

Homelessness in Dublin

A multifaceted insight and analysis of a very current and visible problem in Ireland's capital city, Dublin.

By Kevin Wylde

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Intro

- The question and focus of this project is very much on why there is a large and pervasive problem of homelessness in Dublin. It will also focus on the ethical dimensions present and asking how should the situation be different from how it is now.
- This involves the presentation of the extensive data along with the story of this issue and analysis on its various leading causes as well as potential consequences.
- It is a very human problem along with the economic and social issues and I've also covered it from that angle accordingly.
- From the current housing and economic issues to advice on helping the homeless people you see in your day to day life, this is a presentation of the problem from the street level up to societal and political choices being made that worsen or facilitate the continuing homelessness of people in Dublin.



- The current rise in statistics and change in causal trends will be expanded upon in conjunction with an explanatory tone throughout as I articulate the details of this problem to a new audience.

Interview with Father Peter McVerry

- One of the most unique aspects of my research was the chance I had to interview the leading figure in the battle against homelessness in Dublin, Father Peter McVerry. He is a Jesuit priest who first began working with at risk families and people in Summerhill in the 1970s, an extremely impoverished and dangerous neighbourhood in Dublin's north inner city.
- He has been uniquely placed at the forefront of the battle on this affliction and was willing to interview with me for 30+ minutes over the phone. The full recording is attached below.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IplSyMG->



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Highlights from the Interview

- Given the generous amount of time Father McVerry gave to me in interviewing him it wasn't surprising that we were able to cover almost all aspects of homelessness in Dublin that this project examines.
- Providing a backdrop of sorts to the majority of the questions I sought to answer.

1970s - 2000

- McVerry touched on a dramatic change in the dynamic of the homeless 'crowd' as it were from the 1970s to today. He mentions an almost romantic image of grizzled older men who wandered the streets of Dublin and towns of Ireland for whom most people had a healthy respect and level of affinity for (albeit the majority seemed to have some sort of alcohol addiction).
- A dangerous level of indifference to younger homeless people also existed, which was in keeping with the intolerance of children outside of marriage and many documented abuses of young vulnerable persons at the time.
- This seems to align with the well recorded control of the Catholic Church in Ireland and their stigmatization of such people in vulnerable yet frowned upon situations.

Post 2000

- McVerry highlighted the ample resources now for children who are homeless, but who are not considered to be otherwise at risk, they are provided with accommodation under Section 5 of the Child Care Act 1991.
- He stressed that it is now the adults and families who are most at risk, due almost entirely to financial or drug related issues. (This is ratified by a 2005 EU

study taken on homeless men in Dublin which showed drug abuse, mainly heroin and cannabis, overtaking alcohol as the leading addiction¹)

- The rise in younger more aggressive and drug addicted men has led to a danger in hostels and emergency shelters that forces many out into the streets for the night.

Social (Public) Housing as the Main Issue

- McVerry continued to emphasize the lack of social housing or rent subsidies (a Section 8 equivalent) as the main cause and potential solution to the homelessness crisis in Dublin.
- He pointed out that the middle and working class have been dragged into the competition for social housing due to soaring rent prices in Dublin city and the surrounding suburbs, thus putting more people at risk of not getting one.
- Of note was the numbers he cited of social housing units being built. In 1975 8,500 social houses were built, in 1985 it was 6,900 and yet in 2015 they built 75 social houses. Despite a marked increase from year to year in homeless or at risk people.
- This can be attributed to a changing Governmental policy which reflected the years of prosperity in the 1990s and 2000s in Ireland.

Comparison with other Countries

- McVerry highlighted the difficulty in comparing to other countries as there is no agreed upon definition of homelessness. Statistics can vary hugely from country to country as a result. I.e Ireland does not count individuals staying at friends or

¹ Austin O'Carroll Fiona O'Reilly, 'Health of the homeless in Dublin: has anything changed in the context of Ireland's economic boom?'. European Journal of Public Health, Volume 18, Issue 5, 1 October 2008, Pages 448–453.

family's or young people who still live at home late into their 20s, he claims this is the difference between 8,000 named homeless in Ireland and 80,000.

