HomePlace
Your Newsletter from the heart of Sophia Housing

Sophia
providing homes • supporting people

October 2025

Sophia Housing celebrates our Founder and Patron, Jean Quinn D.W.

April 15th was a very special day for everyone at Sophia Housing. The sun shone down on the Wisdom Centre at Cork Street in Dublin 8 – the heart of where our story began in 1997. Residents, the Daughters of Wisdom, Board members, staff and honoured guests gathered to proudly celebrate our Founder, Jean Quinn D.W by appointing her Patron of Sophia.



Jean Quinn D.W. was appointed as our Patron on April 15th at a special event hosted at the heart of Sophia Housing - the Wisdom Centre, Cork Street, Dublin 8.



Maureen Seddon D.W., Gráinne Hilton D.W. and Jean Quinn D.W.

A Home for Life

Jean's vision for Sophia was as straightforward as it was ambitious: that people experiencing homelessness should have the secure home they deserve, with the care and compassion they need to thrive. She knew that people deserve more than just a bed for the night. People need a home and the warmth of kindness to fulfill their potential.

It is in the sanctuary of home that the work of recovering from the trauma of poverty and homelessness begins. Jean was far ahead of her time, advocating the *Housing First* model in response to homelessness before it was even a term we knew.

Jean saw not only how trauma wounds the spirit, but also how compassion and empathy can heal it. Her approach was at the forefront of what we now recognize as trauma-informed care. She simply called it the "Sophia Way." This warmth and empathy still guides our work every day at Sophia Housing.

Founded on Wisdom

Jean's ideas and goals were encouraged by her Congregation, the Daughters of Wisdom. And since 1997, her vision has become as real and solid as bricks and mortar.

Today, Sophia provides over 500 homes and supports more than 1,200 people – **490 of whom are children** - across Ireland. Thanks to the hard work, determination, vision and leadership of people like Jean pioneering *Housing First*, this approach is now the cornerstone of the Irish State's response to homelessness.

We are delighted to honour our Founder, Jean Quinn D.W. as Patron of Sophia.

Since 1997, Jean's vision has become as real and solid as bricks and mortar

Inside your HomePlace Newsletter...

Celebrating Founder and Patron JEAN QUINN D.W.

Address by our Chairperson, MICHAEL McCARTHY

Where Mercy & Wisdom Met: *Reflections from Helena O'Donaghue RSM*

A Shared Journey of Service *Insights from Frances Crowe, PBVM*

Celebrating Jean Quinn D.W.

Sophia's Founder and Patron



Jean Quinn D.W. spoke about Sophia's origins, on becoming Patron.

Jean shared how witnessing and listening to people's experience of the trauma of homelessness motivated her to found Sophia as a radically different response to homelessness. Jean outlined that in 1997, it was very clear to her that just offering services alone, to people who don't have a place to call home, lacked compassion and sustainability. Instead the approach she took in founding Sophia was to place the person's needs at the centre of the response to homelessness.

Jean thanked the Daughters of Wisdom for their enduring trust, support and commitment to Sophia.

Jean also commended the Religious Congregations around Ireland, who imagined a society where people were at first provided a home, and then were offered support.

Jean reminded those gathered for the celebrations that former President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, spoke at the 58th Session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development in 2020. The former President had paid tribute to the model of Sophia Housing as being ahead of its time when it was established in 1997 – "before there was any reference to ***Housing First*** in the media or political discourse, Jean's vision of offering Housing with Support was in existence".

Jean outlined that the work of Sophia continues and said it is timely to acknowledge and pay tribute to the support of all the Religious Congregations. ***"You shared my vision and made it possible for so many women, men, families and children to build their futures through Sophia. Thank you".***

UNANIMA International advocates for women and children experiencing homelessness/displacement and who are victims of human trafficking, and brings their voices to the United Nations. Since 2017, Jean has led the work of UNANIMA International as Executive Director. During this time Jean has put the issue of homelessness on the UN agenda for the first time, as evidenced by the UN General Secretary Report to the UN Assembly in August 2025.



Michael McCarthy, Chairperson of Sophia addresses guests as Jean Quinn D.W. is honoured as Sophia's Patron.

Address from Sophia's Chairperson, Michael McCarthy *April 15, 2025*

...let me acknowledge the kindness and generosity of all the Religious Congregations with us today. You are at the very heart of this work. Thank you for making it possible for people to recover from homelessness. It is this news – and this being Easter Week it is the *Good News* – rarely reported by media, made possible by the kind generosity of Religious Congregations.

"As we celebrate Jean's role in founding Sophia, three important points come to mind. First, how alive Jean's vision for Sophia is. It is testament to Jean's dream over 30 years ago that Sophia has thrived and evolved.

"Secondly, the bonds between us. We are "Sophia people." We believe in justice and the power of warm and professional support services. I pay tribute to the volunteer Board members here to celebrate this event. I give thanks to our dedicated staff and the wonderful work you do which makes Sophia so special.

