



Mercy Law
Resource Centre

ANNUAL REPORT 2019





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Welcome

In a time of great disturbance, such as 2020, the anxieties of people already in distress become more acute. In a time of hidden discrimination, the pleas of the vulnerable often fall on deaf ears. In a time of persistent inequality, the lives of those who cannot meet their basic needs become intolerable. And in a time of increasing regulation, access to a home is often blocked for those who cannot find, or afford, the expert help necessary to untangle their difficulties.

In a crowded world of many interests, in a sophisticated world of many tools, the voice of pain must be allowed to pierce through the din of culture, procedures and chaos. The instruments of justice which seek to shield from harm and defend rights – our laws and courts - must be available to those who need them but cannot afford them. To listen, to hear with empathy, and to respond with action to that voice is of the essence of our humanity and is an imperative of the common good. Our integrity as a society asks for no less – a response of fairness, equity, dignity and respect for all. This is a time for skilled compassion so that there is just access to a home, housing for people who fall through the cracks of everyday life.

Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) seeks to embody such a response. With over a decade of experience in bringing free legal services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, its excellent staff provide legal advocacy, challenge policy, and enable change-for-the-better in the lives of many individuals and families otherwise pushed to the margins of society.

Chief Justice Frank Clarke argued at the launch of our Annual Report last year that ease of access to legal services at local community level was long overdue. Education and healthcare services are available to all, but legal services are costly and well out of



reach of low-income and homeless families. State legal aid is not generally available for housing issues, so the role of MLRC is vital in this context. This Annual Report for 2019 gives a detailed account of our efforts and successes for more than 1,500 vulnerable people. The skilled service of our staff is the content and substance of the Law Centre. The Report describes the significant policy work undertaken in co-operation with other bodies from housing agencies to the Oireachtas, to the UN. MLRC models a much needed service in advance of a time when free legal services might be more available to all.

MLRC relies on the funding received from generous organisations and sponsors to exist. Therefore, I want to sincerely thank all who have supported us in anyway – our donors, pro-bono allies, barristers, law firms, auditors, befrienders, interns and volunteers. Your commitment and generosity is crucial and I appeal for a continuation of your much appreciated support.

On behalf of the Board, I want to express deep appreciation to our dedicated staff – Managing Solicitor Rebecca, Solicitors Sinead and Paul, to Administrators Nuala, Shauna, Danielle, Caitriona and Kathleen. Thank you on behalf of all the people MLRC is privileged to serve.

To our very effective Board of Directors for their commitment and service - míle buíochas os.

We hope that all reading this report will be encouraged by it.

Helena O'Donoghue RSM,
Chair, Mercy Law Resource Centre
July 2020

Introduction

I take this opportunity to reflect on the work of Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) in 2019 and step outside these times of unprecedented instability precipitated by the covid-19 pandemic. It was on a firm but dynamic foundation that MLRC entered 2020 ready to adapt our services to continue to meet the needs of those in housing crisis.

In October 2019, 10,514 people were experiencing homelessness, the highest ever on record. Our housing system continued to fail vulnerable people, leaving them exposed to eviction and at risk of prolonged stays in emergency accommodation with inadequate long-term housing available.

In 2019, Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) marked ten years in operation. We were most honoured to have the Chief Justice speak at an event to mark this milestone with us, where he recognised the need for MLRC's committed and focused legal service embedded in the community.

In MLRC's tenth year in operation, demand for our service was never higher. During the course of the year, we assisted 1,666 individuals, bringing the total number assisted since our establishment to over 10,000. Last year alone, we supported nearly 500 families in the deep distress of homelessness, giving them hope and moving them closer to a secure home.

Addressing family homelessness was at the core of our policy work in 2019, with first-hand experiences informing our approach. We addressed the Oireachtas Committee on Housing in June 2019 and in December 2019 launched a report on homeless family that included our clients' own testimony. Our recommendations on family homelessness were included in full in the Committee's report.

We look forward to progressing those in 2020. None of our work would be possible without our fantastic team of staff and volunteers. In 2019, MLRC said farewell to solicitors David Joyce



and Sinead Kerins, both of whom inspired with their deep commitment to clients and to MLRC. We welcomed solicitors Paul Dornan and Sinead McGarrigle that same year who fitted seamlessly into the team. Our core administrative team, Nuala, Shauna and Danielle together with our volunteer administrators Caitriona and Kathleen provided expert and compassionate support throughout.

I am hugely grateful to our Chairperson and Board of Directors, whose expertise and empathy underpins the work that we do. Our work would simply not be possible without the very generous support of our many donors. We are deeply grateful to our funders for their support for MLRC's work.

MLRC's vision is of a society where each individual lives in dignity and enjoys equal rights, in particular the right to a home. In 2020, covid-19 has shown us that hostels, hubs and hotels are not homes; they offer no privacy, no security and little hope. This crisis underlines the need to put home at the heart of our thinking. MLRC continually strives to do that. Poet Colm Keegan spoke very powerfully of home and homelessness at our event in December 2019. It seems apt to finish on words that he read that evening, extracted from his piece titled 'Home': "*Home is more than a word, more than a feeling. It's a right, and we need to hold on to it. Home is what we are.*"

Rebecca Keatinge
Managing Solicitor, Mercy Law Resource Centre
August 2020

ABOUT MERCY LAW RESOURCE CENTRE

Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) is an independent law centre, registered charity and company limited by guarantee which provides free legal advice and representation to people who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, in the areas of social housing and related social welfare law. MLRC also seeks to advocate for changes in laws, policies and attitudes which unduly and adversely impact our client group.



OUR VISION

MLRC's vision is of a society where each individual lives in dignity and enjoys equal rights, in particular the right to a home, which is fundamental to each person. MLRC's vision is also of a society where every individual enjoys equal access to justice and legal recourse in order to vindicate those rights.



OUR ETHOS

MLRC's ethos recognises the dignity of each person. We seek to ensure that all people are treated with respect and compassion and are enabled to achieve their full potential as human beings. We are committed to the principles of human rights, social justice and equality.



OUR 5 KEY SERVICES

- 1** Free legal advice clinics in hostels for people who are homeless and in centres that are easily accessible for people facing homelessness
- 2** Free legal representation
- 3** Legal support and training for organisations working in the field of homelessness
- 4** Policy work to advocate for changes to the laws, policies and attitudes that are particularly harsh for people facing homelessness
- 5** Befriending service for clients with specific vulnerabilities and in need of support

THE NEED FOR OUR SERVICE

The ongoing housing crisis has meant an increasing demand for our service and the cases referred to us have become increasingly urgent and complex.

Legal advice and representation in housing, homelessness, and related social welfare law is not adequately catered for by either the private sector or State legal aid. People experiencing homelessness are often on the extreme margins of society and face many hurdles in accessing legal services, rights, and entitlements.

State legal aid is not available for the vast majority of legal issues arising in social housing and homelessness. Any legal assistance which is available is often limited to advice only with no follow up legal representation, and is rarely accessible to our clients.

A further issue is that the services available are often fragmented, ignoring the cluster of problems which our client group often experience, including other legal and non-legal problems. Our experience has shown that homelessness is not an isolated issue. Our client group faces a number of other difficulties, including: marital/family breakdown; domestic violence; mental and physical health difficulties; drug/alcohol addiction and recovery; immigration issues; reintegration following prison; discrimination and trafficking/prostitution.

MLRC seeks to meet the clear gap and need through a truly accessible and holistic service.



HOW WE PROVIDE OUR SERVICE

MLRC provides a unique service that is accessible and, as far as possible, shaped to meet the individual needs of each client. We provide legal advice at outreach clinics at locations that are accessible and familiar to our clients.