- He admits the problem may be more severe in the UK and the US but cites a familiar Irish attitude of determination that in our small nation no one should be suffering as such while the rest of us are living well.

How can you help?

- McVerry stressed the importance of acknowledging the homeless people you see in the street as people in their own right. Getting past the label and making a connection is what he would say to anyone asking, 'How can I help?'
- A conversation and asking someone's name could make all the difference in a homeless person's life who has no one with them every day.
- A little empathy and respect is something anyone can give.
 - ***'If you have nobody that cares about you, you're in hell' - Peter McVerry***
- A simple yet profound sentence showing the mental difficulty of living every day believing that of all the people who pass by every minute no one cares whether you exist or not.

Current Statistics on Homelessness in Dublin

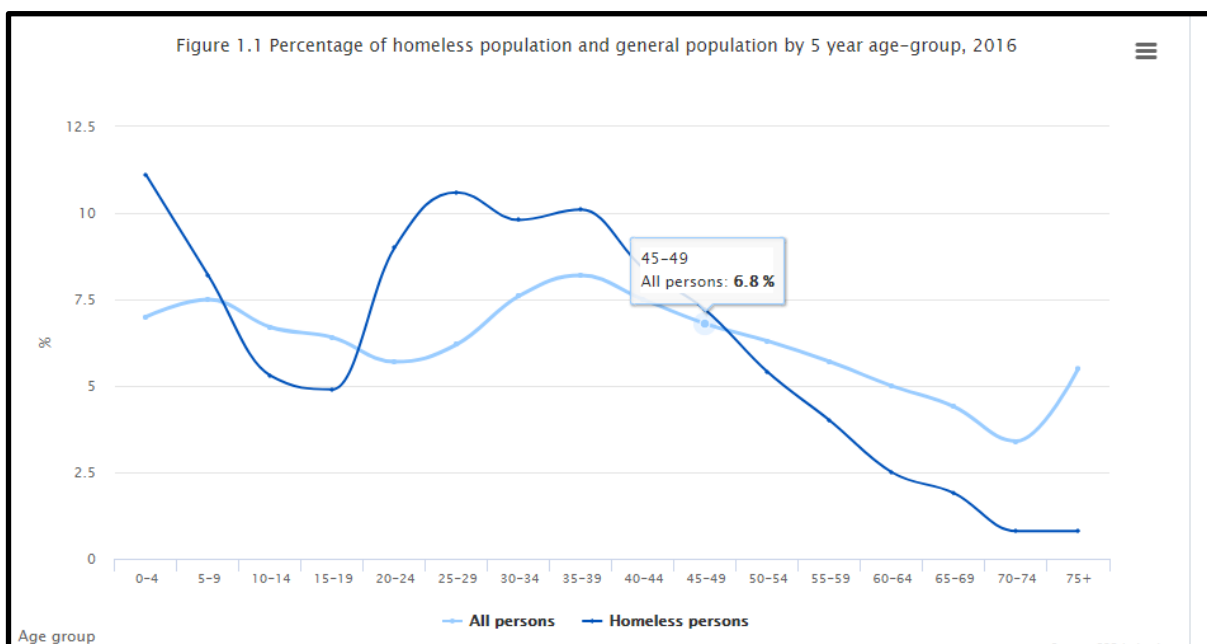
- In order to facilitate a comprehensive coverage of the topic here are some of the most relevant statistics from the Government's Central Statistics Office. Figures which help to tell the story but also serve to highlight the difficulty in defining homelessness and therefore accuracy in reporting.
- 6,906 people were reported as homeless in this 2016 report (this has now increased by 32% up to March 2018), which was categorized as people who

were homeless on the night of the report. Already a subtext that adds fluidity and confusion as to the real figure.

- Approximately 5,009 of these were in Dublin alone.²
- 896 family units were registered as homeless and family being defined as a couple with or without children or a one parent family with at least one child.

