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UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

"What impact can living in a Family Hub as a form of emergency accommodation have on children; a primary research study, from a professional's perspective".

Roisin McCarthy

CARL Research Project

in collaboration with

Good Shepherd Cork.

Name of student(s):	Roisin McCarthy
Name of community group:	Good Shepherd Cork
Name of community group liaison person:	Glenn Dalton, Eithne Murphy
Academic supervisor(s):	Brigette Mintern
Name and year of course:	Master's in Social Work, Year 2
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ABOUT COMMUNITY-ACADEMIC RESEARCH LINKS

What is Community-Academic Research Links?

Community Academic Research Links (CARL) is a community engagement initiative provided by University College Cork to support the research needs of community and voluntary groups/ Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). These groups can be grassroots groups, single-issue temporary groups, but also structured community and voluntary organisations. Research for the CSO is carried out free of financial cost by student researchers.

CARL seeks to:

- provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education;
- provide their services on an affordable basis;
- promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology;
- create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;
- enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and
- enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and researchers (Living Knowledge Network).

What is a CSO?

We define CSOs as groups who are non-governmental, non-profit, not representing commercial interests, and/or pursuing a common purpose in the public interest. These groups include: trade unions, NGOs, professional associations, charities, grass-roots organisations, organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life, churches and religious committees, and so on.

Why is this report on the UCC website?

The research agreement between the CSO, student and CARL/University states that the results of the study must be made public through the publication of the final research report on the CARL (UCC) website. CARL is committed to open access, and the free and public dissemination of research results.

How do I reference this report?

Author (year) *Dissertation/Project Title*, [online], Community-Academic Research Links/University College Cork, Ireland, Available from: https://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/rr/ [Accessed: date].

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I confirm that this research study, "*What impact can living in a Family Hub as a form of emergency accommodation have on children; a primary research study, from a professional's perspective*", is my work. I have made relevant references and cited other's work when used. I have submitted the study to TurnItIn, where I have viewed the originality report.

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ABSTRACT

Child and family homelessness is a growing social issue in Ireland. The reality is that over four thousand children live in emergency accommodation, and this number continues to grow year on year. Family hubs were opened as a form of supported temporary accommodation to help address the needs of homeless families.

This research was part of a Community-Academic Research Links (CARL) initiative, which was carried out in collaboration with Good Shepherd Cork. This organisation is a voluntary organisation that has provided accommodation and support to vulnerable women and children for 50 years. The collaborative research examined if living in a family hub impacts a child's day-to-day life and the support provided by staff to mitigate these effects. This was achieved by conducting six semi-structured interviews with staff working for Good Shepherd Cork's family hub. The staff identified issues such as stigma, shame, loss, isolation and the lack of privacy as some of the problems experienced by the children. The staff expressed how they support children overcome the experience and discussed the child-centred and child-led approach they use when working with the children residing in the family hub. Recommendations were identified from the findings and analysis. There were both government and policy-level recommendations, as well as service level recommendations. The study concludes by stating that a home is a fundamental human need and can give a person both physical security and can contribute towards psychological well-being. More action is needed to meet the needs of homeless children in Ireland.

Abbreviations

APS	ACCOMMODATION PLACEMENT SERVICE
ASD	AUTISM STECTRUM DISORDER
B&B	BED & BREAKFAST
CARL	COMMUNITY ACADEMIC RESEARCH LINK
CBPR	COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH
GSC	GOOD SHEPHER CORK
HAP	HOUSING ASSISTANCE PAYMENT
MSW	MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK
OT	OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
PHN	PUBLIC HEALTH NURSE
UCC	UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK
SNA	SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANE

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1.1 Research Background

The phenomenon of child and family homelessness is a growing social issue in Ireland. It is an issue characterised by instability, lack of security and a situation which can increase risk to the child. Studies have identified consistent pathways that have led families to come into contact with homeless services and can result from a diverse range of individual and structural circumstances. Consequently, families are accommodated through state funding and placed in various accommodation types, such as B&Bs, hotels and family hubs (Children's Rights Alliance, 2017). Living in homeless accommodation can impact a child's world in various ways and can have a potentially negative impact on physical, social and emotional elements. A child may experience displacement from networks, inappropriate places and spaces to play, increased behavioural challenges and some mental health concerns (Biel et al., 2014; Keogh et al., 2006).

Rebuilding Ireland's 2016 housing and homelessness action plan was committed to ending accommodating children in hotels and B&Bs as forms of emergency accommodation (Focus Ireland, 2021). This led to the emergence of Family hubs in 2017. They were intended as a form of supported temporary accommodation to address homeless families' emergency and temporary accommodation needs. Despite the number of children living in emergency accommodation and the time spent there, the shift to family hubs was undertaken without an evidence base and the application of consistent standards regarding the welfare of the families residing there. Family hubs have been scrutinised, and concerns centred around their unsuitability and inability to address the structural causes of family homelessness. According to Hearne & Murphy (2020), there is very little international research or evidence to support the emergence of family hubs as a model to help support those who are homeless. Hearne & Murphy (2020) spoke about viewing hubs as a "*form of institutionalisation of vulnerable women and children, and poor families, and that housing market failures will be forgotten as these families become the caution that hubs may be a new form of institutionalisation 'problem' that needs to be solved*" (p. 3).

In 2019, an Ombudsman's report was carried out regarding children's experiences of living in family hubs, which indicated that many aspects of homelessness that are traumatic for children persist in family hubs (Siersbaek & Loftu, 2020; Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2019). The condition of the accommodation varies, and quite often, families share one room for eating, sleeping, and living while adhering to house rules such as curfews, visitor bans, movement restrictions, and limited overnight leave (Keogh et al., 2006). Hutchinson (1999) and Halpenny et al (2002) discussed the reality of this type of living, including the lack of space, both internal and external facilities for children to play, and lack of heating, which can impact a child's world in various ways. These forms of emergency accommodation can have repercussions such as

unpredictability, risky conditions, and lack of family routine (Hopper et al., 2010; Collins & Phillips, 2003). A secure, safe home is essential to the experience of a 'good enough' childhood.

This is not the case for a large and growing number of children in Ireland, research must be conducted with practitioners to see how family hubs impact children. The research will examine how living in a family hub, as a form of emergency accommodation, impacts a child. This information will be obtained from speaking with professional practitioners who work within a family hub and offer key-working support to families residing there.

1.2 Community Partnership

The research is part of a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) project with Good Shepherd Cork, a voluntary organisation that provides a range of accommodation and support to vulnerable families, women, and children. This family hub opened in 2017 and provides temporary emergency accommodation for up to 17 homeless families at a given time. It is the only NGO that offers emergency accommodation to homeless families in Cork. Families are referred to the family hub through Cork City Council.

The student approached Good Shepherd Cork to work collaboratively with the organisation to research and bring more awareness to the concept of family hubs and gain a deeper understanding of the impact living there can have on a child. The student and the organisation worked collaboratively to define the research question and develop strategies to address the questions. It is hoped that this research may affect social change (Bates & Burns, 2012).

1.3 Rationale

As this is a Community-Academic Research Links (CARL) initiative, the research was guided by the needs of the community group, which is Good Shepherd, Cork. From engaging with Good Shepherd Cork and reading the literature on the topic, it became evident that more research needed to be carried out concerning living in a family hub as a form of emergency accommodation and its impacts on children. This has encouraged me to seek to understand if living in family hubs as a means of emergency accommodation impacts children, focusing on emotional and developmental effects by using a methodology of semi-structured interviews.

1.4 Research Title

The research title is: "*From a professional's perspective, what impact can living in a family hub as a form of emergency accommodation have on children; a primary research study"*.

1.5 Research Aim and Objectives

This research aims to explore family hubs in Ireland and investigate whether they act in the child's best interest as a short-term solution to the welfare of homeless children. This will be achieved by reviewing the literature, legislation, and policies. Consideration will be given to the support put in place by the Irish Government and the best practices used by staff when supporting homeless children in temporary accommodation settings.

