HomePlace
Your Newsletter from the heart of Sophia Housing
Sophia
providing homes • supporting people
April 2026

"All I ever wanted was to be a good mother"



Teresa arrived at Sophia Housing with her three frightened children shivering beside her, and any belongings she could carry in plastic bags.

She had travelled a long road to get here. Not in distance, but through decades shaped by discrimination, violence, addiction and loss. Roads that eventually led her exhausted, traumatised and afraid – to Sophia, seeking safety for herself and her children.

Today, the welcome Teresa received then still radiates from her.

There is a warmth and quiet confidence about her that you feel from the first moment you meet her. She speaks thoughtfully, with a depth of wisdom that comes not just from her heart, but from the life experiences that broke it, and helped to mend it.

A childhood in exclusion

Teresa grew up within the Traveller Community, surrounded by poverty and facing discrimination from an early age. Exclusion shaped her childhood and school years, leaving her without literacy, confidence or any sense of self-worth.

"Fear was the first feeling I remember," Teresa says. "And not being good enough. The times when I did get to go to school, the other children felt they couldn't be friends with somebody like me. Discrimination makes you want to stay in the shadows."

Despite this, somewhere deep inside, she carried a quiet determination.

"Anything I ever did, I wanted to do to the best of my ability. But circumstances kept me limited." As a very young woman, Teresa married and began raising her family. Soon after, violence entered her life and with it, fear and isolation. Without having the support, a safe space or even the language to speak about what was happening, she turned to self-medication.

"Nobody in our community spoke about addiction 30 years ago. Some of these things are still hard to talk about."

Living in survival mode

For decades, Teresa lived in constant flight-mode. Her life became a cycle of moving, reacting and barely surviving. She relocated to England, then back to family in the west. To Dublin. To treatment centres. Even to prison. Always searching for peace – but without the consistent support she and her children needed.

"I was physically broken, mentally ill, scared and alone," she says. "And I still felt like that little kid at school hearing, 'You can't be friends with her.'"

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Meet Jade, Project Manager at Sophia's Donabate Family Homes

A look at Sophia's impact around Ireland in 2026

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The shame and embarrassment were overwhelming. Trauma stayed buried, deeper and ever deeper. And the pressure of trying to hold everything together, especially for her children – eventually took its toll.

When everything fell apart

"I was in turmoil," Teresa explains. "Two and a half years into recovery, I still hadn't healed. I had a nervous breakdown. My mental health was broken."

She describes a life spent juggling responsibilities and expectations until it all collapsed. "I was keeping so many balls in the air that if one dropped, I'd panic. I had my children back and was supposed to be 'better' – to just get on as if nothing had happened."

Trying to protect her children while falling apart inside herself, Teresa relapsed. She lost her home and faced charges.

"When I came to Sophia with two school-aged daughters and my baby boy, there was no one to protect us."

Housing First. Healing Begins.

Teresa arrived at Sophia Housing in Donabate more broken than she had ever been. "I was full of fear, anxiety and trauma that had never been looked at."

"Just knowing my children were safe allowed my body and mind to come out of flight-mode."

For the first time in her life, fear loosened its grip and Teresa could begin to heal – not just to survive, but to rebuild.

The courage to ask for help

After a few weeks at Sophia, Teresa felt safe enough to be vulnerable. "I knocked on the manager's door and said, 'I can't do this on my own. I need help.'" She was met with respect, dignity and care. "I'm very proud," she says. "But what I learned is that when you put pride down and allow yourself to be vulnerable with the right people, in the right place – amazing things can happen." Her key worker supported her to rebuild, not just practically, but emotionally and psychologically.



"Women are afraid to come forward because they fear losing their children. Those fears are bigger than people realise – and women fall through the cracks."



At Sophia, safety became the foundation she had never known. A secure gate. Security cameras. Staff on site. Her children safe each day in the Nurturing Centre crèche.

"I learned it was time to stop hiding," Teresa says gently. "Be honest. Take heart. Be brave. Have courage. Have faith."

Rebuilding from the inside out

During her five years at Sophia Housing in Donabate, Teresa returned to education and began rebuilding her life from the inside out. Today, she works as an outreach worker supporting women in the Traveller Community – helping to bring conversations about mental health and domestic violence into the open. "I want to challenge opinions the right way," she says. "I don't want anyone's beautiful

"If I leave anything behind, it won't be a legacy of failure. I was called to put hope into someone else's life."

daughters and sons to face prejudice." She speaks from experience about the fears that stop women from seeking help. Her work is rooted in hope.

Peace that can't be taken away

Teresa is deeply aware that caring for herself is essential if she is to care for others. "It's okay to mind your mental health," she says. "To love yourself. To know you are good enough." She finds solace in quiet routines – cleaning her home, sitting in silence, walking the beach and talking to her Higher Power. "I've found peace that can't be robbed or stolen. No one owns it but me."