We work in partnership with other organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors to ensure that they are aware of our service and can make referrals to us. We liaise with organisations in these sectors to ensure our clients have the appropriate supports they need. Our team of volunteer befrienders also provides clients with emotional and practical support to complement our legal intervention.



FREE LEGAL ADVICE & REPRESENTATION



Our provision of free legal advice and representation is one of MLRC's core services. Learnings from this casework and from our clients' experiences are a foundation for our training and policy work.

Since our establishment in 2009, MLRC has developed a network of legal advice and outreach clinics and links with hundreds of organisations to support their work with clients affected by homelessness.

LEGAL OUTREACH CLINICS

In 2019, MLRC operated regular legal outreach clinics at accessible locations including

- Crosscare Advocacy Service,
- Focus Ireland Coffee Shop in collaboration with A&L Goodbody Solicitors,
- Liberties Citizen Information,
- Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service and,
- the Dochas Centre.

In September 2019, MLRC opened a new clinic in collaboration with Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service, specifically to meet the needs of members of the Traveller community. Between September 2019 and December 2019, MLRC solicitors provided advice in 50 cases, many of whom were families. We are delighted to be continuing with the clinic in 2020 and are most grateful to our funders for supporting this clinic.

IMPACT OF MLRC'S LEGAL SERVICE IN 2019



We received **3,758** phonecalls



We responded to **620** new queries



This generated **2,992** pieces of work



We provided free legal advice and representation to **1,611** individuals and families

OUR CLIENT BASE

Through our casework, MLRC noted that the housing crisis disproportionately affected non-Irish nationals and ethnic minorities. Families and ethnic minority including members of the Traveller Community were the fastest growing demographic of MLRC client base in 2019.

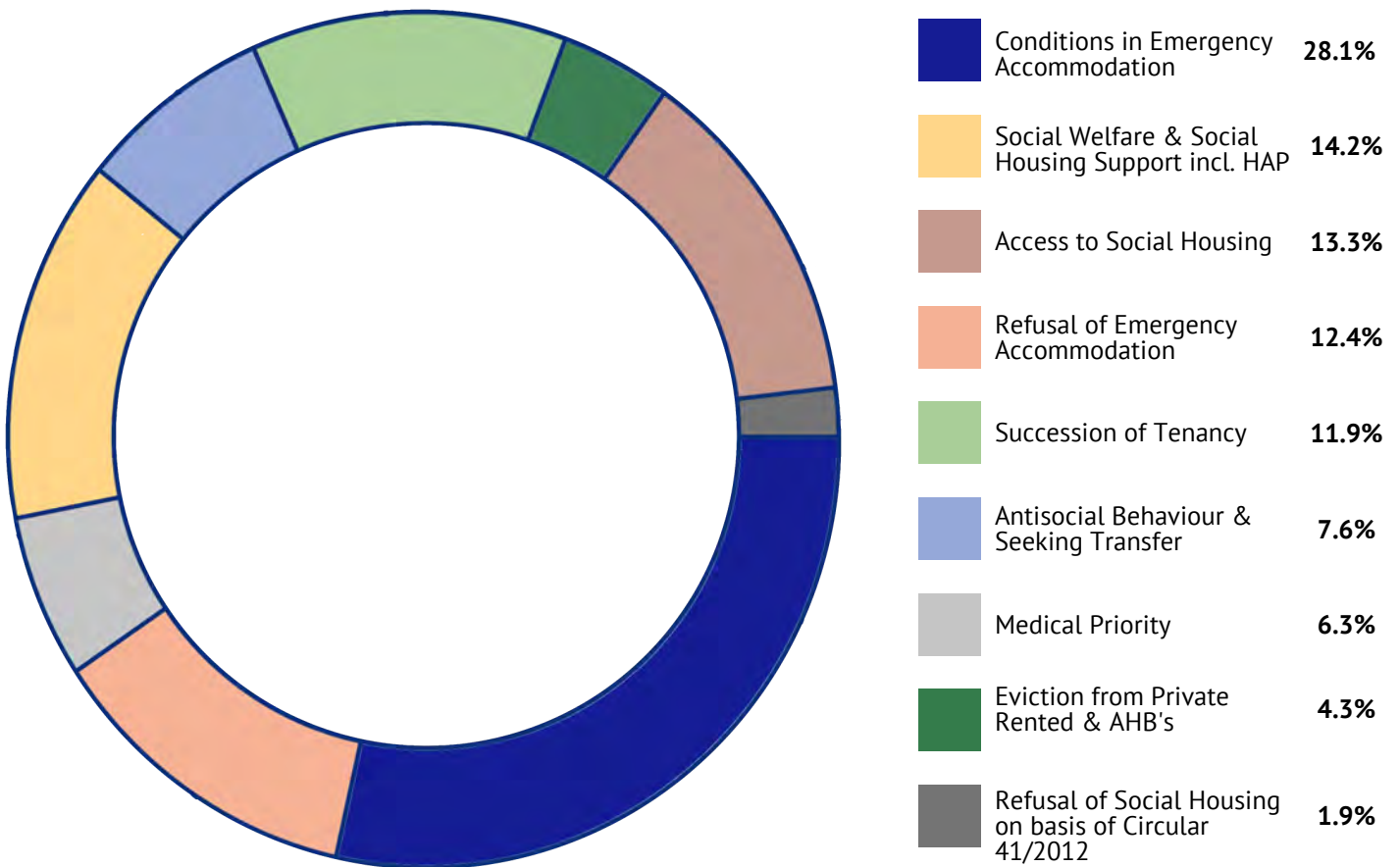
In 2019, **88%** of MLRC new clients presented with issues relating to homelessness. We advised **489** homeless families in 2019. This was an increase of 37 homeless families from the 452 assisted in 2018.

FREE LEGAL ADVICE AND REPRESENTATION

ISSUES ARISING IN OUR CASEWORK IN 2019

In 2019, we worked with a number of families in very upsetting situations, caught in the chaos of homelessness and struggling to access the most basic shelter. In 2019 alone, MLRC assisted **489** families who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. Several of these distressing cases were starkly detailed in our report on *“Lived Experiences of Homeless Families”* which was launched on 11 December 2019.

As well as working on issues affecting homeless families, our solicitors also advised on a number of cases where our clients were at risk of losing their home, or where they were having difficulty accessing social housing supports, including the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).



IMPACT OF OUR WORK



RACHEL'S STORY

Rachel came into contact with Mercy Law in 2019 and attended one of our outreach clinics. She had been refused access to the social housing list because the local authority did not accept that she was normally resident in the local area or had established sufficient connection to it. Rachel believed she would be at risk if she went back to the area where she originally resided. Mercy Law worked closely with Rachel to get full details of her situation and drafted a detailed submission to the local authority explaining her links to the local area and providing supporting documentation evidencing these links. Rachel was subsequently put on the social housing list and was able to access social housing support. Shortly after, she moved out of her temporary accommodation and was able to secure stable long term accommodation and move on with her life.

"Mercy Law were very good and efficient. I was refused from the housing list initially and Rebecca assisted me in advocating with the Council. I am now in a HAP property. I have been here since February 2020. I had a child in April 2020 and I had such peace of mind knowing that I had somewhere safe and stable to bring my son home to. I would not be where I am today if it was not for Rebecca and Mercy Law. I cannot thank them enough."



BLESSING'S STORY

Blessing came into contact with MLRC in 2019 when she had been put in chronically unstable emergency accommodation by the local authority. She was having to move every day with her four young children and had nowhere to go during the day. She was worn out and her children were struggling. Blessing was at a loss as to how to get the local authority to give her secure accommodation. MLRC intervened and made representations to the local authority on behalf of Blessing and her young family. The family were then moved into stable and secure emergency accommodation.