Six staff members employed by the community partner organisation, Good Shepherd Cork, will be interviewed using a semi-structured method. This will help to get their perspective on supporting children who use the service.

1.6 Research Questions

1. Does living in a family hub impact a child and have an affect on their day-to-day lives?

2. What supports and resources are available for children living in family hubs to help meet their needs?

3. What staff approach is used when working with the children who reside in the family hub?

1.7 Dissertation Chapter Outline

Chapter One: This chapter will provide a background on the research study and explain the concept of family hubs. It will introduce the community partner, Good Shepherd Cork, and give a broad overview of the service they provide. Finally, the study's rationale, aims, objectives and research questions will be outlined.

Chapter Two: This chapter will review the currently available literature, beginning by looking at the concept of a family hub and where the idea came from. The chapter will discuss current policies, legislation and child rights. Following this the impacts and experiences of children who reside in emergency accommodation will be highlighted.

Chapter Three: This chapter will go through the intended methodology, presenting the theoretical perspective and methods that underpin the research study. The challenges and reflexivity will be explained.

Chapter Four: This chapter will document and analyse the findings from the gathered data during the interview stage. A thematic analysis will be provided, followed by a discussion of each theme.

Chapter Five: This chapter concludes the research study, providing recommendations for future research and suggestions at both governmental and service levels. Additionally, a personal reflective piece will be presented to show insights and experiences gained throughout the study.

CHAPTER TWO: A Review of the Literature

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This research begins by exploring family hubs and looks at the circumstances that led families to find themselves in such situations. A comprehensive analysis of existing policy frameworks and legislative measures will be undertaken to provide a contextual understanding. Subsequently, I will examine some pressing issues which can impact on a child and their right to an adequate standard of living. The chapter aims to explore the significance of Family Hubs within the broader context of child homelessness in Ireland, with the goal of contributing to evidence-based interventions to safeguard the rights and well-being of vulnerable children.

2.2 The Origins of Family Hubs

Family hubs have been described as "*a form of emergency accommodation that offers greater stability for homeless families, facilitates more co-ordinated needs assessment, and support planning, including onsite access to required services (such as welfare, health and housing service) and provides appropriate family supports and surroundings*" (Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2019, p. 7). They are family-focused and aim to provide better short-term accommodation solutions for families. Rebuilding Ireland, 2017 stated that the policy rationale and design of the family hubs were centred around being more cost-effective than hotel accommodation and offering more stability to families than hotel arrangements (IHREC, 2017). Simon Coveney, the then Minister for Housing, stated that family hubs were thought to be a place where families have more space and a chance to "*go about their lives"* (Respond, 2017). Positive evidence around onsite support in temporary accommodation as an effective service delivery model spurred the development. The stay in a family hub is contingent on seeking alternative accommodation, such as Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) properties, and key workers support people in their search.

Family hubs are thought to have better facilities, such as cooking and laundry facilities, along with spaces for recreation, compared to B&Bs or hotels. They are co-living spaces and are usually purpose-built congregate-type buildings funded by local authorities (Allen et al., 2020, p. 53). The Office of the Ombudsman for Children published a report titled No Place Like Home, in 2019 which included children's views and experiences living in a family hub. The report highlighted that family hubs around the country differ in physical facilities, making it difficult to make general statements about family hubs. As well as physical differences, it is evident that family hub providers run them differently, and transparent standardised practices are absent (Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2019, p. 7). By the end of 2019, 31 family hubs were operating in Ireland, most operated by private providers and some by NGOs.

Studies have identified consistent pathways that have led families to be referred to family hubs, resulting from diverse individual and structural factors (Sylvestre et al., 2017). Structurally, it is often a direct outcome of prolonged disinvestment in social housing, the privatisation and marketisation of social housing, and failures within the private market (Hearne & Murphy,

2020; Amato & MacDonald, 2011; Murran & Brady, 2022). Some structural triggers of homelessness include increased unaffordability and unavailability of affordable housing (Lima et al., 2022). Other contributing factors include rising rent prices, leading to difficulties securing and sustaining affordable housing. The private rental market has been described as having 'light-touch regulation'; it has become a process of financialisation with only slight attempts made to reform it, which had little success. The rental sector has been a leading driver of homelessness due to inadequate security of tenure, frequent evictions, exorbitant rents, and the exclusion of Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) benefits associated with private rentals (Byrne, 2019; McArdle & Byrne, 2022). The government launched a comprehensive Housing for All policy in 2021, where it committed to investing €40 billion towards supporting the development of around 33,000 homes per year over a ten-year period. The Department of Finance however have recently acknowledged the targets are significantly below the demand of 50,000 home per year that is there (Irish Times, 2024). People are limited in ways to exit homelessness, contributing to longer stays in homeless services and increased risks of homelessness (Lima et al., 2022). Some individual causes of homelessness include relationship breakdown, mental health issues, poverty, a family history of parental or substance abuse, domestic violence, and overcrowding. (Sylvestre et al., 2017; Lambert et al., 2018).

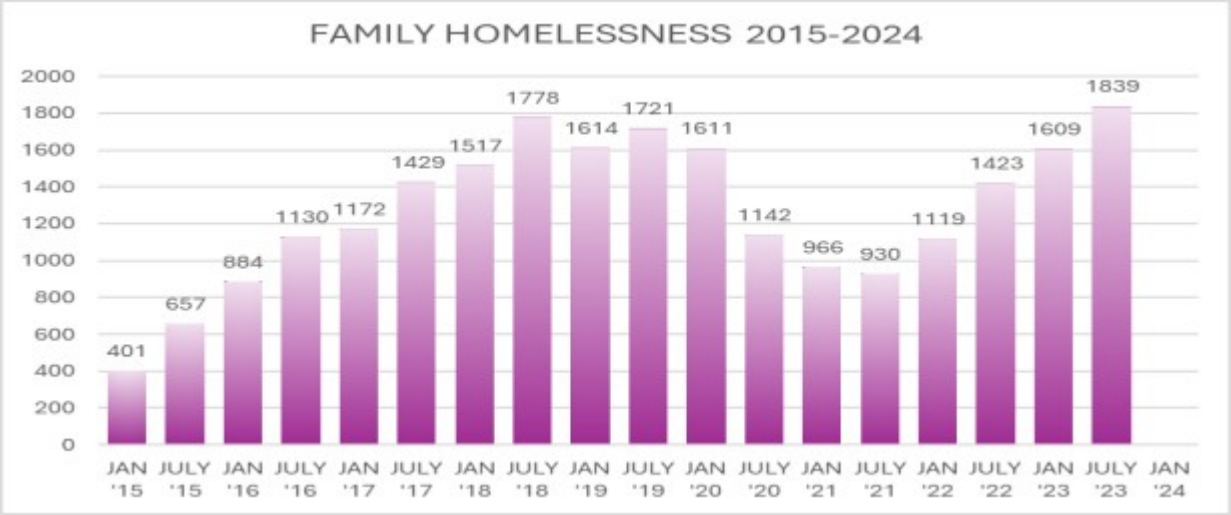
2.3 Child Homelessness in Ireland: Legislation, Policy & Children's Rights

In Ireland, under the Housing Act 1988, a person is defined as homeless when: "*a) There is no accommodation available which can reasonably occupy or remain in occupation of. b) They live in a hospital, county home, night shelter, or other such institution and live because they have no accommodation of the kind referred to in (a). c) They cannot provide accommodation from their resources"* (Irish Statute Book, 2020).

As previously discussed, homelessness in Ireland happens because of a complex array of factors and circumstances. The reality is that statistics in January 2024 indicate that 4,027 children live in emergency accommodation in Ireland. This rise is over 63% since January 2022 and is at an all-time high (Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage Monthly Homelessness Report, 2024). When the United Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1992, was ratified, it committed to respecting and fulfilling children's rights. Article 27 states that "*States Parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social developme*nt" (United Nations, 1989, Art. 27, s 1). However, children experiencing homelessness do not currently possess a statutory entitlement to housing under Irish law, nor do housing policies provide the right to housing. Living in homeless accommodation can have significant impacts on children's rights, especially

the right to protection from harm (Children First, 2015). Exposure to risky behaviours or distressing incidents impacts their right under Article 27 of the Convention. The Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs believes that due to the current housing crisis and its impact on children, it should be a matter of public interest for the Government to look at and

address enumerating a right to housing in the Constitution. Better Outcomes, Brighter Future's National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2022, references that the Government recognises that there can be lifelong negative impacts for a child if they are homeless or in unsuitable accommodation, recognising the need for affordable and suitable quality housing for children and young people (Department of Children & Youth Affairs, 2014 p. 91).





(Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage Monthly Homelessness Report, 2024).

2.4 Impacts and Experiences on Children

The impacts of homelessness on a child's welfare are multi-faceted. This is well documented in

the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs Report on the Impact of Homelessness on Children, 2019. Similar findings were apparent in the Ombudsman for Children's, No Place Like Home, 2019, report where families and children highlighted the restrictions placed on them while residing in a family hub. Feelings of sadness, anger and confusion were amongst the emotions expressed by the children who resided there. Family hubs' impact on children warrants in-depth scrutiny (Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2019; O'Mahony, 2020; Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, 2019).

2.4.1 Displaced from Network and the Experience of Stigma and Shame

Hearne and Murphy (2020) discuss that family hubs threaten human rights, with conditions likely to cause significant harm, particularly to the well-being of children. The Children's Rights Alliance (2017) has made representations regarding concerns about unsuitable accommodation for children. It was noted that longer stays in these conditions violate family and child rights. Children residing in homeless services, such as family hubs, might be displaced from their support, such as family, neighbours, friends, and services. Living there may impact a child's opportunity for contact with family members and friends as they may be moved away from the area where their support and network may be (Halpenny et al., 2002; Biel et al., 2014). The rules and regulations within the family hubs can restrict contact with friends and family, as residents are not allowed to have visitors. Research shows that a child's home environment and relationship with parents and other family network members are a central source of psychosocial development for younger children. They need positive relationships to help them establish and maintain positive social relationships (Halpenny et al., 2002; Barnes, 1999).

Stigma is a recurring theme in the literature. Children feel shame and stigma associated with being homeless. This can cause the child to hide their circumstances from peers, reducing their social networks and distancing themselves from those who were once naturally accessible to the child. This disconnect is considered one of the most 'damaging facets' associated with residential instability. This can result in the child losing a sense of place and impact them psychologically, physically and socially (Biel et al., 2014; Kilmer et al., 2012; Murran & Brady, 2022; Baptista et al., 2017). This was evident in the No Place Like Home (2019) report, when there was "*feelings of shame, guilt and embarrassment*" amongst the children residing there.

2.4.2 Emotional and Developmental Impacts

Homelessness can be very harmful to a child, as they can suffer from extensive emotional harm as they lack a sense of privacy, security and trust. Children who are homeless are more exposed to risky environments that can potentially put them at risk of adverse health, social and

emotional outcomes. Precarity in housing can lead to deepening stress, it can undermine self-esteem. It can heighten children's vulnerabilities and lead to physical well-being and mental health problems (Finnerty & O' Connell, 2017; Mayock et al., 2011). Compared to peers of low socio-economic backgrounds, those who are homeless measured worse in health, emotional, social and behavioural issues (Murran & Brady, 2022; Hausman & Hammen, 1993; Bradley et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2008). A secure base is a fundamental element and a unavoidable necessity of human needs that Maslow (1943) identifies. Housing contributes towards psychological well-being by allowing a person to have a sense of personal space, autonomy and privacy (Finnerty et al., 2016, p. 238). The environment in which a child lives and grows up is a crucial dimension for their well-being and development. Housing can have pervasive effects on the lived experience of a child, and lack of a secure base can impact cognitive and emotional health and development. Studies have shown that homeless children are more likely to experience internalising problems such as depression and anxiety and externalising behaviours such as aggression (Rescorla et al.,1991; Tobin & Murphy, 2013). Walsh and Harvey's (2017) review of 25 families who had experienced living in emergency accommodation captured the impacts on the children over an extended period. They reported feelings of isolation, boredom related to sharing small spaces, behavioural issues, stress, and exposure to risky situations, which they would not have witnessed were they not in emergency accommodation. Narayan et al. (2017) highlights that families who become homeless have more difficulty in shielding their children from childhood adversity as they use increasingly limited resources to meet basic needs. Rebuilding Ireland recognised that prolonged stays in emergency accommodation can "*seriously impact normal family life and is particularly detrimental to children"* (Hearne & Murphy, 2018, p. 14).

2.4.3 Trauma & Attachment

A traumatic event is thought to be something that happens unexpectedly and is seen to be dangerous; it is something which can involve physical harm or threat of physical harm; it overwhelms the ability to cope and leads to intense fear (Lotty, 2021; DeCandia & Guarino, 2020). Living without a stable home is a traumatic experience within itself and can be seen as a defining characteristic of a child's circumstance. Children who have experienced homelessness and co-occurring risk factors are identified as being at risk of exposure to trauma and some adversities while they are within the service, which can heighten stressors. It can pervade multiple facets of a child's world. Studies have shown that children who experience homelessness can experience increased stress and anxiety, behavioural problems, poor health and fatigue (Baptista et al., 2017; Murran & Brady, 2022; Kilmer et al., 2012; Dolezal &

Gibson, 2020). Childhood trauma can distort a child's thinking about the social world and can lead to issues with attachment and a stable sense of self (Waldinger et al., 2006; Knight, 2015).

When a child faces adversity, it is important to have positive caregiving relationships to protect them from the impact of the stress, allowing the child to withstand and recover from adversity and providing them the ability to build resilience. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard

University (2022) recognises that having a consistent nurturing carer who is responsive to the child is a factor heavily linked with resilience (O'Leary et al., 2023). Bowlby, 1969 believed that attachment becomes activated at times of stress; they seek closeness with a primary caregiver to make them feel safe. The positive relationship allows the child to recognise and regulate any intense arousal of emotions. Howe (2006) argues that "*the goal of the attachment system is protection from danger*" (p. 126). If a child has an insecure attachment with a caregiver, it can impact their developmental capacities, including their ability to cope with stress and trauma (Cook et al., 2003; O'Leary et al., 2023).

However, if this protective factor is not present, research shows the long-term effects of traumatic stress on the child's development (DeCandia & Guarino, 2015; O'Leary et al., 2023). Being exposed to ongoing traumatic stressors without support can lead to a 'toxic stress' response, which can heavily impact brain development (Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010; Cook et al., 2005; DeCandia & Guarino, 2015). This can lead to changes in brain functioning, including those associated with memory, learning, self-regulation and the ability to cope. Toxic stress can also result in a heightened baseline state of physiological arousal and sensitivity to internal and external triggers, putting children at a greater risk of adverse developmental, emotional and functional outcomes (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005; Lotty, 2021; DeCandia & Guarino, 2015).

The rate of depressive disorders and traumatic stress among parents who are homeless is higher than that of the general population (Poleshuck et al., 2013). When in homeless services, parents sometimes find it difficult to be the 'buffer' as their parental autonomy is often challenged. Parents have reportedly experienced feelings of powerlessness as they find themselves in an environment where they lack privacy and end up having to 'parent in public' (Thrasher & Mowbray, 1995, p. 98; Bradley et al., 2018; Kissman 1999, p. 374). The sense of judgement felt by parents, coupled with the impact of homelessness and the cumulative stressors, can undermine the family's functioning. The risk factors can affect a parent's well-being (Kilmer et al., 2010; Bradley et al., 2018). This was evidenced in the No Place Like Home 2019 report when parents discussed that rules, policies and procedures within family hubs cause frustration and confusion (p.43).

2.5 Conclusion

The literature review provided thematic areas to guide the formation of primary research questions. The research offers the opportunity to see the extent of harm caused by living in

emergency accommodation. The literature available portrays family hubs as *"transitional supervised accommodation which is more expensive than long-term housing subsidies*" (O'Sullivan, 2017, p. 208). I will collaborate with Good Shepherd Cork staff to hear their perspectives on the topic and raise awareness around the need for more policies and legislation in child homelessness. The research will allow the staff to share their personal experiences of the service that is being provided and the positive and negative impacts that it can have.

