

Housing Rights

We are Housing Rights.

We believe that prevention of homelessness is the best cure. We work tirelessly to keep people in their homes and help them with their housing problems.

We believe that everyone should have a *home*

Impact
Report
15/16

A message from our Chair

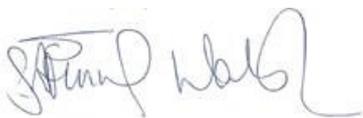
Housing is critical to people's lives. This year, we have helped people across Northern Ireland deal with over 43,000 wide-ranging, and often complex, housing problems. We have prevented homelessness, improved housing situations, improved health and wellbeing, and improved people's feelings of safety.

We want to do our very best for the people who contact us for support. For many years we have captured testimonies and feedback from people, using the information to improve our service; over the past six months, we have taken this further and invested extra resources to develop how we measure our impact.

Our investment is particularly timely as the Northern Ireland Executive is now focusing on measuring impact, publishing its new outcomes-based Programme for Government. We are committed to improving our understanding of how our work improves people's lives so that we can prove our value, meet our clients' needs and make the best use of our resources.

We could not do any of these things without the support of our volunteers, staff, board and funders. As you will see in the report, we are privileged and very proud to work alongside highly motivated, dedicated and professional individuals.

We hope that this report will give you a sense of the positive impact our work has had on people's lives. We look forward to helping people in the year ahead and to working towards our vision: when everyone has a home.



Gráinne Walsh

Our impact



After getting advice and support from Housing Rights:

9 in 10
had a positive outcome to their housing problem

4 in 5
felt their lives had improved

more than 9 in 10
believed their family life and personal relationships had improved

4 in 5
saw an improvement in their ability to work, seek work or to study

9 in 10
felt their feeling of safety had improved

9 in 10
felt their self confidence had improved

9 in 10
had a better understanding of their rights

more than 9 in 10
felt their health and wellbeing had improved

98%
of training attendees said their housing knowledge and skills had improved

32 policy recommendations based on our clients' experience were acted upon by statutory bodies

The challenge

In 2015 - 2016, across Northern Ireland:

39,338
households
were waiting
for social
housing

2,393
households
faced
repossession

18,628
households
presented as
homeless

22,097
households
were in
housing
stress



11,202
households
were
accepted as
homeless

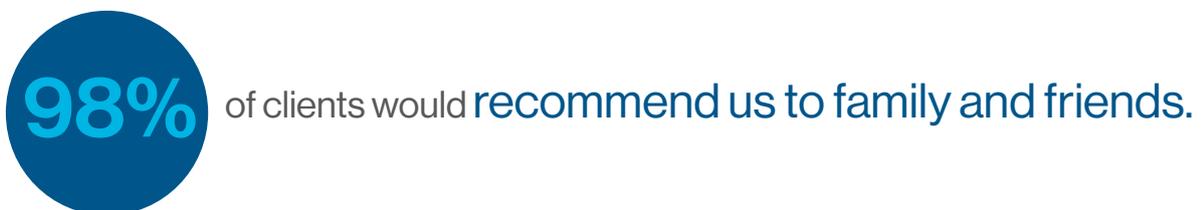
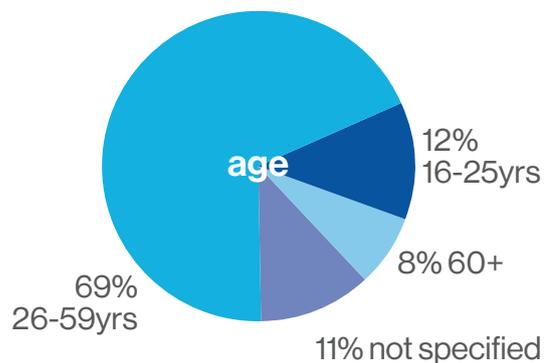
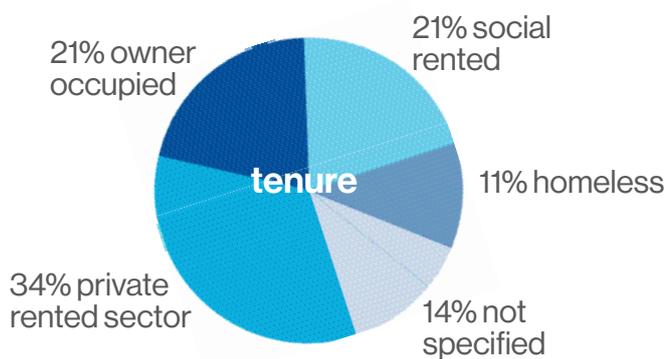
We believe that prevention of homelessness is the best cure and work tirelessly to keep people in their home. During 2015 - 2016 we:



