A message from our chair

Housing Rights is here for everyone. This year, we have supported over 11,500 people across Northern Ireland. We have prevented homelessness, helped people struggling with their housing costs, kept people in their homes and helped people, including some of the most vulnerable, to better understand their housing rights and responsibilities.

Housing Rights helps by:

- giving specialist housing advice over the phone, online and face to face.
- giving clients the confidence to solve their own housing problems.
- advocating for people’s housing rights on their behalf.
- negotiating agreements with mortgage companies, public and private landlords to keep people in their homes.
- attending court and providing legal support to people at risk of losing their homes.
- providing specialist support to help people leaving custody connect with support services in the community.
- providing training and information to help those working in the housing sector.
- sharing our clients’ experiences with decision makers to improve housing standards and practices in Northern Ireland.

We have always known that our work makes a difference to people’s lives. This year, we have invested significant resources to better understand the impact Housing Rights has on the lives of those who come to us for support.

We are proud of what we have accomplished, both because it takes hard work to achieve and because it is challenging to measure. We know that we can continue to get better at measuring our impact and will continue to invest in this area so that we can show our value, meet our clients’ needs and make the best use of our resources.

We hope this report will give you a sense of the significant difference Housing Rights makes to people’s lives every day. Housing Rights wants every home in Northern Ireland to be safe, suitable and affordable and we will continue to work hard until everybody has a home.

Gráinne Walsh
Our year at a glance

| 9 in 10 had the information they needed to make informed housing decisions |
| 9 in 10 know where to go for help in the future |
| 9 in 10 feel less stressed about their housing situation |
| 2 in 3 have been able to stay in their homes |
| 9 in 10 feel better able to meet their housing costs |
| 9 in 10 feel they have a better quality of life |

After accessing advice and support from Housing Rights:

- 9 in 10 had the information they needed to make informed housing decisions
- 9 in 10 know where to go for help in the future
- 9 in 10 feel less stressed about their housing situation
- 2 in 3 have been able to stay in their homes
- 9 in 10 feel better able to meet their housing costs
- 9 in 10 feel they have a better quality of life

As a result of our policy and practitioner support work:

- 88% feel better equipped to give informed housing advice
- 9 in 10 have improved their housing knowledge and skills
- 97 trainees achieved an accredited housing qualification
- 43 policy recommendations implemented
- 9 in 10 Housing Rights members feel better informed of relevant housing issues
- 8 in 10 Housing Rights members feel better able to advise their clients
Our advice services

**Helpline**
A daily housing advice line, helping people across Northern Ireland get to grips with their housing problems.

**Advocacy and Representation**
Housing advisers work on complex, strategic cases. They can represent members of the public at court, liaise with statutory bodies and private landlords on behalf of clients and provide support to people struggling with housing and debt problems.

**Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme**
Specialist legal advisers attend Court to offer free emergency advice and representation to homeowners and tenants facing possession without legal representation and at risk of being made homeless.

**Tenant Debt Advice Service**
The Tenant Debt Advice Service (TDAS) is an arrears management service which Housing Rights offers to social and private landlords. Landlords who have signed up to TDAS can refer tenants who are in rent arrears to an adviser for specialist assistance.

**housingadviceNI.org**
A website that provides reliable, independent housing advice and information to the public in Northern Ireland. The website helps people find the answers to their housing concerns. Service users can also request advice via email using an online form or via instant chat.

**Prisons Housing Advice and Peer Project**
Specialist housing advisers, based within prisons in Northern Ireland, help people who have been remanded into custody or who are serving sentences in prison and are worried about their housing situation.
Housing Rights also trains and supports peer advisers who provide one-to-one housing advice to fellow prisoners, complete paperwork and refer more complicated cases to the Housing Rights housing advisers.

**Beyond the Gate**
Beyond the Gate provides intensive short term support to the most vulnerable prisoners on release to ensure they have a place to live and are connected with appropriate support services within the community.

**Community Housing Advice Partnership**
The Community Housing Advice Partnership (CHAP) supports generalist advice agencies throughout NI to deliver high quality housing advice within their community.

