

Sophia Housing Association
Press Release
September 15th, 2005

Who doesn't have the right to a home?
Those on the fringes remain marginalised

89% of the public feel that the Govt is letting the homeless person down by failing to provide enough housing and appropriate support services. That's according to the results of a startling new LMR Consumer Survey commissioned by Sophia Housing on foot of the launch of their transitional housing project in Donabate Dublin this coming Thursday by President of Ireland, Mary McAleese.

Sophia is calling for the Government to come to its senses. *"Until we as a society radically review both our attitude towards and treatment of people who are homeless, we cannot realistically address the crisis figure (5,000 homeless and in the region of 50,000 households in the need of housing) of homeless in our country,"* according to Jean Quinn D.W. and Eamonn Martin who were speaking ahead of the launch of the Sophia Housing project in Donabate.

However, in stark contrast the survey figures indicate 47% of the population believes that homeless people chose to be that way and could in fact return to their homes if they really wanted to. Not surprisingly, the public's perception that homelessness is in fact perceived as houselessness was highlighted when 88% saw a homeless person as someone who slept rough or on the streets. Only 33% would definitely consider someone taking accommodation in a hostel as being in fact homeless. Groups identified by the public as not being deserving of support in trying to find or establish a home included those very much on the fringes of society. Up to 81% felt that groups such as drug addicts, ex prisoners, prostitutes fell into this category.

This Thursday, September 15th 2005, President McAleese will unveil Sophia's latest project undertaking with the official launch of the new transitional housing project, which is being undertaken in conjunction with Fingal County Council. The project will facilitate twenty families, a nurturing place for children, training facilities, various counselling rooms and staff facilities. Sophia also provides a tenancy sustainment programme, consisting of 6 houses and apartments being provided in conjunction with the Fingal Council throughout the Fingal area.

Sophia Housing is a unique collaboration of religious orders and lay people who are supporting a new and innovative approach to housing for single people and families. Major projects under development: Cork Street, Dublin 8 - Tallaght, Dublin 24 - Churchtown, Dublin 14 - Artane, Dublin 5 - Portlaoise - Cork - West of Ireland.

Jean Quinn D.W. a pioneer of transitional housing in Ireland, has facilitated the collaboration of Religious Orders together with various lay people with a wealth of experience to provide accommodation and holistic support for marginalised and vulnerable people.

Commenting on this visionary approach Sr. Jean Quinn says that the bringing together of the talents and gifts within the various Congregations and the collaboration with lay persons and various bodies gives a unique opportunity to address the emerging and ever changing needs of those who are out of home.

The collaboration was in direct response to a growing need to provide integrated services for the marginalised and included, of course, the provision of good, quality affordable housing for those on low income. As services began to come on stream the intention was to provide a holistic way of looking at peoples marginalisation/homelessness and providing the necessary supports to facilitate reintegration into the community, such as transitional and long term

housing as well as child care support services. Sr. Jean is quick to highlight some of the inequalities that led to this holistic approach being taken.

"I wanted Sophia to try and alleviate the root causes of poverty – lack of education, housing and childcare support. We want to simply empower people, women and men, to move from dependency to self-sufficiency". Speaking in response to the survey findings Sr. Jean Quinn, founder and Director of Sophia Housing replied, "The struggle for social justice in this country will never end irrespective of the colour of someone's skin, background or personal history. The poverty we live in is more than simply the poverty of economics. Ireland however, has the worst human poverty rate outside of the US in the developed world and 1:4 children in this country live in poverty. All people on the margins of Irish society deserve a better life and we have an obligation to try and provide one"