

One Campaign to End Homelessness

Currently in Ireland there is an emerging awareness of urban homelessness as a serious national problem. This is [a new and important development](#). Prior to 2014, for example, there was no systematic tracking of persons who became homeless. This has meant that data remains anecdotal and patchy. From an advocacy perspective the absence of such data poses a major problem. Without the ability to monitor trends and map areas of need, it is very difficult for the relevant NGOs to challenge government inaction and to mount effective campaigns.

Nonetheless, there seems to be a general agreement that approximately 5000 people are currently homeless in Ireland. That figure has not decreased despite efforts on the part of public authorities and voluntary bodies. In Dublin approximately 168 people are sleeping rough in the city every night. Data: [Peter McVerry Trust](#) 2015.



Many experience homelessness because of drugs and family breakdown. The loss of traditional community bonds has contributed to the problem. Equally, in recent years the impact of austerity and the growing inequality in the country has been a factor in making people homeless.

Homelessness is now at the top of the Irish political agenda with all political parties committed to addressing the issue in their 2016 election manifestos. This will require a resumption of the social housing programme with direct government intervention. Previously, it was assumed that the market would provide sufficient social housing. It was also understood that voluntary associations would be in a position to make a significant contribution. In practice, however, the overly bureaucratic planning process and the impact of developer-led building projects effectively stymied effective interventions.

Along with drugs, increasing numbers of asylum seekers, unemployment and poverty, the situation of homeless people is one of Ireland's persistent social justice problems. It will remain for some time to come a focus for advocacy organisations and housing NGOs like the Peter McVerry Trust.

The [ONE Campaign](#) is about to launch a major advocacy initiative focused on homelessness in Ireland. On January 20th, 2015, the Romero Institute at Mount Sion, Waterford, is hosting a campaign launch with school groups. Father Peter McVerry and Dr Phil Brennan will be the principal speakers at the event.

[Social Justice Issues in Ireland 2017](#) from [Donal Leader](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Homelessness in Manchester

Could you take a little time out to view the YouTube below. It is a powerful BBC documentary on the experience of being homeless in Manchester.

Manchester could be anywhere. It could be Dublin, Belfast, Salford, Washington or London.

No one seeks to be homeless. Many people in our society are only one pay cheque away from being homeless.



One of the points made in the video is that family breakdown is (in Western countries) one of the major contributory factors to homelessness. Yet no one speaks about this.

Since the 1970s there has been a shift in public policy away from supporting families to supporting individuals. Both dimensions of support are essential. Blame the poet Philip Larkin. He was one of the first to articulate the view that families are 'bad news'. Ever since, a suspicion of the family as an institution had become endemic among shapers of public policy.

Read the [following review](#) of Robert Putnam's *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* in *First Things*. It is highly instructive on the correlation between family breakdown and social breakdown.

Two solutions are needed for homelessness:

- More social housing for all who need it
- Support for families in all their expressions
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[Shelter: a look at Manchester's homeless. Full film. on Vimeo](#)

[Professor Green On His Homelessness Documentary | Good Morning Britain - YouTube](#)

Homelessness in Belfast

The Westcourt Centre, Belfast, sponsored by the Christian Brothers Trust in Northern Ireland, provides a home for various services in West Belfast, including the Open Doors education project. The Centre is named after the birthplace of Blessed Edmund Rice, the founder of the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers, in Westcourt, Callan, County Kilkenny. He was born there in 1762.



Cormac McArt is the Director of the Centre. He has a keen interest in advocacy for homeless people and over the years has built up a significant relationship with local homeless people, many of whom live in the nearby Morning Star hostel. Education has proven to be the pathway for many of the homeless with whom he works. Through involvement with the work of the Centre and through education projects with a focus on media, many of the homeless people have begun the journey towards accessing both employment and accommodation.

A feature of the advocacy project at the Centre is the involvement of homeless people in telling the story of homelessness in Belfast. With the assistance of the Welcome Organisation a number of media projects documenting the situation in Northern have been developed.

The latest such project *Still Somebody*, a film about homelessness in Northern Ireland has been screened at the Dublin Road Movie House, Belfast, and has been written up in the Belfast Telegraph. See the article by Kirsten Elder [here](#).

In Northern Ireland 18% of all homeless presenters in 2013/2014 were single females. *Still Somebody* offers an insight into homelessness based on the perspectives and experiences of young women service users and key staff from local homeless shelters and support services in Belfast.