CHAPTER THREE: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the methodological underpinnings guiding this research. This will help to explain the purpose of the research, how the outcomes were achieved and how the information relating to the research was collected and analysed (Carey, 2013, p. 179). The research fostered a Community Based Participatory Research framework, described in detail throughout this chapter, highlighting how this was carried out in conjunction with the Community-Academic Research Links (CARL) initiative within University College Cork. To enable a successful partnership, Langan and Morton (2009) recommend clarifying the theories and methods used at the early stages of the research collaboration and between all stakeholders. This chapter will discuss these along with the ethical considerations and limitations faced.

3.2 Community Academic Research Link (CARL)

A Community Academic Research Link is a "*research-to-action approach that emphasises the direct engagement of local priorities and perspectives*" (Vaughn et al., 2020, p. 2). It is work which is co-constructed in partnership with stakeholders as it is believed that they hold insider knowledge and lived expertise (Vaughn et al., 2020). This project is carried out in partnership with Good Shepherd Cork's staff team and represents the interests of those who use the family hub. The nature of the collaborative relationship is to utilise the knowledge of the community group to help "*solve a pressing community problem or effect social change*" (Strand et al., 2003, p. 3).

Community and academic knowledge were shared, along with decision-making and ownership (Hally et al., 2020). A partnership-based approach was taken where the organisation and I worked together in all aspects of the research process. This aligns with Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and the objectives of carrying out a CARL project. The strengths of this type of research are well documented and include the joining of strengths and knowledge of the community partner and the student to help identify issues, prioritise the needs of the individuals and conclude with solutions (Coughlin et al., 2017).

3.3 Epistemology & Theoretical Perspective

Epistemology is a crucial component that allows me to acknowledge different ways of understanding the reality of the world (Carey, 2009). It is essentially concerned with the "*theory of knowledge"* and allows us to uphold assumptions and understand what we know and how

we came to know this (Carey, 20013, p. 50; Crotty, 2009). The epistemology to underpin this research is constructivism, which is the view that human beings construct meaning and reality as they engage with the world they interpret. Constructivism is concerned with knowledge being constructed by individuals rather than being passively received (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 13). This epistemology is relevant for this research as it helps to understand the lived experience from the perspective of the staff working within the family hub. According to Ritchie et al., 2014 various

social, political, and psychological factors contribute to our comprehension of the social world. This viewpoint underscores the importance of understanding how individuals construct their perceptions and behaviours, and how cultural and societal practices shape social reality (Charmaz, 2006, p. 189; Carey, 2012, p. 34; Ritchie et al., 2014). The research aims to explore how children interpret their experiences in the family hub, their surroundings, and the potential outcomes of prolonged stays in such environments.

The theoretical perspective used to guide my view, select research questions, choose methods and interpret the data was interpretivism. This was an appropriate theory as the collaborative project aimed to "*uncover meaning and reality*" and understand the lived experiences of those living in the family hubs (Carey, 2013, p. 53). Through collaboration with Good Shepherd Cork, the research sought to comprehend opinions, responses, and attitudes towards the concepts of family hubs and their impact on children. I endeavoured to "*unearth people's interpretations*" of the hubs and the associated beliefs and consequences of living there for prolonged periods on the child (Carey, 2013, p. 53; Scott, 1995). This perspective will be the focal point of the research, as it values individual experiences.

3.4 Research Methodology

Qualitative research is "*the inductive view of the relationship between theory and reality*". It helps us to understand the social world by listening to and interpreting the world of individuals. It is a method that can take various forms (Bryman & Burgess, 1999). It is a method that covers a broad range of approaches linked to different beliefs about the social world and how we find out about it (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 23). Using a qualitative method allows me to emphasise and value the interpretation of those familiar with the topic, allowing a human interpretation of the understanding of the phenomenon (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 11). For this research, qualitative interviewing was chosen by the community partner and I. It is believed this approach is valid as it allows space to identify themes such as the attitudes and experiences of the group involved (Carey, 2015, p. 155). This depth of inquiry will enable a nuanced understanding of participants' lived experiences and perspectives, contributing to the richness and validity of the research findings.

3.5 Research Methods

The selected research method for this study was semi-structured interviews. This approach was specifically chosen to allow participants the opportunity to express their experiences and opinions regarding the impacts of living in a family hub. I used a schedule of questions to focus on but allowed participants to introduce new topics. The unplanned questions allowed room to unpack and expand on responses which needed clarity.

The designated liaison person associated with the collaboration assisted with the interview schedule. This schedule consisted of ten questions which were aimed at gathering information on particular themes related to the aims and objectives. Prior to the interviews, the designated liaison person and I met to discuss the question and did a 'mock' interview to ensure that the questions were appropriate.

The interviews took place within "*the natural setting*" as suggested by Creswel (2009, pp. 175), when he suggests that qualitative research should occur where participants experience the issue. For this reason, interviews took place in Good Shepherd Cork, family hub. The individual interviews took place one-to-one in a quiet space.

3.6 Sampling

Purposive sampling was the chosen approach applied as it was believed that the selected sample group possessed knowledge crucial for a detailed exploration and understanding of the research aims and objectives (Ritchie et al., 2014, pp. 113-114; Bryman, 2012). The participants comprised of six staff members who have been employed at Good Shepherd Cork's Family hub for more than two years. The designated liaison person collaborated with me to identify participants who met the criteria. The use of purposive sampling ensured that the staff members possessed relevant information related to the exploration of central themes (Ritchie et al., 2014, pp. 113-114; Bryman 2012).

3.7 Data Collection and Analysis

A thematic and critical analysis will be applied to help critically unearth the meanings and understandings from the qualitative data. This approach will allow me to look for specific themes within the gathered data which may include social trends, or outcomes that can help to generate debates regarding the topic of family hubs (Carey, 2012, p. 29). By using critical analysis, it will allow wider themes such as the macro forces which contribute to the issue of family homelessness and how people end up residing in family hubs (Payne & Payne 2004, p. 214; Carey, 2012, p. 29).

Three themes were interpreted and examined in conjunction with the existing literature and will be detailed in the next chapter.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical approval to conduct semi-structured interviews from the MSW Research Ethics Committee (REC). Informed consent was obtained in writing from

participants, who were made aware that participation was voluntary. Consent declarations were obtained from the six participants before the interview commenced, ensuring their full understanding. Participants were provided with information sheets before the interview to ensure they fully understood the research aims. I prioritised the well-being of participants, following the CORU Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Social Workers (2019), and maintained confidentiality and privacy. Identifying information was removed to maintain anonymity.

Interviews were conducted over a two-week period, recorded using a Dictaphone provided by the UCC library, and transcribed within two weeks. Transcripts are securely stored on Microsoft Teams, following the UCC code of research ethics. The data will be stored for two years post-submission and then securely destroyed. The research follows a community-based participatory approach, where interviews are not shared with the organisation however the final dissertation will be disseminated to Good Shepherd Cork.

As an employee of Good Shepherd Cork, ethical consideration was given to ensure there was no conflict of interest or biases towards the research.

3.9 Limitations and Challenges

In this research, I intended to interview parents of children residing in the family hubs to include their voices; however, as they are regarded as a vulnerable group, ethical approval was not granted. Reflection allowed me to see this was the right decision because concerns were raised in the literature, which stated that parents' own issues, such as the stress of living in homeless services, could hinder their ability to accurately discuss their children's experiences and issues (Noble-Carr, 2007).