"My experience working with Mercy Law was so perfect. They were a life saver. When I came in contact with Mercy Law I was in one night only accommodation. I was destitute and going through a really bad time. I had only myself and my four children. I was alone and had no one to rely upon. Mercy Law's work had such an impact and I would recommend anyone in a similar situation to get in contact with Mercy Law."

WHAT OUR CLIENTS SAY

“ My experience of working with Mercy Law was great. They delivered a great service to me and my family. Paul was very helpful and he did not stop until he got a positive outcome for my case. I do not think I would have achieved what I did without the intervention of Mercy Law. I was linked in with no other service and they really stepped up for me and my family. I would highly recommend working with Mercy Law to my friends and family.”

“ I came in contact with Mercy Law through my local Citizens Information Centre. I knew about Mercy Law but was not very sure of what exactly their service did. I worked with Sinead, she was brilliant, she is an incredible worker, she assisted me to get what I am entitled to and I could not fault her work. I would not be where I am now if it was not for the work of Sinead. All the staff of Mercy were lovely and welcoming. ”

“ I am very happy with what MLRC did for me and my family. Everything is now much more stable and I have a place to stay with my family with two meals a day. I am very grateful for all the hard work Paul put into my case. My experience working with Paul was truly life changing and I would not have been able to get to where we are now without him. ”

I found it very difficult to communicate due to my poor English but MLRC were very kind and welcoming. They have had a huge impact on mine and my families' lives. I am very happy where I am now. We initially began on one night only accommodation and now have a stable and warm place to live. I cannot thank you enough.”

“ I would 100% recommend Mercy Law to anyone. They were incredible to work with and no matter who you are they will still try to assist you. Mercy Law were there for me when I had no one. They do not treat you like an outsider but like a human being.”





OUR CASEWORK IN 2019: A YEAR IN REVIEW

MLRC had another exceptionally busy year, with high numbers of vulnerable individuals and families seeking our assistance with their housing issues. We continued to operate a priority referral list to ensure our casework had strategic focus and impact. This guided which cases we took on and the approach we adopted in each case. We provided both legal representation including litigation and advocacy support to our clients in order to secure positive outcomes on their behalf.

In 2019, we had 31 open client files. Of these clients, 77% were of ethnic minority including members of the Traveller community and individuals of Roma ethnicity.

MAIN LEGAL ISSUES OF 2019

-  Challenging refusals to provide emergency accommodation
-  Overcoming barriers to accessing social housing list
-  Challenging deferrals or withdrawals of housing allocations
-  Addressing completely inadequate emergency accommodation
-  Issues arising from over-reliance on the 'self-accommodation' option of emergency accommodation
-  Traveller accommodation issues
-  Challenging evictions of social housing tenants by Approved Housing Bodies

ISSUES ARISING IN MERCY LAW RESOURCE CENTRE CASEWORK IN 2019

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CHALLENGING REFUSALS TO PROVIDE EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

Regrettably again in 2019, many homeless families and individuals who presented to our services were refused emergency accommodation by local authorities. Some of these clients were faced with the prospect of sleeping rough, while others were forced out of necessity to live in cars or rundown caravans without any access to basic facilities.

The reasons proffered by housing authorities to justify the refusals included the lack of suitable emergency accommodation, and assertions of intentional homeless and lack of local connection in the relevant local authority area.

Although housing authorities enjoy a degree of discretion when assessing homelessness and providing emergency accommodation under the Housing Act 1988, this discretion must be exercised on a case by case basis

having regard to all relevant factors. Conversely, the authority cannot take into account irrelevant circumstances such as the circumstances surrounding how an individual became homeless.

Particularly egregious cases related to ethnic minority families, often one parent families with numerous young children, who were refused emergency provision due to a lack of “suitable” homeless accommodation.

Our interventions brought about a successful outcome for the families and individuals involved. In some cases emergency accommodation was secured while in others the housing authorities made offers of social housing to the affected households.



OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SOCIAL HOUSING LIST

Similar to the previous year, many of the cases we worked on in 2019 involved enabling clients to access the social housing list.

In many of these cases our clients were non-Irish nationals. This was on account of an often overly strict interpretation or misapplication of Circular 2012/41. This Circular is a policy document issued by the Department of Housing, Community and Local Government to provide guidance to local authorities regarding acceptance of applications for social housing support from non-Irish nationals. However the Circular, specifically



in its treatment of EU nationals, refers to outdated regulations and is often in conflict with EU free movement rights.

In 2019, we successfully challenged, by way of High Court litigation, refusals to allow EU nationals access to the housing list. In one of these cases, our client had lived in Ireland for many years and raised her young child here. She was faced with homelessness following a relationship breakdown as she could not afford to pay her rent without HAP. Following the separation from her husband, she was reassessed by the local authority in her own right for eligibility to go on the social housing list. She was told by the housing authority she was not eligible to go on the housing list because she did not fit the terms of the Circular and this was 'binding' on the housing authority. Fortunately, legal proceedings brought on her behalf settled in this and other cases prior to any hearing on the basis that the applicants were in fact eligible to go on the social housing list.



CHALLENGING DEFERRALS OR WITHDRAWALS OF HOUSING ALLOCATIONS

We encountered a number of clients whose housing allocations were deferred or withdrawn on dubious grounds.

Housing authorities are entitled to defer an allocation or withdraw an offer of accommodation, under section 14 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1997 (as amended), where a member of the household has engaged in anti-social behaviour or fails to provide information requested by the housing authority.

However, in a number of cases we worked on in 2019, we discovered that this section appeared to have been unlawfully applied to defer housing allocations or to withdraw offers of accommodation. These decisions related to pending charges relating to minor offences or to failures to provide information

which was not requested or within the applicant's knowledge.

In one case, our client had been offered a much-needed transfer to Approved Housing Body ("AHB") accommodation after being on the transfer list for a very long period. However, just before she was due to move in and after signing the tenancy agreement for the new property, the allocation was withdrawn on estate management grounds. Our intervention ensured that the attempted withdrawal was revoked and that our client could move into her new home.



ADDRESSING COMPLETELY INADEQUATE EMERGENCY HOMELESS ACCOMMODATION

Throughout 2019, MLRC continued to support many vulnerable individuals and families who were in completely inappropriate emergency accommodation. In many cases, these clients had spent excessive periods in unsuitable emergency accommodation and this in turn was evidenced to have an adverse and detrimental impact on their health and well-being.

MLRC assisted some single people who were experiencing homelessness, many of whom faced chronic insecurity in their emergency accommodation, frequently moving from B&B to B&B or hostel to hostel. Some reported dreadful conditions in some of the hostel placements, and felt unsafe accessing a bed for the night.

Several homeless families also accessed our services complaining of being 'stuck' in emergency accommodation and recounted the very adverse impact the homeless accommodation was having on the health, in particular, of their children. MLRC obtained medical reports in some cases that evidenced the negative impact on the health of the children, particularly in relation to mental health, nutrition and developmental progress. Relying on such reports, MLRC

frequently argued that local authorities were not meeting the needs of homeless children, in the manner in which they were providing emergency accommodation. MLRC highlighted the highly unsuitable nature of hotel accommodation for families and raised concerns about the negative impact of families living in congregated settings such as family hubs. In these representations made on behalf of clients, MLRC relied in particular on legal protections of family and private life and the protections against inhuman and degrading treatment. MLRC succeeded in securing more suitable long-term emergency accommodation for many of these vulnerable clients.