[Still Somebody](#)

[Word on the Street — Still Somebody](#)

[Hidden Voices — Still Somebody](#)

[Hidden Quarter — Still Somebody](#)

For more information or help about homelessness visit homelessbelfast.org

Human Rights and Extreme Poverty

Emily Logan, CEO Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission speaking at the launch of the ATD/FI Human Rights and Extreme Poverty Handbook in Dublin



For many the area around [Mountjoy Square, Dublin 1](#) is unfamiliar territory. In its day it was once of the premier locations in Dublin city, the discrete 18th century urban setting for Ireland's rural elite who came to the city to participate in the social rounds of what was called 'the season'. Today, it is an area that has seen better days. There are the offices of

organisations who can't afford to be anywhere else. There are the flats where Ireland's newcomers can find a home if they are lucky. It is also the location of Ozanam House where Saint Vincent De Paul have been working with poor people for over a hundred years. There are photographs from of Daughters of Charity passing out shoes from its steps to the poor people of the area.

A Different Kind of Book Launch

On December 8th, Ozanam House was the location for the launch of a handbook, *Making Human Rights Work for People living in Extreme Poverty*, the work of collaboration between [ATD Fourth World] and [Franciscans International](#). The project was assisted by other organisations, including the Christian Brothers and [Edmund Rice International](#).

The location was colourful and welcoming. There were simple hand-crafted murals and posters. The amplification system creaked and the chairs were uncomfortable. For sure, this was not the kind of book launch that the corporate world could ever endorse: wrong location, wrong people, absence of media, and, well, not likely to make the Nine O'Clock News. And, on top of that, we were expected to engage in a World Café process about engagement with poor people. Media hacks would be heading for the door!

Poor People can claim their Human Rights too

The people who came were the volunteer workers whose lives are committed on a daily basis to being with poor people, the grassroots organisations, the newcomers and the poor people themselves. They came to support one of the very first unambiguous engagement of the human rights community with poor people. Too often, human rights can be the territory of the powerful: the states, the NGOS, the academics, the human rights lawyers, and sometimes, the ideologues.

It was encouraging to hear in a human rights setting the language of respectful inclusion, the admission of failure and the openness to doing things differently. Because that is what the launch of this new handbook was about. It was an event that listened to [Brother Rodrigo Peret](#) when he said on the launch video: “Human rights we don’t claim on our knees!”

If there was one message that embedded itself in our consciousness from the presentations of the panelists it was that poverty, especially extreme poverty, is a profound violation of human rights. That is new language and deeply subversive of the understanding of human rights among western liberal elites. It is the voice of poor people saying “Human rights is not just for you; we are claiming this space for ourselves as well.”

It is Time to Listen and Hear

Emily Logan, CEO of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, was very positive in her comments on the ATD/FI Handbook. She acknowledged that human rights language is often viewed as the property of the establishment, academic and legal. It is time for poor people to reclaim this language as their own.

Sometimes, as Bruno from ATD said, we tend to see see poor people ‘as too complicated to work with’. This perception gets passed on in the media DNA shaping a negative public perception of poor people. From this ‘poison’, as he called it, evolve a host of toxic myths that shape attitudes and beliefs. It is time for human rights to really engage with poor communities and to listen to poor people with respect.

The Challenge

Making Human Rights Work for People in Extreme Poverty is one of those rare books, at once practical, inspirational and challenging. It challenges all of us. To those of us who say, ‘the poor are too complicated’, it forces us to think again. To those who say all they need is love, it forces us to engage with poor people in ways that enable them to say, “We can do this ourselves.” To those who say that poverty is a fact of life, it confronts us with a clear statement that poverty is a violation of human rights. To those who say we are powerless to do anything, the handbook challenges us to think about simple, practical steps that can be taken.

For me, it is the voice of Brother Rodrigo OFM from Brazil that rings in my ears. In his heavily accented English, with the gaping holes in the brickwork of his dilapidated barrio dwelling in the background, he calls out to us: “We are not invisible. We, too, belong to the city.”

[Extreme Poverty: Standing Up for Rights! - YouTube](#)

[Launch of New Handbook on Human Rights-Based Approach to Extreme Poverty - Mísean Cara](#)

atd-uk.org

www.atd-uk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/resources/20141017-The-Roles-We-Play.pdf