



keystone

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Message from An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern TD

I am delighted to introduce this first edition of Keystone, the Threshold newsletter.

Threshold has played a significant role in the provision of housing advice and information, and in housing research, since its foundation in 1978. Over the years it has helped very many with advice on a wide range of housing issues – including, among others, people in the private rented sector and the homeless. Threshold is helping to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable members of society. Threshold has also carried out research into a variety of housing issues.

Housing is one of the main priorities of our Government. We have introduced a variety of schemes for affordable housing over the last number of years. Recently I was pleased to announce the establishment of a new Affordable Homes Partnership, to drive the provision of affordable housing in the Greater Dublin Area. Through the Residential Tenancies Act 2004, we updated the legislative framework for the private rented sector, setting down in law the respective rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants and giving them an effective means of resolving disputes. The Private Residential Tenancies Board, established under the Act, has received around 90,000 tenancy registration applications to date and several hundred dispute cases. Moreover, the Board's information service catered for a volume of enquiries beyond all expectations, showing the great need for this new service.

The housing needs of an increasing

number of households are being met each year through the provision of housing by local authorities and voluntary and co-operative housing organisations. Since 1997 the housing needs of 86,000 households have been met. The Government has allocated record levels of funding for social and affordable housing programmes this year. Total capital spending on social and affordable housing output in 2005, including non-Exchequer finance, will amount to €2 billion and will assist in meeting the housing needs of over 13,000 households. The Government's decision to introduce 5-year multi-annual capital investment programmes provides the appropriate framework for sound longer-range planning based on certainty regarding funding.

I welcome the publication of this first edition of Keystone. I am sure it will become a valuable source of information on housing issues and policy, and I wish it every success.



We focus on people living in poverty and those in greatest need of our support.

Introduction to Threshold

by Aideen Hayden, Chairperson

I warmly welcome you to this first edition of 'Keystone'. I hope you will find it informative and a useful source of practical advice.

Threshold is a national not-for-profit organisation established in 1978. Our mission is to solve peoples' housing problems and to campaign for a better housing system. We focus on people living in poverty and those in greatest need of our support. Due to a lack of affordable rental accommodation, many people who contact Threshold are forced into unfit housing where the basic essentials for living are not present.

Last year, Threshold helped over 20,000 people in many ways, including challenging threats of eviction, helping people to recover rent deposits and seeking improvements for people in poor living conditions. We also support and represent people who bring their disputes to hearings of the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB).

Threshold also campaigns for change. By carrying out research through our Housing Research Unit and publishing our findings, we make the case for housing reform. We are proud of our contribution to the new Residential

Tenancies Act 2004, which provides increased protections for tenants and landlords in the private rented sector.

We also deliver solutions to homelessness. Threshold's Access Housing Unit in Dublin and our regional placement services based in Galway and Cork help people to move out of homeless hostels and shelters and into rented accommodation.

Finally, Threshold creates new housing models. Our Gilabney Court Housing Project in Cork city, established in 1985, helps couples and families with limited financial means to save towards buying a new home.

Aideen Hayden is chairperson of Threshold and a member of the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB). A practising solicitor, Aideen has written extensively on housing and has recently completed a research fellowship at Trinity College Dublin.



A landlord must provide a rent book, which the tenant keeps.

Finding a Flat: Do's and Dont's for Students

At this time of year, students are looking to rent accommodation for the college year. Our advice is to take your time and DO NOT take the first place you see. You have more choice now than in the past.

1. What should I check for when viewing a property?

Look at the area for things like public transport to and from college. What local services and amenities are there? Is the area safe and well-lit?

Ask questions and make sure that the property is fit to live in. Check for signs of dampness. Is there ventilation, heating and lighting? Is there hot and cold running water? Do the cooker, fridge and other appliances work? Does the landlord live in the property? Will you be sharing? Who has access? How are the bills split? Are there house rules?

2. How much of a deposit should I pay?

A landlord can seek any amount although it is usually equivalent to a month's rent. Don't hand over money unless you are happy with the



accommodation and always ask for a receipt. When your tenancy ends the landlord must promptly return the deposit. The landlord may only keep some or all of the deposit to cover rent arrears or the costs of repairing any damage above normal wear and tear.

3. Should I have a rent book?

A landlord must provide a rent book, which the tenant keeps. All payments should be recorded either in the rent book or by receipt if you have a written agreement.

4. Does the landlord have to give me a lease?

If a landlord offers you a lease you should only sign it if you are happy with the terms. Any written or verbal agreement is legally binding, so if you are unsure seek advice from Threshold or a solicitor.

The rent should not be above market rent and can only be reviewed once a year.....

5. Who is responsible for repairs?

You must notify the landlord immediately of any repairs and allow access for the work to be done. If the landlord fails to fix the problem within a reasonable time, you can get the repairs done and your landlord must reimburse you.

6. How much notice am I entitled to?

If you do not have a fixed term agreement (e.g. lease) then a landlord can give 28 days written notice of termination in the first 6 months but does not have to give you a reason. A tenant living in accommodation from September 1st 2004 for at least 6 months and who hasn't been given notice is entitled to remain for a further 3 and a half years (this is called a 'Part 4' Tenancy). During this period a landlord can only ask the tenant to leave on specific grounds (e.g. if they are selling the property).