Status	Male	Female	Total
Single	1,733	1141	2,874
First marriage	206	212	418
Re-married	12	8	20
In a registered same-sex civil partnership	10	14	24
Separated	255	144	399
Divorced	172	58	230
Widowed	43	36	79
Not stated	726	442	1,168
Total	3,157	2,055	5,212

View of the homeless population by marital status



View of the homeless population by age

² Irish Population Census 2016

- **An Economist article** in November 2017 illustrated a number points surrounding the cost of living in Ireland which has directly contributed to the crisis.
- As demand for housing rises and supply fails to keep up rent rose 12.3% from January to September last year alone, leaving Dublin second only to Luxembourg in Europe in terms of cost. To put this in perspective the average cost of rent in Dublin is now 23% higher than it was in 2008 at the peak of Ireland's infamous 'Celtic Tiger' property boom.³
- This coupled with an average yearly earnings increase of under 2% had devastating financial consequences.⁴
- The article also repeats the point mentioned by Father McVerry that as more and more of the middle and lower classes are dragged into the struggle for housing and to pay rent, those at the bottom suffer increasingly.
- The lack of social housing alluded to throughout this paper is also mentioned here, Governmental policy has reflected an increasing move towards the right side of the political spectrum with regards to social housing construction and this has been coupled with an inadequate private housing supply in proportion to the



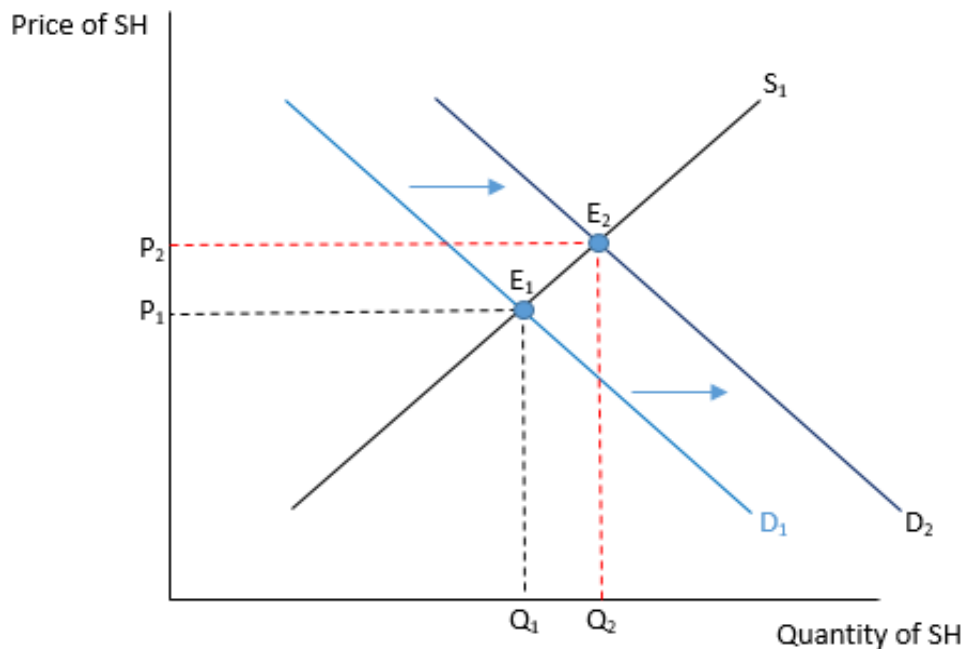
demand at the moment.

³ The Economist, 'The roots of Ireland's property crisis', Nov. 30th, 2017.

⁴ Central Statistics Office Report, 'The Average Industrial Wage and the Irish Economy', May 2017.

- A paltry 5,377 new housing units in the private industry were completed in 2016.⁵
Exacerbating the problem as demand steadily increases on all fronts.

