



NO EASY SOLUTION TO HOMELESSNESS

By Alice Leahy

Alice Leahy has devoted decades of her life to helping the homeless and most vulnerable in our society. She tells the Gazette how this work came about, and the challenges she has faced along the way.

When we were founded in 1975 Ireland was a different place, the people who were homeless at that time were referred to as the single homeless and all of them came from the island of Ireland.

Generally the services at that time were limited and the majority of the people came from the institutions, the Magdaline Laundries, the psychiatric hospitals and the army - Irish and British.

Voluntary bodies ran hostels to accommodate people and the numbers of people homeless was nothing like what we see now. A landline phone and a typewriter, if you were lucky, were the only technology tools available to us, there was less bureaucracy and more interaction between the agencies.

TRUST, founded in 1975, grew out of work I carried out with a group of doctors, all working in a voluntary capacity visiting people in shelters, hostels, and sleeping rough. Our service, the first of its type in Ireland, has been used as a model for services here and abroad. In November 2015, after 40 years in existence, the then trustees, after a lot of reflection, decided it was an opportune time to reconstitute TRUST as a company limited by guarantee without a share capital. For a number of reasons, including confusion sometimes caused by the existing name, it was also decided to rename TRUST the Alice Leahy Trust (www.aliceleahytrust.ie).

We originally operated from a prefab health centre in Lord Edward Street, and moved to our present location in 1982, in the basement of the Iveagh Trust Hostel which we rent from the Iveagh Trust

Over time money came from Europe and facilities improved, psychiatric institutions closed and increasing numbers of people from around the world, especially Eastern Europe seeking work and

dreaming of a better future came to our country - like our own people in the past. Many of them became homeless, Housing Agencies increased, providing much-needed social housing but some would question how this allowed Local Authorities to stop building as they had in the past.

The Alice Leahy Trust is not grant-aided and not actively involved in fundraising. The running costs of the agency are met in full by unsolicited voluntary donations and accounts are audited annually by Chartered Accountants RBK. Our work would not be possible without the support we receive from the general public from all sections of society and for that we are extremely grateful. Church of Ireland groups from all over Dublin and beyond are extremely supportive of our work.

The philosophy of the Alice Leahy Trust is based on the recognition of every individual's right to be treated as an autonomous and unique human being. The work has a dual focus, providing frontline health and social services for people who are homeless while ensuring they

receive their statutory entitlements.

There is a strong commitment to education and advocacy to create a greater understanding of the nature of homelessness.

There is no easy solution to homelessness and everyone who is homeless is unique. People are complex and have varying needs.

There is no "one size fits all" solution. The distinction between the lack of housing and homelessness is important.

Some mornings we meet up to 18 people who come from doorways, squats, skippers, parks, tents, hospitals, and Garda stations. On a given month we could meet people from up to 18 different countries, (down from 26 different countries pre-pandemic), who are homeless in our capital city.

Some people we meet cope with very serious addiction problems, including drugs, alcohol, and gambling. Many people call on an ongoing basis and then disappear; many call just once and others reappear after many years.

Time with people is spent on providing a wide range of care, advising on housing and entitlements, referral to specialist services, assisting with washing/showering, foot care (extremely

time-consuming yet hugely beneficial to those sleeping out), contacting families, healthcare professionals working in hospitals and the community. Gardai, welfare officers, and workers in the NGO sector, and the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive.

Befriending/human contact is a

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vital component of the work of the Alice Leahy Trust and this entails an enormous amount of time, which is difficult to quantify and increasingly not easy to provide. Now since the Pandemic the value of being able to give more time to the people who use our service is obvious.

The provision of showers is easy to undervalue. It is the first step to linking into other services, statutory and voluntary, keeping an appointment in a hospital, in the Courts, even to access accommodation or reconnecting with family, etc.

Our submission to Dublin City Council for public showers (July

2006 and resubmitted in 2014) in our capital city can be viewed on our website: www.aliceleahytrust.ie. The need for same is even greater now.

The words of the late Tony Gill, who used our service for many years and is buried in our plot in Glasnevin Cemetery, reminds us daily of the isolation of some of our fellow human beings: "Today I spoke to no one. And nobody spoke to me. Am I dead?"

People from all walks of life continue to make our work possible while recognising that in an ideal world there should be no need for

our service.

The support and concern for our staff and people who use our service that we received from the general public during COVID-19 times was particularly gratifying. While we know that we cannot change the world, all of us together can make a difference.



Alice Leahy is the Director of Services at the Alice Leahy Trust. She was Co-Founder and Director of TRUST

from 1975 - December 2015. aliceleahytrust.ie

YOUNG CONNOR LEADERS COMPLETE SERVE COURSE

Four young leaders in Connor have completed the SERVE course in preparation for continuing to lead in their local parishes.

SERVE is a diocesan young leaders' course for young people aged 15 and up. Through the autumn term, the group met over eight sessions to discuss different aspects of Christian leadership and get involved in tasks to develop their leadership abilities.

There was an opportunity to do different spiritual disciplines, lead a book review, learn more about how

Jesus led, and deliver a short talk! This year, young people from All Saints', Antrim; Lisburn Cathedral; Church of the Holy Spirit Mossley; and St Brigid's, Glengormley, took part.

The SERVE course is delivered in partnership with the Hub, the Church of Ireland, and Methodist residency at Queen's University Belfast. Oliver Baird, Community Team Lead at the Hub, co-led the course with Christina Baillie, Connor Diocesan Youth Officer.

Christina said: "We were delighted with the four young

leaders' participation in the course over the past few months. They have stepped out of their comfort zone and grown as leaders. We can't wait to see how they continue to serve in their local parishes and in other ways in the coming years!

"We're grateful for the partnership with the Hub and it's been great to have Oliver leading along with me week by week as well as different students from Connor Diocese and beyond involved at different parts of the SERVE course."