



Mercy Law
Resource Centre

Annual Report 2018

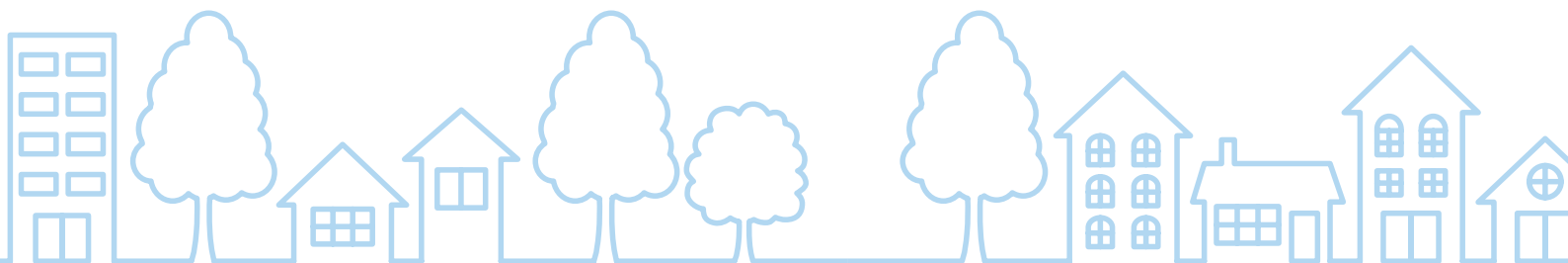




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WELCOME

Chairperson of the Board of Directors, Sr Helena O'Donoghue

Mercy Law Resource Centre is ten years old! Why is it still there, you may well ask? Established in September 2009 to provide free legal assistance to vulnerable people affected by homelessness, there was an assumption then that this scourge on society would gradually abate through the combination of State and non-State efforts and policies. Instead, MLRC has witnessed the continuation, and indeed increase, of deeply unfair procedures and circumstances, amounting to crisis level for over 10,000 people and creating very distressing human realities.

In its first year of existence, MLRC provided free legal advice and representation to 270 clients. In 2018 that figure rose to 1,381, a slight increase on the 1,333 which MLRC solicitors assisted in 2017. In the ten years to date over 8,000 disadvantaged people have availed of MLRC's services. The dominant words throughout those years were housing shortage, emergency, frightened families, night-by-night accommodation, ethnic discrimination, confined children, no access, sudden eviction, refusals – all words generating anxiety, fear, desperation, guilt, and trauma.

Homelessness has been a gaping wound on our society for the last decade. Its impact on affected people and families is profound, touching on issues of identity and emotional security, on child development and well-being, as well as on the most concrete basic need for shelter and stability. It runs up against all our learnings regarding human dignity and human rights, and its current extent in our civilized, wealthy Republic is a blight beyond shameful.

It is at this raw edge of need that MLRC continues to serve – advising, defending and enabling clients to work through the legal



barriers they meet. The policy work of MLRC described in the Annual Report emanates from this casework, giving it a relevance and urgency in the context of the continuing homelessness issue. MLRC strongly calls for the necessary introduction of home-protection within Constitution or statute.

The Annual Report 2018 gives a detailed account of the nature, activities, and structure of MLRC. For the first few years two solicitors and support staff carried the case load, the policy work, and the training in housing and welfare law for frontline staff in other agencies. In recent years a third solicitor joined our team, and in spite of demand, we have deliberately maintained the service at its current size and cost. As a donor-funded charity and registered law centre we carefully consider the need for, and viability of, the service.

I would like to acknowledge here and express sincere appreciation for the excellent professional and compassionate work done by all our staff. My thanks also to a wide range of volunteers who provided pro-bono service in several ways – our auditors, many lawyers, accountants, befrienders and others. All are indispensable and named in the Report.

Our special gratitude is due to those who support us by donations – we (and those whom we serve) rely totally on your generosity and commitment as we do not receive any State funding. On this our tenth anniversary we make a special plea for your continued support for this effective project, Mercy Law Resource Centre.

“We cannot do everything; let us do something” (Jeff Dixon).

Thank you for your attention to our Annual Report 2018.