"Thirdly, let me acknowledge the kindness and generosity of all the Religious Congregations with us today. You are at the very heart of this work. Thank you for making it possible for people to recover from homelessness. It is this news – and this being Easter Week it is the *Good News* – rarely reported by media, made possible by the kind generosity of Religious Congregations.

"This work is not for the faint-hearted. It takes courage, skill and most of all a vision. All of us in Sophia so much appreciate Jean agreeing to be our Patron, and she'll continue to inspire us with Sophia's model of providing safe, secure homes."

Where Mercy and Wisdom Met:
Sophia's First Homes

Once a house of religious life, the Sisters of Mercy Convent on Cork Street is now a community of 50 homes for people and families who had known the pain of homelessness.



Sr. Helena O'Donoghue RSM

On the occasion of celebrating Jean Quinn D.W. as Patron of Sophia Housing, Sr. Helena described the pioneering collaboration between the Mercy Sisters and the Daughters of Wisdom:

"...When it was agreed that we would transfer the whole complex to Sophia as a millennial gesture on our part, and as an anchor for the new venture on their part, there were whoops of joy, relief and hope from both parties..."

"I'm very happy to join this special celebration recognising Sr. Jean Quinn, Daughter of Wisdom and Founder. Given the many roles which Jean has filled – from founding, encouraging, being CEO and Board member of Sophia – it is most appropriate and entirely right that Jean should become its Patron.

"I'm especially happy because of the close association between Wisdom and Mercy, between Sophia and the Mercy Sisters. It was the vision, courage and creativity of Jean that brought us together at the turn of the Millennium. ***The vision – believing in the inherent human dignity and potential of everyone caught in the distress of homelessness***. We saw how that potential can be released when the provision of a home is accompanied by caring professional support, pleasant surroundings and a reflective environment. With courage, creativity and persuasiveness it's possible to open up a new approach in addressing the ever more difficult challenge of homelessness.

"In the Millennium year, we Mercies were looking for an organisation that would engage with us on the succession journey. The Cork Street complex was on our minds. It had a large supported-living building for women, a day service for people in need, and a community of sisters. Along the way we met Sophia – or they met us! The ethos, values and practical compassion of the recently-formed Sophia resonated strongly with us.

"I remember the final meeting – preceded by several explorations. When it was agreed that we would transfer the whole complex to Sophia as a millennial gesture on our part, and as an anchor for the new venture on their part, there were whoops of joy, relief and hope from both parties. That was the beginning – it has been more quietly replicated many times since around Ireland over the years, and it continues."

"For me, one of the great strengths of Sophia was the foresight of the Daughters of Wisdom in enabling and encouraging Jean to take up this new venture and run with it. Such a blessing, for a yet unproven project, could not be assumed! And many a good idea fell by the wayside in the cautious decision-making rooms of religious orders! But Wisdom (with a capital W) prevailed, due to Jean's passionate advocacy, and in time the support of many religious orders duly materialised.

"Today, Sophia is a significant player in addressing homelessness and has marked several milestones in recent years. It continues to evolve even as Jean's presence has to adjust to the many calls on her gifts in other fields at home and abroad. But her influence is always present. And with that of the early supporters, she has shaped and imbued many past and current staff members with the same values, ethos and practices of Sophia for almost three decades. Indeed, other organisations and State agencies are influenced by Sophia's holistic responses to people seeking the basic stability of home as being more effective and successful.

"Sophia will continue to be needed in our unfair, unjust and unforgiving world. The State, having primary responsibility for the care of vulnerable citizens, needs the voluntary sector as a partner.

The State response is often slow, it can be cumbersome, rigid and impersonal. The voluntary sector is less constrained. Within the boundaries of law and regulation, it can often break new ground, evolve with the times, and respond with greater agility and compassion to the unacceptable conditions of homelessness and human distress. This is exactly what Jean and Sophia have achieved many times over.

"For these and many other reasons, it is eminently appropriate, right and good that Jean should become Patron of Sophia, an organisation which is the very essence of wisdom and compassion. And so with everyone here I rejoice with you Jean, I thank you for your enormous generosity and look forward to the continued success of Sophia under your Patronage. Congratulations Jean!"

The Presentation Sisters and Sophia:

A Shared Journey of Service

Together with Sophia, the Presentation Sisters N.E. Province are developing 52 new homes on the site of Presentation Convent, Portlaoise. The project is being delivered on time and within budget, offering a new chapter of hope and security.



Sr. Frances Crowe and Sr. Mary McDermott with Jean Quinn, D.W. (centre).

At our celebration of Founder and Patron Jean Quinn, D.W., Sr. Frances Crowe, former Provincial of the Presentation Sisters N.E. reflected on the enduring partnership between the Sisters and Sophia. Sr. Frances spoke of the inspiration she felt by Sophia's staff members dedicating their skills and passion to social justice through Sophia, and she warmly congratulated Jean Quinn, D.W., for founding such a lasting vision of dignity in housing.