3.10 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is one's connection to the research topic, such as personal or professional experiences that led to interest in the topic (Gringeri et al., 2013, p. 56). In conducting this research, it is essential to critically examine my own beliefs and assumptions regarding the topic. By practising reflexivity and acknowledging my position within the research, along with my existing values and beliefs surrounding the subject, I can strive to prevent undue influence on the research process. I was drawn to this research topic as I work as a 'Resettlement Worker' within the context of the family hub. I was interested in exploring the impacts prolonged stays in an emergency accommodation facility can have on children. It also afforded me the

opportunity to identify any gaps in the service provided to the children who reside there. I acknowledge that I should continue to reflect and be aware of my reflexivity to ensure I am tuned into my biases and preconceived ideas. As a staff member affiliated with Good Shepherd Cork, it is crucial to maintain a critical awareness of how my role may impact both the process and outcomes of the research, as well as the interactions with the participants involved. I will remain

mindful of my position within the research and commit to an ongoing process of reflection (Koch & Harrington, 1998). Ensuring that I effectively communicate the context and interconnectedness of the study can enhance the credibility of the research (Berger, 2015).

It is pertinent to recognise that all research findings are influenced by the personal histories and perspectives of both the participants and I (Gringeri et al., 2013, p. 56). This acknowledgement underscores the significance of considering the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints contributing to the research. Through a reflexive approach, I aim to navigate these dynamics with sensitivity and transparency, ensuring that the research process remains guided by ethical principles and a commitment to rigour and impartiality (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 23).

3.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research employed a comprehensive methodology to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals residing in family hubs. The methodological underpinnings, including the use of constructivist epistemology and interpretivist theoretical perspective, provided a robust foundation for understanding the complex realities of life within family hubs.

Qualitative research methods, particularly semi-structured interviews, were utilised to gather rich, in-depth participant data. Purposive sampling ensured that the selected participants possessed the knowledge crucial for exploring the research aims and objectives. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process, with measures taken to ensure informed consent, confidentiality, and the well-being of participants.

The next chapter will outline the themes and findings that emerged through this process.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the findings which bring meaning and understanding to the research questions. The data emerged from interviews with six staff members who work for Good Shepherd Cork. The data was analysed and compared to occurrences in research findings and other theoretical perspectives as outlined in the literature review (Carey, 2013, p. 155; Carey, 2012, p. 218).

Subsequently, three key themes were identified:

1. Pathways to the service & family hub living
2. Emotional & developmental impacts
3. Staff approach when supporting the children residing in the family hub

The themes were chosen as they helped to answer the research question, which included: Does living in a family hub impact a child and affect their day-to-day lives, and what supports and resources are available to help overcome these adversities and help meet their needs?

4.2 Pathway to the Service & Family Hub Living

4.2.1 Individual and Structural Causes of Homelessness

The staff interviewed sharedinsights into the reasons families may come to reside in the family hub and the referral pathway leading to their arrival.

"A family is referred from APS, that [Accommodation Placement Service] would be the first point of contact, they see whether the family has a housing application or not. And then if they're deemed suitable, they will either be referred to B&B services or lets say ourselves [family hub] or another emergency accommodation depending on the circumstances of the family" - Participant 1.

The Housing For All policy recognises the need to respond to those who are in need of homeless accommodation. Section 3.6 of the policy suggests emphasizing building more appropriate emergency accommodation through local authority-owned facilities to respond to those who find themselves in need of homeless accommodation. This resulted in Good Shepherd Cork setting up the family hub.

Those interviewed described various reasons why families may come to reside in the family hub. Common reasons included mental health difficulties, domestic violence, overcrowding, family breakdown and difficulties maintaining a tenancy. However, staff more commonly discussed structural housing factors that contribute to homelessness, such as evictions, unaffordable housing

prices, and housing shortages.

"*A lot of families and individuals that are being priced out of the market at the moment, and I kind of want to get that point across, you know, there is a huge amount of structural component to all of this. I suppose, I kind of think sometimes there's maybe this notion of people enter homeless services because maybe they've done something wrong to end up in emergency accommodation such as individual issues, and although it can be a factor there is a huge structural component that's related to like housing policy, rental policy, all of those kinds of things"* – Participant 2.

The staff identified the current issues on a structural level, this included the market trends, housing policies and the general precarity in the Irish housing system, identifying the impact it is having on homelessness (Finnerty & O' Connell, 2017). Structural factors such as housing market pressures and lack of supply are the main determining factors in the rise of homelessness across the EU in recent years. It is a well-documented systemic issue contributing to increased family homelessness (Baptista & Marlier, 2019; Daly, 2018; Focus Ireland, 2020; Lima et al., 2022; Finnerty & O' Connell, 2017). Nearly all staff interviewed recognised that more housing solutions are needed. Many interviewed stated that *"it seems to me that it [the family hub] is becoming a housing solution rather than a response to a crisis, which we [staff members] are actively trying to advocate against"* – Participant 4. All interviewees spoke passionately about the advocacy role and how they often highlight the need for "*more accommodation*" and "*appropriate accommodation*". Participant 4 stated, "*Unfortunately, I must admit that it is a tougher battle than I would like it to be [advocating for accommodation]".*

4.2.2 Associated Loss & Isolation

Losing one's home and coming to homeless accommodation can be a very overwhelming experience that is likely to impact a person in many ways (Duncan et al., 2019). The staff members interviewed spoke emotionally about the experience of children coming to the family hub, losing their familiar environment, networks, social connections, and feelings of safety. The staff discussed how families are often overwhelmed by the struggle of maintaining a normal life while residing there. When children come to reside in the family hub it is often a space which is away from their usual services, schools and networks.

"*APS try to accommodate people, let's say when there being referred to the family hub they [Cork City Council] try to make sure that their schools are nearby but some circumstances this isn't possible. some circumstances kids need to move schools, which would then be really difficult because maybe if the child had an SNA or obviously if there's friendships with other*

kids in school, that that can be a massive change. So that's really hard on the kids as well" – Participant 1.

"I think they're more often than not their removed away from their community, their estate, you know, their friendship groups there. That all has a negative impact on them, of

course" – Participant 3.

The literature reviewed for this study revealed that children residing in emergency accommodation often experience a disconnection from their usual support networks, including extended family, neighbours, friends, and services. In Good Shepherd Cork, specific rules and regulations can further restrict contact with family and friends, as residents are not allowed to have visitors. Staff explained that this is in place to safeguard residents. We know from the literature that housing and a home is a forum for interactions with family, friends, and neighbours, and they are spaces that contribute to positive well-being. A home is a space where identity is formed, a place of privacy, and a space to escape pressures and the prism through which we see the world around us (Coates et al., 2021). Without housing and the neighbourhood where connections are formed, a child may feel an absence of belonging and the subjective well-being that comes with it (Coates et al., 2021).

"*It's quite normal to have your friends come to your house, engage in play and fun with your friends. What you find is here, due to health and safety we can't have friends visit*" – Participant 6.

"*I find there's a challenge here, you're saying happy birthday, here's your present .. go off and have your party elsewhere. Where as when I grew up, I had parties at home and friends came over. It's also a very much a cost saving measure as well for my parents. We can't, we're asking people to celebrate birthdays out. And we're putting an added cost and pressure. Now, we're lucky we will give some financial support in situations like through vouchers and stuff, but we are actually adding a little bit more financial pressure than we would like*" – Participant 4.

Research shows that a child's home environment and relationship with parents and other family network members are a central source of psychosocial development for younger children. They need positive relationships to help them establish and maintain positive social relationships (Halpenny et al., 2002; Barnes, 1999). The staff interviewed explained that these rules are in place to help keep children safe and protected from harm (DREH, 2019). Participant 3 said that "*every rule is justified and it is [code of conduct] something that is often up for review*". One staff member explained that a new framework, the National Quality Standards for Homeless Services in Ireland, will be adopted by the family hub over the coming months. It is a framework that aims to further establish consistent practices in addressing the needs of homeless individuals and enhancing service quality. It will help promote safe and effective service provision to persons experiencing homelessness (DRHE, 2019).

4.2.3 Barriers to Accessing Existing Services

Following on from this, it emerged from interviews that coming to the family hub often means that children are moving from one side of the city to another, ie. from the North side to the South side of Cork. Staff members interviewed discussed how this can often cause issues for families when trying to access services as they may no longer be in the correct catchment area.

