

Open Door

Issue 02 | Spring 2025

Charmaine's Story

Annual Impact

*One Big Sleep Out
is Back!*



Your kindness is transforming lives...

Thank you so much for believing that everyone deserves a home. We are so grateful to have you by our side as we support people on their journey out of homelessness.

Every day, we support hundreds of people in many different ways but what unites them all is the desire for a permanent place to call home. And it is because of you that more people, more families, more children do have a place to call home today. Together, we are creating stability and hope for people like Charmaine.

In this edition of Open Door, I am so pleased that Charmaine chose to share her journey from homelessness to recovery with Simon Community, and is now on a path to a home of her own. I hope that it gives you a little bit more insight into what your support is making possible.

I am incredibly proud of the work we are doing together at Simon Community and the impact we are making every day. But, at the same time, it is important to highlight the deepening homelessness crisis we face and on page 5 you can read more about our policy work to ensure our Government gives this crisis the focus that is urgently needed.

I know that the levels of homelessness in Northern Ireland can feel overwhelming but together we really are making a real difference. Because of you, we are able to be there for vulnerable people like Charmaine. We can offer life-changing support to help them leave homelessness behind once and for all.

As always, we welcome your feedback so please do get in touch!

Harriett Roberts
Director of Growth and Engagement

Thanks to your support...

This is the difference we made in 2023/24

We measure the impact of the work we do to help us achieve our vision of a society where everyone has a home. It also helps us understand what is working and develop new, innovative ways to support people facing homelessness.

Here you'll find some of our highlights from last year. To find out more about our impact you can read our Annual Report on our website.



Last year, Simon Community helped thousands of people facing homelessness across Northern Ireland.

We provided vital support to those experiencing homelessness through temporary accommodation and essential services.

And for many families and individuals, we ended homelessness, breaking the cycle and creating a legacy for generations to come.

We focused on supporting those most at risk of homelessness, preventing it before it starts.

21

accommodation services across NI with a total of 464 beds.

99

people were supported through our Family Accommodation Service including 58 children.

1,086

people were helped through our accommodation sites or support services.

173

deposits were provided for those who couldn't afford the up-front costs associated with private rental accommodation.

17,915

calls for help were made to our freephone support line.

9

Creating Homes properties were purchased as safe, secure and affordable homes for people experiencing homelessness.

653

people were able to stay in our temporary accommodation sites across Northern Ireland.

277 days

was the average length of stay in our temporary accommodation services.

Charmaine's Story

Charmaine's journey began in a volatile relationship, leading her through addiction, loss, and homelessness — and ultimately to a place of recovery and growth.

She spent years in an abusive relationship, afraid to leave. *"You want people to see a picture-perfect family. They don't know what goes on behind closed doors."*

Alcohol became her way to cope, but addiction made things harder. When the relationship ended, she found herself in and out of recovery, stuck in a cycle of instability.

For a period, Charmaine had nowhere to go, sometimes sleeping rough. *"It's not even about sleeping — you're always on high alert."*

Finding a crash bed offered some relief, but it wasn't a home. Eventually, a support worker referred her to Simon Community. *"I came here with just the clothes I stood in."*

That first night, she felt an overwhelming relief. *"I was just glad to have a warm bed and know that no one could come through that door unless I let them."*

Simon Community became more than a place to stay — it became a place of healing. Through counselling, well-being services, and community support, she began to rebuild her life. *"I've always been a wallflower, but now I've found my voice."*

Today, Charmaine is looking ahead to a future of stability, her own home, and continued growth. *"I know I'm leaving stronger than I arrived."*



Scan the QR to read Charmaine's story.

Facing a Crisis

1 in 32 1/3

now **homeless** in Northern Ireland.

Around a third (18,567) of those who are officially homeless are **under the age of 18.**

59,518 57%

people are **officially homeless.**

Families make up over half of the people with official homeless status.

4,000 89,098

more people are homeless than this time last year.

people across NI are **currently waiting for a social home.**

Source: Based on data from AQW 14882/22-27 & NIHE FOI 661

The Programme for Government

The Executive has been back for over a year now and the Programme for Government - 'Doing What Matters Most' - was agreed by the four parties at the end of February 2025. While we welcome commitments to social housing with the provision of more social, affordable and sustainable housing being a key priority, Simon Community is urging the Executive to prove they are serious about tackling homelessness with the urgency required.