Supply and Demand Curves for Social (Public) Housing in Dublin

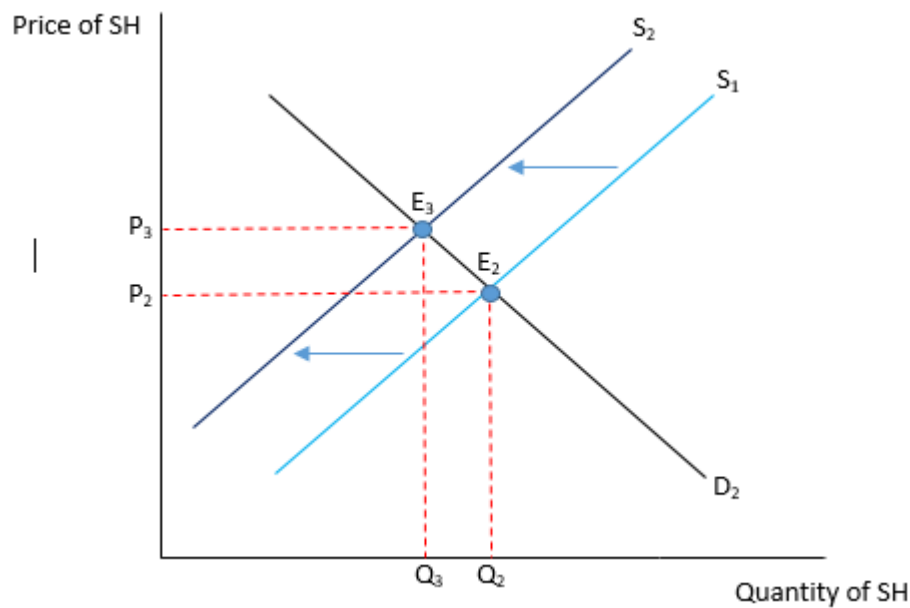


1. Demand curve shifts to the Right

- This graph shows the demand curve shifting to the right with a surge in demand for social housing in Dublin.
- This is caused by the rising prices of property and a disproportionately small % increase in income, mainly due to the new demand from formerly uninterested members of the working/middle class.
- This has raised the price from where it was previously at the point of equilibrium @ E_1 .
- It now sits at the less accessible higher price of P_2 and the new equilibrium point of E_2 .

⁵ The Economist, 'The roots of Ireland's property crisis', Nov. 30th, 2017.

2. Supply Curve shifts to the Left



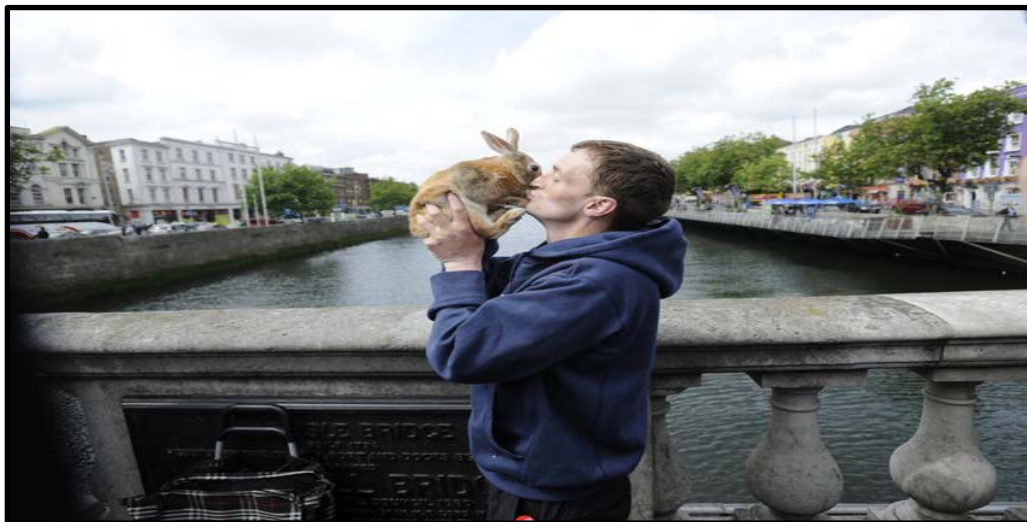
- This graph shows the shift in supply of social housing in Dublin with the supply curve shifting to the left.
- This is largely due to significantly less new units being built, a reflection of changing governmental policy and the private industry's interest in that area.
- The cost of construction in Ireland is a contributing factor with construction cost "40% higher than Amsterdam"- Ronan Lyons, Professor of Economics, Trinity College Dublin.⁶
- The equilibrium has now shifted to E_3 .
- Coupled with the increase in demand this lead to the new price of P_3 which is higher and renders these housing units more inaccessible than ever before.

