step to the resolution of homelessness among young people:**

- In Ireland, transitional housing targeting youth has been phased out.
- 2013: A ‘housing-led’ approach officially articulated within policy.
- Interventions remain focused on the provision emergency and short-term accommodation for young people due to a lack of social or other affordable housing options.
- The **private rented sector is therefore the primary exit route** to stable housing for youth experiencing homelessness.

# Research Context: The Irish Housing Market

Ireland is currently in the midst of an acute housing crisis that has been driven by a chronic scarcity of housing supply and compounded by rising rental and house prices:

Recent figures show that national average rents have reached an all-time high at € 1131 in Q1 2017, increasing by 52% since their lowest point in late 2011

Dublin rents are now 15.4% higher than they were during the peak of the Celtic Tiger in 2008, with the monthly average increasing from €906 in 2008 to €1668 in Q2 2017

There were 1,074 properties available to rent in Dublin on May 1<sup>st</sup>, the “lowest figure recorded in a series stretching back to January 2006” (Daft.ie rental reports, Q1 2017: 18)

In Cork and Galway city, rents are rising at a slower pace but are still 9.7% and 17.8% above levels recorded in 2008. Outside the cities, the average rent is 3% above its previous peak

(Sources: Daft.ie rental reports, 2010; 2017)

# Research Aims

**To generate in-depth knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of youth homelessness in Ireland**

**Capture the temporal dimensions of the homeless experience amongst 'out of home' youth**

**Understand young people's trajectories through and possibly out of homelessness over time**

**Extend the scope of the study to include the perspectives of the families of a sub-sample of the participating young people.**

Phase one was funded by Focus Ireland and Phase 2 was jointly funded by:

**FOCUS**  
Ireland

  
**Threshold**  
Solving housing problems,  
preventing homelessness

  
**Simon**  
Community

  
**Peter  
McVerry  
Trust**  
Opening doors for  
homeless people

  
**SVP**  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul

# Methodological Approach

## Study Design

- Qualitative longitudinal approach.
- Two year time-lapse between baseline (2014/15) and follow-up interviews (2015/16).
- *Transition and change* - core principles of longitudinal research.

## Recruitment at Baseline

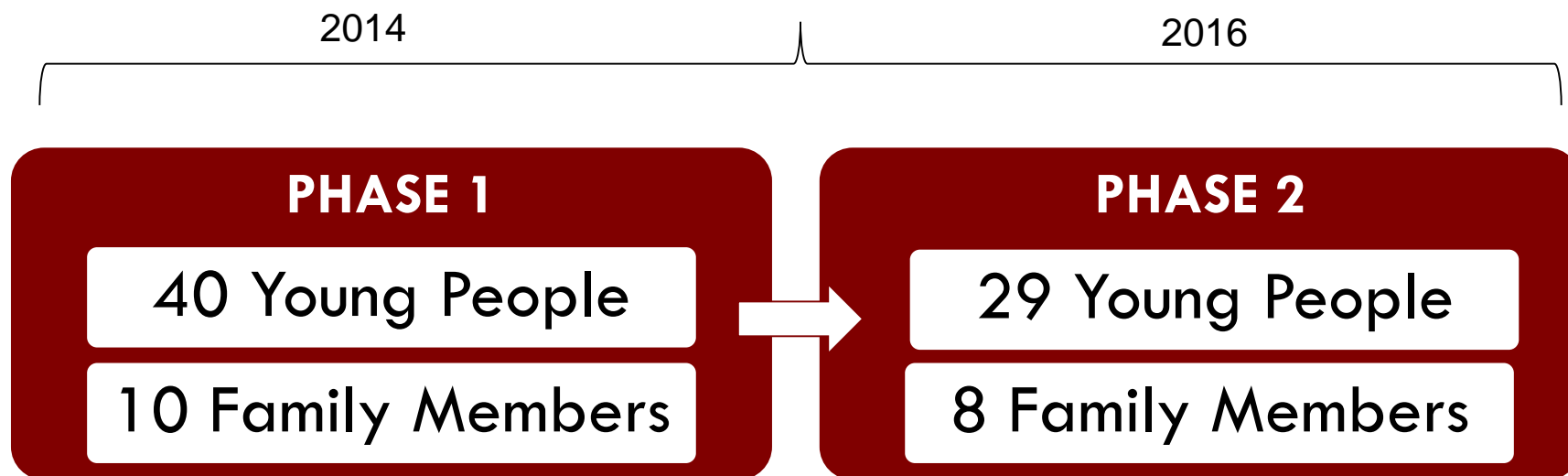
- 40 'out of home' young people aged 16 - 24 recruited from a range of statutory and non-statutory services in Dublin (n=34) and Cork (n=6).
- 10 family members (5 mothers and 5 sisters) recruited where possible and appropriate.

## Research Methods

- Young people – Life history interviews.
- Family members – In-depth interviews.



# Sample and Retention



Over the course of the study, we successfully tracked and re-interviewed 37/50 participants 2 years after their recruitment to the research, yielding a **retention rate of 74%**.

