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Chairperson's Comment

This year saw the establishment of the Private Residential Tenancies Board, set up on an ad hoc basis to pave the way for full scale reform of the private rented sector. My appointment to this Board has enabled Threshold to inform the process, with the benefit of its vast experience in the sector, and to ensure that the interests of those most vulnerable and most in need are represented.



The need for reform of the rented sector has never been more acute. Housing demand generally and problems of affordability have pushed many into renting, who would otherwise have become home owners. On top of this, government measures to provide social housing have proved grossly inadequate, leaving many continuing to live in poor quality rented accommodation.

Lack of enforcement by local authorities of minimum standards of accommodation continues to be a serious problem with over half the properties surveyed by the authorities falling below standard. Coupled with this, a government measure to cap rent supplement levels has forced many tenants to top up officially declared rents by significant amounts, leaving them short for basic necessities like heat, clothes and food. Constant risk of homelessness faces many in our society daily, with grossly inadequate resources spent on prevention. It is no wonder therefore that the need for our services continues to rise.

I would like to thank all Threshold staff whose continued dedication means that many vulnerable people in our society get the real help they need. I would like also to welcome our new Director Patrick Burke to the organisation. At the same time I would like to acknowledge the enormous work of Kieran Murphy our former Director, known to many for his wisdom, foresight and commitment to housing as a basic human right.

I would like to express my appreciation to our Board of Directors, who give generously of both their time and expertise, and assist the organisation in many ways that are not always seen. Finally and on behalf of the organisation I would like to acknowledge the major contribution of all our donors, both large and small, without whose help our work would not be possible.

Aideen Hayden

Aideen Hayden
Chairperson

Director's Comment

Because Threshold works on the ground with over 20,000 people each year it has used this experience not only for the benefit of individuals but for the development of better housing policy. Our experience has led us to develop a vision for the future of housing encompassing three fundamental themes: rights, access and sustainability. Achieving this vision would mean an Ireland where everyone will have access to good quality affordable housing appropriate to his or her needs.



Our work in furthering this vision has led this year in particular to Threshold developing opportunities to work jointly with other organisations around a rights-based approach to housing and social cohesion. We believe this collaboration has broadened the wider housing debate and benefited from the best of what each organisation has to offer.

Specific projects have included:

- i) a conference in spring of this year on housing rights, in association with the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at TCD;
- ii) a joint research project to review local authority housing strategies and homeless action plans and their effectiveness, with St. Vincent de Paul, the Simon Communities of Ireland and Focus Ireland;
- iii) a study on the implications of housing inequality for women, with the National Women's Council of Ireland; and
- iv) a leading study on the potential for institutional investment in the private rented sector with the Irish Bankers Federation.

On a day to day basis also Threshold staff work collaboratively with other organisations to provide advice to and further the needs of individual clients disadvantaged by the housing system. We believe that in the year ahead we can extend and deepen these links at every level within our organisation and continue to meet the constant challenge to make a real difference to the lives of people.

Patrick Burke

Patrick Burke
Director

Services Section

Services Section

Cork Advice Office

In 2002, 850 properties in the Cork City area were inspected in relation to Minimum Standards issues but no cases were taken against any landlords. However, Cork City Council still manages to compare favourably with the two-thirds of all County Councils which did not inspect any dwellings.

Cork Threshold dealt with 762 queries regarding housing conditions in 2002. Most of these enquiries, 572, came from people living in the Private Rented Sector.

Cork Statistics

Nearly a quarter of the total number of queries Cork Threshold received throughout 2002 concerned money. Out of this figure, nearly 20% concerned deposit retention, which would indicate that there is much abuse of the current system. Threshold provides a voice for those who are unable to speak up for themselves and advocates relentlessly for disadvantaged and vulnerable members of society.

Cork Threshold initiated a weekly Housing Advice Clinic at Cork Simon Community Day Centre for homeless persons. An experienced advisor is available to discuss the individual's problem in an environment that is familiar to the client. This allows us to build up relationships with particularly vulnerable members of society and over time, allows us to draw up a Personal Housing Plan to suit the individual need. Links are also being forged with the Settlement Team at Cork Simon to allow us to help those who are ready to live independently. We aim to support them effectively in their search for a home, be that private rented accommodation, local authority housing or transitional housing.

