

Open Door



Stuart's Story

*Corporate
Partner Spotlight*

*Supporting Young
People in Need*



Welcome to *Open Door*, our new magazine that highlights the life-changing – and often life saving – work we do with your support.

The name *Open Door* perfectly reflects what we do at Simon Community. Our doors are open 24/7, 365 days a year, to those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Everything we do is driven by our commitment to end homelessness, helping people find and keep a safe, secure, and affordable home.

For 53 years, Simon Community has been working across Northern Ireland, originally operating during the early years of the Troubles. Whilst I'm very proud of our rich history and the people we have been able to help since then, it is heartbreaking that so many still need our help.

Today, levels of homelessness are at an all-time high. Over 85,000 people are on the social housing waiting list, and more than 55,500 are legally homeless. Despite these alarming

figures, I genuinely believe that, with the right political will, proper investment in affordable housing, and your continued support, we can end homelessness.

In this magazine, you'll learn more about the size and scale of the homelessness problem and meet some of the people we've been able to help with your support. You'll hear their stories, how we've supported them and their hopes for the future.

I hope you find *Open Door* interesting and we welcome your feedback or ideas on anything you would like to see in future issues.

In the meantime, on behalf of our charity and the people we exist to help, thank you again for your support.

Jim Dennison
CEO

ONE BIG SLEEP OUT

Join us for One
BIG Sleepout 2024!

When: Friday October 11th at 7pm to Saturday October 12th at 9am
Where: Stormont Estate, Belfast

In Northern Ireland, 1 in 34 people are homeless. Over 85,000 are waiting for a home. Simon Community believes change is possible and that homelessness can be prevented.

Simon Community invites you to join hundreds of people in our 'One BIG Sleepout' at Stormont on Friday 11th October. Sleep under the stars to raise awareness and funds for people experiencing homelessness across Northern Ireland. Sleeping out does not replicate homelessness, but it will send a powerful message that we must do things differently to end homelessness.

Can't make it in person? No problem! Join us from the comfort of your own garden. With One BIG Sleepout at Home, you choose the location, and your participation will still have a powerful impact.

What to Expect:

Community: connect with others creating positive change.
Safe Space: designated sleeping areas and all support provided.
By the Fireside: activities and performances to raise awareness of homelessness.

Your Impact:

Your participation provides hope and helps Simon Community support thousands of people each year.

How You Can Help:

Register: Sign up or form a team.
Fundraise: Use our tools to collect donations.
Donate: Consider giving if you can't join.
Spread the Word: Share using #OneBigSleepOut and #SleepOutForSimon.

Scan here to find out more and register

Register Now:

Registration fee: £40, Fundraising Target: £150
Together we can create a future where everyone has a home.



Stuart's Story



Stuart cared for his mother during her battle with dementia, but after she died, he became homeless. "My mental health hit rock bottom and I was desperate, nearly buying a tent to sleep in a park." His cousin suggested calling Simon Community's 24/7 helpline, and within three days, Stuart was offered a room in our temporary accommodation site in North Belfast.

Initially, Stuart was withdrawn and his key worker Paddy had to regularly check in on him. "Stuart was very nervous. He didn't realise he could stay for up to two years; he thought he'd have to leave after a few weeks." Paddy helped Stuart take small steps to improve his well-being, organising activities like walks in the mountains.

Over time, Stuart's confidence grew and he reconnected with friends and family.

When Stuart was ready to leave temporary accommodation and move into a home of his own, his options were severely limited. Social housing waiting lists are at record highs, leaving Stuart stuck in temporary accommodation. Fortunately, Simon Community were able to step in and offer him a permanent home through our Creating Homes Project.

Stuart is now safe and happy in his new home with his two cats, Sammie and Flair.

“ Simon Community literally saved my life. Home to me is security and comfort. Thanks to this home, I am happier than I have been in a long, long time. ”



Scan the QR to watch Stuart share his story.

What is Social Housing?

