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Intergenerational use of homeless services and Educational Interventions in Good Shepherd Cork

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*First a Home,
then Hope*



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Chapter 1: Introduction

Good Shepherd Cork is a voluntary organisation that has been providing accommodation and support to vulnerable women and children for 50 years. It is the only NGO in Cork City which caters for homeless families. It supports women, young girls and children who have experienced homelessness through a combination of residential, educational and support services.

Edel House provides emergency accommodation for women and children who are homeless. Once admitted to Edel House, everybody is assigned a key worker who will get to understand the circumstances that have contributed to her homelessness and assess her needs before implementing a detailed personal care plan.

Bruac is Good Shepherd Cork's Education & Development project. It offers educational opportunities to women who may not have been able to access mainstream education. Participants are aged 16 to 35 for the Local Training Initiative (LTI) and participants can be of any age for all of the other programmes. Staff work in a person-centred way, concentrating on the needs of the individual and finding ways to engage beyond the traditional classroom approach.

Intergenerational homelessness is a very complicated issue, with many facets to it. Intergenerational disadvantage gives rise to intergenerational usage of homeless services. Homelessness is the present and visible issue, however, for service users, there are many underlying issues, such as the intergenerational transmission of poverty, addiction issues, mental health issues, domestic violence and a lack of opportunities (including educational opportunities).

Staff in Good Shepherd Cork, specifically Edel House, are dealing with acute cases and are attempting to address the immediate issues (i.e. suitable accommodation) as best they can. In terms of education in Edel House, there are short, informal training sessions (e.g. IT literacy, culinary skills). The focus for staff in Edel House is not on adult education, but on making sure that the children attend school. The School Connect Programme is vital here in ensuring that schools are aware of the situation and that they help to support the children and parents.

Bruac offers second chance education to girls and women who are or were homeless, are at risk of homelessness, or who may have had educational disadvantage. Bruac provides second level equivalency modules, QQI courses, Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP), horticulture and practical training (e.g. culinary skills, employability skills). Some women from Edel House attend Bruac, but for many in an acute situation, their priority is not to develop education and training.

The women who do attend Bruac really enjoy it. They find camaraderie as well as education. Some women re-take the same modules multiple times in order to still be involved. Some women move on, having taken QQI level 3 in Bruac, to PLC colleges and, some, to third level, and some women having completed courses (e.g. Certificate in Nail Art) move into employment. For others, it is simply that they have gained confidence in their own abilities having attended Bruac.

Observations of case workers in Good Shepherd Cork indicate that there is a high proportion of intergenerational use of homeless services.

This project aims to firstly investigate if there are significant instances of intergenerational service use during a twenty-year timeframe (2000 – 2020), secondly to document the intervention services, specifically educational interventions, available in GSC and the scale of their use and thirdly to ascertain if education and training can offer a new pathway for women, and if early intervention with children, in particular, may act as a 'circuit breaker'.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

This report aims to:

1. To document the experiences and insights of caseworkers in Good Shepherd Cork in relation to intergenerational service use.
2. To document the available education and training options available in Good Shepherd Cork.
3. To explore the possible role of educational intervention in addressing the prevent drivers of intergenerational homelessness and service usage.

1.2 Methods Employed

This research involved semi-structured interviews with staff members of GSC (GSC).

The initial research design proposed a mixed methods approach involving a quantitative analysis of anonymised records held by GSC covering a twenty-year timeframe, in combination with case studies and semi-structured interviews conducted with staff members. However, it was subsequently determined that semi-structured interviews with staff members would allow the volume of instances of intergenerational homeless service use observed in GSC to be ascertained.

The semi-structured interviews involved ten long-standing staff members in GSC. The staff members interviewed consisted of four case workers, three programme managers and three project managers. The themes explored included: observations in trends of intergenerational service usage, demographic observations, challenges encountered by staff, impacts of the lack of suitable accommodation, educational and training interventions and outcomes for service users.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by University College Cork's Social Research and Ethics Committee (Log 2021-213). Each participant was contacted via email initially and information sheets and consent forms were emailed to participants who confirmed their willingness to participate prior to meeting with the researcher. All interviews took place in person. Hard copies of the information sheet and consent form were brought to each interview and were read to the participant in person, prior to the beginning of the interview, in order to ensure informed consent.

Chapter 2: Family Homelessness in Ireland: Trends and Housing Policy Context

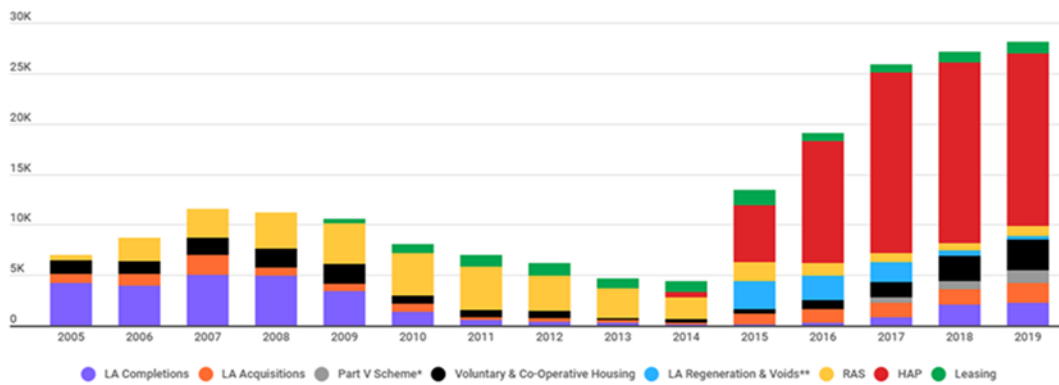
This section provides a broad review of trends, policy and literature in relation to family homelessness in Ireland. The discussion begins with a short exploration of the underlying drivers of housing demand before going on to look at the specific data on homelessness.