"*When families are coming into those services into homeless services and maybe to the*

family hub, they [services] might not be in their catchment area anymore, so instead of them being able to maintain their place on that list, they're then having to transfer to a different area and they're starting on the bottom and working up again. So what you actually have here is a whole cohort of children who are more vulnerable by virtue of the fact that they live in homeless services, who are then having their vulnerability and their ability to address those vulnerabilities impacted by services just being navigated for them" – Participant 2.

Staff members interviewed recognised accessing services as an issue and discussed how they seek to bridge the gap by helping the families to link in with services. One staff member mentioned how as part of their role"*we advocate for services, we write letters, we ring doctors, we try and push for whatever therapists are needed"*. The staff discussed how they would like to see special provisions made for children who are in homeless services to help access services and be made priority on these lists. They expressed frustration for a system which does not appear to understand ormake provision for the impact that living in homeless accommodation can have on a child. There was a strong urgency from all staff regarding the waitlists and lack of services available, stating "*children are bouncing around waiting lists and services*" – Participant 2.

4.3 Emotional and Developmental Impacts of Homelessness on Children.

The literature has shown that children who experience homelessness are at risk of adverse outcomes, which can include development delays, poor academic achievement, emotional issues and poor health outcomes (Bassuk et al., 2020; Halverson et al., 2023). Despite this evidence, I found very limited research available to represent the children impacted by emergency accommodation and the appropriateness of family hubs in which these children live.

4.3.1 Lack of Space and Privacy

When asked about the potential impacts that children may experience while living in a family hub, most staff identified the lack of space as a significant concern. They discussed situations where bedrooms might not always be suitable. They described a space where younger siblings might share rooms with older siblings or families were all in one room.

"You could have two adults and two children sharing a room and they could be at different developmental stages as well. You could have a toddler, or an older teenager with a younger child. It just depends on the family" – Participant 1.

The staff highlighted their efforts to promote the use of communal spaces among residents, especially for families with small infants. They outlined several communal areas which are in the family hub, these including a spacious dining and living room, a designated

play area, a garden, and a recently built sensory room. Staff recognised the limited space in bedrooms may hinder infants' ability to crawl, they also acknowledged that the communal areas may not always be appropriate for small children. With as many as thirty children residing in the family hub at times, staff acknowledged the potential safety concerns for younger children in these shared spaces.

"I would say it has a negative impact on children. I mean, you have like babies coming in, you know, and developmentally they don't have the space to grow and you know, learn to crawl and learn to walk and I know we have a nice dining and living area downstairs, we have outside [garden] but if it's raining outside and there's other activities, or let's be honest, there's another ten children aged 4 to 12 in that space, it's not an appropriate space for a baby to be crawling around" – Participant 5.

The research shows that limited play areas exacerbate the situation of living in homeless accommodation by constraining children's ability to engage in recreational and developmental activities. With inadequate space for play, children may experience boredom, frustration, and a lack of stimulation, which can negatively impact their emotional well-being and overall development (Keogh et al., 2006). Having space to play can be a positive contributor to emotional expression. Bedrooms in homeless accommodations are often not always conducive to the play due to the lack of space and the number of people using the space, limiting the opportunity for toys and materials. The lack of space can also limit the opportunities for children to explore their environment and focus on motor and cognitive skills, which are often necessary for development (Halverson et al., 2023).

The staff within the family hub spoke about constantly "*reimagining the space*" to make the family hub more appropriate. The addition of a sensory room is a space which all staff spoke positively about and felt it would benefit the children there. Child appropriate spaces are an important resource within emergency accommodation that have the potential to promote positive child well-being (Volk et al., 2022; Halverson et al., 2023).

Older children was a theme which emerged often, this was an area that I had failed to explore in the literature. The staff frequently discussed how there was a lack of space within the family hub for the teenage age group. They identified concerns for teenagers and the lack of privacy they experience. They found that many teenagers may feel embarrassed to share a room with siblings or parents, and the experience may be uncomfortable for them, hindering their autonomy and sense of independence. Several staff interviewed stressed the challenges faced by teenagers in maintaining privacy within the family hub, as they cannot be left unsupervised by their parents. This lack of autonomy can further compound feelings of isolation.

"*The teenager age group have very little space to isolate from their parents. They're often living in the same room or in very close quarters with their parents. They need a space to be able to isolate away from their parents, engage with their friends, whether it be online or whether it be just sitting reading whatever it might be, but being very close to your parents can often be really challenging for a teenager*" – Participant 4.

I found it impactful to hear one staff member describe the lack of space for teenagers as *"like a*

pressure cooker really, like you know, in terms of like emotionally and that that's really, really impactful" – Participant 2.

4.3.2 Noise Levels

Nearly all staff interviewed acknowledged that noise levels in the family hub can affect the quality of children's sleep. To help overcome this concern, the family hub has implemented a 'wind down time' where children are asked to go to their rooms at 9pm and not use communal spaces. This is to help reduce the likelihood of younger children who are sleeping to be woken or interrupted. However, staff acknowledged that this could cause difficulties as all families have different routines that work for them.

"*So yeah, I suppose not that it's a rule, but noise levels and complaints can be an issue, families operate in different times. Their sleep patterns are different, you know, the building I suppose is not very soundproof. So one child might wake up another child*" – Participant 5.

Another issue identified that may impact a child sleep is the differing ages within one room.

"*You have to be very consciousness of the noise levels, which can be really difficult if there's like slightly older children and they want to be up a bit later. So it's very hard because they're going to try and accommodate all age groups. Which is very difficult because you have such a range of children living here as well*" – Participant 1.

These issues were further identified in the 2019 Ombudsman Report, No Place Like Home where reference was made to poor quality sleep due to noises such as banging of doors, children talking and shouting, sharing a room with family and siblings.

4.3.3 Stigma & Shame

Many staff members interviewed highlighted the stigma attached to homelessness and how this is mainly felt by teenagers. They discussed the pervasive stigma associated with homelessness and its impact on teenagers. This stigma can affect their self-esteem and sense of belonging and exacerbate their challenges in forming and maintaining social relationships. The staff spoke about how it mainly affects teenagers as they are more aware of their circumstance and the opinions of others.

"A lot of teenagers might not even tell their friends that they're living here because they'd be too embarrassed, which is really difficult because we see that they might be quite isolated, they might stay in their room a lot and they don't interact with staff or other residents which can be really difficult as well" – Participant 1.

In chapter three, the literature emphasises the significance of having a trusted network for teenagers, which is a crucial protective factor. Teenagers often rely on people beyond their

immediate family circle, and this social support plays a vital role in navigating life stressors during their teenage years (Halpenny et al., 2002). However, when children become homeless, they may experience feelings of shame and embarrassment. Staff interviewed recounted instances where teenagers disengaged from their friend groups, disrupting their social connections and support systems. Shame is an effect of trauma and can be seen as an experience that arises when people are worried about how that are perceived and judged by others (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022).

4.3.4 Peer Support

While interviewing staff, a significant number of negative impacts were mentioned. However, all staff members also highlighted the positive peer relationships formed by the children while residing in the family hub. Participant 1 shared an anecdote when a parent described the family hub as a "*constant birthday party for the child*". This was attributed to the presence of many children of similar ages in the family hub. Positive peer interaction was consistently mentioned as a beneficial aspect of hub living by all staff.

"*I suppose the children do get peer support in around children experiencing you know, similar circumstances. I suppose they have access to activities that the child & youth team will do, whether it be trips to Fota or you know, play days and stuff*" – Participant 5.

4.4 Staff Approach When Supporting the Children Residing in the Family Hub:

4.4.1 Trauma Informed Approach

Some staff members highlighted homelessness as a traumatic event for children, emphasising that every child may process being homeless differently. They discussed how, in addition to the trauma of experiencing homelessness, families arriving at the hub may have encountered other traumas in their lives.

"*It's kind of like, I suppose, homelessness can exacerbate the impact of previous traumas that have existed but also can maybe be a new trauma that occurs in somebody's life*" – Participant 2.