Conclusion: These graphs show the unavoidable economic consequences of the social housing crisis (and the wider housing market) in Dublin. Demand is increasing on all fronts while the supply is remaining stagnant or increasing at a proportionately inadequate rate.

⁶ The Economist, 'The roots of Ireland's property crisis', Nov. 30th, 2017.

Human Aspect of the Issue

- An important takeaway from my research in this area has been the ease with which people get lost in the statistics. The importance of simple anecdotes and reminders of the humanity of these people's situations cannot be understated.
- 2 such stories came my way in researching this project and they couldn't be more uniquely different.
- John Byrne was begging for change as a homeless man in 2011 by Dublin's River Liffey when a youth took his pet rabbit and threw it into the river. He dived in and saved the rabbit at great risk to himself. John was given a Compassionate Citizen Award and received national attention due to his selflessness. This story showed the importance of the few possessions homeless people have but primarily that even in the worst of situations people, can have the strongest of characters.



- John now lives with his dogs in a tent beside the

Canal in Dublin.⁷ While he remains in homelessness he is content with the company of his few remaining friends and animals.

⁷ Cormac Fitzgerald, TheJournal.ie, 'Homeless man who rescued his rabbit from the Liffey in 2011 now lives on Royal canal with his dogs', Nov 4th 2017.

- **Father McVerry repeatedly stressed the concept** that most people forget during our interview, that thrust into the same situations and troubled childhoods as these people we would almost certainly turn to the same outlets, be they crime, drugs, alcohol. He used the expression '*But for the grace of God there go I.*'
- He shared a story of an 11 year old boy who, some years ago, appeared at his homeless shelter for men claiming to not have a bed for the night. He eventually found out the boy's address and drove him home whereupon the boy refused to go inside.. After gentle coaxing the child revealed that his alcoholic parents had been sending him out into prostitution in Dublin city every night and if he didn't return with enough money he suffered violent consequences.
- A thought too troubling for many of us to even imagine doing that to a child. But unfortunately and inevitably this child bore those scars for life and is in and out of prison on petty drug and theft charges. He remains homeless when not in prison and has not received adequate mental health treatment. Yet is a part of a category that people sometimes claim 'only have themselves to blame'.

In Summary

- The direct effect of being homeless translates into a near total loss of financial opportunities (due to the necessity of a fixed address to be employed) as well as a lack of emotional or personal connections that we all thrive on in our daily lives.

- This project is as much an analysis of the issue and its causes as it is a presentation of a problem to an audience far removed from the reality of the situation.
- The challenge that was revealed to me after I began was maintaining a human level of relation to the people we discuss in the statistics and raise questions not discussed as frequently.
- Such as the propensity for housing to become a human right in Ireland, whether at the State or European level. Is that realistic or too burdensome an idea?
- I've attempted to do that in the sharing of stories and in particular using my instrumental interview with Father McVerry who quite literally works with at risk