There are a number of underlying drivers of demand for housing (regardless of tenure type). These underlying drivers can be understood in terms of demography, such as the growth in the overall population and especially the household forming cohort. The initial data from the Census 2022 indicates that there has been an increase of 8% in the population of Ireland since the previous Census in 2016. A further driver of demand arises from the transformation of household size. In common with most other developed societies, Irish household size has been falling for the past number of decades. There are more single person households, reflecting lifestyle choices, the impact of divorce, separation, ageing population etc. Household size is also falling due to the lower number of children per household. In overall terms over the past few decades the average size of households in Ireland has fallen from 3.00pph in 2002 to 2.6 in 2022 which has clear implications for the volume and type of housing required to meet demand. Macro-economic issues such as the rate of employment also have an impact on housing demand. Ireland is currently experiencing full employment with a recorded unemployment rate of 3.8% in May 2023. This means more individuals have a desire to establish independent households either by buying or renting. Full employment is also a driver of immigration as local sources of labour are fully utilised. Inward migration from outside of Ireland and regional migration – mainly rural to urban, also fuel demand for housing. The current Government housing strategy Housing for All which was adopted in 2021 aspires to deliver 300,000 homes by 2030 including 90,000 social and affordable homes. There is a clear pipeline of social and affordable stock anticipated from Housing for All but there remains an over reliance on HAP especially in the provision of housing for low-income households. Questions have also been asked about Housing for All in terms of effectively targets will be met as initial indicators are that apart from HAP target direct provision through local authorities and AHBs are falling short. Beyond these concerns is an underlying unease that the HFA targets are too modest in light of forecasted demand for housing which some estimates put at 50,000 per annum in contrast to HFA target of 30,000.

2.1 Trends in family homelessness in Ireland

In the Irish context family homelessness is a relatively recent phenomenon, and the majority of recent inflows are from the termination of tenancies in the private rental sector. There is an ongoing restructuring of the private rental sector in Ireland as the two main sources of supply have contracted in recent years. In the first instance there has been a steady exit of small-scale landlords who make up the vast bulk of the sector. There is evidence that these landlords – most of whom own one or two properties are selling up their properties and cashing in on their investments due to retirement, etc. Secondly there is the departure of institutional investors who were more recent and numerically much smaller actors in the private rental sector in Ireland. These investor funds are in essence speculative investors who seek out optimal returns for their investors. For a number of years the private rental sector in Ireland was viewed as a lucrative investment opportunity due to attractive tax reliefs and low interest rates offered by alternative investment such as deposits and government bonds. Rising interest rates have made real estate investment less attractive to mobile investors who in the face of better returns elsewhere have moved out of the Irish housing market. Competition for diminishing rental stock. The pressures described above are overlaid on a housing system which has seen a gradual shift from directly provided social housing to subsidised provision in the private market. This reflects how the concept of marketisation identified by Clapham (2017) is played out in how the state operates according to market principles. In the context of Irish social housing this means how it engages with private actors to acquire accommodation on behalf of low-income households rather than providing it directly through building programmes by local authorities or approved housing bodies. The most clear-cut example of this has been the expansion in recent decades of schemes based on rent supplements payments such as the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). In addition, the state has adopted long term leasing and acquisition strategies to source social housing. Over the past two decades, local authorities have acquired 16,000 units in direct acquisitions (also known as “turnkey” developments) from private developers (In 2020, local authorities bought two turnkey houses for every one they built). This equates to 50% of the total number of units build by local authorities in the same period. Graph 1 below illustrates how the profile of social housing delivery has been transformed over the past two decades whereby direct provision by local authorities and AHBs has been overshadowed by HAP, RAS and leasing schemes as the main drivers of social housing offers.

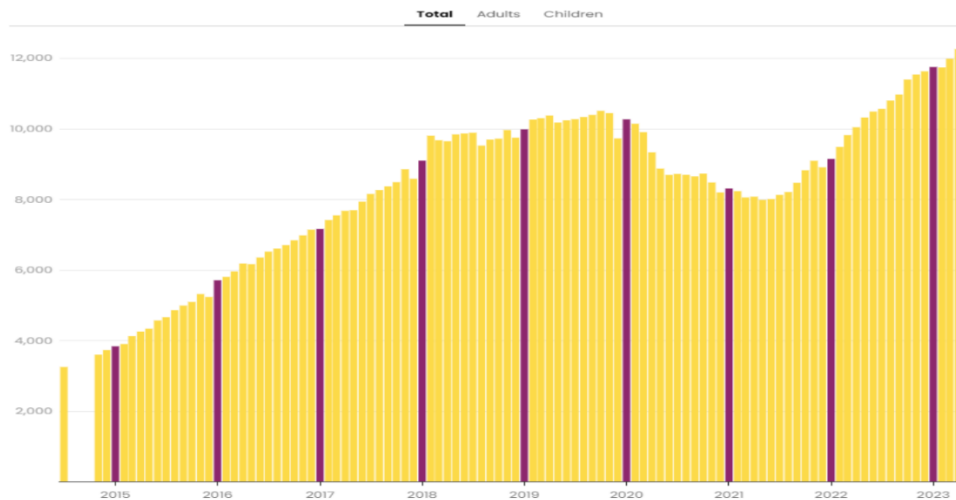
Social Housing Delivery (2005 - 2019)



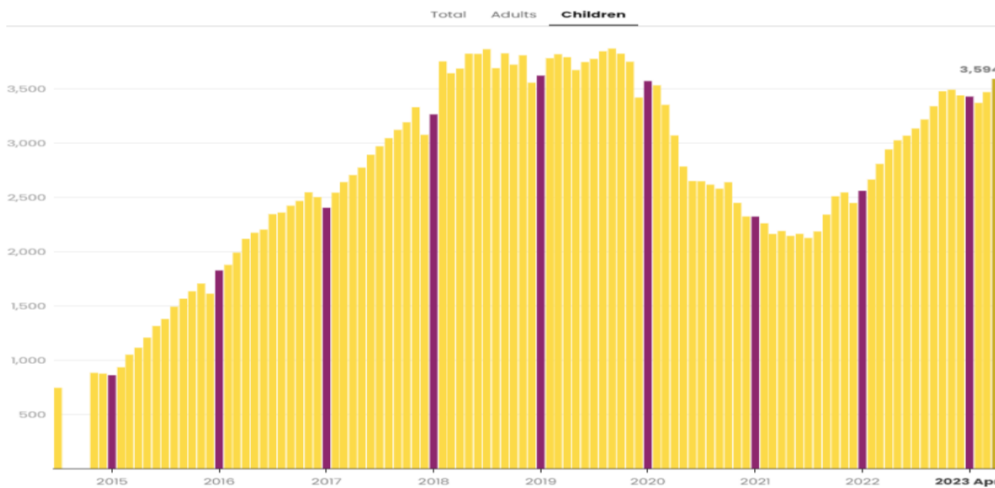
As Graph 1 illustrates the long-term trend has been a scaling back of local authority and AHB completions and a with a massive rise in private HAP tenancies. In the context of family homelessness HAP tenancies are a core component of the problem as most families who are at risk of or become homeless live in the private renting.