**Housing Champions Project**
A peer volunteer learning project, to train and support members of black and ethnic minority communities to provide one-to-one housing advice to members of their community.

**Landlord Advice**
A free helpline for registered landlords in Northern Ireland to promote professional standards in both the management of accommodation and delivery of quality services to tenants in Northern Ireland. It helps landlords comply with their legal requirements and promotes good practice in the private rented sector.

“I felt people listened and understood quickly the position I was in. I am genuinely indebted for the advice I received, it lifted a lot of stress from my shoulders and allowed me to approach my landlord [with] much more confidence.”

**Who we help**

- **35% live in the private rented sector**
- **23% live in the social rented sector**
- **21% own their own homes**
- **13% are homeless**
- **8% not specified**
Our training and information

Housing Rights delivers regular training courses and seminars to keep housing professionals up to date with the latest developments in the sector.

As well as a public programme of events, the training team also offers tailored packages to organisations who want their staff to attend training on a specific housing issue. Our courses are attended by frontline staff from across the voluntary, statutory and private sectors in Northern Ireland.

In 2016/17, our training and information prepared housing professionals and advice agencies for the impact of the Social Sector Size Criteria (the Bedroom Tax) on people in Northern Ireland. We produced four professional resources on welfare reform, renting privately, hate crime and housing, and mental health and housing.

“This course has increased my confidence and will help me do my job more effectively. I feel more aware now of how welfare reform will impact on our services. I will use this knowledge to support clients.”

Our training and information assists:

- advice agencies
- community groups
- environmental health staff
- housing providers
- landlords
- legal professionals
- letting agents
- staff working in the criminal justice system
- support workers
Our policy work

The policy team works to positively influence policy and practice on housing issues by representing the experience of clients who contact Housing Rights for advice.

The team listens to those housing concerns and communicates them to decision makers in Northern Ireland. The policy team responds to relevant consultations and delivers briefings to political contacts and policy makers.

In 2016/17, our policy team influenced seven changes to public policy and made thirty six recommendations which were enacted by public bodies. This includes ensuring direct tenant input into the government’s review of the private rented sector, and amending government guidance on antisocial behaviour.

“I come across constituency cases where I feel that landlords are not carrying out their duty. I commend the actions of Housing Rights and councils’ environmental health officers for their actions in trying to bring to account those who are not responding to need.”

Roy Beggs, UUP - NI Assembly, 20 June 2016

Our policy work assists:

- advisers
- government officials
- housing providers
- MLAs
- people in housing need
- researchers
Our impact measurement

**Impact is the difference we make; the changes that happen because of something we have done.**

Housing Rights is a client-focused organisation. We want to do our very best for the people who contact us for advice and assistance. By investing in our impact practice, we can more accurately measure and maximise the difference we make.

This year, we have developed our impact practice by writing a Theory of Change for Housing Rights. A Theory of Change is a diagram that explains the impact an organisation wants to achieve and how this can happen. It outlines the things that the organisation does for its beneficiaries, the ultimate aim, or impact, of the organisation, and each of the separate outcomes that lead or contribute to that impact.

We are still working on improving the evidence we collect so we are not yet in a position to report on all the outcomes that are included in our Theory of Change. We want to get better at measuring how we help our clients access accommodation and live in better quality housing.

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**Our Theory of Change**

Our Theory of Change is the basis for our impact measurement framework, which helps us to:

- be confident that what we do has value.
- improve the evidence we use to demonstrate our value.
- fulfil our mission more effectively, making the best use of resources.
- identify ways in which we can improve to meet our clients' needs.
How we make a difference - our Theory of Change

inputs → activities → outcomes → goals → impact

staff & volunteers → funding → premises & equipment

- help lines
- legal advice
- casework
- advice in prisons
- policy work
- training

clients have info they need → clients understand rights & responsibilities → clients know where to go in future

clients know how to access accom. → clients feel less stressed → trainees equipped to give housing advice

trainees have up to date housing knowledge → trainees gain accredited qualification

policy recommendations implemented

clients sustain their tenancy → clients are better able to meet housing costs

clients live in better quality housing → clients are prevented from becoming homeless

clients feel they have a better quality of life

people in NI live in safer, more suitable and more affordable homes which improve/maintain their wellbeing
Looking forward