During the year MLRC also began work on an alternative legal remedy of the collective complaints mechanism under the European Social Charter to complain of the negative impact on children of the current provision of homeless accommodation.



ISSUES ARISING FROM OVER RELIANCE ON THE SELF-ACCOMMODATION OPTION OF EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

Throughout 2019, local authorities continued to use the 'self-accommodation' form of emergency accommodation, placing the burden on the homeless family to source their own hotel or B&B. Larger families, Traveller families, non-Irish national families and those families with limited English faced serious difficulties in securing bookings in hotels and B&Bs. This exposed them to the risk of being "street homeless" or resulted in them falling back on the local authorities' wholly unsatisfactory provision of "one night only" emergency accommodation. This leads to chronic instability in a family's living situation.

In late 2019, we were referred the case of a vulnerable non-Irish national family who had been on one night only emergency accommodation with five children for eight months.

Just prior to us meeting the family, the mother gave birth to a sixth child. The mother and her newborn baby were discharged from the maternity hospital back into one night only emergency accommodation with the family. A public health nurse and a medical social worker from a maternity hospital each wrote to the local authority to highlight the unsuitability of one night only emergency accommodation and negative impact on the newborn baby. The family were subsequently approved for 'self-accommodation' by the local authority but this was totally unsuitable given that the family have very limited English, they are a large family and the father was in employment. As they were unable to source their own accommodation, they remained in one night only emergency accommodation. MLRC were instructed to act on the family's behalf at the end of 2019 and the matter resolved in early 2020 following our legal intervention and initiation of High Court litigation on behalf of the family. They are now residing in family emergency accommodation awaiting an allocation of housing.



TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION

In the second half of 2019 MLRC opened a new legal outreach clinic in partnership with Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service, specifically to provide legal advice and representation to members of the Traveller Community facing housing difficulties. Through this clinic we assisted numerous clients with their housing issues. Examples of the issues that clients presented at that clinic included: difficulties securing access to a local authority's social housing transfer list on the basis of overcrowding; requests for essential maintenance work to be carried out to dwellings and on halting sites that are not fit for habitation, and excessive length of time spent in emergency homeless accommodation.



CHALLENGING EVICTIONS OF SOCIAL HOUSING TENANTS BY APPROVED HOUSING BODIES

Throughout 2019 MLRC saw a number of notices of termination issued by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to tenants in the first six months of their tenancies. As MLRC have outlined previously, AHBs are permitted to do this, relying on the provision of the Residential Tenancies Act which allows a landlord to terminate a tenancy without giving a reason within the first six months of the tenancy. MLRC has sought to challenge this position in the RTB and High Court in cases of long-term social housing tenants and has provided other individuals with advice in their attempts to challenge same.

One example concerned a former tenant of Dublin City Council who transferred to AHB-provided accommodation and whose case favourably resolved following our intervention. MLRC represented this client in an RTB Tribunal after appealing an RTB Adjudication. The client was a tenant of Dublin City Council for 25 years before transferring to an AHB tenancy due to overcrowding. She received a notice of termination in the first six months of her AHB tenancy. MLRC argued that the notice of termination interfered disproportionately with her right to family and private life, which included her right to a home, as protected by Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights. The client gave evidence that, at the signing of her tenancy, she understood that there would be a six-year agreement signed after six months and if she was happy at that point, she could stay in her new property for as long as she wanted.

The AHB did not attend the RTB Tribunal. The RTB Tribunal found that there was an implied term in the tenancy and that no written warnings or evidence of any breach of the client's obligations under the tenancy were issued to the client. The notice of termination was deemed to be invalid. The AHB did not appeal this decision and the client remains in the property. She was hugely relieved to avert eviction and to be able to remain in her home.



CONCLUSION

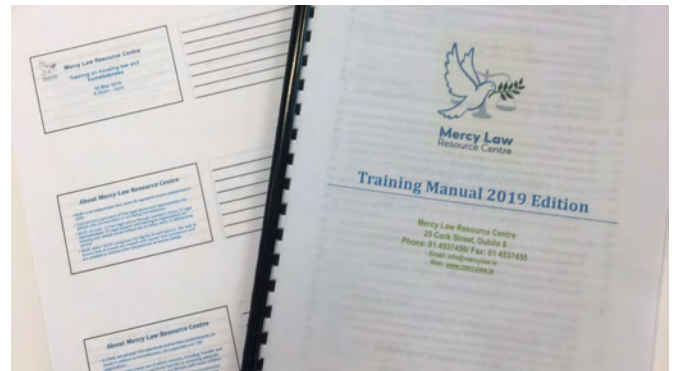
MLRC legal service was exceptionally busy and in demand in 2019. Our solicitors worked with dedication and commitment with clients in deeply distressing situations, relying on the law and their advocacy skills to address the urgent issues arising. In the majority of cases, MLRC secured positive and transformative outcomes for vulnerable families and individuals.



LEGAL TRAINING FOR ORGANISATIONS WORKING IN FIELD OF HOMELESSNESS

Housing and related social welfare law can be complex. It can be very difficult to access clear, comprehensive and accurate information on the law regarding rights and entitlements. To help address this, MLRC solicitors deliver training on housing law and homelessness to advocates working or volunteering in the field of homelessness and to professionals working on housing issues.

This training helps those working in the field of homelessness and housing to support their clients, to help them identify legal issues and to recognise when it may be appropriate to refer a person for legal advice.



MLRC training is designed to be interactive and responsive to the issues encountered by the attendees in the course of their work. We use a combination of presentation on the law and discussion of case studies so that attendees can enjoy interactive, lively and practical training sessions.

In 2019, MLRC held training for 150 people, all staff and volunteers working in the field of homelessness or whose clients' issues included housing and homelessness. In 2019, MLRC provided tailored training to staff of the following organisations:

- National Migrant Support Agencies
- A&L Goodbody Solicitors
- South Dublin Citizen's Information Services
- Respond Housing
- Local County Councillors

MLRC also provided training materials on migrant access to housing, to support the integration work of Immigrant Council of Ireland. In 2019, MLRC provided a series of six workshops on social welfare law, covering a wide range of topics. We are most grateful to Professor Gerry Whyte, School of Law, Trinity College Dublin, who delivered the sessions and provided detailed training materials on each topic covered on the course.

WHAT OUR PARTNER ORGANISATIONS SAY ABOUT MLRC

“ Our close working relationship with Mercy Law Resource Centre has been invaluable to our clients in accessing accommodation and appropriate housing that otherwise would not have been available to them. The Solicitors in Mercy Law have provided a legal remedy to some of our most vulnerable clients. Often presenting in bleak and difficult circumstances, they have exhausted all avenues in accessing the supports they need.

Mercy Law’s professionalism and dedication has given our clients hope and dignity. By providing in house bi-monthly legal clinics and working closely with us, Mercy Law’s legal expertise and ability to address complex housing issues has been transformational in the lived experience of families and individuals accessing our service. I cannot stress how beneficial this relationship is in our ability to deliver effective outcomes for our clients. We look forward to continuing our work with Mercy Law.”

Crosscare Migrant Project

“ I have worked with Mercy Law for some time now in my capacity as an IASIO Resettlement Coordinator in the Dochas Centre. In that time Mercy Law have proven to be very responsive to my requests for support on behalf of the women I work with, in particular as advocates in the housing and welfare issues that can arise from imprisonment.

Every request is treated with dignity and respect, and the support they provide is truly appreciated by the women. I value the support Mercy Law provide and look forward to further collaboration in the future.”

IASIO, Mountjoy Prison Campus & Dochas Womens Prison

“ Exchange House Ireland works in partnership with Mercy Law Resource Centre to provide an outreach clinic to members of the Traveller community. They provide exceptional legal advice and representation on housing related matters to our service users - many of whom are experiencing poor housing conditions and or homelessness.