There has been a consistent increase in the number of homeless people in Ireland over the past decade. As the chart above illustrates in 2015 there was under four thousand people recorded as homeless. This number grew consistently until 2019 when the 10,000 threshold was first broken. There was a temporary drop in the numbers during the Covid pandemic arising from the implementation of a series of government measures including a ban on evictions. Arising from these public policy interventions the number of homeless persons declined to below 9,000 in mid-2021. However the trend since then has been upwards and by May 2023 the total number had reached a new record of over 12,000 persons. This data can be analysed in more detail by extracting the number of children from the overall figure. The long-term trend for this data indicates that in 2015 there was under 1,000 child dependents (under 18 years) recorded as homeless in Ireland. As with the total number, this figure grew to almost 3,700 children by 2019. A downward trend was recorded during the Covid pandemic and by mid-2021 the figure recorded was around 2,000. However as with the overall figure the number of children recorded as homeless has grown since the Covid measures have been lifted and by May 2023 the figure has risen to 3,600.

Number of people who are homeless and relying on emergency homeless accommodation



Number of people who are homeless and relying on emergency homeless accommodation



2.2 State responses to homelessness

The state utilises a number of accommodation types in responding to homelessness. Firstly, there is PEA -Private Emergency Accommodation which takes the form of hotels, B&Bs and other residential facilities that are used on an emergency basis. Supports are provided to services users on a visiting supports basis. There is also STA -Supported Temporary Accommodation which includes family hubs, hostels, with onsite professional support. Finally, there is TEA -Temporary Emergency Accommodation which is emergency accommodation with no (or minimal) support provided for residents.

2.2.1 Impacts.

When a family becomes homeless it inevitably involves moving from their “own door home” to some variant of homeless accommodation usually in the form of Supported Temporary Accommodation hubs where accommodation is provided in congregated / communal settings. Becoming homeless can prove to be a very traumatic and disruptive experience for parents and children as it involves their removal from familiar and reassuring spaces and surroundings, the loss of the place they call home and its related amenities such as the garden, the neighbourhood etc. It may also impact through disruption and uncertainty around what becomes of valued personal belongings, clothes, toys, furniture, pets, items of sentimental value. The emotional, social, economic impacts also include separation from extended family, friends, children’s school, clubs and activities, and services such as doctors, childcare and employment. Family homelessness can also incur additional burdens and expense such as rearranging childcare, making new travel arrangements to maintain school attendance plus paying for additional travel costs. Emotionally, some service providers have referred to children feeling a sense of shame and stigma at school if / when their homelessness becomes known to class mates and teachers and there is a strong basis to assertions that becoming homeless amounts to an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) for children which may have long lasting consequences including a risk of homelessness later in life for some.

2.2.2 Experiences

As stated the majority of families who become homeless are preferably provided with family placements in STA “homeless hubs” with onsite supports, though there may be some initial period spend in hotel or B&B accommodation. While STA provision addresses the immediate issue of providing shelter for the family the configuration delivery and extend of such supports has consequences for families. Living in homeless hub is a form of communal living and has implications for the sense of privacy, autonomy and control over everyday routines and practices such as cooking, laundry, family activities, recreation, visitors, which families take for granted as normal. Furthermore where families are larger than the norm or expanding with the arrival of new members the difficulties can be compounded as more children and adults may end up sharing confined spaces. Children and parents may have access to only a single-family room, sharing with their parent(s). Children may experience see / hear things in communal settings which they would not normally be exposed to such as noise, tension, stress, rows, arguments

etc. In addition families with complex needs such as mental health issues, substance and dependency needs can be living side by side with families who have no / low level of need.

The majority of families who become homeless do not have social care needs of the types mentioned above and have become homeless through the impact of “no fault” evictions from the private rental sector. Such families need a suitable, stable and affordable home and do not necessarily require a Social Care / Social Work intervention. However, the longer they remain homeless the greater the risk that issues will arise thereby necessitating a social / therapeutic intervention. Hearne and Murphy (2017), in a major research study of family homelessness summarised the Irish research on the impacts of living in emergency accommodation (Hickey and Downey 2003, Smith, McGee and Shannon 2001; Halpenny, Keogh & Gilligan, 2002, Hickey & Downey, 2003. According to Hearne and Murphy (2017) these researchers found issues for families related to managing and storing food, food poverty more generally and vulnerability to poor nutrition especially amongst the homeless population in Dublin shelters.

They also cite a 2015 Housing Agency review of families’ experience of homelessness and Hearne and Murphy (2017) stated that “living in emergency accommodation was traumatic and stressful with the many varied rules leading to disempowerment for parents, and with the additional costs of purchasing food and extra transport very expensive.”

Often moving in to temporary accommodation meant that family members had to live separately They also cite Walsh and Harvey who noted that the experience of becoming homeless and moving into homeless accommodation also involved families having to split up on a temporary basis and cope with poor conditions in emergency accommodation while trying to access services and supports to exit homelessness (Walsh and Harvey 2015).

With respect to developmental impacts in children reaching key milestones they cited Fallon (2016) who reported that public health nurses observed significant impacts on child development with gross motor delay, speech delay, infections and behavioural problems as developmental delays. They also found difficulties in accessing services as constant movement meant follow up appointments fall through leading to inadequate support for families.

