

Rachel's Story

It is impossible to imagine what life must be like for parents experiencing homelessness with their children. There are almost **5,000 children** in homelessness in Ireland right now and over **2,000 families**. We asked Rachel*, a mother with two teenage children if she would be willing to share a little bit about what homelessness is like for her.



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Rachel has been battling homelessness for nearly two years now. She has also suffered through this horror while undergoing cancer treatment. **Fighting a battle on many fronts.**

Two months after she was made homeless, Rachel received a frightening diagnosis. Before she was made homeless, Rachel was living a perfectly normal life. Like many young families, she couldn't afford to buy a home of her own. So, she was renting. Until her landlord told her he was selling the property. **That's all it took.**



For the first few weeks, Rachel and her children slept in the living room of a friend's house. She had to sleep on a sofa with her daughter. Her son slept on the floor. When Rachel turned to the council for help, they immediately moved her and her two children into emergency accommodation on the other side of the city. Within weeks, Rachel started to become ill. She thought it might just be the stress that they were undergoing. But it wasn't. This is how Rachel remembers the day she received her diagnosis:

"The doctor had told me to bring somebody with me. I don't really have anyone, so I brought the two kids. When he told me I had cancer they started to cry. But I didn't. I just had it in my mind that now I'm going to have to fight this too."

After she was diagnosed, Rachel was put on the priority housing list by the council. That was nearly two years ago. She's still waiting.

Since then, Rachel and her two brave children have been living in one room in emergency accommodation. She still has to share a bed with her daughter. Even on nights when her chemotherapy makes her sweat and feel like vomiting.

At any other time in our history, Rachel would have been allocated a proper home to live. But sadly, the complete lack of any sort of affordable housing, means that's not the case anymore. So, at the darkest moment of her life, all that our housing system could offer her was a single cramped room for her and her two teenage children.

Through the wonderful fundraisers that support Focus Ireland, together, we were able to instantly start advocating on Rachel's behalf. She was able to be moved to an emergency accommodation nearer the hospital she has to attend. Now she doesn't have to travel across the city on the days that her chemotherapy makes her too weak and too sick to even walk. The resilience and strength that Rachel shows every day is just incredible.

It's traumatic enough trying to survive homelessness and protect your children. But Rachel's illness just makes the injustice of it even more horrific. Once you've been made homeless, it can become simply impossible to survive it on your own. Together we have made sure that Rachel has the support of a dedicated Case Worker, to help her search for a new home and navigate the cruel and complicated housing system that has trapped her in homelessness for two years.

Homelessness robs families of their ability to engage normally with life. Literally everything becomes more difficult. Getting to school, getting to hospital appointments, looking for a job. Everything.

Rachel still has a few more months of chemotherapy left. That means more sickness. More worry. And more sleepless nights in the one room. No human being should ever have to live that way – especially someone like Rachel who is already literally fighting for her life.

Life keeps going after you've been made homeless, and we believe that people like Rachel and her children are particularly vulnerable to the trauma and stress of losing your home. As the number of families entering homelessness continues to rise, we want to ensure they are protected and supported.

The demand for Focus Ireland's services is at an all-time high. The work that Focus Ireland is doing to support children and families experiencing homeless is vital, **but we can't do it alone**. We need people to come together to take real action to create real change.

**We have changed all names and identifying details to protect the family's privacy.*