INTRODUCTION

MLRC Managing Solicitor, Rebecca Keatinge



In 2018, Ireland saw yet another increase in individuals and families facing the crisis of homelessness. The ever increasing numbers of those experiencing homelessness cannot properly convey the deep distress of those caught up in our housing emergency.

Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) continued to meet the challenges of the crisis head on in 2018. Our solicitors engaged with 1,381 individuals and families during the course of the year. Such engagement is remarkable given our small team and our limited capacity. We worked with families and individuals in very upsetting situations, caught in the chaos of homelessness and struggling to access even the most basic shelter. Our engagements secured transformative impacts, supporting individuals and families in their time of crisis and ensuring they could access secure housing.

During the course of the year, we built on our policy work publishing two further reports on the right to housing: 'The Right to Housing in Comparative Perspective' and 'Children and Homelessness: A Gap in Legal Protection'. The latter highlighted very serious and ongoing concerns in relation to the current legal framework which fails homeless children. The reports continue to influence the broader policy debate, in which we remain active and vocal.

In 2018, MLRC bid a sad farewell to Maeve Regan, Managing Solicitor. We are indebted to Maeve for her complete commitment and excellent work at MLRC. We are also hugely grateful to Sinead Kerin, who stepped up as Acting Managing Solicitor for much of 2018, and showed great heart and dedication throughout her time at MLRC.

MLRC is most fortunate to have a deeply dedicated and knowledgeable team, who go above and beyond to support our vulnerable clients. Our volunteers share this commitment and contribute hugely to the work of MLRC. Many thanks to all the staff and volunteers for their excellent work in 2018.

I am indebted to our Chairperson and Board of Directors, whose expertise and empathy guides the work that we do and provides vital direction to MLRC.

Our work is simply not possible without the very generous support of our donors. We are deeply grateful to our funders for their support of MLRC's work and look forward to continued partnership in coming years.

MLRC is coming of age and marks ten years in operation in 2019. MLRC has built an excellent reputation and established expertise over the last ten years, made possible by the inspiring work of the many staff and volunteers who have worked with MLRC during that ten years, so generously supported by our funders.

MLRC will continue to be an impassioned and vocal voice in these extraordinary times, treating each person with dignity and advancing that home is core to every person. Recognition of the dignity of each person and the need for a home informs and drives our work in every respect. We look forward to many years ahead of dynamic and impactful work with our clients and partners.

Rebecca Keatinge, Managing Solicitor
Mercy Law Resource Centre, July 2019

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 change in laws, policies and attitudes which unduly and adversely impact its client group.

OUR VISION

Mercy Law Resource Centre'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 human being. 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 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 changes to the laws, policies and attitudes that are particularly harsh for people facing homelessness and on the margins of our society**
- 5 Befriending service for clients who present with specific vulnerabilities and are in need of support**

THE NEED FOR OUR SERVICE

The ongoing housing crisis has led to a huge increase in the need for our service; that need has also 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. Homeless people are often on the extreme margins of society and face additional 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. The very limited legal assistance which is available is often limited to advice only, and is not always 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 and our client group face a number of other difficulties, including: marital/family breakdown; domestic violence; mental and physical health difficulties; drug/alcohol addiction; immigration issues; reintegration following prison; discrimination and trafficking/prostitution.



Housing is the basis of stability and security for an individual or family. The centre of our social, emotional and sometimes economic lives, a home should be a sanctuary; a place to live in peace, security and dignity."

Leilani Farha, UN Special Rapporteur on Housing

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.