The impact of living in emergency accommodation has also been captured by Harvey and Walsh’s (2017) review of 25 families’ experience of living in emergency accommodation. This found the day-to-day reality of living in homeless accommodation over an extended period of time had caused significant stress, in turn affecting their sleep and ultimately their mental health and having to use various strategies to cope with the stress. Significantly moving from autonomous and independent living in their own home to a situation characterised by dependency on others for food can compromise nutritional and

mental health (Share and Hennessy, 2017). A striking feature of these studies is the overall impact on capacity to parent effectively and the impact on child and parental well-being.

2.2.3 Exits and support

Family homeless providers have reported that exit time from homelessness has been rising and in recent years has gone up from 5/6 months to 11-12 months. This clearly reflects a severe shortage of move on accommodation and reflects a pattern of two families in, one out. With respect to exits from homeless accommodation the preferable destination is to Local Authority or Approved Housing Body homes. This is superior to private rental tenancies where much family homelessness emanates from in the first instance due to the termination of tenancies by private landlords. There is also a strong case to be made for preventing homelessness before it happens. Tenancy sustainment and support through liaising and linking in with advocacy organisations such as Threshold can help avoid homelessness or buy time so that alternatives arrangements can be put in place in the event of an unavoidable tenancy termination. Prevention of homelessness in the future through capacity building and working with families who re-present as homeless is also important and education and training, ongoing family support, life skills, counselling services such as provided by Good Shepherd.

2.3 Trauma and homelessness

The foregoing section focused on the policy and housing level drivers of family homelessness and concluded that the dominant reason for family homelessness in Ireland at present is system led i.e. that the majority of these families would not have become homeless but for their precarity in the private rented sector. A clear preventative strategy would be to ensure an adequate supply of accessible, affordable social housing which is not exposed to the impulses of private sector landlords. There is however another cohort who need to be considered when discussing family homelessness whose more complex and challenging experiences putting them at risk homelessness potentially on an ongoing and potentially intergenerational basis. These are individuals and families where trauma is a factor. As highlighted by Parker (2020, citing Anderson and Rayens, 2004, pg. 31) while childhood abuse and trauma are not, in and of themselves, an 'unequivocal predictor of future homelessness amongst families, research suggests a link between homelessness and 'experiences that represent separation from, neglect by, or emotional unavailability

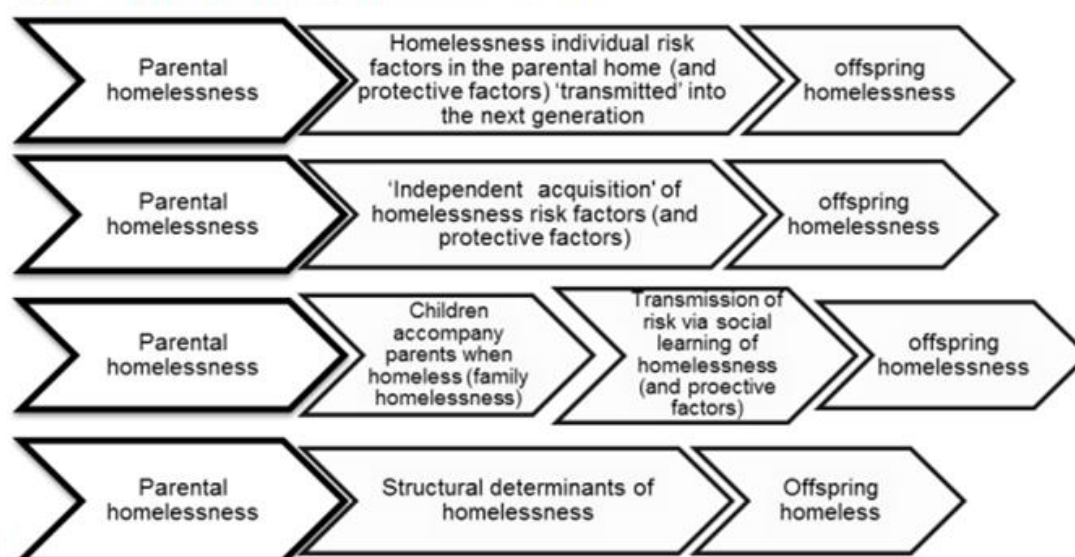
of significant family relationships'. Parker goes on to highlight that diminished family ties and social support networks can have a future impact on the ability to draw on these sources of emotional and practical assistance. Parker (2020, pg. 209-210) recommends that services should make the 'progression from simply being trauma "aware" to being trauma *informed*'. This coupled with other key recommendations would likely help to minimise stigma and reduce exposure to risk and re-traumatisation. FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, (2017, pg. 3) recommends a number of key steps to develop trauma sensitive services including:

Creating a physical environment that is safe, developing services based on the assumption that the service user will manage the effects of trauma, minimising the barriers to service by ensuring low thresholds and harm reduction approaches, ensuring that services do not retraumatise service users through being too strict or imposing authoritarian rules, ensuring a gendered approach to trauma that affects men and women differently, establishing services that ensure caring long term relationships, providing training on trauma informed care and therapeutic relationships, making services client driven, focusing on strengths not deficits, supporting staff with emotional stress to avoid burnout.