# Young people's Living Situations

- *Homeless/Housing Status between Phases 1 and 2*

HOUSING STATUS	PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Homeless	39 (98%)	22 (76%)
Housed	1 (2%)	7 (24%)

- *Young People's Living Situations at Phase 2, Categorised According to ETHOS*

CONCEPT	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Housed	3	4	7
Insecure	5	2	7
Houseless	8	4	12
Roofless	1	0	1
Inadequate	0	2	2

# Negotiating a Route to Housing

**Routes to housing stability were unpredictable and precarious for the study's young people. An array of factors and experiences interacted to produce trajectories that served to block a path to housing stability for a majority.**

*“Even though I was eligible for the rent supplement initiative, it was still impossible to find housing.” (Bryan, 24, Phase 2)*

*“They [landlords] don't like the idea of an eighteen-year old with no history of living on their own. They just look and think, ‘No, he's too young’. (Christopher, 18, Phase 2)*

# Unsustained Exits and Threats to Housing Security

**A considerable number of young people had exited homelessness over the course of the study but subsequently returned to homeless service settings; others who had exited by Phase 2 were at risk of becoming insecurely housed/returning to homelessness services.**

**Many with experience in the private rented sector reported a whole host of difficulties in housing, including:**

- **A lack of preparedness for independent living**
- **Poor standard of affordable/accessible PRS housing**
- **Problematic tenancy relationships**
- **Loneliness and social isolation**
- **Experiences of relapse, mental health problems and domestic violence**

# Unsustained Exits and Threats to Housing Security

## Returns to Homelessness

*“When you go in [to private rented housing] and kind of isolate yourself, it does get very lonely. Like they [services] were saying to me there would be people linking in with me but that just gradually went. I would have liked more support.” (Warren, 26, Phase 2).*

*“She [rebecca] was doing well. She had a beautiful house and then she lost it over him [referring to Rebecca’s violent partner]. Nobody’s helping her. I think Rebeca needs to be put into a drink and drugs facility. She needs to be talked to about relationships, parenting, she needs all that stuff like ... I think she could be capable of doing something bad to herself like, you know” (Jacqui, Rebecca’s mother, Phase 2).*

# Young People 'Strategizing' Exit Routes

Difficulties sourcing and maintaining accommodation in the private rental sector created blockages in the service system and resulted in patterns of repeat/ongoing homelessness and a sense of 'service fatigue'.

A considerable number began to seek out alternative routes to housing, often out of desperation and in an attempt to escape hostel life. This led to many entering into highly unstable and tenuous living arrangements, including:

- Private rented tenancies on the lowest end of the quality spectrum
- Situations of 'concealed' or hidden homelessness
- Informal sub-tenancies with no security of tenure
- Unstable returns to the family home/home of a parent

# Strategizing Exit Routes: Living ‘Off Grid’

## Pattern of Repeat/Ongoing Homelessness and Service Fatigue.

*‘[Doubling up] is fine if you’re on the edge of homelessness or still at risk of being homeless. I took it [referring to informal house-share with no lease] because it was an opportunity and I seized the opportunity of course, like anyone would.’ (Bryan, 24, Phase 2)*

*There was rot on the wall like, and it was really, really bad. But I was at the stage where I was like, ‘OK, I don’t care. I’m going to take it.’ (Abigail, 21, Phase 2)*

*[Did you feel that moving home was the best place for you at the time?] “No, it wasn’t, but I knew it was the only place that I could go. So I just made do with what I had.” (Patrick, 23, Phase 2)*

# Consequences of Living 'Off Grid'

**Young people living 'off grid' were essentially invisible to homelessness services and other systems of intervention and were not receiving any formal supports.**

**As a result:**

- **Their accounts typically highlighted significant hardships, vulnerabilities and risks**
- **Their living arrangements were precarious and untenable in the longer-term**
- **Almost all of these young people expressed a 'lack of control' over their situations**
- **A large number expressed uncertainty, concern and despair about the enduring nature of their housing instability.**



# Consequences of Living 'Off Grid'

## Service Fatigue and Feelings of Entrapment.

*"I just feel like giving up. There's nothing around ... Like I can't just see myself now just sitting talking to you [referring to interviewer] in another two years' time and trying to still get a place. It's just not in my head now that I think I am going to get anywhere." (Sophie, 22, Phase 2)*

*"There's not enough supports, there's not enough housing. So, like, once you fall into this trap it's very very hard to get out of it, do you know what I mean? I can keep trying, like I'll keep trying, it's just not easy. I could have somewhere sorted out in two days, two months, two years." (Michael, 26, Phase 2)*

# Conclusions

- Housing affordability and availability - key drivers of ongoing homelessness/housing instability among young people.
- Structural barriers of access to PRS housing were compounded, in many cases, by complex and unmet support needs.
- In response, young people engaged in distinctive strategies in an attempt to reclaim a sense of autonomy and control over their housing situations.
- These practices led to exiting attempts that were highly unstable; young people concealed from official homelessness statistics; and outside the remit of homeless service provision.
- Circuit of service use and returns to homelessness.

# Implications for Housing First for Youth

- Models of accommodation for youth that fall under the Housing First 'umbrella' take different forms and include transitional or congregate housing models in some jurisdictions, including Ireland.
- While the evidence base on these models is currently limited, there is every reason to believe that many *young people will have success in moving directly to independent housing*, with support provided in accordance with an assessment of their preferences and needs.
- Housing solutions for youth must extend well beyond the point at which young people exit the service system: *In-housing* support is critical.
- Need to avoid larger-scale congregate housing models such as those currently being established in Ireland in response to the 'crisis' of family homelessness.

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***It's hard to think about the future right now because it's so uncertain.***

**(Maria, 26, Phase 2)**

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