

# Open Door

Issue 03 | Autumn 2025

*Kelsey's Story*

*Public Perceptions*

*Carols at St Anne's*



**Homelessness could happen to anyone, even me.**

**Hi there, I'm Karen McAlister and I have the amazing job of leading on how Simon Community makes sure our work is both impactful and innovative.**

We recently polled over 1,000 people in Northern Ireland and 86% agreed that homelessness could happen to anyone, even you or me. It's such a powerful reminder of our shared understanding.

In my role, I focus on maximising our impact. I want to make sure our support services reach those who need them most and help as many people as possible especially with the limited resources we have.

I don't often get the chance to chat with you all directly, but I wanted to say thank you for your continued support. It allows us to make a real difference to the lives of people we're here to help. It means we can offer so much more than just a safe place to stay and genuinely end the cycle of homelessness for so many people.

In this edition of Open Door, we share how with your support Kelsey, Simon

and Aidan are on a path towards ending their homelessness. I know it's these stories of hope that you enjoy reading, but I thought you might also be interested in a few more statistics from our recent Public Perceptions Poll.

You might be surprised to learn that 1 in 14 people in Northern Ireland say they have experienced homelessness. However, 93% still underestimate the true scale and complexity with many still associating it primarily with rough sleeping in city centres.

On page 3 you will find a few more of the results that I found particularly interesting and while the survey shows that public understanding of the crisis we face is improving, significant gaps remain.

We are so thankful to have you in our corner as we work together to make sure everyone has a home from which they can build a stable future.

A handwritten signature of Karen McAlister in white ink, written in a cursive style.

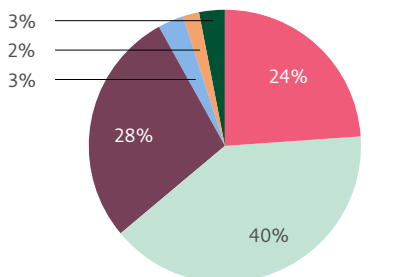
**Karen McAlister**  
Head of Innovation and Impact

## Public Perceptions Poll on Homelessness – 2025

In February 2025, Simon Community conducted a Public Perceptions Poll on homelessness in Northern Ireland to understand how people perceive one of the most urgent, and often misunderstood, social issues facing NI. The survey findings confirm a strong public recognition of homelessness as a serious issue in Northern Ireland.

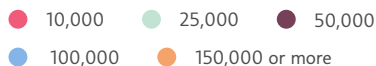
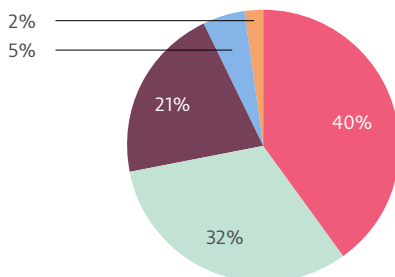
### The seriousness of homelessness in Northern Ireland

Respondents were asked how serious of a problem is homelessness in Northern Ireland.



### Scale of homelessness

Respondents were asked how many people they thought were homeless in Northern Ireland.



The official figure for statutory homelessness in Northern Ireland currently stands at 61,689 people (approximately 1 in 31 individuals). But this doesn't account for the estimated additional 25,000 people outside the system. The true scale of homelessness is therefore likely to be closer to 85,000 people.

There is widespread public concern about homelessness with:

**95%** of people believe it is important that we reduce homelessness in Northern Ireland.

**88%** of people believing everyone had the right to decent, safe and secure housing.

To read the full report  
scan the QR Code





Finding strength  
in uncertainty:

# Kelsey's Story

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While many children grow up supported by a loving family, Kelsey's childhood was starkly different. From a young age she faced upheaval and trauma without the safety net most of us take for granted. Instead of carefree days and happy childhood memories, her early years were marked by instability and survival.

Now, at just 19, Kelsey has faced more hardship than many experience in a lifetime.

Kelsey's story is one of a relentless drive for a different life and a determination to build a better future for herself.

Kelsey's teenage years were shaped by the breakdown of family relationships.

With no permanent place to call home, she moved between temporary accommodations and lived with strangers across two countries, all while trying to complete her education and navigate the challenges of a global pandemic. It was a time filled with constant upheaval, and the risk of falling into the wrong crowd was ever-present.