**Helpline impact study**
In the course of developing our Theory of Change, we have noted that there are areas of Housing Rights’ impact that we understand less well. The most significant gap exists in the helpline, as it is difficult to measure the impact of one-off advice. Often, the people we speak to call our helpline once and we do not hear from them again. We plan to address this by carrying out a research project into the outcomes experienced by users of our helpline.

**Collecting evidence**
Now that we have developed a Theory of Change that accurately reflects the impact of Housing Rights, we will begin improving and collecting our evidence to measure each outcome. We will analyse the evidence we collect to make sure that the impact Housing Rights has corresponds with what we expected to find. This will allow us to learn from our findings and use them to improve our work.

**Impact reference group**
One of our next steps in continuing to improve our impact measurement practices is to establish an impact reference group, made up of key stakeholders, which will help us to maximise the impact of Housing Rights. Members of the impact reference group will come from a variety of backgrounds and include funders, researchers and evaluators. The group will aim to develop a shared understanding of good practice in impact measurement, consider how Housing Rights can continue to improve its impact measurement practices, and contribute to the publication of Housing Rights’ 2017/18 Impact Report.
The difference we make through advice

Patrick called our helpline worried about losing the home he rented privately. His landlord was thinking about selling the property and he was also having problems with damp.

Our helpline adviser was able to confirm for Patrick that his landlord still had a responsibility to carry out repairs on the property. We also reassured him that while his landlord could sell the property, this takes time and was not likely to happen immediately. The adviser explained that as Patrick was a periodic tenant, he needed to be aware that his landlord could serve notice to bring the tenancy to an end at any time. We took him through his options for accessing other accommodation and told him important things to look out for like deposit protection, tenancy agreement terms and inventories.

“I wanted to know where I stood if the house was sold. Did I have any rights with the repairs? I was frantic. I was really upset and didn’t know what I could do and what the next step was. I was worried because there are no houses to rent in my area. I was relieved when I was told that I have rights - they have to give me 28 days' notice if they were to sell the house.”

9 in 10 had the information they needed to make informed housing decisions.
9 in 10 know where to go for help in the future.
9 in 10 feel less stressed about their housing situation.
2 in 3 have been able to stay in their homes.
“Before, I was in a panic, but after I spoke to them, I felt a lot better. I knew where I stood. They gave me information and confidence. They were amazing, really, really amazing.”
Jane and her family had been living in the property they had bought through their right to buy 27 years ago. After losing her eyesight and not being able to work, Jane had been receiving benefits and so had been able to keep up with her mortgage. However, her benefits reduced when her son turned 18 and she found it difficult to cope financially. This took its toll on her mental health. When Jane got in touch with our helpline, her mortgage lender had already initiated possession proceedings and the Court had issued an order for her home to be repossessed.

We assessed Jane’s financial situation and contacted her lender’s solicitor advising them about her circumstances. We put forward a proposal to pay the monthly mortgage instalment and £100 each month towards the arrears. The lender accepted the proposal and the eviction was cancelled.

“I buried my head in the sand after getting into trouble with my mortgage. I plucked up the courage to call Housing Rights and they called me back.”

<table>
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<tr>
<th>9 in 10 feel better able to meet their housing costs</th>
<th>9 in 10 feel they have a better quality of life</th>
<th>1,147 households prevented from homelessness</th>
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1,147 x £15,470* = £17,744,090 saved for the public purse

*homelessness in NI is estimated to cost £15,470 per household
“Housing Rights’ housing adviser spoke with me in great length and at all times was very patient, kind and calm, courteous, reassuring, she saved me from losing my home. Thank you.”
The difference we make through training

Ciaran and John are currently in custody at HMP Magilligan. They got a housing qualification after completing an OCN accredited Housing Rights' training course. This enabled them to take on the role of peer prisoner housing adviser.