It was identified by the staff interviewed that the organisation is making efforts to become a trauma-informed service. One staff member spoke about a steering group that Good Shepherd Cork created to support the organisation's move towards this approach, recognising the approach as beneficial.

"*We're at very early stages, but we are trying to see how we can use best practice to inform how we will use that [trauma-informed approach] in our work with families going*

forward" Participant 2.

It was acknowledged that having a trauma-informed approach can help to avoid re-traumatising a person. We know from the literature that a trauma-informed approach can create a supportive and empowering environment, reducing vicarious trauma exposure (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022).

4.4.2 Child Centred & Child Led Approach

When asked about the approach the team takes when working with the children, every staff member identified it as a child-centered approach.

"*Oh, very child-centered and child friendly of course. I mean, they are the heartbeat of Redclyffe [Good Shepherd Cork, family hub]*" – Participant 3.

Most staff spoke about having a non-judgemental approach where they are open and honest and supportive of families. Staff spoke about listening to the child and how active listening was very important to the team.

"*And I suppose it's really important [listening to the child] because again, having children, all different ages, it's just sit down and give, you know, the child space and listen to them. And I suppose like any concerns or anything that they might have going on, to link in with them, but also to link in with moms and dads as well*" – Participant 1.

The staff also prided themselves on adopting a holistic approach, recognising their limitations and understanding what they can provide for the child.

"*From there, we make appropriate referrals, whether that be to public health nurses or to OT's. So we've a very eclectic knowledge of our own understanding & capabilities. We'd always love to be able to do more, but something we're very proud of is knowing our own limitations*" – Participant 4.

The staff interviewed spoke about the professionals working with children residing in the family hub. This included staff directly employed by Good Shepherd Cork, including the child and youth worker, child domestic, sexual and gender-based violence worker, school connect worker, and the staff team of resettlement workers. Other professionals identified from outside the service who work with the children include Springboard and a public health nurse. Staff explained that they can link with a psychologist and a mental health nurse if they need advice or guidance. It was also demonstrated that staff have made good connections with external services and can support a child by referring them to services such as play or art therapy. The staff acknowledged that although being in the family hub was not necessarily positive, they can support the children and identify any additional support needs they may require.

"*Like I think, although there are huge negative emotional impact [living in a family hub], I do really feel that the staff here try to identify where those gaps are and try to kind of support and scaffold it as much as possible*" – Participant 2.

The family hub has a 24-hour staffing arrangement, meaning that families have access to support at any point they need it.

"*Staff are here for whatever is happening, and that can be hugely intrusive for families as well but I suppose when families are struggling staff members are there on site. We can be immediately there and sit with families who are you know, in crisis, we can make onwards referrals and we can support families through the referral process*" – Participant 6.

4.4.3 Role of Advocacy

The role of advocacy was important to all staff interviewed. Many interviewed discussed how they are there to work with families, advocate for them and help fight for social justice.

"*Staff would be very motivated to try and get the best results for families that they work with, staff would really try and kind of understand from a family's perspective what they need"* – Participant 6.

The staff recognised the importance of this role and distinguished the different levels of advocacy. They discussed case-level advocacy, where the staff worked with the families to exercise their rights, realise their goals, and achieve outcomes. Aside from this, they also spoke about the role of advocacy from a structural perspective, where they see the need for societal changes on matters that affect the families residing in the family hub, including better solutions to the housing crisis, and shorter stays in emergency accommodation. They had a great understanding of the oppression the families were facing and modelled an empowering practice to help provide opportunities for the families to take control of their lives (Teater B, 2014).

"*From our point of view, I suppose we are definitely proactive in trying to get families to exit here [family hub], like we would advocate very strongly for all the families and support them to you know, put all procedures in place for themselves, I suppose to exit here*" – Participant 6.

"*We really empower the families, if they're not sure how to advocate for themselves. We sit and have conversations and help them with advocacy skills*" – Participant 3.

4.5 Discussion & Conclusion

The findings and analysis presented in this research align with the aims and objectives concerning the impacts of living in a family hub on a child and the support provided by staff

to mitigate these effects. Common concerns shared among staff who were interviewed include the emotional and environmental impacts of residing in homeless accommodation, such as isolation, stigma, lack of space, barriers to services, and disrupted sleep patterns. From interviewing the staff, I found their commitment to prioritising the children's best interests and striving to provide support and care, endeavouring to ensure that the experience is as positive as possible given the circumstances very evident. The staff interviewed spoke passionately about

their roles and how they do all they can to support the children and families through this negative experience. Although family hubs are not ideal, many staff interviewed spoke about how they are often a better solution than B&Bs as they offer more space, better facilities, and highly qualified staff support. The staff interviewed have a deep understanding of the negative impacts that can come from homeless accommodation but are driven to advocate for the children and ensure they are supported to meet their goals and have a stable environment.

The next chapter will focus on recommendations proposed based on the findings to support children who find themselves in homeless accommodation. A conclusion will then be constructed, followed by a reflective piece on the work carried out.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter aims to draw overarching conclusions from the research, which sought to investigate the impact of living in a family hub on a child's day-to-day life and identify available supports and resources to mitigate these challenges. Firstly, I will present conclusions and recommendations based on the findings and analysis. Subsequently, I will propose areas for further research that could contribute to our understanding of this topic. This chapter will conclude with a reflective piece about my experience of undertaking this research project.

5.2 Conclusions

This research study aimed to investigate what impact can living in a family hub as a form of emergency accommodation have on a child. It was undertaken in collaboration with Good Shepherd Cork by conducting primary research semi-structured interviews. Three main themes emerged from the interviews: the pathways through which families come to reside in the family hub, the living conditions within it, and the emotional and developmental impacts experienced by the children. Additionally, the study explored the support and the approach offered by the staff to those residing in the family hub.

The qualitative study revealed that staff members were passionate about their roles and the well-being of those in the family hub, advocating for residents' various needs, including housing and therapeutic support. However, it was evident that the duration of stays in family hubs often exceeded the intended six-month period, as noted by Participant 4;

"*In my time working in homelessness, it's actually only getting worse. The wait times that people are spending in services are only getting longer and longer and longer. And I don't know how long the longest is going to be. But it's going to be significantly more than the six months it's designed for, which is not good enough*".

All staff interviewed acknowledged the discrepancy between the intended short-term nature of family hubs and the reality of prolonged stays, highlighting significant challenges faced. Staff identified that children frequently experience adverse effects from these extended stays, including feelings of isolation, stigma, disrupted sleep patterns, limited space and privacy and emotional issues stemming from feelings of loss and isolation and a lack of services available to help support children through these experiences.

As homeless numbers are continuously rising, and more demands are being placed on resources, the housing sector needs adaptations to protect those who are most vulnerable. This

is especially relevant when discussing children who are in homeless accommodation for long periods. The Irish Government need to consider more progressive policies and allow for more options to help people exit homelessness.

5.3 Recommendations for Government & Policy

The pathways to exit homelessness are often complex and fragmented, characterised by inadequate housing policies and strategies. Changes in policy and government interventions are needed to increase the options available to help people who are experiencing homelessness. More flexible and responsive support systems are required to address the diverse needs of those living in family hubs. The most recent Housing for All, 2022-2024 strategy declares that "*too many people are experiencing homelessness or are unable to access appropriate housing*" (p. 16). The strategy outlines a statement for more affordable homes and more supply for both social, affordable and private homes while addressing social inclusion issues such as homelessness as a priority. The strategy discusses eradicating homelessness, and its solution is to increase housing delivery. However, we have seen from the research that current housing supply falls short of meeting demands. The targets outlined in the strategy are significantly below the actual demand of 50,000 homes per year, as acknowledged by the Department of Finance (Irish Times, 2024). While the Irish Government signed the Lisbon Declaration on combating Homelessness by 2030, achieving this goal will require further systemic changes. More comprehensive measures are needed to address the root causes and drivers of homelessness, including rising house prices, insufficient amount of social housing and housing assistance, low incomes, increase in job losses, family breakdown, and discrimination.