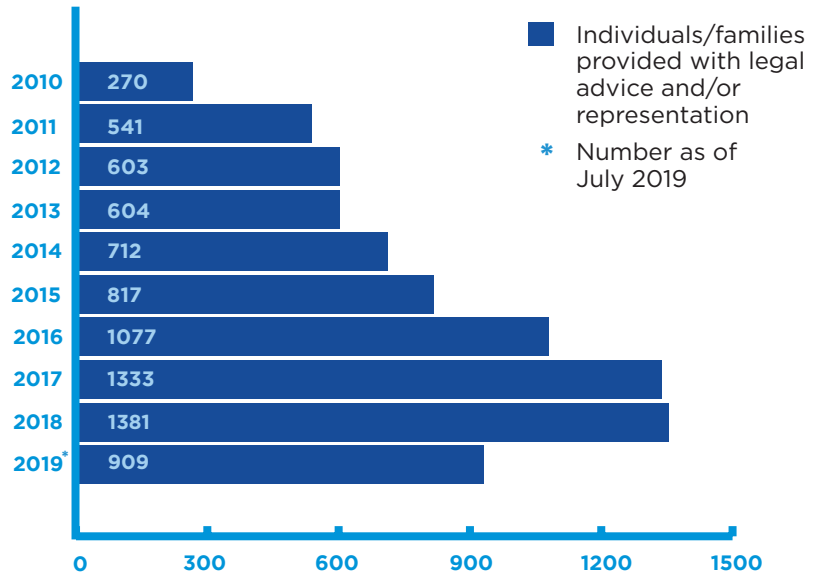
We work in partnership with other organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors to ensure clients have the appropriate supports they need. We also have a team of volunteer befrienders who provide clients with emotional support as they go through the difficult process of seeking to assert their rights.

MLRC's mission recognises the dignity of each person. We seek to ensure that all people are treated with respect and compassion and are enabled to access their full potential as human beings.



FREE LEGAL ADVICE AND REPRESENTATION

Since our inception in 2009, MLRC has provided free legal advice and representation to approximately 8,335 individuals, families and organisations. In 2018, MLRC advised 1,381 new individuals and families and supported over 100 organisations, including Dublin Simon, Focus Ireland, Crosscare, and Merchants Quay Ireland.



LEGAL OUTREACH CLINICS

MLRC holds free legal advice clinics in hostels for people who are homeless and in other centres that are easily accessible for people facing homelessness. Our clinics are staffed by solicitors who advise on legal issues relating to social housing, homelessness, and social housing support.

Throughout 2018, we held a weekly clinic at Liberties Citizens Information Centre and a twice monthly clinic at Crosscare Advocacy Service. We also held a regular clinic at the Focus Ireland Coffee Shop as part of our pro bono partnership with A&L Goodbody solicitors. We continued on-demand clinics to residents of Backlane Hostel, Haven House Hostel and Saoirse Women’s Refuge.

FURTHER INCREASE IN PEOPLE MLRC ASSISTED

In 2018, there was a further increase on previous years in the numbers that our legal service supported. Our pro bono partners increased our reach and advised 225 new clients through the Focus Ireland clinic. MLRC reached more people than in 2017, a further increase on previous years, confirming an ever increasing demand on our service.

PROFILE OF THOSE ASSISTED IN 2018

We noted an increasing number of members of the Traveller Community accessing our service; these new clients reported hearing about MLRC legal service through word of mouth and presented with urgent and complex housing issues. A staggering 88% of our new clients presented with issues in relation to homelessness and 12% of our new clients were at imminent risk of homelessness.

WHAT CLIENTS HAVE SAID ABOUT MERCY LAW RESOURCE CENTRE

“

My experience with Mercy Law Resource Centre was absolutely fantastic. With their help, I was taken off one-night-only emergency accommodation. My situation has vastly improved and I now have a more stable form of accommodation. Before this I was forced to spend all day on the streets with my two young children and had no access to resources that could improve my situation. I don't think I would have gotten more stable accommodation without the help of Mercy Law. Everyone I worked with was really helpful and knowledgeable. I appreciated how understanding they were of my situation and have already recommended their services to people I know.”

“

Mercy Law Resource Centre were of a great help to me last year. The solicitor I worked with was really helpful and gave me accurate and practical advice. She knew exactly how to approach my situation and did an amazing job advocating on my behalf. With the help of Mercy Law my housing situation stabilised. I have even recommended their services to people I know on account of how effectively they dealt with my case.”

“

Mercy Law Resource Centre assisted me when my family and I could only access emergency accommodation that was a considerable distance from my children's school and the maternity hospital I was attending. This situation was incredibly draining on our family and wholly unsustainable. The staff at Mercy Law were so good to us. They helped us correspond with the council and eventually secured us a house in the area that we wanted. We are so grateful to everyone at Mercy. The service they provided us was invaluable and they really eased us through an incredibly stressful time.”