Dublin Advice Office

In July 2002 following a request from the Ballymun Community Law Centre, Threshold set up an outreach clinic operating on a fortnightly basis. Over 70 clients have availed of the service with the majority of the queries relating to the regeneration programme, other queries include local authority housing applications and transfers, and issues of anti-social behaviour. The number of clients has steadily increased and there have been a number of repeat clients. Feedback from clients has been very positive.

With the focus of the advice offices shifting towards greater advocacy work in July 2002 a pilot project was introduced by the Dublin Advice Office to develop an advocacy model template for advice workers when dealing with deposit retention cases. One in four of the clients who contacted us were successful in getting their deposit returned without having to take an action in the small claims court.

Dublin Statistics

- Over 8000 clients
- 5128 living in the Private Rented Sector
- 3281 living in their accommodation for less than 12 months
- 409 people complained of breaches in their leases
- 139 cases of non-compliance with minimum standards
- 434 people contacted regarding rent increases
- 16 people complained about vermin in their accommodation

Cork Advice Office

Dublin Advice Office



Our Management Team (L-R):
Deirdre Murphy,
Andrea O'Reilly,
Margaret O'Neill,
Patrick Burke,
Ita Mc Tighe,
Thora Mackey,
Stephen Large.

Absent:
Louise Mullen,
Russell Chapman.

Services Section

Services Section

Galway Advice Office

Galway Advice Office

The Galway Advice Office offers outreach services to places such as Athlone, Sligo and Shannon. We had an open Café for street homeless people where we organized for other information givers (covering a range of areas) to be available to give advice on the spot to those without a home. We give talks to schools, third level colleges and students unions with a view to informing young people of the issues, thereby preventing housing difficulties for these people in the future. We train other information givers including CIC's and work closely with other agencies dealing with disadvantage to deal with the housing problems which their clients experience. We have a placement service every Wednesday and offer an advocacy service where this is needed.

Services Development

Access Housing Unit

Case Studies

Galway Statistics

In 2002, we dealt with over 5000 people in our Galway advice office. Almost 50% of our clients live in the Private Rented Sector. Almost 20% of our clients were born outside of Ireland. Over 2000 people visited our advice office over the period, 760 of those were seeking accommodation in the Private Rented sector.

Services Development

Due to increasing numbers of queries from people who did not speak English as their first language, Threshold applied for and received funding from Comhairle and produced a range of information leaflets in five different languages to answer queries about housing in Ireland. The aim of the leaflet is to detail the different forms of housing and the various rights associated. The leaflet is available in French, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian and Spanish.

Access Housing Unit

In June of 2002 Threshold established the Access Housing Unit on a pilot basis with funding from the Homeless Agency, the objective being to increase the availability of private rented accommodation for people who are homeless. We then began the process by researching how such a service would function in Dublin and initially produced an updated version of the original project plan. By October, there were designated referral organisations and we had a clear idea of how the project would function, both with regard to accessing landlords and also how potential tenants would access the Unit and have the opportunity to find accommodation.

Subsequently, Threshold employed the first project worker in November and the process of accepting referrals from other homeless service providers began. By the end of the year, our first contacts had been made with landlords and we began the streamlining of policies and procedures which would inform the operation of the service moving into 2003 and help to ensure funding became a reality beyond the pilot stage.

Case Studies

Sarah

Sarah paid a deposit of €550 and signed a one year lease agreement. The lease expired and after three months the tenant gave 28 days notice to quit. The landlady refused to return the deposit claiming adequate notice wasn't given and that she was under the impression that the tenant was remaining there for a further year. The Threshold advice worker advocated on the clients behalf telephoning the landlady and her legal representatives. After pointing out the clients legal position the landlady agreed to return the deposit in full. The landlady was very pleased with the way the case was handled and requested further information from Threshold.

Caroline

Caroline, a single parent, came to Threshold for advice, she had been renting a house for eight years and the landlord was selling the property. The new owners were allowing her to stay on but were raising the rent. She wanted to know where she stood regarding the rent allowance she was getting as the rent increase took the rent above the rent cap. We contacted the City Council as Caroline was on the waiting list for eight years. The allocations officer indicated that Caroline would be made an offer but not for another few months. With this information, we wrote a letter to the Superintendent C.W.O. requesting that Caroline be paid rent allowance over the cap until the City Council made an offer of a Local Authority house. This was granted and continued until she was housed a few months later. The client who has a severe hearing impairment has a dog that alerts her when someone calls so Threshold negotiated with the Local Authority that she could bring the dog to her new home. Client moved into a beautiful new house after a few months and is very happy.