How we help



Who we help



Our work

We work tirelessly to keep people in their homes and help them with their housing problems. We do this by:

Advice, advocacy and legal services

Our housing helpline and advice website offers information and advice to members of the public and other advice practitioners. Dedicated case workers take on more complex housing cases. We represent members of the public at court and liaise with statutory bodies on their behalf. We also offer specialist advice to those people under threat of repossession and who face losing their home. We work with social landlords to provide a debt counselling service for tenants in arrears.

“Housing Rights helped me keep my house and child together”

Housing Rights Client

Policy

Our policy team listens to the concerns people have about housing in Northern Ireland and makes sure that these voices are heard by the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Housing Executive and other decision making bodies. Our policy team is committed to trying to improve standards and practices in housing in Northern Ireland by making people aware of our clients' experiences.

“I also acknowledge the contribution of our stakeholders, particularly Housing Rights, whose expertise proved invaluable in the Committee’s deliberations”

Alex Maskey, MLA, Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development

Prisons

We believe everyone should have a home and deliver an advice and casework service in prisons to help prevent homelessness. We train prisoners to become Peer Housing Advisers, meaning even more people can be helped keep their home. We also work intensively with people being released from prison to help them access and sustain accommodation which can help reduce reoffending rates.

“Housing advice is indispensable in prisons. I would struggle to meet housing needs without [Housing Rights]. Thank you.”

HMP Maghaberry Staff Member

Training

We provide an innovative range of training courses on housing and welfare related issues, responding to the sector's training needs. We train to an accredited standard, professionalising the housing advice offered by our trainees. We produce specialist legal information in plain English for the public, frontline advice agencies, statutory bodies and private organisations. We work with local advice agencies to ensure good quality housing advice is available throughout Northern Ireland.

“This has made giving advice to my clients so much easier”

Housing Rights Trainee

Our impact

A good home is more than just somewhere to live. Having a good home improves relationships, increases feelings of health and wellbeing and helps to develop children's educational opportunities. Good decent homes help to decrease crime rates and to develop communities and the economy.

Our impact on the public purse

The work we carry out prevents people losing their homes. Sustaining tenancies avoids the need for our clients to access public funds.

Preventing a family from becoming homeless saves the public purse an estimated £15,470 per year. We prevented homelessness for 1096 families this year.



79%

of our clients told us that the advice and support they received from Housing Rights helped to **improve their ability to work, seek work or to study, which will have a positive impact on their lives and the local economy.**

“The effect of homelessness impacts on individual lives for years and this influence goes beyond the immediate lack of accommodation. It impedes an individual's health, financial and social wellbeing.”

NIHE



homelessness is estimated to cost **£15,470** per year

we prevented homelessness for **1096** households

we have saved the public purse an estimated **£16,955,120** this year

Our impact on housing knowledge

Housing Rights has been providing the highest quality training to the public and private sectors in Northern Ireland for over 20 years. We are committed to offering quality training which promotes a high standard of housing advice throughout the sector. This year, we trained 803 people, with 105 of those training participants achieving an accredited standard in housing advice.



98% of our respondents told us their **housing knowledge and skills had improved** as a result of attending Housing Rights' training.

Ciara Duffy is a Resettlement Officer, with North West Methodist Mission. She attended our Housing Advice Training Programme in Derry/Londonderry.

“I attended the Housing Advice Training Programme as I had recently changed roles within the Mission. My favourite part of the course was the case studies. These helped me apply learning and demonstrated the positive implications the training could have for my service users.

I act on behalf of vulnerable service users some of who find communication with professional bodies challenging if not impossible. I expanded my knowledge and awareness surrounding housing options and have become more confident to challenge decisions made, to request reviews, to raise issues with landlords etc. It has been a benefit to the service users; not too sure the agencies that have to deal with me however would agree!”

Ciara Duffy, North West Methodist Mission

Our impact on housing policy and practice

We listen to the concerns of the people who contact us for advice and use these to secure positive changes to housing legislation, policy and practice in Northern Ireland. Throughout this year, we have made recommendations to MLAs, councils, government departments and committees, the NIHE and the Consumer Council.