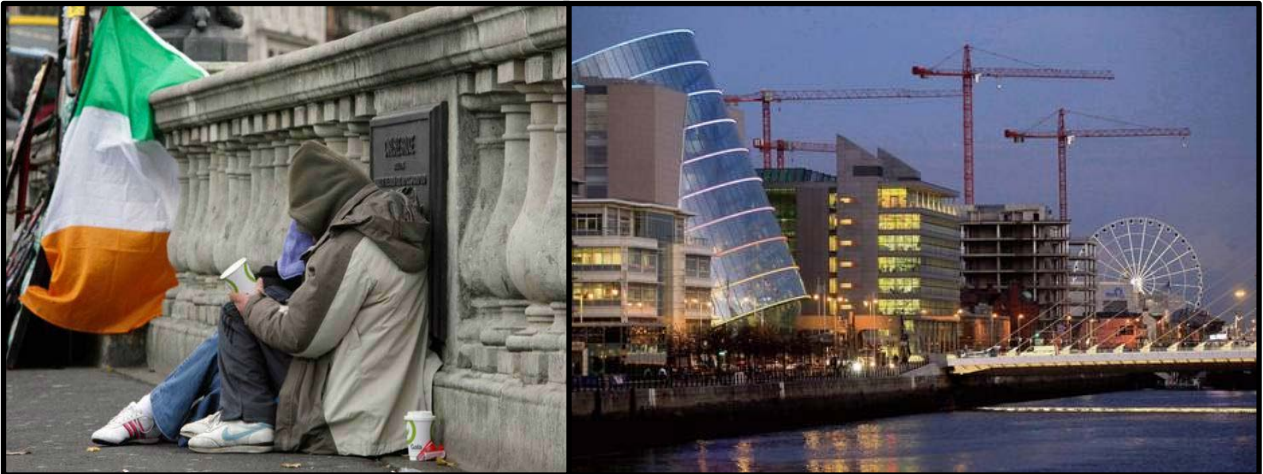


and
homeless
people in
Dublin
every
day.

- The causes have been construed as societal, industrial and governmental, mainly in terms of housing policy and production on one hand.
- On the other is the effects of broken homes and childhoods on children who receive no guidance or assistance and end up trapped in a cycle of poverty and often crime and substance abuse throughout their adult lives.

- On a day to day basis, the importance of acknowledgement and (however brief) personal connections with people on the street cannot be underestimated.
- In the grand scheme of things, real change in policy and priorities seems necessary in a bid to drastically improve what is a systemic problem and quite simply put people before profit and politics.

Literature Review



- **The contrasting images here really serve to emphasize the two realities of Irish life.**
- **One of prosperity and growth while the latter, amidst all the new wealth and development, is left behind..**



Introduction

- The literature relevant to the issue of homelessness in Dublin varies greatly, from well researched newspaper articles to government issued statistics and doctoral theses. I have tried to encompass as many different viewpoints as possible in approaching this topic to give a well rounded and balanced insight.
- Due to the multifaceted nature of this crisis and the absence of a single causal reason many factors must be mentioned in the conversation about the problem and efforts to alleviate it which requires quite a broad range of material.
- I have whittled this down to the most relevant pieces of work on the subject and sources of vital statistics and information.

Media sources and Coverage

- The prevalence and relevance of the issue in the mainstream consciousness at the moment has ensured a steady stream of consistently well researched newspapers articles documenting the issue for numerous years now. Reliable sources and independent reporting has ensured depth in information and analysis across the board.
- Such articles as *'Housing a homeless spirit'* by Paul Casey and *'Homeless crisis: Nearly 9,000 destitute in November'* by Aine McMahon (both Irish Times) are prime examples of the disparity in angles that is covered by the Irish media, with these two articles showing a focus on individual narratives in one and statistics and policy in the other.
- The coverage and research has reached an international level to some degree with commentary from The Economist on the economic impact and specifically the housing market's on this problem in November of 2017.

My use of these Sources

- The breadth of reporting and info gathering on this topic by reporters has resulted in a wealth of reliable statistics and data as well as insights into the personal lives of the people deemed to be homeless in Dublin. I will be seeking to use this literature to further my economic and policy analysis but more so for the personal impact and stories of the people involved.

Academic Sources

- Academic commentary on this long standing social issue does exist though not quite to the extent desirable as the problem is usually viewed as rooted in the realm of policy decisions and economics. However, there are some detailed articles on the topic and articles from the US in a similar vein that could further the analysis and comparison of the situation greatly.
- The most exemplary piece of writing on the topic I have found is Susan Eustace's {BA (Hons.), MSc (Counselling Psychology)} doctoral thesis on the topic entitled 'A

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Enquiry into Homelessness' from Dublin City University.

Susan employs a vast range data sets and individual subjects to study everything from the psychology of being constantly bored as a homeless person to the definition and ethical considerations of the phenomenon of being homeless.

- Another article brought to my attention by a fellow student is the paper on *'Housing, Homelessness and Capabilities*' by Carol McNaughton Nicholls who has extensively researched the essentialism of human lives and the need for secure housing focussing on this side of the Atlantic.
- One further aspect of this paper is the health and well being of the homeless which is explored in the European Journal of Public Health article entitled *'Health of the homeless in Dublin: has anything changed in the context of Ireland's economic boom?'*

My use of these Sources

- The varying approaches to homelessness and the numerous aspects of it dealt with in this academic material is very helpful to my work. It furnishes me with further angles to analyze and present this problem as a comprehensive research paper.
- The comparisons and contrasts I could draw from Carol's work with the Irish material could also be valuable in my presentation of this topic that is relatively foreign to many here, in a geographical sense.
- As I delve into this material I expect, in the referencing or citations, to come across other sources of academic insight with which I can increase my knowledge of the topic.