7. Can the rent be increased?

The rent should not be above market rent and can only be reviewed once a year unless the property has been substantially improved.

8. What can I do if I have a problem?

You should attempt to resolve the problem with the landlord but if this fails you can apply to the PRTB dispute resolution service to have your case settled. Information and forms are available from www.prtb.ie

For further information, please contact a Threshold advice centre near you:

Eastern Region Advice Centre, 21 Stoneybatter, Dublin 7.

T: 01 678 60 96 or Email: info@threshold.ie

Western Region Advice Centre, Augustine House, St. Augustine Street, Galway.

T: 091 563 080 or Email: thresholdgalway@eircom.net

South Region Advice Centre, 8 Father Quay, Cork.

T: 021 427 12 50 or Email: threshold@eircom.net

Or visit the Threshold advice forum on our website www.threshold.ie

You don't have to be an athlete to join us on the Vietnam Trek.

Trek Vietnam in Aid of Threshold

If you have ever wanted to do an exhilarating challenge for charity here is your chance. Threshold is looking for adventurous volunteers to trek along one of the world's most stunning trails to Vietnam's highest peak from the October 27 to November 5, 2005. All you have to do is pay a deposit of €500 and raise a minimum sponsorship of €4,250.

Trek organiser, Aisling Donoghue, says:

"This is one adventure that you will never forget. We have found the best local guides to bring us along an unspoiled trail into the heart of rural Vietnam.

You don't have to be an athlete to join us on the Vietnam trek. The level of

fitness required is really achievable. My job is to support you all the way – from training tips to fundraising ideas, from Dublin to Hanoi and back.

If you are interested or just tempted, please get in touch and I can tell you more."

You will visit the bustling capital of Hanoi, witness the beautiful mountain scenery of the northern highlands and meet the ethnic hill tribes that make up 10% of Vietnam's population. Finally you will experience the wonderful panoramic views of Mount Fansipan, at 3,143 metres Vietnam's highest mountain peak, overlooking the mountain capital of Sapa.

Simply give Threshold a call on: 01-670 70 03 or email: aisling@threshold.ie for a full information pack and everything you need to take part in the adventure of a lifetime. You can also visit www.threshold.ie for more information about the trek.



The reality is that landlords come back to us time and time again.

Threshold's Access Housing Unit

Threshold's Access Housing Unit makes a real difference to the lives of people who are homeless. The Access Housing Unit helps people living in emergency hostels and shelters to move out of homelessness and into longer term rented accommodation.

Russell Chapman, Manager of the Access Housing Unit, describes how it works:

"The people who are referred to us are homeless but could manage in their own place with a little support. Often they find it difficult to find this accommodation in the first place. We tackle this problem by taking people referred by other homeless organisations, like Focus Ireland and Dublin Simon Community, and matching them with suitable landlords. Last year, we helped 127 people, including 33 children, to move out of homelessness.

The benefit to the landlord is that we interview all potential tenants and only recommend those we feel will cope in their own place. We also ensure that rents and deposits are paid. The reality is that landlords come back to us time and time again. Some have housed six or seven homeless people



and are very happy to continue to work with us."

The Access Housing Unit also supports people after they move into their new home and helps them to gain the skills and confidence needed to live independently. A worker will visit and check if the person knows how all the appliances work, if there is food in the fridge and that bills are not lying around unpaid.

If you own bedsit accommodation and are interested in renting to a person who has experienced homelessness, please contact Russell Chapman on 01-678 63 11 or email: russell@threshold.ie

She was also linked with a local counsellor to help her deal with her ongoing family issues.

Mary's Story

Mary is 19 years old and was referred to Threshold's Access Housing Unit by a homeless hostel for women. Mary became homeless after her relationship with her mother broke down. Mary had no other family and she had left school at 15 years of age with no qualifications.

Mary was interviewed by the Access Housing Unit and presented well. However she was anxious about living on her own so it was decided to move slowly. Mary met with a Tenancy Sustainment Worker on a weekly basis and learnt about her rights and responsibilities as a tenant, budgeting, weekly shopping, paying household bills and putting a savings plan in place. Mary then went on a practice viewing to get a feel for the type of flat she was going to live in. She also talked to a landlord for the first time.

The Access Housing Unit secured a bedsit for Mary and she moved into her new place. The Tenancy Sustainment Worker then helped Mary to transfer her social welfare payments, register with a local doctor and dentist, set up utility bills and an EasyPay plan, and make an appointment with the local Money



Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS). She was also linked with a local counsellor to help her deal with her ongoing family issues. Mary is still being supported by Threshold to achieve some of her outstanding goals, such as joining the local library, becoming a volunteer worker in the local area and looking for a full-time job.

trek Vietnam

in aid of Threshold



From walled empires to tiered paddy fields, follow in the footsteps of the ancients and trek Vietnam in October/ November 2005 in aid of Threshold, the National Housing Organisation.

All you have to do is pay your €500 registration fee then raise a minimum sponsorship requirement.

Call (01) 6707003

for an information pack, or contact:
Aisling Donoghue, Threshold, 21 Stoneybatter, D7

aisling@threshold.ie

www.threshold.ie