In a review of the literature on linkages between trauma and homelessness, Johnsen et al have identified a number of studies which highlighted the relationship between different forms of childhood adversity and homelessness (Roos, 2013; Mar, 2014). They state that "evidence suggests that physical abuse, physical neglect and general household dysfunction are the most prevalent childhood adversities reported by members of homeless populations." Johnsen et al also cite a study by Marr who concluded that individuals reporting four or more of different ACEs severely affects the age of first experiencing homelessness, in that homelessness is more likely to occur at a young age (Mar et al., 2014). The impact of Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) as a risk factor to being homeless later in life is well documented in the literature. Cutali et al 2017 have concluded that "childhood adversity continues to be a significant predictor of worse adult functioning – in this case, homelessness – which is also associated with broader contexts of risk for the next generation". (Cutali et al 2017: 122). Preventing childhood adversity and/or providing compensating protective factors holds the potential to not only prevent later adult homelessness, but also interdict associated intergenerational transmission of risk through bolstering caregiver competence in multiple domains. (See also: Flatau et al, 2013. Cutali et al, 2017. Narayan et al, 2017. Theodorou and Johnsen, 2017). This is particularly true for children who become homeless with their family. According to Flatau et al these children are far more likely to be affected by the same factors that resulted in their parents being homeless (Flatau et al., 2013). Flatau et al. highlight that these children may 'learn and adapt to the experience of homelessness from being homeless

with their parents' (pg. 5). This not only illustrates the impacts of ACE on children, then parents, but also highlights the potential intergenerational transmission of this risk. As Cutuli et al. (2017) comment, adult homelessness appears to represent 'a circumstance through which past childhood adversities are brought forward' (pg. 116). This, they highlight, remains true even when accounting for the influence of other factors such as sex, age, minority status, or income. Narayan et al. (2017) highlight that parents with ACE's who become homeless have far more difficulty in shielding their children from childhood adversity as they use increasingly limited resources to meet basic needs. Cutali et al. (ibid) illustrate the impact ACE's have on adults' developmental history which may simultaneously contribute to higher risk for adult homelessness and a 'more pervasive context of higher developmental risk for the subsequent generation' (pg. 116). This can best be observed in Fig 1. (below) compiled by Flatau et al. (2013, pg. 11) which illustrates the Channels of Intergenerational Homelessness.

Figure 1: Channels of intergenerational homelessness



What is striking about each of these channels is the trajectory towards the risk of offspring homelessness and Flatau's typology underlines the importance of ensuring that there are not solely therapeutically informed interventions to address ACEs and other sources of adversity that may drive intergenerational homelessness but also interventions that address structural determinants of homelessness such as access to secure, affordable, appropriate housing which if unaddressed may compound the risk of next generation homelessness. For each of these channels Flatau et al. (ibid) recommended interventions based on the following principles:

1. Interventions directed at parental behaviour and supportive programs for children

2. Preventative strategies focused on individual and early risk factors
3. Recognition that homelessness can be learnt therefore programmes focused on children and teens
4. Policy measures to address structural factors such as the absence of affordable housing and employment opportunities

Reflecting Flatau's approach, Narayan et al. (ibid) recommends the need for efforts to disrupt the cycle of intergenerational adversity by reducing ACE's early on. Narayan et al. (ibid) elaborate on this by recommending the identification of pregnant women who have themselves high levels of ACE's and by providing supportive services and resources to them. For high-risk children Narayan et al. (ibid) recommend preventative interventions that would 'improve socioemotional function at the time of school entry' (pg. 12). They also emphasise the impact of ACEs in the trajectories and intergenerational experiences of homeless families and conclude that "(these findings) illuminate the extent of ACEs in homeless families and underscore the need for efforts to disrupt intergenerational cycles of adversity by reducing ACEs early in the life course." Also highlighted is the necessity for early identification and supportive intervention as a preventative measure to reduce or minimise the risk of transmitting adversity effects from at risk parents to their children. Accordingly Narayan et al state that "from a clinical and policy perspective, it may be helpful to identify women with high levels of ACEs before or during pregnancy and then provide supportive resources, such as home visiting services, stable housing access, mental health services, or domestic violence services, to reduce the risk of adversity exposure in their offspring." It is not solely at-risk adults who should be supported for preventative interventions. Narayan et al also posit that these such supports should be child (especially early years) focused especially in the context of school entry and assert that "high-risk children with exposure to ACEs involving maltreatment should also be prioritized for preventive interventions to improve socioemotional function at the time of school entry. (Narayan 2017 p: 12)

Chapter 3: Findings

The lack or pursuit of capital in all its forms is present in everybody's lives. For the majority of people, when they refer to capital, it denotes economic capital. However, capital manifests in many forms. Ó Tuama (2022) outlines five capitals associated with lifelong learning. They are seed capital, identity capital, social capital, cultural capital and human capital. Seed capital, in this context, refers to having achieved a baseline of learning. Identity capital here refers to the ability to take ownership of one's life course and to mould your own identity. Social capital refers to the networks developed through education and the shared norms and values therein. Ó Tuama (2022: 12) refers to human capital as 'the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being'. In the context of interventions, education and intergenerational homelessness, these capitals, as defined by Ó Tuama (2022) are helpful in framing the progressive positive impacts intervention and education can have.

3.1 Demographic Observations

There are no 'typical' service users who approach GSC for help. However, each service user and family are vulnerable. Vulnerability can present in a number of guises. One participant who discussed the meaning of what it is to be vulnerable, defines it as:

A special event in somebody's life has happened. Special thing that has become a disadvantage for them. It's very hard to step over that.

(Participant A)

The event(s) that have occurred in the lives of many of the service users can be, as Participant A stated, very difficult to overcome. While There is no 'one size fits all' for the service users in GSC, there are some issues that persist in being obstacles for service users.

There would be a very high proportion of clients who are involved, you know, with addiction, alcohol, drugs and people who are quite unwell with their mental health.

(Participant G)

In terms of instances of intergenerational homelessness, there are also some observed commonalities. Participants described observing families experiencing domestic violence, mental health issues and addiction issues in conjunction with homelessness. The 'Toxic Trio' (which refers to two or more of the above issues presenting in the same person) is relatively common amongst families experiencing intergenerational homelessness. Participant G described the issues facing some of the families they had worked with, and summarised the home lives for many of the families they work with as 'chaotic'.

There was domestic violence, social work involvement, kids being taken into care, and older kids having teenage pregnancy and then, in other families, the kids are in care, there's domestic violence or domestic violence and addiction, social work involvement, suicide and then, you know, young kids becoming pregnant again early and ending up in homeless services.

(Participant G)

Another Participant perceived two different family types who access services in GSC. The first family described has simply hit on hard times but is otherwise stable and requires little intervention or support. The second family described requires, due to disadvantages and trauma that they have experienced, quite a lot of support from staff. Participant I highlights that it is the second family that are more likely to experience intergenerational homelessness.

