

Introduction

This case study presents a new initiative called *Haven* introduced by Meath Partnership in 2018 under Goal 2 of SICAP, an Information and Advocacy action. The initiative was supported by SOSAD Navan. This case study highlights the positive impact that inter-agency collaboration can have when the objectives of multiple agencies are aligned for the benefit of people who are homeless.

Project Description

In June 2018, Meath Partnership undertook an action based research project called the Meath Homeless Initiative to identify access pathways to the range of housing, accommodation and support options available to people who are homeless/at risk of homelessness in Co. Meath. The reasons people become homeless are many and varied and each person often has a complex set of individual needs. The results of our research led to the development of the Information and Advocacy Service which is concerned with developing a community response to helping people who are in need, particularly those who are homeless/or at risk of homelessness.

Challenges experienced and how they were addressed

From the research conducted it became evident that many families living in emergency accommodation, such as B&B's, did not have access to cooking or kitchen facilities. Many parents were struggling daily to provide healthy meals for them and their children due to the challenging circumstances in which they were residing. The inability to cook also led to higher levels of expenditure for these families as many resorted to buying takeaways and/or eating out in fast food establishments propagating further issues in relation to health, nutrition and the absence of family meal and social time.

Another challenge faced by families living in emergency accommodation is the lack of physical space. Often families are living in one room and children have very little space for play. For children living in this situation, play is crucial as it reduces anxiety and increases family communication and interactivity.

The Haven Project

In order to support families living in emergency accommodation, at these most difficult times, Meath Partnership established the *Haven Project*, an initiative fully funded by SICAP, to provide a safe home-like space for vulnerable families. The space for the Haven Project was offered by SOSAD, Navan who had a community house in the centre of the town of Navan with a kitchen and dining area as well as an office and 1:1 consultation rooms.

The Haven Project ran for 3 mornings per week from 7.50am until 9am on a rota basis for families in emergency accommodation, so each family could be given space to receive the support they needed. Two members of the SICAP team were present each morning when the families arrived. The Haven Project provided breakfast for the children and parents: tea, coffee, hot chocolate, toast, cereal etc. If the parents needed a safe space to talk privately one of the SICAP members would complete the

intervention in one of the 1:1 rooms provided. The children had space to complete their homework and upon completion of their homework; interactive board games were available and played. The purpose of the games was to create a positive and fun atmosphere for the children so they would go into school feeling relaxed and rejuvenated.

The Haven Project supported a number of families from October 2018 up until September 2019. As the project is needs-driven and demand-led, Haven remains an approach under SICAP available to local families as soon as the requirement is identified and a referral to the SICAP Programme received.

A special word of thanks must be given to the team at SOSAD who fully supported this initiative and provided the space, rent free for a period of almost 12 months.

A Participant's Story

In September 2018, a family of six were referred to the Meath Homeless Initiative by Meath Volunteer Centre. The family had been living in private rented accommodation in Navan since 2016, however in June 2018 the family were served with a notice of termination as the landlord was intending to sell the property.

During the notice period the family were unable to secure alternative private rented accommodation. Meath County Council's Homeless Service Unit supported the family through the provision of emergency accommodation in Trim, approximately 15 kilometres outside of Navan.

A key goal for the family during this time was to provide as much stability in their children's lives as possible and they decided to keep their children in their current schools in Navan. This presented another issue for the family, as the local bus service timetable from Trim to Navan ran from 7.30am and thereafter at 9.10am. The family would have to take the 7.30am which would arrive in Navan at 7.50am. As the school of the two youngest children aged 5 and 12 years old did not provide a breakfast club as part of the School Meals Local Projects Scheme, the family resorted to going to McDonalds every morning, as this was the only option available to them at that time each morning. The cost of this, as well as the health implications added to the stress within the family.

The *Haven Project* supported this family from October 2018 up until they were offered alternative emergency accommodation in Navan in May 2019. To support this case study, we have a short video testimonial from Louise, the mother of the family, who describes in her own words her family's experience of homelessness and the help she received at the Haven Project.

In August 2019 Meath County Council offered the family their own council house, and the family have now officially moved out of homelessness.

Outputs and Outcomes achieved

The *Haven Project* is available for a number of families living in emergency accommodation in Co Meath. It is operated on a rota basis so each family receives the space and tailored support that they need. The *Haven Project* helps to normalise the family routine of going to school, having breakfast together, as well as completing homework in a support environment. It also aims to increase family social time with games and a safe space to communicate. These are dimensions of family life that often become increasingly difficult when living in emergency accommodation.

Link to the Case Study Testimonial:



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