Social housing is housing that is provided by not-for-profit organisations. In Northern Ireland, this is mainly through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and housing associations. It offers affordable rent and secure tenancies, often for those with the greatest need or from the lowest household incomes.

How Does it Work?

To qualify for social housing, you must apply through the NIHE. Your application is assessed based on need, with priority given to those who meet certain criteria, such as being homeless or having dependent children. Applicants are placed on a waiting list and allocated housing based on a points system, not on a first-come, first-served basis.

In order to be eligible for social housing in Northern Ireland a person must:

- be habitually resident
- have a right to reside in Northern Ireland
- not be subject to immigration control or restricted from accessing public funds

What are the benefits of social housing?

Affordability: Lower rent compared to private housing.

Security: Tenants have more secure tenancies.

Support: Access to additional support services.

Community: Often located in well-established communities.

What are the disadvantages of social housing?

Waiting Lists: Long waiting times due to high demand. Today, there are over 86,000 people on the waiting list.

Limited Choice: Less flexibility in choosing a location.

Stigma: Sometimes associated with negative perceptions.

In summary, social housing is critical and it provides affordable, secure accommodation for low-income and vulnerable individuals, helping reduce homelessness and housing insecurity.

Simon Community are urgently calling on the government to invest in social housing. Without it, we cannot stop the escalating homelessness crisis in Northern Ireland.

Corporate Partner Spotlight: A&L Goodbody and Simon Community

Since April 2023, Simon Community has been fortunate to be partnered with A&L Goodbody (ALG) through their employee fundraising and volunteering activities. ALG has been involved in Simon Community's Dragon Boat Race, Sweaters for Simon, and our festive 'Sing for Simon', but a standout moment was the recent volunteer day at Linen Hall Court in Armagh. ALG employees worked alongside the people we help and our staff to transform a wellbeing garden, leaving a lasting impact for the community in the future.

In addition to hands-on volunteering, ALG has also provided pro bono data protection training to Simon's senior leadership team. This partnership aligns with ALG's Responsible Business objectives, focusing on reducing

inequalities and supporting their local community.

"Our partnership with Simon represents a shared commitment to making a positive impact in the community, by working together, we create lasting change, not just through financial support, but by encouraging our people to actively participate in things that make a real difference to people's lives."

Suzie O'Shea, Senior Responsible Business Executive, A&L Goodbody



To learn more about Social Housing scan the QR code to head over to our knowledge hub for more information.



Justin's Story

Justin's path to homelessness began following a relationship breakdown. At first, he stayed with his sister and her family, but he knew this couldn't last in the long term due to lack of space. Forced to stay with friends or crash on sofas, Justin became one of Northern Ireland's 'hidden homeless'. For months, he was sofa surfing and moving from one place to the next, not accessing support or help. As a result, Justin began to develop drug and alcohol problems.

When Justin finally reached out for help, he was just 23. He moved into a Simon Community temporary accommodation service in Lisburn and despite feeling nervous about being there, he quickly received support from the team on mental health, substance use and medical appointments.

"I never met people with similar experiences; we're all just looking for a place to stay, and there is no judgement."

Having been with Simon Community for 4 months, Justin can now focus on finding a job and getting back on track. He dreams of a stable life and having a family.

"I'd like to thank Simon Community for being welcoming and caring."

'It's not good for the head, sofa surfing; it depresses you and makes you think about life, but there are people out there who have it a lot worse.'

All Ireland Hidden Homelessness Poll Findings

In June, Simon Community released new research that reveals significant underreporting of homelessness in Northern Ireland.

Official government statistics state that **55,500 people** are homeless. However our research suggests that there are a further **25,000 people who are currently experiencing "hidden" homelessness** - people who are not engaging with the statutory bodies and are therefore invisible to the official system.

Our data indicates that many people who are 'hidden homeless' experience it for at least six months. Long periods in temporary accommodations, like B&Bs, hostels, or cars, has severe long-term effects on mental and physical health, with repercussions felt by individuals and the health service for years to come.