Government Sources, Charities & Misc.

- I will be employing many statistics gathered by Government censuses and reports by The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government's in my legislative and economic analysis of this issue which will add yet another worthwhile dimension to examine.

- Charities such as the Peter McVerry Trust, the Simon Community and Focus Ireland work extensively with all types of homeless people and families and have constant up to date reports on the gravity of the situation.
- Father Peter McVerry is a leading figure in the fight against homelessness in Dublin and as well as his book *'The Meaning is in the Shadows'* on the topic.
- I will be attempting to get a phone or Skype interview with him during my research. His book and he himself are full of truly unique insights and experiences that one could only get by spending a lifetime at street level trying to help people and alleviate this problem.

My use of these Sources

- These sources could be key to the entire paper as they have the most potential to unearth personal, ethical and sociological findings as well as the reliable data available from the reports and Government statistics.
- It's with a great deal of enthusiasm that I approach this section of my work in particular as there is the allure of not knowing what I might find.

Conclusion

- It is essential to the success of my research to include all these various strands of past works and combine at least some facet of them with my analysis.
- The contribution I hope this will make to the literature on the issue is dependent on the integration of all these factors and methods as is the importance of presenting the whole of the story, as it were, to my audience here in Virginia.
- These sources I have selected will aid me greatly in achieving those goals and I have no doubt that they will present ideas and other material to me that I couldn't have envisioned before I set out on this endeavour.
- The academic commentary is somewhat limited relating to the specific geographical problem in Dublin but thankfully I don't have to rely on narrow analysis or conclusions due to the depth of raw data and information easily available.

- I can only hope to convey this issue in a way becoming to all those who have done similarly and in a manner helpful to all the people mired in homelessness at the moment.



Methodology

Intro

- The methodology employed to construct a paper is vital to its relative success and coherency. In establishing a set rhythm of analysis and presentation of the information the author can guide and pique the interest of the reader in the topic at hand. All the while ensuring consistency of research and the reliability of results.

Methodology I will Employ

- My primary focus will be on a contrast - comparison analysis and a qualitative research methodology. I will be taking insights and information from a broad range of sources and presenting it to my readers along with my own questions, hypotheses and suggestions based on the data acquired.
- An aspect of the paper will be the comparing and contrasting of the homelessness problem in Dublin to that of other European cities and America (if one can't generalize to that extent I may just focus on generally accepted facts/realities).

Desired outcome of this method

- I aim to provide an approach broad enough to offer the previously clueless reader an understanding of the topic akin to that of a native of Dublin. While this is ambitious I believe that sticking to the methodology and highlighting similarities and contrasts with the situation in other countries will allow the reader to engage and understand to the extent I seek.

Establishing a Comprehensive Method of Research

- The broad range of disciplines and literature I will be engaging with will be central to my expansive method of research.
- In keeping with my goal of giving a comprehensive overview of the topic, this will involve dealing with raw statistics and data along with a multitude of reports and articles that have already offered hypotheses as to the causes of the problem, based on such data.
- A clear presentation of already gathered data from economic, governmental and philanthropic organizations is vital to this process.
- I will also be looking to include some more philosophical and societal analysis in order to give greater scope to my analysis.
- Along with an economical angle that should constitute a sufficiently wide spectrum of research.

Motivation and Urgency of the Project

- While I will maintain a clear and concise tone throughout I think the subject itself imparts a sense of urgency.
- The fundamental concept of not having a place to rest, call your own or shelter from the world is scary enough to us that seeing others going through this ordeal evokes strong reactions and empathy.
- However, as this problem is present in every country in the world, it may be difficult to invoke legitimate concern from people far from the place it is occurring, especially given the prevalence of the problem here in the US.
- It is purely a case of geographical distance and removal that can, on occasion, make relating to people and a situation mildly difficult.
- There is a school of thought that a moral hazard could exist in helping these people too much, to the point of dependency.