There are probably two different types of families who access the service. The mom is functional, and things may have gone wrong temporarily, but she knows how to be a good mom. She knows how to parent her child, how to be there, how to look after the needs of her child. They often move through services. Then you have other families who a lot of work will go into to try and support that family and to stay unified through the emergency accommodation system. Just because they stay together here does not mean that they will stay together when they move out and things fall apart at that stage. A lot of supports go into making sure that the parent and children have their basic needs met. And those are the children you are more likely to see coming back later in life.

(Participant I)

The trauma, disadvantage and poverty experienced by the mothers of these families cannot be underestimated.

A lot are mothers who themselves might have been very vulnerable when they were young and had kids early.
(Participant A)

The one characteristic that each of the service users share is that they are experiencing homelessness. The lack of suitable and affordable accommodation in Ireland, combined with a complex social housing system, means that finding a pathway out of homelessness can be long, arduous and, at times, seemingly impossible. Many of the issues mentioned here that service users may be experiencing can be exacerbated by experiencing homelessness. The issues being faced by many service users may also be as a result of a lack of capital (social, cultural, economic and human).

3.2 Observations in Trends of Intergenerational Service Use

Intergenerational homelessness can be a result associated with some of the issues discussed in the previous section. In a situation where generations of the same family face poverty, disadvantage, lack of opportunities and family homelessness, intergenerational homelessness becomes, unfortunately, a possibility. Many of the staff in GSC are aware of multiple families that they have worked with who have accessed their services and who had been in Good Shepherd themselves as children.

Now you kind of see their daughters coming back, or you might have seen an older woman and her daughter is in - the grandkids are starting to come back. I see it now because I'm into the next generation. You know, you can take it 20 or 25 years, every kind of quarter of a century when a generation comes around, so that next generation is just starting. I just had one a couple of weeks back, somebody who came back. Her mother was with me, and I was in the labour ward with her mother.
(Participant H)

I can definitely name on my hand 5 or 6 families. There have been few people in the last number of years who have been here, maybe as children or maybe not have been here as a child but they might say their aunt was here or another family member.

(Participant D)

The observed trends in intergenerational service use over time appear to have remained relatively stable with each participant recalling 5 or 6 families who had experienced intergenerational homelessness. One of the issues surrounding intergenerational families accessing services is the impact of the housing crisis, the lack of accommodation and the sometimes difficult to navigate, systems in place. As a result, many families are now remaining in Good Shepherd for longer and longer. One participant recalled a family that had remained in emergency accommodation for 18 months. Another participant discussed how the system has changed over time.

There was a time where it was a lot easier to enter homelessness. I mean, come and go out of homelessness. If you weren't getting on with somebody, you get up, leave that accommodation, and in a couple of months your accommodation again and the whole site can start again. Whereas now for people to get in and get out of homelessness, has taken an awful lot longer and it's an awful lot harder for people.

(Participant B)

Families experiencing intergenerational homelessness were almost always headed by a mother who had herself been a service user in GSC as a child (the mothers had accessed the services with their own mothers). Each of the participants had been told by service users that they had positive memories of being in Good Shepherd as children, and when they then found themselves and their children facing homelessness, they felt no reluctance in approaching Good Shepherd.

If you have been here as a child, you probably had a very positive experience. A lot of children have very positive experiences when they are here. It's a lot less scare to come back here as an adult. If your own family doesn't provide you a safety net, then there will always be one available here.

(Participant I)

You're starting that trend of the next generation starting to kind of come through either daughter or granddaughters. It's amazing, but you can always really predict it. There's a predictive cycle because nothing really has changed.

(Participant H)

It is an incredible compliment to the staff and overall organisation that so many service users feel comfortable accessing services. It is also, however, very sad that for many mothers experiencing intergenerational homelessness, their own positive memories of childhood revolve around GSC. Staff are very aware of that many of the experiences children have while experiencing homelessness are not positive. As such, while accessing their services, they do try, where possible, to give children positive experiences.

We try to make some happy memories for them, and that when they remember their time of homelessness, it's not all doom and gloom.

(Participant B)

3.3 Challenges

With intergenerational homelessness and service use, inevitably, comes challenges faced by staff in Good Shepherd. Staff are simultaneously trying to support service users, using a person-centred approach, and helping them to secure suitable accommodation. Staff frequently attempt to help service users navigate the systems. Many service users do not have access to a computer and are not computer literate.

Using those systems, you know, they're kind of moving everything to mygov.ie and the number of clients who don't have e-mail addresses. How are they supposed to access all of this going forward?

(Participant G)

In addition, the lack of available accommodation in Cork has meant that staff must now spend additional time travelling outside Cork City to visit service users they are supporting.

Obviously because of backlogs in the system there, you know a lot of people kind of fall through the cracks and also because of a housing shortage people are having to move further and further out so we can spend an awful lot of time travelling to get to those clients.

(Participant G)

Service users are facing immense challenges. They are attempting to navigate complicated systems, attempting to locate accommodation, attempting to engage with the supports provided by or arranged by staff in Good Shepherd, while also looking after themselves and their children.

So yeah, it's kind of a challenging picture out there at the moment for sure. You know, definitely 20 years ago, it seemed a lot simpler.

(Participant G)

3.4 Interventions and Education

As mentioned previously, Flatau et al. (2013) recommended interventions to address intergenerational homelessness based on the following principles:

1. Interventions directed at parental behaviour and supportive programs for children.
2. Preventative strategies focused on individual and early risk factors.
3. Recognition that homelessness can be learned therefore programmes should focus on children and teens.
4. Policy measures to address structural factors such as the absence of affordable housing and employment opportunities.

While the last principle is outside the remit of GSC, the first three principles are practiced. In GSC intervention begins almost immediately after accessing the service.