For decades affordable housing has been neglected and the figures illustrated on the opposite page are the result. It is utterly shameful that the most vulnerable in our society are being failed and overlooked – evicted, forgotten, invisible and left to try to survive day to day, not knowing where they are going to spend the night.

Sky-rocketing rents and deepening poverty only serve to compound the worsening situation.

But this situation is not inevitable, it is solvable...

With the right political will, sustained investment in housing and prevention, and true collaboration across government, we can tackle the root causes of our housing and homelessness crisis - from poverty to inadequate water infrastructure.

Now is the time for the Executive to prove that it is serious about tackling homelessness, not just because it is the right thing to do but because it saves lives, strengthens communities and reduces long-term costs to society.

We must do things differently and we must do it now.



Sherry's Story

At just 19, Sherry has already faced many challenges, including family breakdown and years in care, eventually leading to homelessness. After leaving the care system at 17, she moved between her parents' homes and stayed with a friend before finding herself without a stable place to live. In January 2024, she was referred to Simon Community's Mount Street Mews in Coleraine — a turning point in her life.

"When I first arrived, I was scared, but everyone was so welcoming. It really surprised me."

Staff helped her settle into her flat, stay on top of benefits appointments, and access well-being services. ***"Knowing they were there really helped my mental health. I love chatting with them — it felt easy and comfortable."***

After 10 months of support and growth, she now lives independently but remains grateful. ***"I miss the support of the staff, but I know they're always there if I need them."***

Sherry hopes to support her younger brother and ensure he doesn't face the same struggles. ***"Simon Community made a huge difference in my life, and I want to do the same for him."***

Ava's Story

Growing up in foster care, I spent 14 years with my foster mum, but over time, our relationship became strained. Conversations turned into arguments, and the house no longer felt like home.

Eventually, things became too difficult to manage. I moved out just to keep things from getting worse between us. I didn't know what would come next, but I needed space. That's when I came to Simon Community in June 2024.

The first 24 hours were tough. I felt scared, anxious, and close to tears. I wasn't sure if this would feel like another temporary stop rather than a fresh start.

But the staff were great. They helped me settle in quickly, and their support meant I didn't have to sit alone with my thoughts. Over time, I grew comfortable and started focusing on my future—attending tech, job hunting, and completing my childcare course.

"Living here changed my perspective. I found more than just a place to stay—I found support, opportunities, and hope."



Specsavers

We are delighted to be partnering with Specsavers as part of a UK-wide initiative to improve access to eye care for all and remove healthcare barriers for people experiencing homelessness.

Clinical staff from Specsavers have been volunteering at Simon Community temporary accommodation sites to deliver free eye tests and glasses to people experiencing homelessness.

By bringing the service to our sites, we can help at a time when physical health often becomes a lower priority and alleviate the potential stigma people might feel about visiting an eye care facility.



"We know that when people go a significant length of time without having an eye test, any issues they may have can worsen or they may develop serious eye health conditions. We are so pleased to be able to help those experiencing homelessness by hosting clinics and it is an honour to be involved in such an important initiative."

Matthew McKenny
Ophthalmic Director at Specsavers,
Park Centre, Belfast

ONE BIG SLEEP OUT

One BIG Sleep Out is back...

When: Friday 10th October at 7pm to Saturday 11th October at 9am

Where: Stormont Estate, Belfast

Sleep under the stars and raise awareness and funds for people experiencing homelessness. Sleeping out does not replicate homelessness, but it does send a powerful message that we must tackle homelessness now.

Register Now:

Registration fee: £40 -

Minimum fundraising target £150

Early Bird Rate*: Use code **sleeput25** to register for £25

*Offer valid until 01.06.25



Scan here to find out more and register.



Europa Abseil

When: Sunday 22nd June

Registration fee: £35 -

Minimum fundraising target £120



Scan here to find out more and register.

You can also join **#TeamSimon** whatever your challenge and help us end homelessness.

Get in touch with us to chat about your fundraising idea: fundraise@simoncommunity.org



Ways to support us

Support us with a monthly donation

With your kind regular gift we can be there for people when they need us most, making sure no one faces homelessness alone.



To set up your monthly donation scan the QR code

Support us while you shop

Raise FREE funds for us with your everyday shopping!

Sign up today at Give as You Live




Give as you Live
Online