“

My family and I heard about Mercy Law Resource Centre through our local citizen information centre and I don't know what we would have done without their services. They played an integral role in getting us our current house. We are so thrilled to be in a more permanent and stable situation. Our solicitor was incredibly helpful and kept us informed at every stage in the process. We are so grateful for the support we received and would 100% recommend their service.”

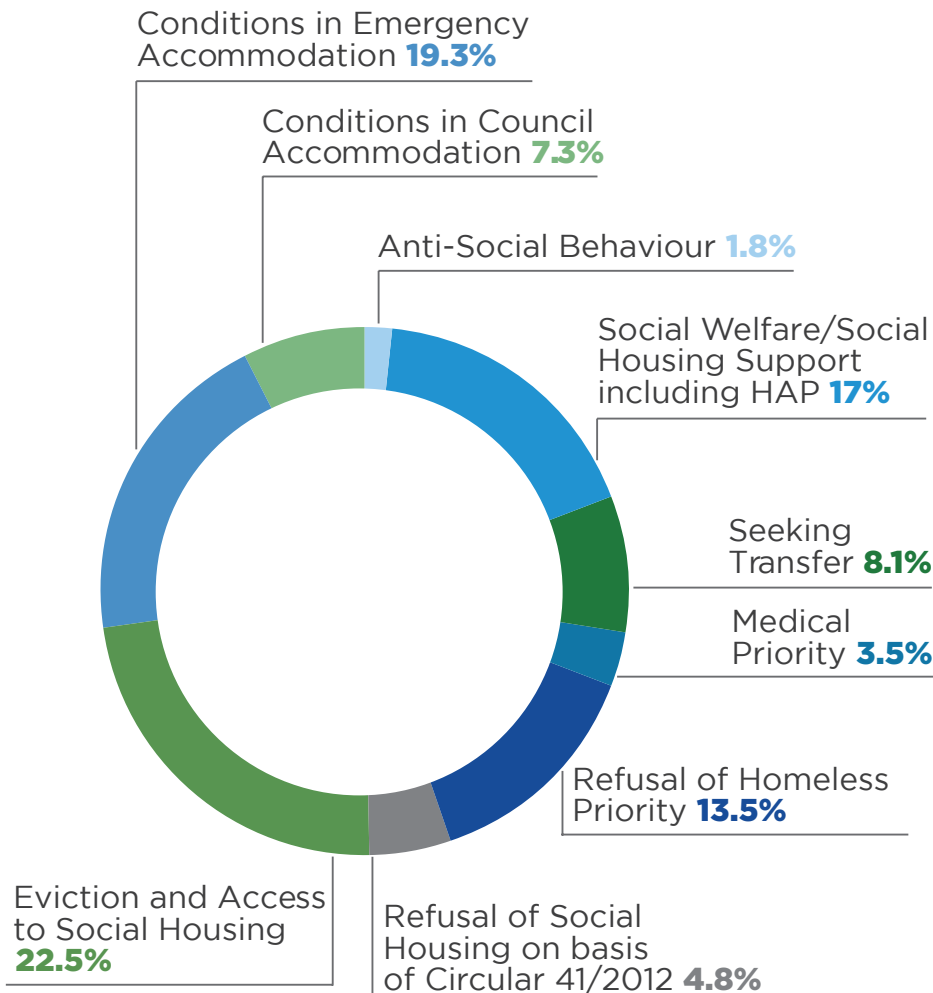
ISSUES ARISING IN 2018 ADVICE AND REPRESENTATION WORK

In 2018, MLRC solicitors advised on a range of issues at our advice clinics. There were a high number of new clients who came seeking advice on problems with their emergency homeless accommodation. These included: chronic instability in that accommodation, unsuitable or inadequate conditions or prolonged time spent in that accommodation. We also dealt with a number of queries in relation to the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), which is a form of social housing support.

Of particular concern to MLRC is the high number of homeless families who had the need for recourse to our legal service through 2018.

In 2018, MLRC provided free legal advice and representation to 452 families. This constituted 28% of the overall figure of families recorded as homeless nationally in December 2018, which was 1,617.