But Kelsey's determination never wavered. She knew she wanted more for herself. In 2024, she made the brave decision to return to Northern Ireland alone, where she was offered a place at The Foyer, Simon Community's temporary accommodation for young people aged 18–25.



***"I never imagined my life to be like this, moving from one place to another, no stability, no place to call home, no real relationship with my family," Kelsey shared. "But I know that right now, I'm exactly where I need to be."***

Kelsey quickly settled into life in the Foyer. The structure and support offered her a sense of stability she hadn't known in years. Simon Community's Foyer offers so much more than a roof over a young person's head. The tailored care and advice provided by Support Workers like Davy, help young people access the healthcare, job opportunities, well-being activities and housing advice they need. It is this support that gives each young person the best opportunity to move forward with their lives.

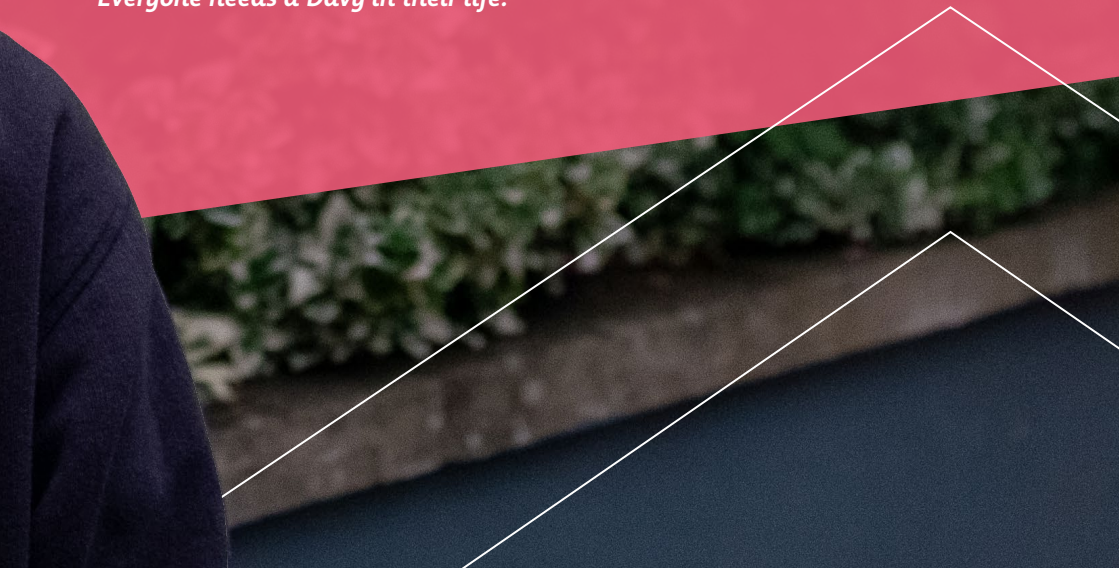
***"Davy and the rest of team have been such an amazing source of help and support over the past few months. They've been helping me with my housing application, with my mental health and with creating boundaries. Everyone needs a Davy in their life."***

Kelsey reflected on her love of learning and sport, and her hopes for the future. Currently working a part-time role in retail, she's keen to return to education and take up sports again to help secure a full-time role. She's looking forward to her own place and celebrating Christmas and her birthday with people who love and support her.

***"Christmas and birthdays have never been the best for me; I've always been a bit jealous of people who look forward to celebrating them."***

***"But I'm only 19 and I know that good times are coming for me and there'll be a time when I look forward to them too!"***

Kelsey's story is a powerful reminder of the strength it takes to choose a different path, even when the odds are stacked against you. Her journey continues, but her courage and resilience already speak volumes.



## A Spotlight on Women

In our recent Public Perceptions Poll, there is a notable gender bias in homelessness with 41% of the respondents associating homelessness primarily with men, while only 3% with females. This stark imbalance suggests homelessness is still overwhelmingly perceived as a male issue. However, the reality is very different.

- 56% of households currently experiencing homelessness are headed by women.
- More than 11,000 families are currently experiencing homelessness in Northern Ireland – 84% of these are led by women.
- Over 5,000 single females are also experiencing homelessness right now.