In my experience, their team works tirelessly to provide a high quality service to individuals in desperate need of assistance. Their expert knowledge is an invaluable resource to our team at Exchange House Ireland.

Our team regularly receives favourable feedback from our services users on the impact on their work.”

Exchange House Ireland

Organisations which attended MLRC training in 2019:



- Ballyfermot Social Intervention Initiative
- Cavan Citizens Information Service
- Citizens Information Board
- Cross Care Haven House
- Crosscare Bentley House, Dun Laoghaire
- Dublin City Councillors
- Dublin City Northwest Citizens Information Service
- Dublin Simon
- Galway Citizens Information Service
- Housing Agency
- iCare Housing
- ICON
- IHREC
- Local authority staff
- Mental Health Social Workers, HSE
- National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities
- Offaly Traveller Movement
- Ryan's Solicitors
- Salvation Agency
- SAOL Project
- Smyly Trust
- Sophia Housing
- Staff of TDs
- Technological University of Dublin
- Threshold
- Women's Aid

FEEDBACK ON TRAINING IN 2019

"I found the training session very useful and will use it in my work going forward."

"Training was very informative, useful and was also enjoyable."

"Very interesting and informative and very useful information for advocating on behalf of clients."

"Found the sessions excellent. Really learned a lot from Gerry. I found the comments and questions from others on the course very useful as well."

"Very comprehensive and not rushed. Enough time for questions and feedback."

"I thoroughly enjoyed the training. I found the trainer engaging and knowledgeable."

"In addition to the excellent training presentation, sessions were a good opportunity to hear about cases dealt with and issues arising in other area/centres."



Are you or your organisation interested in MLRC housing law training?

The main MLRC training consists of a full day (7 hours) session. Participants receive the MLRC training manual and topics covered include:

- Introduction to MLRC and MLRC casework
- Background legal principles including freedom of information and fair procedures
- The law in relation to social housing including eligibility, priority and transfers, HAP, evictions
- The law in relation to homelessness
- Case studies and breakout sessions
- Question and answer session

We are now delivering online training! See our website for our half day online training workshops.

POLICY WORK



MLRC’s policy work in 2019 was informed by the legal issues that arose in our casework. Our focus during the year was on addressing family homelessness and on progressing the right to housing.

LAUNCH OF REPORT: "LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESS FAMILIES"

On 11 December 2019 Deputy Noel Rock, then Chair of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, launched our report entitled Report on "Lived Experiences of Homeless Families". We were delighted to also be joined by published poet and playwright Colm Keegan (pictured below) who shared a powerful poem on homelessness and read a piece entitled 'home' at the event.



The report was based on MLRC’s extensive engagement with homeless families and sought to bring their voices to the fore of the policy debate. The report drew on MLRC’s work with over 800 families experiencing homelessness in the preceding two years. It not only detailed the challenging experiences of these families but also included their own words describing their experiences, as well as analysis from medical

professionals on the impact of the homeless crisis on these families, including young children.

"My children speak all the time about being homeless and ask me when we will have our own home. The younger children say they are ashamed of being homeless and will not have any of their friends to play. We do not have a proper place or set up for these visits and we generally do not go to other people’s houses as it reminds us on what we are missing out on." *MLRC client*

"The sense of stigma and hopelessness that the children feel is corrosive and damaging to their self-esteem. It makes it hard for them to make friends with other children in school, as they fear being judged or excluded." *Social worker*

The report made a number of recommendations. It called for an urgent shift in Government policy to meaningfully address the dysfunctions and failures in the homeless system, so that children do not continue to experience adversity and damage to their well-being, health and educational attainment.

Speaking at the launch, Deputy Rock endorsed a number of the recommendations set out by MLRC and noted that these recommendations were included in the recent reports launched by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs which focused on Child and Family Homelessness.



MLRC PRESENTS TO OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE ON FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

On 12 June 2019 MLRC presented to members of the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government on child and family homelessness. Before the Committee, MLRC raised urgent concerns in relation to the accommodation provision made to vulnerable homeless families and set out several positive recommendations to address these issues.

MLRC Managing Solicitor highlighted in particular the increased reliance on provision of one night only emergency accommodation to vulnerable families and shared the devastating impacts on families arising from this chronically unstable emergency accommodation.



Later in the year, MLRC welcomed the report of the Committee that incorporated all recommendations made by MLRC in relation to family homelessness, including an express recommendation that reliance on one night only emergency accommodation must cease. MLRC continues to advocate for implementation of those recommendations into 2020.

MLRC PRESENTS TO OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE

MLRC presented to members of the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality on Wednesday 11 December 2019 on the issue of access to justice. MLRC welcomed the focus of the Committee on this vital issue, and raised a range of concerns in relation to

the barriers that exist to vulnerable individuals accessing legal advice and representation. MLRC highlighted the absolute dearth of free and accessible legal aid provision on housing and of homeless matters and the difficulties this presents to vulnerable individuals. MLRC Managing Solicitor noted that the primary challenge for any individual with a potential legal issue is access to legal advice and information in the first instance. MLRC Managing Solicitor advocated to the Committee for greater support of the community law centre model, as operated by Mercy Law Resource Centre and other independent law centres.

RIGHT TO HOUSING

In January 2019, MLRC Managing Solicitor spoke at a conference on the right to housing, alongside a number of housing experts. The conference was organised by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions as part of the Raise the Roof campaign.

In March 2019, MLRC was delighted to speak at an event on the right to housing as part of Maynooth NUI Social Justice week.

Throughout 2019, MLRC remained an active member of the steering group of Home for Good, a coalition of individuals, organisations and academics, advocating for constitutional protection of the right to housing. The group launched in early 2020.



BEFRIENDING SERVICE



The Befriending Service is not only a legal support – it is an invaluable asset to MLRC and ensures that we are providing a holistic service to our clients. We recognise that the legal system can be alienating, difficult and frustrating to negotiate. We also recognise that our clients often have a range of challenges that they may need guidance or support to overcome.

As part of this service, befrienders are matched with clients in order to accompany them and provide them with emotional and practical support as they go through the difficult process of asserting their rights. The role may entail supporting the befriended to fill in forms, accompanying him/her to court, helping her/him to attend appointments and being a listening ear. Training and ongoing support is provided to all befrienders and careful consideration is given to matching clients with the right befriender, so they can form a mutually beneficial relationship.

Throughout 2019, MLRC actively engaged with Volunteer Ireland, contributing to their Volunteer Fair in October and their volunteer information share, in order to recruit new befrienders. MLRC also did a full review of our volunteer policy and procedures and updated our training materials. We ran an information evening for prospective befrienders where one of our existing befrienders shared her positive experience of volunteering with MLRC.

By the end of 2019, we had recruited new volunteer befrienders who are supporting our service into 2020. MLRC were delighted to begin training our newly recruited volunteers in early 2020.

BEFRIENDER STORY

"When I was offered the opportunity to become a befriender with MLRC I felt apprehensive about my lack of expertise in this area. While the training eased my mind a little I still felt quite unequipped. However, I was assured I would receive support from the professionals whenever needed and that they were always available to answer questions.

My first assignment was to assist a man make an application for housing with the County Council. He had separated from his wife and was living with his mother and adult siblings. He was partially sighted and found it difficult communicating with the authorities and filling out forms.

MLRC legal staff member arranged a meeting to introduce me to this gentleman and discuss his situation. At that point I was asked if I thought I could be of help. Over a three year period I had the privilege of helping this man complete application forms, make numerous visits to the council office if feedback was slow and resolve any minor issues or concerns. He was a very open and kind man and we became good friends. Even though it was a long haul the end result was positive. He finally succeeded in being housed under the HAP scheme.