A future built on dignity

In January, Teresa moved on from Sophia Housing into her permanent home. She is thriving, grounded, hopeful and paying her gratitude forward. She remains in contact with Sophia staff, who she describes as family.

"All of this progress just started with the bricks and mortar," she reflects, "and now I've built a foundation inside myself." Teresa's journey is a powerful reminder of what your support of Sophia – bringing safety and compassion can make possible. It's creating something beautiful in the lives you save.

Because when people are given time, dignity and support, they don't just survive. They rebuild, they heal, and they go on to help others do the same. Thank you for your kindness, bringing these precious gifts to Teresa and all Sophia's residents.

Meet *Jade*, Project Manager at Sophia's Donabate Family Homes

With years of experience in Social Care, Jade brings deep, hands-on knowledge to her role as Manager of Sophia's Donabate transitional family housing. But just as importantly, she brings warmth, positivity and a belief in people – qualities that shape the atmosphere behind the gate every day.



Jade, Manager of Sophia's Donabate family homes, brings warmth, leadership and over 12 years' social care experience to supporting families as they move from crisis to stability.

We spoke with Jade about her work, the families who live at Donabate, and how Sophia supports both residents and staff.

Jade, can you tell us what drew you to work at Sophia?
I've been working in Social Care for over twelve years, and I've seen the impact that trauma, homelessness and instability can have on families, especially children. But what drew me to Sophia was the ethos at the heart of this charity. It really does feel like family here – not only for residents, but among the staff team as well. That culture has been embedded from the very beginning, and you feel it the minute you walk through the door. There's a shared understanding of why we're here and how we treat people.

For people who may not know the Donabate development, what does it look like?
You could easily walk past and not realise what's behind the gate. There are 21 family residences here: 19 two-bedroom apartments and two three-bedroom apartments – all designed as short-term, supported housing for families with children. Each apartment has its own kitchen, bathroom, laundry facilities and living room, just like any other home. For families coming from shared emergency hotel or hostel accommodation, having their own front door, privacy and space makes an enormous difference. This is a safe, secure place where families can begin to build a foundation for moving on to permanent housing.

What are families experiencing when they first arrive?
There's often a huge sense of relief. Many parents have been struggling for a long time, living in crisis. Just knowing they have a safe place to call home, and that their children are secure, allows them to breathe for the first time. That certainty is important. Parents need time to settle before they can even begin to look at the underlying issues that brought them to homelessness in the first place.

How does support begin once families move in?
Everyone now has their own home to manage, and that can feel overwhelming at first, especially if people haven't had that responsibility in a long time. Some families ask for support with very practical things initially: grocery shopping, meal planning, cooking or household cleaning, even taking the bus. Those everyday life skills are often the first step in rebuilding confidence. Other parents might need support strengthening relationships with their children after a time of instability. That can mean helping to establish routines for getting out the door to school on time, or creating games that reward and reinforce positive behaviour. If there's a way to win, we'll find it!

"If there's a way to win, we'll find it!"

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INVITATION

You are invited to the Opening Day of New Sophia Homes in Portlaoise!

Together with Sophia, the Presentation Sisters N.E. Province celebrate 52 new homes on the site of Presentation Convent, Portlaoise. The project was completed on time and within budget, offering a new chapter of hope and security.

Please join us in Portlaoise on **Wednesday 29th April** to celebrate the opening of 52 new Sophia homes with wrap-around support to families, couples and individuals. Bring a guest (or two!) and enjoy a cup of tea with us, and a tour of the development in its lovely town-park setting.



Space is limited! Don't wait!
Please book before Friday 24th April by contacting Emma Murphy, Head of Philanthropy at emmajmurphy@sophia.ie or by calling 087 1464359.



The Nurturing Centre at Donabate serves our resident children.

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Sophia offers trauma-informed care. What does that mean?

The families here share a common bond in having experienced homelessness and trauma – but every family's situation is unique. That's why our response has to be individual, compassionate and non-judgemental. That's been the Sophia Way before we knew what the term trauma-informed care even meant.When families arrive, we start with a pre-assessment meeting. The most important thing at that stage is reassurance. It's not easy – or realistic – for people to share every aspect of their history straight away. Having fragile mental health or struggles with addiction doesn't mean someone can't be here. There's nothing they need to hide from us. We can manage these things together, at the family's pace.

What role does the Key Worker play?

After the pre-assessment, each family is assigned a Key Worker. This is the staff member they'll be closest to and who will support them throughout their time with us. The Key Worker can help with physical safety and emotional wellbeing, navigating family situations like restraining orders or supervised visits, organising finances and paying bills, attending appointments, or linking families with legal advice and specialist services. Whatever help is needed on a practical level is often the best place to start building trust. Sometimes it begins with a daily check-in and grows from there. Alongside that, families work with their Key Worker to create a self-designed care plan. From the start, we're always looking towards the move-on strategy and preparing families for that transition.