Behind closed doors, it is women bearing the brunt of the housing crisis. Women experiencing homelessness often face unique and heightened risks, including gender-based violence, exploitation, and trauma. These challenges make it essential to provide safe, supportive environments tailored to their specific needs.

The launch of Simon Community's first women-only temporary accommodation service this summer marks a significant milestone in the fight against female homelessness. This new service is the result of months of dedicated preparation which has transformed a building into a secure, welcoming space and equipped staff with specialist training to support women with complex needs.

The team's efforts reflect a deep understanding that women require more than just a roof over their heads, they need safety, dignity, and trauma-informed care.





Frances Black, Accommodation Manager, Women's Service in Belfast  
***"We know that there are gender specific pathways into homelessness which disproportionately affect women – these include domestic abuse, economic dependency and family breakdown."***

***Many of the woman now living in the service have a shared experience of domestic abuse, followed by the loss of financial independence, leaving them with nowhere to turn. Their stories highlight why gender-specific support is so vital.***

***I'm incredibly proud of our team and the unwavering commitment they've shown in bringing this service to life. Every detail, from the building's refurbishment to the specialist training has been shaped with compassion and care. Seeing the women who now call this place home begin to heal and grow is deeply moving. Their strength inspires us every day. We're excited about what the future holds and the impact this service will continue to have. This is just the beginning."***

Women-only spaces offer a safe, supportive environment where women can begin to rebuild their lives, free from fear, judgment, or pressure. These spaces create a sense of belonging and community, which is often the first step toward lasting stability and independence. For some women, mixed-gender accommodation works well - but others need the choice of a women-only service where they can feel safe and secure.

Our new women-only accommodation fills a vital gap in existing services. It's a bold step forward in making homelessness support for women more compassionate and responsive to real needs.

**The launch of this new service brings hope, safety, and the chance for every woman facing homelessness to thrive.**





## Simon's Story

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**Simon, 24, arrived at our Downpatrick temporary accommodation service in 2023 having already been homeless for a year. Following a traumatic event, his mental health declined, leading to a breakdown in family relationships and leaving him without a support network or stable income.**

Not knowing what to expect and unfamiliar with the environment and people, he was scared and anxious. But he quickly discovered that support was available.

In the past two years, Simon has made remarkable progress rebuilding his life. He has received tailored mental health support, built strong friendships with other residents, and even found ways to help others in similar situations.

We've also been on hand to support Simon with healthcare and his housing application as well as connecting him

with a well-being practitioner, local food banks and other community services.

Simon has struggled with the stigma of living in 'a hostel', worried about being judged and embarrassed to give out his address, but his experience shows that homelessness can affect anyone. Like most people, Simon just wants a stable happy life with a good job and a family.

Despite the challenges of living in temporary accommodation, Simon has worked so hard and continues to thrive – enjoying social activities and going to the gym. He has set himself a target of moving on in 6 months making plans to rent privately, get his driver's license and learn a trade.

Simon's experience highlights how with the right support at the right time it is possible to turn your life around.

***"The staff made me feel welcome and reassured me that they were there to help. It was such a relief to have a safe place to stay, a roof over my head, and a warm bed. I was grateful for basics like hot water, food, and a place to wash my clothes. Knowing I had support lifted a weight off my shoulders."***





## Aidan's Story



After 25 years together, Aidan's relationship ended at age 65, leaving him without a home. He spent a night sleeping rough in Belfast before being offered a room at Simon Community's Larne accommodation service.

Stepping through our doors brought immediate relief.

***"I didn't feel frightened. I felt safe,"*** Aidan shared.

***"The staff were brilliant from day one, helping with doctors, benefits, anything I needed."***

Now 66, Aidan is focused on rebuilding his independence. Despite serious health challenges, including lung cancer and asbestos exposure, he remains active and positive. Daily walks help him stay fit and clear his mind.

With support from his keyworker, Aidan has applied for his pension, secured additional benefits, and is getting ready to to apply for over-55s accommodation. He regularly attends community lunches, food-based activities, and enjoys visits from the project barber.

***"I've learned how to be independent again. Living here has been a positive experience, and I can now look forward to what's next."***

Aidan hopes to enjoy his retirement in a home of his own - and Simon Community are here to help him get there.