5.4 Other recommendations

- Family hubs should be standardised across Ireland. The National Quality Standards Framework for Homeless Services in Ireland should be implemented in each family hub to ensure high standards, promote safe and effective service provision, and support the objective of the Housing for All policy. By implementing this framework, organisations will be clear about their responsibilities.

- Based on findings from the primary research, better communication between the local authority (Cork City Council) and the families residing in the family hub is needed to help them exit homelessness. This approach offers more support and promotes transparency between local authorities and families.

- The Government should prioritise trauma-informed practice training for the staff working in the housing departments to give them the skills to better support families seeking assistance

with housing needs. By following a trauma-informed approach, practitioners will have a better awareness and knowledge around the impact of trauma and homelessness as a trauma.

- The housing system and services are hard to navigate, consideration should be given to the service design and delivery. It should be more user friendly to allow for those who are using the service to be able to engage more effectively with it.

- The findings show many negative impacts of homelessness on the child. Children who have experienced homelessness should have access to funded therapeutic services to help them understand and overcome their experiences. The Government should consider providing more support for homeless services. This may include access to in-house occupational therapists, play therapists, art therapists, and speech and language therapists.

- Legislation should be established within the framework of local authority housing allocations to facilitate the assessment of family needs, particularly regarding the required number of bedrooms. Some families may necessitate a bedroom per child based on individual needs, yet this requirement might not be adequately addressed in the housing application process. Staff have raised concerns regarding the challenges families face in accessing these assessments to prove the need, including lengthy waitlists, inconsistent information about assessment procedures, and associated costs. Failure to adequately address these needs prior to housing placement could result in families struggling to maintain their tenancy and potentially returning to homeless services.

- The Government should fulfil its intention to combat homelessness by 2030 under the Treaty of Lisbon. By signing this treaty, it was agreed to have no person living in emergency accommodation for longer than required and where evictions cannot happen without an alternative housing solution in place.

5.5 Recommendations for the Service

- The service acknowledges the importance of becoming a trauma-informed service and should continue to prioritise upskilling in this area. Understanding the emotional, psychological, and social effects of homelessness and the trauma associated with it is crucial.

- Staff should continue to support families in exiting homelessness, recognising that some residents may struggle to seek support due to the effects of trauma. Advocacy work should be maintained to ensure residents receive the assistance they need.

- Staff interviewed discussed the proposal to involve an occupational therapist in direct work with families. This is commendable and should be actively pursued with efforts to secure funding.

- Given the potentially high number of children in the service, consideration should be given to hiring a second child and youth worker. This additional staff member could help identify and address any needs the children may have and provide appropriate referrals.

- Family hubs should be purpose-built accommodation with better facilities, including larger room

sizes to afford families more privacy. These spaces should enable children to have their own space separate from parents or siblings of different genders and age groups. Additionally, family hubs should be more soundproof to reduce disturbances and promote better sleep patterns for children.

5.6 Future Research Opportunities

I would strongly advocate for more research that gives voice to homeless individuals themselves. While the 2019 Ombudsman's Report, No Place like Home provided valuable insights, there is a pressing need to listen to the new cohort of individuals who are experiencing even longer stays in homeless accommodation than those documented in 2019. Gaining insights into those who experience living in family hubs has remained somewhat neglected.

5.7 Personal Reflection

I am privileged to have been allowed the opportunity to carry out this research project and have thoroughly enjoyed the process.

Reflecting on the journey, it was difficult to be an employee of Good Shepherd Cork and a research partner. To overcome this, I needed to be aware of my biases and separate my working alliance from the research. Once I put this boundary in place, I was able to immerse myself in the research project and embrace the experience.

The experience of interviewing staff and hearing them speak so passionately about the service provided was truly enlightening. These interviews have profoundly influenced my future practice, highlighting the value of gathering firsthand, comprehensive data. Moving forward, I will prioritise engaging with individuals who have expertise and insight into the research area, recognising the significant role they play in enriching evidence-based practice.

However, if I were allowed to redesign this research project, I would have liked to have the chance to speak to the families who live in the family hub and include their voices. This would have benefited the research questions.

Overall, I feel my research design helped me to answer my research questions, and I am pleased with the results.

5.8 Conclusion

This final chapter concludes by expressing that a home is a fundamental human need and can give a person both physical security and can contribute towards psychological well-being. All things that living in a family hub takes away from a person (Finnerty et al., 2016). The family hub staff team are doing the best that they can with the resources available to them. Changes need to come from government level, where they need some structural amendments to meet the needs of children who are in emergency accommodation, such as family hubs.

This conclusion has led to the outlined recommendations. I believe the findings have added to the knowledge and understanding of the research questions and have led to some recommendations which should be considered going forward. To conclude this chapter, I have reflected on the process of carrying out this social work research project by addressing what I may do differently and the learning goals identified from this piece of work.

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Literature Appendix A: Ethical Approval

Dear Roisin,

Thank you for your resubmission. Your research study has been **approved** by the MSW REC committee. One additional comment (you do not need to email us back):

1. Q30d. Only deleted data 13 months after the examinations board.

Best wishes,

Dr Kenneth Burns
MSW REC Chairperson

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Information Sheet

Thank you for considering participating in this research project. The purpose of this document is to explain to you what the work is about and what your participation would involve, to enable you to make an informed choice.

The purpose of this study is to get practitioners' perspective of the impact that living in a family hub, as a form of emergency accommodation, has on a child. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to take part in a one-to-one interview with a member of the research team. This interview will be audio recorded and is expected to take 30-40 minutes to complete. Although the researcher is part of The Good Shepherd Cork team, this research is carried out independent to this.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no obligation to participate, and should you choose to do so, you can refuse to answer specific questions, or decide to withdraw from the interview. Once the interview has been concluded, you can choose to withdraw at any time in the subsequent two weeks.

All of the information you provide will be kept confidential anonymous and will be available only to the researcher and my supervisor. The only exception is where information is disclosed which indicates that there is a serious risk to you or to others. In the event a serious risk is identified, I would need to disclose this information to the management of the service and follow Good Shepherd Cork's policies and protocols. Once the interview is completed, the recording will immediately be transferred to a safe UCC data storage platform and wiped from the recording device. The interview will then be transcribed by the researcher, and all identifying information will be removed. Once this is done, the recording will also be deleted and only the anonymized transcript will remain. This will be stored on a University College Cork supported cloud storage platform, one drive. The data will be stored for minimum of two years.

The information you provide may contribute to research publications and/or conference presentations.

We do not anticipate any negative outcomes from participating in this study. At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. Should you experience distress arising from the interview, the contact details for support services provided below may be of assistance.

This study has obtained ethical approval from the UCC Social Research Ethics Committee.

If you have any queries about this research, you can contact me at 121101653@umail.ucc.ie

If you agree to take part in this study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

Literature Appendix C: Consent Form

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Research Consent Form

Date: ……..

I …… agree to participate in Roisin McCarthy's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Roisin McCarthy to be audio recorded.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview (e.g. my name / location won't be used) may be quoted in presentations and publications (e.g. article, book chapter, student thesis, social media publicity of the study's findings, etc.), if I give permission below (please tick one box):

I agree to participate in this study ☐

I do not agree to participate in this study ☐

Signed: …….

PRINT NAME: …….

Literature Appendix D: Interview Schedule

1. Can you list a few reasons why children may come to reside in the hub?
2. What impact do you think coming to a family hub and staying for a period of time can have on a child? (POSITIVE/NEGATIVE)
3. What are the emotional needs of the children who present in the hub, and are there any factors that may impact their emotional well-being?
4. Can you identify any factors that may cause developmental impacts on a child?
5. Are there any rules within the family hub that you are aware of that could impact the child?
6. Do the children have adequate places and spaces to play and explore their

environment?

7. Do you feel there are any gaps in the service provided to children?

8. What approach do you take when working with children who reside in the family hub?

9. What is the value system of the team who work for Good Shepherd Cork?

10. Some of the literature I've read talks about a fear that those in family hubs are being forgotten about – and that they may become a long-term solution to homelessness. Do you think this is the case or is there a proactive approach to helping people exit?