Children are central to Sophia's work. Can you tell us about the Nurturing Centre?

The Nurturing Centre is right at the heart of the Donabate development. From toddlers to after-school care, up to 60 children can attend. It's a warm, positive environment with indoor and outdoor spaces for play, led by expert staff. Children can explore, learn and build friendships – and most importantly, feel safe and secure. For parents, knowing their children are happy and cared for gives them the mental space to focus on their own recovery and rebuilding.

Social care is emotionally demanding work. How does Sophia support staff?

That support is crucial. Sophia is a national organisation, and one of the things I really value is the flat hierarchy. I can pick up the phone and ring a colleague anywhere in the country and know I'll be supported. We're encouraged to work collaboratively and reach out to one another.

How is the nature of homelessness changing, and how is Donabate responding?

The face of homelessness has changed completely. There's no stereotype anymore. We have families with adult children, young people with autism, and students attending third-level education, getting up early to travel to places like Maynooth each morning. Our response has to be nimble and flexible to reflect that reality.

One idea we're working towards this year is creating a shared Sensory Haven onsite. There needs to be a quiet communal space for residents. It would benefit parents who need time to re-centre, teenagers who need a calm place to sit with themselves outside the family home, and younger children who would gain from sensory exploration. It's a goal I'm really hopeful about.

Finally, what motivates you in this role?
People arrive here at one of the hardest moments of their lives. My job is to meet them with dignity, safety and belief in what's possible. When families feel supported rather than judged, when they feel safe enough to begin again, that's when real change can happen. Being part of that journey is a privilege.

Can you help with a Big Wish?

Please help us create a Sensory Haven for parents, teens and children at Sophia in Donabate.

A nearly-new portacabin is being given for Jade to create this special, calming space for all residents from stressed parents to busy toddlers. Currently there are 13 children with extra needs who would benefit from having a neutral, shared place to regulate their complex emotions. We estimate all costs to total €10,000.

If you can make a donation to help, please ring Emma at 087-1464359. Thank you!

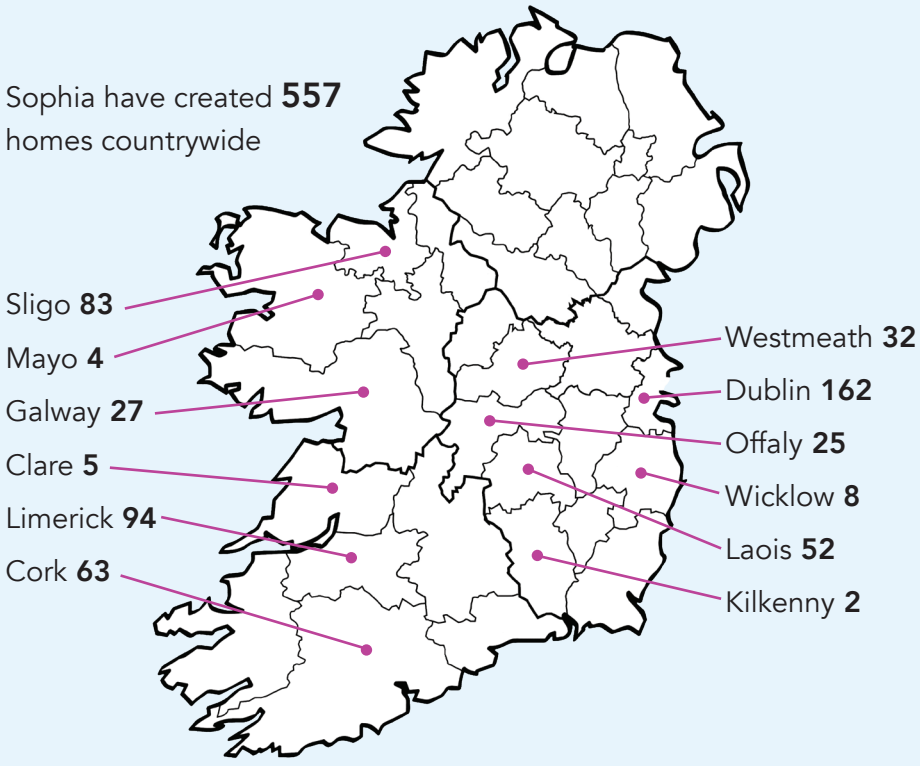


Emma can be reached at 087 1464359 or by email to emmajmurphy@sophia.ie

There's no place like home...

A look at Sophia around Ireland in 2026

For children and adults who've been without a home, your gift to Sophia gives the support that helps people and families to exit homeless permanently.



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