Fundraising & Accounts Section

Fundraising &
Accounts Section

Charity Shops Project

2002 was a busy year for the Threshold charity shops project with 3 shops now operating in Dublin, Cork and Galway. Our newest shop in Ballincollig, Co Cork won two prizes for window display from the Ballincollig Enterprise and Employment Board, so congratulations to all the staff there! Thank you to the shop managers, the FAS staff and all of the volunteers who work so hard in the shops. Special thanks also to those of you who donate good quality used items for us to sell – without your support we would not be able to stay in business.

Fundraising

Special thanks is due this year to each of Threshold's generous supporters who helped to make 2002 our most successful fundraising year ever, by contributing €562,696 towards our work with those facing homelessness in Ireland.

Events

- **Shelbourne Park Dogs Night**
For the fifth year running, members of the construction industry generously supported Threshold's annual Dogs Night in Shelbourne Park on 28th November, raising €18,000 for our cause.
- **Golf Classic**
Auctioneers, valuers and members of the financial sector once again lent their tremendous support to Threshold's annual Golf Classic (also in its fifth year), helping us to raise €15,000 in Milltown Golf Club on the 20th of May.
- **Hand of Cards**
The Hand of Cards appeal, supported by the Sunday Business Post and Sherry FitzGerald, once again encouraged companies not to send Christmas cards, but instead to make a donation to Threshold.

Financial Report

Income

Total	1,068,000
Donation & Fundraising	431,000
Grants	359,000
Exceptional Income	150,000
Charity Shops	53,000
Rental Income	35,000
Miscellaneous	40,000

Expenditure

Total	940,000
Salaries & Pensions	446,000
Fundraising	128,000
Administration/Sundry	106,000
Premises	89,000
Research	78,000
Publications/Printing/Postage/Stationary	55,000
Half-Way House Expenses	38,000

Auditors: Bates Butler & Co., Kingston House, 64 Patrick St.,
Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin

Charity Shops Project

Fundraising

Events

Financial Report



Key issues during 2002

A major issue for the Research Unit was evaluating the 33 local authority housing strategies and the local homeless action plans (published in 2001) from the perspective of access to housing that is appropriate, affordable and sustainable, and presenting our findings and the case for reform to key policy makers. This work was conducted jointly with Focus Ireland, the Simon Communities of Ireland and the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

In follow up to this work, research commenced looking into the impact of development land availability and prices on housing for people with low incomes. A submission was made to the Committee on the Constitution highlighting the need for immediate reforms.

Given the continued pressure on public finances, energies were directed to protesting against the paring back of Exchequer funding for more local authority housing, the weakening of Part V of the Planning and Development Act as a means of adding social housing into private residential developments, the imposition of a freeze on rent supplement and increase in the tenant's personal rent contribution from €7 to €12 per week.

Publication of the papers presented at Threshold's conference on housing rights contributed to the momentum that gathered for a rights agenda during the year across a range of socio-economic spheres.

Publications in 2002

Housing Access for All: an analysis of housing strategies and homeless action plans

Amongst the key findings:

- efforts should be redoubled to at least achieve the social housing investment set out in the National Development Plan
- targets should be set on the maximum time for households to expect to spend on local authority waiting lists
- the Department of the Environment should issue detailed guidelines for local authorities reviewing their housing strategies to make them a more effective instrument for ensuring access to housing
- the housing strategy reviews should more carefully link in transport, service, amenity and other elements of sustainable, integrated development, in addition to considering the spatial dispersion of social housing tenants
- homeless action plans should be put on a statutory basis
- specific commitments should be included in the plans on provision of accommodation and services to reflect the continuum of care needed
- an independent review of *Homelessness – An Integrated Strategy* should be commissioned

Housing Rights – A New Agenda

Seven authored papers look at the housing rights approach from different perspectives. One sets out a framework for analysing the Irish housing system, comparing it with a rights-based model. Another offers a rights-based critique of both current law governing private residential tenancies and prospective legislation. In countries where rights language has emerged, the obstacles to achieving desired outcomes are identified, including a right to shelter in New York and new responsibilities on UK local authorities to house the homeless. Progress in developing rights internationally is summarised and ways of advancing on rights in Ireland are considered.