When someone gets to Edel House they are assigned a keyworker who works with them on 7 things including basic life skills.
(Participant I)

The basic life skills this participant was referring to includes money management, cooking skills, developing routines and an introduction to technology. Staff in GSC recognise that housing is not a panacea for many of the service users, particularly those who are in a cycle of intergenerational homelessness. In reference to the social housing system, Participant F said, 'There's a lot of money [from government] being fired at different schemes and it's not what they need at all.'

Intervention in the form of life skills is the first step on the path to addressing intergenerational homelessness. The outcomes of non-intervention are that generations of a family will continue in a cycle of poverty, disadvantage and, sometimes, homelessness. This cycle was described by Participant B.

I suppose when you can see the path that they're on is the same path that their family members have been on, or their mother has been on and they see the outcome, which if they don't see it, you can see the outcome, and you'd love to be able to shake them and say, 'look, can you not see its history repeating itself? If you can do X, Y and Z, you will stop history repeating itself and hopefully stop it for your kids'. So, that's the frustrating part sometimes that I would find that you can see history repeating itself, but they can't see it.
(Participant B)

While interventions based on life skills may not appear to have direct and lasting impacts, the reality is that for many of the mothers accessing services in GSC they themselves have grown up in poverty and disadvantage. As a result of their own upbringings and experiences, they are lacking in capital. Capital in this instance referring to cultural and social capital.

The purpose of interventions of this kind is that they act as a circuit breaker in intergenerational homelessness and help to form the foundations upon which capital (in numerous forms) can be built.

You're trying to break the cycle that one, so they don't come back.
They're taking some of those skills with them.
(Participant H)

These interventions may also act as seed capital. Ó Tuama (2022) describes seed capital as a baseline of learning and skills. He notes that individuals are more likely to continue to accumulate beneficial learning once a baseline of learning has been achieved. The initial interventions provided by GSC offer this baseline learning to service users.

3.4.1 Children and School

In line with Flatau et al's (2013) principle's 1 and 3, a pilot project was established in GSC in 2021 called 'School Connect'. School Connect, which is under the direction of the Education and Development Unit in GSC bridges a gap between families who experiencing homelessness, the schools their children are attending and other statutory bodies. The purpose is to help and support children so that they can remain in school, with as minimal disruption as possible, while maintaining effective and positive participation. The School Connect Project staff in GSC also liaise with staff in schools and advocate on behalf of the children and parents. The School Connect Project is administered in an individualised way and works to promote the idea of 'every day counts' in relation to school attendance.

Bridging the gap between families experiencing homelessness and the school system is a vital role. While the vast majority of teachers and administrators will empathise with families experiencing homelessness and, where possible, allow some flexibility in terms of punctuality and homework completion, there is a lack of understanding of the experiences the children have had and are having.

There's that massive lack of understanding in the school system
about what these children and what these families are facing and
the current situation that they are in.
(Participant B)

The schools that have been contacted by staff in the School Connect programme have engaged positively with the programme and have been able to make some allowances. For example, a family may have been residing in one part of the city and children enrolled in a local primary school. However, since becoming homeless and accessing services in

GSC, the family are now on the opposite side of the city. This poses the issue of getting the children to school on time, on the other side of the city, using public transport.

In addition to the logistical issues, there is also the issue of priority. The families are actively seeking accommodation, attempting to navigate the social housing system, they many also be engaged with other statutory bodies, and they are attempting to feed and clothe their families. All of these factors sometimes means that children attending school is not the main priority.

For a lot of people making enough money so you can buy food for tomorrow is the priority, not going to school, or in some cases, getting up to go looking for a house or just being able to get out a bit is their priority as opposed to worrying about kids going to school and lunches.

(Participant B)

In addition, parental supports are in place to assist parents in communicating with schools and in setting routines for themselves and for their children.

If you have a woman who was never sent to school herself or was never given a routine herself growing up, is she then supposed to construct a routine for her child when she has no experience or knowledge of doing that?

(Participant J)

Many parents are fearful of judgement and stigma associated with experiencing homelessness. In some cases, there may also be an element of mistrust of people perceived to be in a position of authority. As a result, parents are anxious and apprehensive around communicating to schools about their housing situation.

They don't want to tell them that 'I'm homeless'. So, it's having a conversation with parents. The more we tell those schools, the better. [Questions like] why is Mary acting the maggot or coming tired or she has no lunch or her school clothes might not be clean or whatever, the school knows then. I suppose stigma associated

with the fear of judgement, but the reality is that once the school knows...

(Participant H)

The School Connect Project acts as both a bridge between GSC service users and the schools their children attend, and as almost an early intervention. By putting supports and routine in place that encourages parents and children to attend school on a regular basis, to engage positively with schools and in helping with homework completion, Principle 2 of Flatau et al's (2013) recommended interventions is achieved.

I think with all the education is there with all the strategies, early intervention with schools and all this kind of stuff, it's making a difference.

(Participant A)

3.4.2 Education for Adults and Young Adults

One of the unique aspects of GSC is their Education & Development project based in Bruac. It offers educational opportunities to women who may not have been able to access mainstream education, with programmes aimed at women aged 18 to 35. Staff work in a person-centred way, concentrating on the needs of the individual and finding ways to engage beyond the traditional classroom approach. The programmes offered are dynamic. They change each year depending on what is needed (and wanted) by the service users. As Participant E said, 'it's a completely different type of a teaching from the mainstream'.

Many of the service users have not had positive experiences of the education system, or education was not a priority during their upbringings. For many, a lack of confidence in their own abilities stymies progress in the education system, or prevents people from engaging in education and training at all. In this, Participant I summed up the approach is GSC as 'I think you need to show people they are able to do it before they think they can do it'. The approach in Bruac is to work with the people that are in front of them, rather than specifically working in a formal education setting. For some service users, a formal education setting, and approach works well, but for many there is a deep fear and lack of confidence around anything to do with education.

Just looking at that kind of a fear, quite a visceral fear of it, you know, unfortunately again, it was just confidence wasn't there.

(Participant E)

The level of education amongst service users is quite diverse. Some service users will have completed the Junior Certificate or Leaving Certificate, and other may not have completed primary school. The levels of literacy and numeracy are, likewise, quite diverse. It is a highly skilled role to teach a class presenting with such a diverse range of proficiencies.