If you or someone you know is at risk of homelessness, please contact us at **0800 171 2222** or [click here to learn more](#).

While these stories reflect real experiences, names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy and dignity of the people involved.

# ONE BIG SLEEP OUT

Join us for One Big Sleep Out - make a real difference in one unforgettable night.

Step out of your comfort zone and spend one night under the stars to raise vital funds and awareness for people facing homelessness across Northern Ireland.

One Big Sleep Out is our powerful, award-winning annual event that brings together hundreds of people to sleep out at Stormont. We extend our heartfelt thanks to our incredible headline sponsor - Galgorm Collection, as well as our Primary Sponsor Portview Fit-Out, and Event Partner PropertyPal - for their generous support of this year's event.

Their support means so much - not just in making the event possible, but in showing real commitment to people across Northern Ireland who are facing homelessness. From helping us raise awareness to making sure everyone taking part has a safe and meaningful night, we couldn't do it without them.

*"At Galgorm, we believe in the power of community and the importance of standing alongside those who need support the most. Sponsoring the One Big Sleep Out is our way of helping shine a light on the realities of homelessness in Northern Ireland and supporting the incredible work of Simon Community. We're proud to be part of a movement that not only raises vital funds but also inspires hope and change."*

**Colin Johnston,**  
Managing Director,  
Galgorm Collection

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

**Where:** Stormont Estate, Belfast

**Registration Fee:** £40 -  
Minimum fundraising target £150

Scan here to find  
out more and  
register



Thank you Galgorm Collection, Portview Fit-Out and PropertyPal, we're one step closer to a future where everyone has a place to call home.

Headline Sponsor

**GALGORM**  
COLLECTION

Primary Sponsor

**Portview**

Event Supporter

**PropertyPal.com**

## You are invited to join us for Carols at St Anne's – An Evening of Reflection, Music, and Hope

As the festive season approaches and the year draws to a close, we invite you to take a pause from the hustle and bustle and join us for a truly special evening - **Carols at St Anne's**. This heartwarming event is more than just a carol service; it's a moment to come together as a community, to reflect on the year that has passed, and to look ahead with renewed hope for the future.

The evening will feature a rich and varied programme of music performed by local choirs and performers.

### When:

Wednesday 3rd December, 6.30 - 8.00pm

### Where:

St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast

### Afterwards:

Join us for mince pies, mulled drinks, and festive cheer in The Mac.

Bring your friends, your family, or simply yourself—and let's share in an evening that celebrates the true spirit of the season: peace, hope, and the joy of belonging.

### Tickets cost £10

(under 18s are free) - numbers are limited, early booking is encouraged.



Scan the QR code  
to secure your ticket





# Help Us Be Better – Take the Supporter Survey!

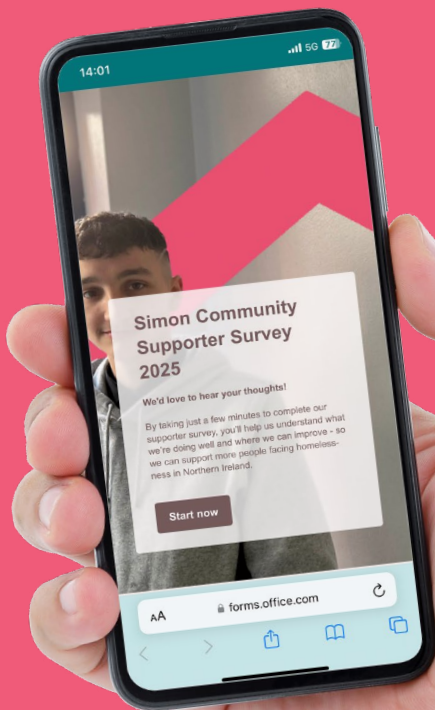
Take 10 minutes to tell us what you think.

Your feedback helps us share the right stories, keep you up to date in the ways that suit you best, and make sure our communication is clear and meaningful.

The survey closes on 30.11.25 - don't miss your chance to shape how we keep in touch with you and share the difference your support is making.

If you would like a paper copy of the survey, please email [supportercare@simoncommunity.org](mailto:supportercare@simoncommunity.org)

To speak to us call 028 9023 2882 (select fundraising)



Scan the QR Code to complete the survey!