I was supported every step of the way by MLRC legal staff when needed. I learnt a lot about the homeless situation, the housing difficulty and resources available. Along the way we meet so many caring and helpful staff."

ORGANISATION

STAFF

MLRC had the following staff team in 2019:



Rebecca Keatinge
Managing Solicitor



Paul Dornan
Solicitor



Sinead McGarrigle
Solicitor



Danielle Curtis
Administrator &
Caseworker



Nuala Monaghan
Legal Secretary



Shauna Curran
Administrator

Sincere thanks to all Mercy Law staff members for their hard work and enormous dedication to work of MLRC throughout 2019.

In the early part of 2019, MLRC said farewell to solicitors David Joyce and Sinead Kerin and thanked them for their huge contribution to the work of MLRC.

In 2019, MLRC was delighted to welcome two new solicitors to the team: Paul Dornan and Sinead McGarrigle. Their past experience and expertise brought great benefits to MLRC clients and the work of MLRC more generally during the course of 2019.

PAUL DORNAN

Paul is a solicitor with extensive experience in family and childcare law having worked for the Legal Aid Board as a part of the civil legal aid and advice team at Finglas Law Centre. Prior to this, Paul was part of the corporate team at A&L Goodbody, Belfast, acting on behalf of businesses and charities in relation to corporate legal needs. During his time with A&L Goodbody, Paul was also an active contributor to A&L pro bono projects, including producing a report on forced labour. Paul holds a BA in History & Political Science and a Masters of International Peace Studies from Trinity College Dublin. Paul also holds a Master of Legal Science from Queens University in Belfast and attended the Institute of Professional Legal Studies in Queens University Belfast, subsequently qualifying as a solicitor in 2016.

SINEAD MCGARRIGLE

Sinead is a graduate of Trinity College Dublin (LL.B.) and the University of Oxford (B.C.L.). While studying at Trinity as a law student, Sinead developed her legal knowledge of human rights, a lifelong passion that has seen her volunteer in a wide range of organisations. This motivation to make a positive impact on vulnerable communities has seen Sinead working with underprivileged young adults in Hong Kong, disabled orphans in Romania and as a volunteer with the Free Legal Advice Centre (FLAC) in Dublin. Following her studies at Trinity, Sinead specialised in human rights law at the University of Oxford, furthering her legal knowledge and expertise. Sinead previously worked as an Associate at McCann Fitzgerald, working on cases relating to EU and Competition law, constitutional law and legislative queries.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteerism is a key aspect of the impactful work that MLRC does. We have a number of administrative, legal and befriending volunteers working with MLRC, who greatly enhance our work. Without their support, our work would not be possible and we are very grateful for their assistance. We are particularly appreciative of the support of the following volunteers:



Sr. Caitriona O'Hara
Volunteer Administrator



Sr. Kathleen Byrne
Volunteer Administrator



Geraldine Hynes
Volunteer Solicitor



Aoife Gillespie
Volunteer Solicitor

TESTIMONIAL FROM VOLUNTEER

"It is nine years now since I first heard of Mercy Law Resource Centre from a friend who was then managing solicitor. It took little encouragement for me to come on board as a volunteer when I saw the very worthwhile achievements of this fledgling centre. There was already significant unmet legal need in the area of housing and homelessness and even then, a lot of work to be done. MLRC has developed with changing social circumstances and an exponential growth in the need for its services. There are now six legal, paralegal and administrative staff, augmented by a succession of bright and committed interns providing vital services to an ever-larger client base. My input has changed from the early days of locum solicitor operating outreach clinics and High Court litigation to occasional advice and sounding board. What makes MLRC special for me is the people who work there. The ethos and the atmosphere amongst the team members have never changed, despite the hugely demanding and responsible work they all do. These vibrant people that I have met and worked with over the years are the life-blood of MLRC. Their combination of empathy and expertise, commitment and creativity, dedication and good humour make the staff a privilege to work with and always a pleasure to meet. From the original incredibly resourceful coordinator to the most recent arrival in the Cork Street nerve centre, you know who you are. Take a bow!"

Geraldine Hynes



INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

MLRC is always delighted to welcome interns to work with us as they bring new energy and freshness to our work and the addition of their legal research and assistance adds greatly to our capacity to progress legal cases and advance our policy work. MLRC is delighted to have a strong relationship with Trinity FLAC and has been delighted in recent years to welcome as an intern the winner of the Trinity FLAC Karen Kenny Memorial Moot Court Competition. MLRC also supports the Clinical Legal Education programs of UCD and TCD.



In 2019, we warmly welcomed and would like to thank the following interns: Ciara Ross, Michael O'Brien, Ceara Tonna Barthet, Nadine Fitzpatrick, Mary Hastings and Louis O'Carroll.

THE EXPERIENCE OF MLRC INTERNS IN 2019

CEARA TONNA BARTHET

"Last summer, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to intern for a month with the Mercy Law Resource centre.



This experience, for me, was a very positive one: I gained a great insight into how the law can effect change in the lives of vulnerable people, obtained a real and practical understanding of the work of a solicitor and also developed my own confidence and interpersonal skills. These benefits and my enjoyment of my time with Mercy came down to the wonderful staff that work there. I was made to feel valued and included every step of the way, and was given ample opportunity to contribute to the work being done in the centre. The work I undertook was incredibly varied, engaging and practical. I could not recommend interning with Mercy enough."

NADINE FITZPATRICK

"I spent a month interning in Mercy Law during June 2019. I had admired their work from afar before approaching Rebecca about work experience with the organisation.



I gained a great insight into the struggles faced by members of society experiencing extreme housing issues. I was allowed to use my personal and legal skills to assist the team with their very useful work. I also had the great opportunity of attending events such as the launch of the IHREC annual report and participating in a training session for Migrant Access to Social Protection, provided by Crosscare. Everyone at MLRC was so willing and eager to help me in each and every way. I never felt like a burden in the office and more like a long-standing member of the team. Their kindness and helpful experience was so appreciated. I am so grateful to Rebecca and all the team at MLRC for the fantastic opportunity."



COMMUNICATIONS

In 2019, MLRC’s communication capacity and reach continued to broaden. MLRC featured in 22 media pieces, including high profile interviews with MLRC clients and our Managing Solicitor on flagship news programmes. Our report on the lived experiences of homeless families also featured prominently.

In 2019, we published four e-zines that went to our nearly 1,000 subscribers. We continued to maintain our website to ensure it was up to date and informative. MLRC was honoured to be a finalist in the community law firm of the year category at the Irish Law Awards in June 2019.

Our pro bono partners, A&L Goodbody were also shortlisted for the Excellence in Community Volunteering award in the Chambers Ireland Corporate Social Responsibility in relation to the outreach clinic project with MLRC and Focus Ireland.

To keep up to date with news from MLRC, please keep in touch through our social media channels and through our website.

Homeless children poorly nourished and falling asleep in school, report says



Homeless children feel 'shame and embarrassment' at school (Stock photo)

Shane Phelan
December 11 2019 04:52 PM

Children living in emergency accommodation due to the homelessness crisis were found to be "nutritionally deficient" and "falling asleep" at school desks, according to a report by a legal charity.

The report by the Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) highlighted the impact of homelessness and poor short and long term accommodation on children's physical and mental health.