- But that seems to fail to account for the real crippling issues that afflict many of them that have contributed to their being homeless.
- Real conditions such as schizophrenia, addiction and mental instability require treatment for anyone suffering, thus to potentially limit the aid provided for these documented contributors to homelessness for fear of moral hazard is seemingly negligent.

Conclusion

- My challenge is that of someone attempting to learn new things about a topic I know quite well while also presenting this as a new subject to an audience far removed from the problem itself.
- The questions I have on the issue will be balanced by an informative undertone to facilitate this initial learning phase of the reader while achieving a sufficient academic standard of research and questioning.
- Such inquiries as to the allocated governmental budget to deal with homelessness, the rights of people with nowhere to live and the legislation and actions being implemented at the moment.
- Are the Irish government doing enough to combat this problem, relative to other comparative nations? Is it feasible to eliminate homelessness?
- Following the structure and methodology I have laid out will hopefully lead me to possibilities, if not answers, in many of the areas in question above.



Normative Section

There is a record number of homeless people and families in Dublin in 2018.

What should the level of homeless people be and what should be the main focus of efforts to help?

Capabilities Approach

- The Capability approach, initially developed by Amartya Sen and expanded upon by Martha Nussbaum (in list form famously) lends a guiding hand to the discussion here as it provides a unique angle to this issue.
- It outlines certain goals that exist that would facilitate people living 'a good life' such as bodily health and integrity, emotional freedom, freedom of affiliation etc. In this analysis the emphasis is on people's ability to attain these things, their 'capability' to.
- Poverty and thus homelessness or vice versa constitutes a direct deprivation of those capability. The lack of an address has so many negative employment and economically related consequences that getting a job to remedy not having a home becomes extremely difficult.
- Coupled with being deprived of emotional support, proximate relationships with others and any control over one's environment, one can see how homelessness has a hugely significant and directly negative impact on the vaunted attainment of these goals.

1. What level of homeless people should there be?

- There have always been homeless people in societies throughout human civilization. But the extent to which that is true has varied greatly with the size, wealth and design of those cities and societies.
- Ireland as a First World, developed Western country should hold itself to a high standard in terms of what is expected from it in dealing with this issue. Our level of homelessness

should be at a comparative minimal as we have the wealth and resources to 'solve' the problem for the majority who want to be helped.

- Given the gap in sufficient policy making and the widespread shortage of housing across the country it's clear that one contributory factor of this issue is the Government.
- While not in line with laissez faire schools of thought, Government backed investment in social housing units and rent subsidies schemes has been shown to improve the problem closer to the level it should be at.
- There has to be an allowance for individuals who have fallen out of housing due to mental health issues or familial tensions or sometimes by choice. But a systemic failure to ensure accommodation for people shouldn't exist to the point that the amount of people who are homeless is at crisis levels.

2. The main focus of the Efforts to help?

- Again an emphasis on systemic impacts and social housing policy which has rapidly declined in recent years in Ireland should be the priority in trying to effect change in this area.
- An improvement in mental health services is a regularly cited factor in improvement of a society and it is no different in this case. This paper has shown the complex myriad of contributing factors to a person being homeless such as addiction, financial or familial issues or abuse.
- It is not realistic to think the Government and society can categorically prevent all of these but through systemic change they could better prevent some.
- On an economical and industrial level the relentless hunt for profits is hurting the lower income families as accommodation options remain scarce.
- It is a problem the world over but a lesser focus on exponential profit and more consideration given to the community and society would help decrease the level of homelessness closer to where it should be.

Conclusion

- Homelessness shouldn't be at the level it is. While a certain level has been omnipresent throughout history a wealthy nation like Ireland should aspire to keep higher standards of care.
- This should translate into the bare minimum of people on the streets, allowing exceptions perhaps for those who's circumstances are far beyond the norm.
- The impacts it has on the capabilities of individuals to further their lives and themselves is near catastrophic in its crippling effect.
- It renders them stuck in the infamous 'poverty cycle' with a statistically nominal chance of escaping their circumstances.
- To the greatest effect, an increased emphasis on constructing and making available public housing would help in solving this issue.