The rising cost of private rents is worsening the problem, pushing more people into homelessness. Young people are particularly at risk.

One person shared, *"There were no houses available, so my niece and her children moved in with my sister-in-law. They stayed there for nearly a year before finding a private rental through a friend."*

We believe it is crucial that the government shift focus from emergency responses to prevention, with a robust housing strategy as a priority to address this crisis.

Thanks to your support we are able to advance our understanding of homelessness in Northern Ireland and drive the change needed to end it.

To learn more about Hidden Homelessness in Northern Ireland scan the QR code or visit www.simoncommunity.org/homelessness/knowledge-hub/all-ireland-hidden-homelessness





Dean's Story

Dean was 13 years old when he was taken into care. On turning 18, he became homeless. For the past six months, he has been living at Simon Community's Belfast Foyer, a temporary accommodation service for young people aged 18-25.

"The staff at Simon Community are here 24/7 – I always know help is there when needed," Dean says.

With support, Dean has been able to make a plan for his future. He has been accepted into Belfast Metropolitan College for classes in September and has received an offer of a house.

Meg, one of the Simon Community team at the Foyer said *"Dean has been holding down a job since the day he walked through the Foyer. He puts in the work and is a credit to himself."*

One day, Dean hopes to become a social worker so that he is able to help others with similar experiences.



Thomas's Story

Thomas, 18, lives in one of Simon Community's Supported Living Services for Young People. Coming from a care background of 12 years, he moved frequently and never had a stable home. After brief stays with family members, Thomas found support with Simon Community.

"The staff here have been amazing, helping me become more independent," says Thomas. *"They taught me how to manage my finances and set up utilities. Monthly one-on-one sessions help me focus on my mental health."*

Thomas recently enrolled in an employability program with Springboard to gain job qualifications. His goal is to find a stable home and settle down in life.

Supporting Young People in Need

Did you know that 18- to 25-year-olds make up one-third of our clients at Simon Community? We know that young people, especially those leaving care, are at a higher risk of homelessness. Every year, 120 care leavers in Northern Ireland end up without a home, facing even further uncertainty and instability.

Our Housing First for Youth service provides a vital lifeline for some of these young people. This programme provides immediate housing and 24/7 support to young care leavers at risk. Unlike traditional methods, Housing First gives the young person a stable place to live right away and the security they need to start building their futures.

Our service offers more than just a roof over their head. We provide help with:



Education



Jobs



Mental health



Life skills



■ 18 - 25 years ■ 25+ years

The Housing First for Youth service gives young people the tools they need to overcome challenges and become independent members of their communities.

The impact is real. Young people in our programme report better health, stronger community ties and fewer risky behaviors. Many say the service has saved their lives.

Your continued support makes this possible. Together we're helping young people avoid homelessness and achieve their full potential.

To learn more, scan the QR code below to read the ins and outs of the service from Connel McKenna, our Senior Operations Lead for Housing First for Youth.





A Festive Invitation to You

Simon Community is delighted to invite you to our first Carols at St Anne's on the evening of Wednesday 4th December 2024 at St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast.

Hosted by BBC journalist Tara Mills, Carols at St Anne's will combine music, storytelling and reflection. Featuring a variety of local choirs and performers, the event will be an opportunity to celebrate the festive season whilst looking forward to a future without homelessness.

To reserve your place, visit www.simoncommunity.org/get-involved/events/carols-at-st-annes



A Legacy for the Future

A gift in your Will can help end homelessness once and for all.

Leaving a legacy to Simon Community ensures that people facing homelessness receive the essential support, shelter and care they desperately need. Your gift will have a lasting impact, helping to provide safe homes and rebuild lives for years to come.

A Gift of any size, big or small, can help struggling families get the support they need and will create a powerful, enduring legacy.

If you would like any further information or if you have any questions about leaving a gift in your Will to Simon Community, please contact our team on 028 90232 882 or email legacy@simoncommunity.org

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Ending Homelessness

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