Rent Supplement: A Social Policy Report

This report, conducted jointly with Comhairle, presents an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the rent supplement scheme, based in part on interviews with clients. Amongst the issues identified were the difficulties some recipients faced in finding accommodation within the rent limits, barriers to accessing the assistance due to poor information, complex rules and accessibility of Community Welfare Officers, and work disincentives.

Thank you

The work of the Research Unit would not have been possible without access to the core funding from the Department, the generosity of donors and most especially, funding for the Unit from the Irish Bankers' Federation and the Irish Mortgage Council.

Key issues
during 2002

Publications
in 2002

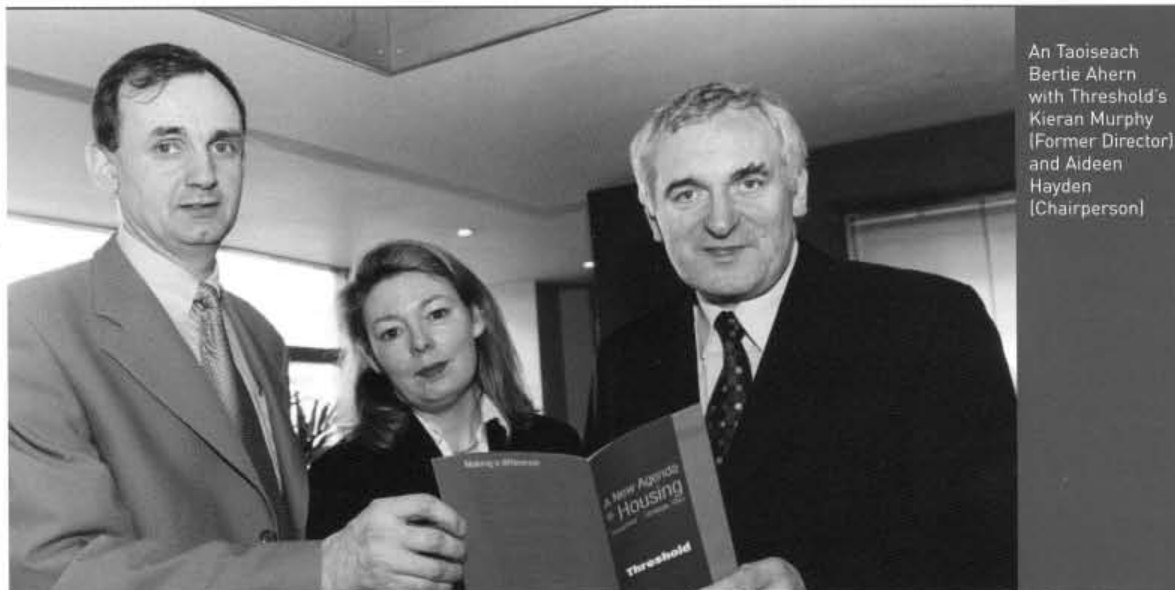
Thank you

An Taoiseach
Bertie Ahern
with
Felix O'Regan,
IBF



Thanks & Contact Details

Thanks &
Contact Details



An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern with Threshold's Kieran Murphy (Former Director) and Aideen Hayden (Chairperson)

Major Supporters

Threshold's Circle of Friends

Contact Details

Major Supporters

Threshold would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Irish Bankers' Federation and the Irish Mortgage & Savings Association (now the Irish Mortgage Council), whose commitment and significant funding has enabled the development of **Threshold's Housing Research Unit**. The Unit is dedicated to identifying the problems endemic in the Irish housing system and to searching for practicable solutions.

The following have shown outstanding commitment towards Threshold's work and their generosity has gone towards relieving the suffering of hundreds of households in housing crises:

- The Department of the Environment and Local Government
- Bovale Developments
- Cavan Developments
- Colorprint
- Cork Corporation
- CRH
- Cyril O'Neill
- Dublin Corporation

- Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council
- EBS
- Fingal County Council
- Galway City Council
- Health Boards
- Kell Marketing & Design
- Loreto Sisters, Beaufort
- Mountbrook Homes
- NCB Stockbrokers
- South Dublin County Council
- The Shelbourne Hotel
- Treasury Holdings

Threshold's Circle of Friends

Many of our supporters make regular monthly donations to Threshold by standing order. Their long-term support enables us to plan our work in the knowledge that we have a regular income stream, and in addition, standing orders are a low cost method of fundraising and an easy method of donating for our supporters. We'd like to thank all of our Circle of Friends for their commitment and ongoing support for our work, we greatly appreciate it.

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