You would have six people in the class and everybody's actually on a different part of the course. You don't come in and say 'today we're going to do fractions' and that's it. Everybody's doing something different.

(Participant E)

Bruac is not exclusively for women and young women who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness. Some people who attend Bruac have experienced educational disadvantage but are not experiencing homelessness. In recent years, two young women attending Bruac entered the BT Young Scientist Competition and made it to the interview stage of the process. This was a momentous achievement for young women who lacked confidence in their own abilities and had experienced from educational disadvantage. Their topic was centred on anxiety surrounding mathematics.

The unique approach that Bruac takes to education is that it is dynamic and person-centred. The type of teaching changes depending on the person and their needs. For some students a formal QQI qualification in a formal setting works for them and is what they are seeking. For others, a more informal approach is required with a focus on building confidence. Having built up a person's confidence, they may choose to continue in their education, or they may choose to use their new knowledge and skills in practice. For some people, the experience of education in Bruac is so positive that they have completed the same modules and course multiple times. The experience for them has been very enjoyable and they do not wish to leave the companionship and collegiality.

3.5 Outcomes for Service Users

In terms of measurable outcomes for service users, usually in intervention studies and programmes the parameters are a solid set of variables that can be quantified. For some people who have attended Bruac, there are measurable, quantifiable outcomes (e.g. some people who have attended Bruac have continued with their education to third level), however, for many the outcomes are more intangible, or the impacts may not be observed for some time. Seed, social and cultural capital as described by Ó Tuama (2022) is a

journey through educational experiences. Seed capital, which, through achievement of a baseline of education, builds confidence in one's own abilities. It is this confidence that so many of the people who attend Bruac lack. Confidence in one's own abilities is immeasurable and can be intangible to those attempting to measure it, but it is invaluable to the person who has built it.

Education just gives you confidence, and all of the other things that education brings - the connections and support.

(Participant E)

The quote above from Participant E highlights the connection between seed capital and increased social and cultural capital that can result from engagement with education.

The thing that builds your confidence is a certificate.

(Participant E)

While building confidence and encouraging engagement in education is wonderful and has benefits that reach further than just the individuals involved, the outcomes relating to those experiencing intergenerational homelessness take a little longer to discern. As previously mentioned, interventions and educational interventions may be seen as 'circuit breakers' in disrupting the cycle of intergenerational homelessness. While it may not be immediately obvious or quantifiable to outside observers, staff in GSC are certainly of the opinion that educational interventions are the way forward in addressing intergenerational homelessness.

For the most vulnerable, educational interventions are actually breaking the cycle... I would say education is the one thing that will certainly move people out of [the situations they are currently in].

(Participant A)

Chapter 4: Conclusions

This research has examined the factors which underpin the phenomenon of intergenerational family homelessness and how service providers devise and implement strategies and services to respond to it. Intergenerational family homelessness can be understood as a particular subset in the context of broader family homelessness and can be defined as a situation where homelessness and its related impacts are experienced within families across successive generations. In other words, intergenerational homelessness is where people who experienced homelessness as children with their parents also experience it as adults with their own children thus continuing the cycle. The pathways to and consequences of intergenerational homelessness are profound for the families who experience it and the cycle can be challenging to break. Families may often be engaging with multiple social services, both statutory and voluntary, over extended periods of time. These may range across child protection, mental health, dependency and health issues as well as homeless services. There may be unmet needs and unaddressed traumas and as the literature review revealed, becoming homeless as a child can frequently form the basis of trauma later in life and there is much international evidence of the impact of childhood trauma on the risk of becoming homeless as an adult. The drivers may be housing and non-housing related in origin though recent trends in the growth of family homelessness in Ireland point to the dysfunctions of the housing system and the dearth of accessible, secure, long term social housing due to over reliance on private renting as a major factor. Many families who experience homelessness do not require therapeutic interventions – they require a secure home.

In the context of the research partner Good Shepherd Cork, this project has strongly endorsed the ethos of GSC and its person centred developmental approach to breaking the cycle of intergenerational homelessness. The consultation with GSC staff has illustrated the critical importance of implementing circuit breakers to ensure the risks and precarities which lead to intergenerational homelessness can be curtailed.

The approach of GSC is reflective of O'Tuama's five capitals approach with particular focus on seed capital where there is an emphasis on the achievement of base line education and training to build capacity, build confidence in the service users' own abilities thereby setting them on a positive pathway into education, training and life long learning. Such achievements by parents can also generate direct benefits for children such as instilling a sense of routine and attendance at school, participation in social and other activities

though the detrimental impact of the disruption caused by homelessness should not be underestimated and it is vitally important to emphasise that achieving circuit breakers is a collective responsibility and is a reality multi stranded issue that goes beyond the individual family. Therefore the onus cannot be solely placed on the family and its support agency. Other providers such as social services, schools etc should also be sensitive to the needs and circumstances of the children in terms of attendance, punctuality, uniforms, and behavioural issues.

Building seed capital along the lines identified by O'Tuama (2022) also requires broad and ongoing inter institutional collaboration and co-operation. Institutions involved in life-long learning such as adult education providers, FE colleges, and community-based educators all have a role to play. The recognition of the different learning contexts – non-formal, informal and formal is also essential. Cultural institutions such as art galleries and museums also engage in valuable outreach initiatives which are often the first step in a learning journey. Partnerships such as UNESCO Learning Cities and Learning Neighbourhoods, Trauma Sensitive City initiatives also offer a network of activities and opportunities which emphasise participation and place the person at the centre of the learning at their pace based on their needs. Furthermore, in an age where the risk of exclusion is now multi-faceted, awareness of the need for digital literacy is also essential especially as access to an increasing volume of public, social and private services such as social housing (eg online choice based lettings), utilities, banking etc is online. Finally sharing best practice between agencies who are involved in the development and provision of services is vital so that there is an acknowledgement of the complexities of intergenerational family homelessness and the necessity for joined up responses to ensure the cycle can be broken and that it will not be the experience of future generations.

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