MLRC Managing Solicitor @RebeccaKeatinge highlighted the inadequacy of the 'self accommodation option' which allows a #housing authority to accept a family as #homeless but place the burden on often very vulnerable #families w/ young children to source accommodation themselves



@MLRCLaw are delighted to be at the @IrishLawAwards this evening! We are nominated for the Pro Bono/Community Law Firm category

#housinglaw #probono #IrishLawAwards



MLRC was delighted to be joined last night by @NoelRock & poet @Colm_Keegan

Thanks to all who attended & to those who have supported us. Without your generous support we could not provide the service that we do.

The report is available online here: bit.ly/2Eck6wF



MARKING TEN YEARS OF MLRC

In September 2019, MLRC was delighted to be joined by the Honourable Mr. Justice Frank Clarke, Chief Justice to mark 10 years of MLRC. At the event, the Chief Justice commended the work of MLRC and recognised the clear need for accessible legal services for those in housing difficulty and those experiencing homelessness. We were most grateful to the Chief Justice for speaking at the event.



GOVERNANCE

MLRC is governed by a Board of Directors. The Board of Directors meets with our Managing Solicitor every six to eight weeks.

In 2019, MLRC held seven Board meetings. At each meeting, the Managing Solicitor presented a report to the Board on case work, policy work, compliance matters, employment matters and future development of MLRC. A finance report was also reviewed together with governance considerations. The Chair of the Board remained in frequent contact with the Managing Solicitor in between Board meetings.

The MLRC Finance & Risk Committee comprises of two Board members, MLRC's Managing Solicitor and two MLRC Administrators. The Committee oversees the finances of the organisation and identifies and addresses any risks to the organisation. In 2019 the Finance & Risk Committee had seven meetings and reported to the Board on the financial position of the organisation.

The MLRC Policy Committee comprises of two Board members, MLRC's Managing Solicitor & two MLRC solicitors. The Committee oversees the strategic direction of MLRC's casework and also directs the policy work of the organisation. In 2019, the Committee met formally on two occasions and there was substantial consultation with the Committee during the year for their review and oversight of our several policy submissions and publications.

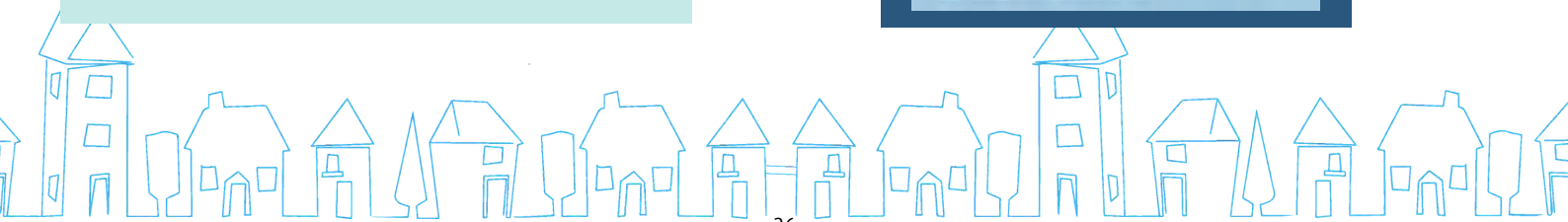
Mercy Law Resource Centre CLG is registered as:

- An Independent Law Centre with the Law Society of Ireland
- A Charity with the Revenue Commissioners (Chy No: 18698) and with the Charities Registration Authority (Charity Registration No: 20072254)
- A Company Limited by Guarantee and not having share capital with the Company. Registration Office (Co. Reg. No: 471072)
- MLRC is registered with the Charities Regulator and is listed on the Public Register of Charities.



STRATEGIC PLAN

In July 2019, the Board of MLRC adopted our Strategic Plan 2019-2024. This plan guides and underpins the direction of the work of the organisation and is published on our website. It was devised in consultation with staff and volunteers of MLRC. The Board is appraised of progress towards achieving the goals as set out in the plan at each meeting and a mid-term review of the plan is scheduled for 2021.





CHARITIES GOVERNANCE CODE

The Charities Governance Code was published by the Charities Regulator in 2019. It sets standards that a community, voluntary or charitable organisation is expected to maintain in order to effectively manage and control its affairs.

MLRC strives to achieve its charitable objectives with integrity and is managed in an effective, efficient, accountable and transparent way. MLRC is fully committed to meeting the standards as outlined in the Governance Code. In 2019, MLRC worked towards evidencing our adherence to the code and to put in place systems and processes to ensure that MLRC achieves its objectives with integrity.

In 2019, the MLRC staff and Board attended Governance Code training sessions to learn about changes in the code and to gain insights on best practices. On foot of this, MLRC worked in 2019 and into 2020 on implementing policies, systems and processes to ensure compliance with the new code by 2020.

The Directors of MLRC Board in 2019 were:



Helena O'Donoghue
Chairperson since 2009



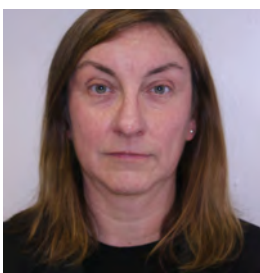
Anne Doyle
Director since 2009



Niall Farrell
Director since 2011



Ciara McGrath
Director since 2011



Deirdre Quigley
Director since 2011



Gerry Whyte
Director since 2009



Patrick Stagg
Company Secretary
since 2009



Liam Twohig
Director since 2011



Catherine Dooley
Director since 2019



Eamonn Casey
Director since 2019

In 2019, MLRC was delighted to welcome Catherine Dooley and Eamonn Casey to the Board of MLRC. Each were provided with a welcome and an introduction and induction to the work of MLRC.

FINANCE

MLRC's financial year runs from 1 May to 30 April. In 2019, MLRC implemented a new accounting system in order to allow for financial reporting under the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP). MLRC is committed to best practice in financial reporting and accountability. Our accounts continue to be audited annually. Our audited accounts are published on our website.

FUNDRAISING

MLRC has been a signatory to the Statement of Guiding Principles on Charitable Fundraising since 2013. MLRC is fully committed to maintaining the standards contained within the Statement of Guiding Principles of Fundraising, which are to improve fundraising practice, promote high levels of accountability and transparency and to provide clarity and assurances to donors and prospective donors. MLRC is also operating in line with the guidance on fundraising issued by the Charities Regulator.

COST OF OUR SERVICE

The cost of running MLRC in 2019 amounted to €262,468. MLRC is completely dependent on fundraising and in 2019 did not receive any main public grants or State monies. In 2019, we secured a total of €318,191, out of which €258,010 was received by way of donations and €40,895 was secured through successful grant applications. The balance was made up of State rebate of maternity benefit, recovered legal costs, further fundraising and income from provision of training.

The value of our service far exceeds the cost as a result of a large number of in-kind donations we receive, for example:

- Reduced rent and utilities
- Free conference and reception facilities
- Pro bono legal services by barristers
- Pro bono expert reports from doctors/engineers etc.
- Pro bono auditing and accounting service

- Volunteer befrienders
- Volunteer administrators
- Volunteer part-time solicitors
- Legal interns
- Communication interns

We estimate the value of these donations to be approximately €150,000 for which we are extremely grateful.

Our main costs include:

- Office expenses
- Core salaries and employer costs of administration staff and solicitors
- Project costs, including operation of outreach clinics,
- Befriending programme, policy and research, and client costs
- Publication and launch of reports
- Advertising/explanatory booklets/leaflets
- Training materials

MLRC continues to work towards becoming self-financing. In 2019, MLRC provided an increased number of housing law training sessions which generated income. MLRC trialed Facebook donation promotions and have continued to explore other income streams. Into 2020, MLRC will continue to apply for appropriate grants, and expand our fundraising programme, including our donor programme and fundraising events.