The work of the peer prisoner housing adviser
The work of the peer is to help resolve simpler housing issues and address homelessness issues for prisoners. They also refer more complex matters to the housing rights adviser in each prison.

When new prisoners enter custody, the peer housing adviser delivers a comprehensive presentation on a range of housing matters, focusing on frequently faced issues and some common housing misconceptions. They also tell everyone coming into prison about the advice service.

The peer advisers give both time and commitment to prisoners who need it, providing a vital role supporting the Housing Rights staff to reach more people who need advice.

“The peer advisers are an invaluable part of the housing advice team in HMP Magilligan. Because of their skill and commitment, we have been able to ensure that prisoners get initial, quality advice much earlier, and that those who need advocacy and continued support are identified at the appropriate time.”
Housing Rights prisons adviser
Impact of the peer prisoner housing advisers

Housing Rights’ experience has shown that prisoners tend to engage well with fellow prisoners. This is evident at the induction sessions and is particularly the case for the more vulnerable prisoners who have been through the prison system many times. Ciaran and John agree that peer advice can be more effective when giving advice in the prison.

“Prisoners open up to us more. If they feel you are in the same boat, in the same situation, they will tell you more.”

The project isn’t just about allowing Housing Rights to reach more people. It also provides a vital service in giving prisoners a tangible skill that can be used on their release.

Daniel* is an ex-prisoner who worked as a peer adviser. Now released, he volunteers a couple of days a week for an advice agency in Belfast, providing housing advice.

“I wouldn’t be there if it hadn’t been for Housing Rights’ training.”

The future

On a recent visit to HMP Magilligan, the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons said that it was a leading example in terms of resettlement and rehabilitation. He was noted as saying prisons in England and Wales should learn from the peer model and he particularly highlighted the work of Housing Rights and the peers as ‘exceptional’.

In the future, Housing Rights would like to see more peers like Daniel use their skills to provide them with opportunities on their release.
The difference we make through policy

In July 2016, Nichola Mallon MLA approached Housing Rights and other bodies in the housing, advice and voluntary sectors, for input to her proposed Private Member’s Bill on homelessness prevention.

Providing client focused comment to inform change
By utilising the expertise of Housing Rights advisers and helpline staff, our policy team developed four practical proposals which aim to enable statutory bodies to better relieve and prevent homelessness. Our suggested recommendations were:

1. A broad range of statutory agencies should work with and support the Housing Executive to tackle homelessness, helping all relevant bodies to prioritise resources towards tackling homelessness.

2. The Housing Executive, in liaison with other relevant bodies, should assess the housing support needs of any homeless applicant and help people to access holistic, multi-agency support that can help them to sustain their homes.

3. The government should produce regulations and guidance to ensure the Housing Executive’s new “Housing Solutions” model is as effective at tackling homelessness as possible.

4. Currently, a person is only “threatened with homelessness” if they will become homeless in the next 28 days. We proposed extending this window to 56 days, and placing a duty on the Housing Executive to attempt to prevent homelessness in this time.

Impact of the policy team’s contribution
We submitted these proposals to Nichola for her consideration, and they were then included in the draft Private Member’s Bill submitted to the Assembly Bills Office.
“I want to thank Housing Rights for their support to date on my Private Member’s Bill. Their input in terms of research and front line advice experience has been invaluable.” Nichola Mallon MLA
Most of us are lucky enough to take having a home for granted. Many people in Northern Ireland are not so fortunate.

Housing Rights was established in 1964. We believe that prevention of homelessness is the best cure. We work tirelessly everyday to keep people in their homes and help them with their housing problems. We believe that everyone should have a home.

Last year we helped over 11,500 people who were struggling with nearly 43,000 housing problems. With your help we can assist even more.

“The service Housing Rights provide is invaluable and has helped me in the most troubled of times, keeping a home for my family.”

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. Visit www.housingrights.org.uk/volunteer.

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