This year, 32 of our recommendations were acted upon by statutory bodies in the following areas:

- Private rented sector (Housing in Multiple Occupation Bill);
- Social housing sector (Tenant Participation Strategy);
- Advice sector (Strategy for the Delivery of Generalist Advice Services in NI 2015-2020); and,
- Justice sector (Strategy for Access to Justice).

32 of Housing Rights' **policy recommendations** based on our clients' experience were acted upon by statutory bodies.

The Housing (Amendment) Bill was introduced in 2015 to allow information sharing between statutory bodies in relation to antisocial behaviour. We understand the distress that antisocial behaviour can cause and recognise the merit in agencies sharing information and working together to tackle the problem. However, we had 2 concerns:

- The Bill allowed information sharing on the grounds of antisocial behaviour, rent arrears and neglect of a dwelling. We felt this was unnecessarily wide, and that information should be limited to antisocial behaviour.
- The Bill required guidance and regulations. We recommended that this should be statutory guidance to ensure consistency.

We submitted our concerns in writing and also presented our arguments in person to the Social Development Committee.

We were pleased that both of our recommendations were actioned. Our contribution should mean that:

- there is an effective, multi-agency approach to tackling antisocial behaviour,
- the legislation is applied fairly to all social tenants,
- the privacy of people living in social housing is protected.

“Housing Rights expressed concerns and asked whether it was necessary or went beyond what was necessary to address antisocial behaviour. [...] The Committee relayed the concerns of Housing Rights to the Minister, who has, ultimately, tabled the amendment.”

Roy Beggs MLA

Our impact on safety in the home

Housing has a significant impact on people's safety. Unsafe environments increase the likelihood of accidents, injuries and illnesses.

According to the 2011 NIHE Housing Conditions Survey, 4.6% of all dwellings in Northern Ireland are unfit to live in. Highest rates of disrepair are in rental homes with 53% of properties in a state of disrepair. 1 in 7 of the people who contacted us this year needed assistance with poor housing conditions, including issues with damp, electrical hazards and heating.



92%

of our clients told us that the advice and support they received from Housing Rights helped to **improve their feeling of safety.**

Our impact on family life

Unstable housing situations cause families stress and can have a direct impact on family income. Children living in unsuitable or temporary housing have a greater chance of suffering mental health and behavioural problems. These children also have a higher risk of poor health and educational under-achievement, which can affect their economic prospects.



96%

of clients told us the advice and support they received from Housing Rights **helped to improve their family life and personal relationships.**

Anna

Anna is a single mum with two teenage children. She lives in a housing association property and was finding it hard to cope when she contacted Housing Rights for support. Anna has long term health difficulties that means she finds stairs and getting in and out of the bath a challenge. Consequently, Anna had fallen several times and had become reliant on her daughter to help her move around her home.

The situation was causing Anna's health to deteriorate further and her children to be very worried about their mum. Following assessment, Anna's occupational therapist concluded that the property was not suitable for Anna's needs and recommended that adaptations should be made to the home. The housing association had not carried out the adaptations and had advised that Anna should instead transfer to a more suitable property, despite not being able to source such a property. A Housing Rights adviser wrote to the housing association, requesting that they reconsider their decision and take interim measures to ensure that Anna could stay in her home while the necessary building work was carried out.

Following our intervention, a site meeting was arranged between the housing association, Anna and Anna's occupational therapist to determine if the property could be suitably adapted. The housing association decided that the adaptations could be carried out and a stairlift was installed to help Anna in the interim. Anna was able to stay in her home, where she had built up a good support network of neighbours who helped to look after her children when she had to go into hospital.

“I just wanted to give you the happy news that work started on the foundations for the adaptation yesterday! yeehaa! I have a smile and a sense of reassurance that things are finally underway, and it's thanks to all of you and your hard work and input. Thank you so much for your help I am eternally grateful.”

Anna

Our impact on health and well being

Experiencing or being threatened with homelessness is a worrying and stressful situation in which to find yourself. Receiving quality housing advice that helps resolve your housing issue can reduce anxiety, which has a positive impact on quality of life.



91%

of our clients told us that the advice and support they received from Housing Rights **helped to improve their health & wellbeing.**

Our impact on self-confidence

Finding yourself at risk of homelessness or struggling to cope with your housing situation can make you feel powerless and out of control. It can be intimidating trying to navigate the various statutory and legal agencies that may become involved in your personal situation.



87%

of our clients told us that the advice and support they received from Housing Rights helped to **improve their self-confidence.**



92%

of our clients **understood their rights better** after our help.