FUNDERS

MLRC would like to acknowledge and thank our funders most sincerely for their generous support in 2019. MLRC's funders are a combination of corporate and philanthropic organisations and individuals acting in a private capacity. We gratefully received grants and donations ranging from €10 up to €80,000.

In particular, we would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Sisters of Mercy who have supported our legal service from inception. We are also most grateful to Mason, Hayes and Curran and the Archbishop of Dublin for the most generous support.



FUNDER TESTIMONIAL



"The relationship between Mercy Law and Mason Hayes & Curran is long established, dating back to the Centre's inception. We have been honoured and proud to have been involved, in a small way, in Mercy Law's story. From the outset we intended that our role would be deeper than a donation and this has been achieved through many and varied professional collaborations through the years. For almost 12 years now, the Centre has been at the forefront of legal service provision for those who are homeless, and at risk of homelessness. Mercy Law has been no stranger to adapting to meet new and diverse demands, and has greatly expanded its services over this time, going from strength to strength. Recent innovations such as the Focus Ireland clinic held in Temple Bar, and the clinic run in partnership with Exchange House to assist those in the Traveller community, underscore the keen awareness which the Centre has of the most effective ways to reach those most in need of their support.

I have had the great pleasure to spend time in the Mercy Law offices, and in the Centre's legal advice clinic in the Liberties. I have seen first-hand how the Mercy Law team works harmoniously to provide legal assistance to those in the community who so rely on their services; their non-judgmental, compassionate approach to their work is inspiring.

I was given the opportunity to use the knowledge and skills gained during my MHC training to advocate to local authorities on behalf of two young families, which formed part of ultimately successful appeals against denials of social housing. I was also able to provide preliminary research assistance to the Centre in its collective complaint under the European Social Charter, addressing the needs of children in homelessness. The law may be very powerful, but the power of Mercy Law in using the law to protect the best interests of those who may not otherwise be given a voice is much more. The Centre provides service which is invaluable and, in many instances, life changing."

Yvonne Kennedy
Solicitor
Mason, Hayes & Curran

HOW YOU CAN HELP MLRC

MLRC is entirely dependent on donations and grants to maintain our vital service. We are also reliant on the generosity and commitment of volunteers. We – and most importantly, our clients – value your support hugely.

CORPORATE PARTNERSHIP

Do you think your company can help?

MLRC is looking for partnerships with businesses so that together we can make an impact on the lives of our vulnerable clients. We would be delighted to engage with your corporate social responsibility team or committee and share information on MLRC's much needed service.



To talk to us about how you can help MLRC, please contact

info@mercylaw.ie

or call the MLRC office on

01 453 7459

FUNDRAISE

Organise your own fundraiser for MLRC

Take part in an event on behalf of MLRC or organize your own fundraiser, such as a benefit night, coffee morning, sporting event, lunch-time event, etc. All funds will go towards the provision of free legal advice and legal representation to the most vulnerable in our society.

DONATE

There are a number of ways to donate to MLRC

MLRC is totally dependent on charitable funds to continue to provide free legal advice & representation to those who are homeless and at risk of homelessness.

Donations can be made via:

Post: You can post cheques, bank drafts or postal orders, made payable to the "Mercy Law Resource Centre", to our office at 25 Cork Street, Dublin 8.

Bank transfer: Donations can be made by sending money directly to our bank account by either bank transfer or standing order, please contact MLRC for details

Online: To donate online just click on the "Donate"

button on our website at www.mercylaw.ie and enter your details. Donations are made through Facebook and PayPal.

VOLUNTEER

Volunteer with MLRC

At MLRC, volunteers are an integral part of our centre. We appreciate all the assistance we get and value being able to draw on such great expertise, experience and passion.

If you feel you would like to offer your time, either in a small way or regular times we would be very interested in speaking with you.

Volunteer positions may be in legal, research, communications, administration or fundraising roles.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The value of our service far exceeds the cost as a result of the large number of in-kind donations and pro bono support that we receive. MLRC would like to acknowledge and thank all those who provide services to us.

SOPHIA HOUSING

We are particularly grateful to Sophia Housing, who support our service in a number of ways, including provision of free conference and reception facilities and assisting with maintenance. In 2019, Sophia Housing facilitated our need for further office and meeting space, for which we are extremely grateful. The additional space has greatly enhanced our ability to meet the needs of our vulnerable clients.

BARRISTERS AND PRO BONO SUPPORT

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the following barristers who provided us with pro bono legal support.

Rosario Boyle SC	David Leonard BL
Siobhan Phelan SC	Derek Shortall BL
Teresa Blake SC	Eoin Coffey BL
Cormac O'Dúlacháin SC	Lewis Mooney BL
Michael Lynn SC	Michael Kinsley BL
Conor Dignam SC	Nóra Ní Loinsigh BL
Alan DP Brady BL	Tricia Sheehy-Skeffington BL
Colin Smith BL	

AUDITOR

We are hugely grateful to our auditors Anne Brady McQuillans DFK, in particular Natalie Kelly, Lisa Millett, Luke Gannon, Conor Amerlynck and Mark Lam for their ongoing support.

PHOTOGRAPHER DESIGNER

Derek Speirs

Danielle Curtis

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer Administrators:

Sr Caitriona O'Hara & Sr Kathleen Byrne

Volunteer Solicitors:

Geraldine Hynes & Aoife Gillespie

To our many volunteer befrienders, in particular to our long-term befrienders Michael Liddy, Adele Lawlor & Orla O'Connell

Volunteer Interns:

Michael O'Brien, Nadine Fitzpatrick, Ceara Tonna-Barthet; Louis O'Carroll, Ciara Ross, Mary Hastings

OTHERS

- James Rooney
- John Gaynor & Co Solicitors
- Paul D'Alton, Clinical Psychologist
- Donal Ryan, Accountant
- Dorothy Barry, Consultant
- Monica Hynds, Barnardos
- Noel Guiden, Behan and Associates Legal Cost Accountants
- Staff of Liberties Citizens Information Centre
- Staff of Focus Ireland Coffee Shop
- Staff of Crosscare Cathedral Street
- Staff of Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service
- Staff of IASIO
- Staff of Crosscare Haven House hostel
- Staff of Dochas Prison
- Staff of Dublin City Volunteer Centre
- Aiden Collard BL
- Neil Maddox BL
- Pól O'Murchú, Solicitor
- The PILA team
- Liam Thornton
- Cormac Breatnach
- Martin Kelly & Staff

APPENDIX

Balance Sheet as at 30 April 2019

	2019 €	2018 €
Fixed Assets		
Intangible assets	3,897	0
Tangible assets	<u>17,092</u>	<u>9,680</u>
	20,989	9,680
Current Assets		
Debtors	8,989	9,839
Cash and cash equivalents	<u>311,996</u>	<u>270,937</u>
	320,985	280,776
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	<4,062>	<8,267>
Net Current Assets	316,923	272,509
Total Assets less Current Liabilities	337,912	282,189
Reserves		
Income and expenditure account	337,912	282,189
Equity attributable to owners of the company	337,912	282,189

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small company regime and in accordance with FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland", applying Section 1A of that Standard.

Approved by the Board on 9 December 2019 and signed on its behalf by:



Helena O'Donoghue
Director



Patrick Stagg
Director





Providing free legal advice and representation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

Mercy Law Resource Centre

25 Cork Street, Dublin 8, Ireland

T: 01 453 7459 - F: 01 453 7455

Email:
info@mercylaw.ie

Facebook:
[@MercyLawResourceCentre](https://www.facebook.com/MercyLawResourceCentre)

Twitter:
[@MLRCLaw](https://twitter.com/MLRCLaw)