In 1824, the Presentation Sisters founded in Portlaoise a school and community to provide free primary education for disadvantaged children. Two centuries later, the same spirit of service continues, now in response to one of today's most urgent needs: housing for people and families who are homeless.



Two hundred years after founding their school in Portlaoise, the Presentation Sisters now respond with Sophia to today's urgent call: providing homes and supporting people.

Our warmest thanks to the Presentation Sisters for bringing people home to Sophia.

HOUSING FIRST

Across Europe: Learning, Testing, Scaling

Sophia is leading an EU-supported learning partnership on Housing First with three renowned pioneers: Arrels Foundation (Barcelona), Housing First Berlin and Y-Foundation (Finland). Together, we're comparing what works in very different housing markets and welfare systems – and translating those lessons into practical change for Ireland.

At its heart, Housing First is simple and radical: home first, support always. Instead of asking people to be "housing ready," we provide a permanent home quickly and wrap flexible, person-centred supports around each tenant. The partnership allows us to pressure-test that model across contexts – Mediterranean, Central European, Nordic and Irish – so we can see which elements are universal and which need tailoring.

For Sophia, the partnership accelerates our ability to scale with fidelity – keeping the core principles (choice, separation of housing and treatment, harm reduction, recovery orientation) while fitting Irish realities like HAP, local authority allocations, and health support. We're packaging the learning into practical toolkits to continue developing proof of evidence and demonstrate what the Housing First model achieves for people in homelessness with complex needs.



The research findings will be launched this coming November. To receive your copy, just contact ***emmajmurphy@sophia.ie***

A Legacy of Education and Belonging

Thanks to the Sisters of Charity of St. Paul the Apostle, nine homes for older people are created in Limerick.



The Sisters' legacy endures at St. Paul's Convent on Castle Lane. This landmark in the town will be a new homeplace in the community.

In 1903, four Sisters of Charity of St. Paul the Apostle arrived in Kilfinane, Co. Limerick. The Sisters taught the local children, nurturing both mind and spirit in the vibrant space for learning they'd built.

Today, that spirit of service continues. Partnering with Sophia, the Sisters' historic convent now offers not only a link to Kilfinane's past, but lights a beacon toward its future. Turning a place of education into secure homes with a focus on older persons, the nine self-contained apartments will be ready this October.

Thank you Sisters of St. Paul the Apostle for giving the gift of home with Sophia.

In Every Room, a Story of New Life

Sophia celebrates housing justice with the Sisters of St. John of God, Kilkenny



This project – blending restoration with renewal – translates a place of prayer and community into a source of stability and belonging.

On College Road in Kilkenny, the former home of the Sisters of St. John of God will be lovingly transformed into new homes. With planning permission granted, Sophia will convert the convent into 14 thoughtfully designed apartments and build eight additional semi-detached and terraced homes on the site. It is a true testament to the Sisters' enduring mission of care and compassion, now adapted for a new chapter of housing justice.

Thank you, Sisters, for your compassion and generosity in making a homeplace for people to thrive.

Cill Bhríde: At Home in the Midlands

Sophia reflects St. Brigid's legacy of care and hospitality

In the heart of the Midlands, Sophia has opened Cill Bhríde, serving people with complex needs coming from emergency homeless accommodation. More than just a building, Cill Bhríde represents a landmark in how temporary accommodation can be thoughtfully designed for dignity and privacy.

Inspired by the hospitality of Brigid, the service offers a holistic, person-centred response to each resident's needs. The 12 private rooms in the main house, and five self-contained one-bedroomed apartments ensure comfort, autonomy, and the feeling of home. This commitment to personal space recognises that privacy and security are key to rebuilding stability after the trauma of homelessness.

Cill Bhríde is more than a response to urgent housing need – it's a statement of belief that everyone deserves a safe place to call home and the chance to move forward. In the spirit of Brigid's legacy of care and hospitality, Cill Bhríde provides both shelter and the stepping stones toward a better future.



Brigidine Sister Mary Hiney visiting with residents of Cill Bhríde.

The service is staffed by a skilled, compassionate team who work alongside residents to create their unique, individual careplans – addressing health, employment, education and social connections. By meeting people where they are, Sophia ensures that supports are meaningful and tailored.



Surrounded by green spaces, Cill Bhríde offers residents a peaceful environment for rest, reflection and recovery.



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

Meet Emma Murphy

Sophia's Head of Philanthropy

To fulfill Sophia's Strategic Plan, the Board has appointed a Head of Philanthropy to safeguard and develop Sophia's financial ability to provide more people with the homes they deserve.

Emma comes to Sophia with a deep commitment to social justice. "Philanthropy makes the world go around. Your generosity can transform lives with Sophia, and your impact will be far-reaching here," says Emma.

"When philanthropy is invited to step in, urgent priorities can be addressed confidently and impact achieved faster than statutory funding sources allow. It's a privilege to assist in such targeted, thoughtful generosity."

Sophia's strategic priority is to provide the economies of scale to allow the housing stock to be well-maintained while meeting all operations costs associated with the regulatory codes and standards.

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