Patrick and Mary

Patrick and Mary are 76 and 72 respectively. They had taken out their mortgage just before the property crash and their home was in negative equity. They had secured their mortgage through a broker whom they had told what their income was and what they could afford.

The case was passed to our legal team as we suspected that their mortgage had been mis-sold. We requested a copy of the mortgage application from the lender. On reviewing the documents, it became apparent that false information had been included without Patrick and Mary's knowledge. Their mortgage had been offered on the basis of a false income and the assumption that the couple would not retire until they were 90. Patrick and Mary were adamant that they hadn't provided this information and at no point had the lender contacted the couple to verify any information.

Our legal team based their arguments around several key pieces of legislation: Financial Conduct Authority Guidance, the Mortgage Conduct of Business Rules; the Administration of Justice Act 1970; the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act. Following protracted negotiations, a settlement agreement was reached.

Our work meant that Patrick and Mary had an extra 6 months to live in their home and to try to sell it. We also ensured that the couple would not be liable if the house sold for less than the mortgage owed. Our assistance prevented the couple from being made homeless and improved their financial situation.

“They helped to ease the stress and worry for us at our age, 72 and 76. We felt really ashamed to be in this position at our age....Took away feeling of depression and gave reassurance, helped us to understand they could help us - not on our own. We have a lot of health problems and having someone on our side eased the pressure.”

Patrick and Mary

Recognition and rewards

Admission to the Institute of Professional Legal Studies

Stephen Fennell, Housing Adviser, passed the admissions test for the Institute of Professional Legal Studies and started his apprenticeship in September 2015. Stephen is now a Trainee Solicitor at Housing Rights under the guidance of Housing Rights' Solicitor, Carmel Ferguson.

Women in Housing Awards

Housing Rights' Director, Janet Hunter, won the Exemplary Housing Professional Award at the Women in Housing Awards in October 2015. The award recognises individuals, with a professional qualification in their field, who demonstrate an in-depth understanding and knowledge of the sector and whose input has a positive impact for clients.

Professional Legal Qualification in Civil and Commercial Mediation

Sarah Corrigan, Housing Adviser, qualified as a Legal Mediator in October 2015. The qualification is accredited by the Northern Ireland Law Society. A mediator is a neutral person who assists parties and their advisers to a resolution of a dispute.

Chartered Accountancy

Our Finance Officer, Mark Eakin, qualified as an Associate Chartered Accountant in November 2015. Mark is now a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, Ireland's largest and most prestigious accountancy body.

Mediation Theory and Practice Qualification

Caoimhe McEleney, who works in our Beyond the Gate project, achieved her qualification in Mediation Theory and Practice with Mediation NI in December 2015. The course develops participants' knowledge and skills around conflict and associated behaviour, and teaches them how to apply the process of mediation in disputes.

New Year's Honours List

Housing Rights' Director, Janet Hunter, was awarded an OBE in the 2016 New Year's Honours list for her services to the community. Janet has worked in housing for over 30 years and has been the Director of Housing Rights since 1994. This award is testimony to Janet's dedication to making a positive difference to the lives of the people who are homeless or have housing problems.

Looking forward

Improving how we measure impact

Housing Rights is a client-focussed organisation; we want to do the very best for the people who use our services and improving our impact measurement will allow us to do this. We also work in an increasingly competitive environment with funding constraints and being able to credibly evidence our critical value will help Housing Rights to be sustainable.

We are committed to improving our understanding of how our work improves peoples' lives. Housing Rights has been interested in understanding the effect of the work we do for many years because it allows us to be confident that our work has value. Being clear and transparent about our achievements is integral to the organisation's ethos. By working to improve our impact measurement, we will be able to:

- improve the evidence we use to demonstrate our value to clients, stakeholders and society,
- fulfil our mission more effectively, making the best use of our resources,
- identify ways in which we can improve to meet our clients' needs.

Get involved

Most of us are lucky enough to take having a home for granted. However, there are many people in Northern Ireland who are not so fortunate. There are many ways for you to get involved and support our work.

If you would like to find out more, please visit www.housingrights.org.uk/support-our-work

Donate

By making a one-off donation, you can help us to work tirelessly to achieve our vision “when everyone has a home”. Visit www.housingrights.org.uk/make-donation

Volunteer with us

If you would like to play your part in helping us assist even more people you can contact us to volunteer. Email Claire for more information: clairemcloughlin@housingrights.org.uk

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