Legal issues advised on in 2018



TESTIMONIAL FROM BARRISTER TERESA BLAKE SC



I have had the pleasure and privilege of being instructed as a barrister to represent clients of Mercy Law for a number of years. For me there are four stand out qualities I have experienced in the service that is Mercy Law – these are responsiveness, professionalism, openness and hospitality. I love being associated with Mercy Law and its work and here's why.

One of the first things that struck me about Mercy Law was its responsiveness to a plight, problem or issue represented by the housing circumstances of an individual or family who looked for help. Not surprisingly, the situations of individuals and families who require Mercy Law assistance regularly need a quick turnaround. When help or action is needed the attitude I encountered was, what can we do? When can we do it? And how soon can it be done? Then a little band of solicitors, junior counsel, legal assistants, interns, administrators, and professionals from a multitude of backgrounds (e.g. social workers, psychologist, doctors, teachers, economists) emerge, all who share a common view: let's do what we can to respond to this individual's or this family's crisis in housing. Working together, the best possible case is made out and such action as is necessary is taken step by step.

The next quality is the professionalism evident in the diligence of all staff. Irrespective of the task, the attitude is the same, whether it be meeting clients, taking phone calls, the preparation of legal papers, presentation in court, settling cases, winning cases, losing cases, the professionalism prevails.



Teresa Blake SC, (on the right), photographed at MLRC report launch with MLRC Managing Solicitor Rebecca Keatinge and MLRC Solicitor David Joyce

This professionalism has resulted in Mercy Law being recognised as a significant contributor in the provision of legal services for homeless people and to the wider debate on homelessness in Ireland and the search for solutions. It is a knowledge that comes from meeting people where they are at and bringing that knowledge to the decision-makers. I am privileged to be part of it.

I see the openness and hospitality of Mercy Law evident in the sharing of professional knowledge with other organisations, the working together to support the homeless in its outreach work, and the practical provision of services like the befriender service.

As lawyers, we do not always achieve the result our clients want but with Mercy Law involved the personal support is there whatever the outcome. Ireland has yet to recognised a constitutional right to housing. We need real commitment from our politicians to solve our housing crisis. Mercy Law is searching for and working towards finding a solution that's why for me the openness and hospitality of Mercy Law is one of its stand out qualities.

I share the approach of Mercy Law. I believe everyone should have a place they call home, however humble.

Mercy Law is so much more than a legal service."

Teresa Blake SC

IMPACT OF OUR WORK



DON'S STORY:

Don first contacted MLRC in 2011 when he was refused access to the social housing list. MLRC argued that he was being discriminated against and engaged with the local authority to put his case forward. Initially, the local authority did not respond favourably, but after MLRC progressed the case towards litigation, the local authority reversed their decision and put Don on the social housing list. Don returned to MLRC in 2018 when he was refused medical priority on four occasions. This refusal was despite evidence of his serious and debilitating medical condition being negatively impacted by his overcrowded and inappropriate housing. MLRC submitted a successful appeal of that refusal on behalf of Don, and he went from number 235 on the housing list to number 8. We hope that Don will be housed very soon and continue to advocate on his behalf.

"If I hadn't met with Mercy Law, there's a chance I wouldn't even be on the housing list. I'm now at the stage where I'm number eight, and I couldn't argue with the fact that it's down to Mercy Law, it's totally down to them. I wouldn't have gotten this far, but from the beginning, Mercy Law reassured me that I couldn't be refused, and have been fighting my corner all the way. From the moment I came in here I have been supported."



ADEOLA'S STORY:

Adeola contacted MLRC's offices in crisis. She had recently given birth to a baby boy, who arrived four weeks early; she also had a fifteen month old baby boy. When she left the maternity hospital, all the local authority would provide her with emergency accommodation on a one night only basis. She had to move every day with her infant baby and toddler. Within a day of our engagement, Adeola was provided with stable accommodation. Adeola remains in emergency accommodation with her young family and we continue to support her and her family.

"When I was on the one night only emergency accommodation, I felt like it was the end, that I would not manage. But Rebecca gave me hope. I felt like I was Rebecca's only client. There is nothing that Mercy Law could have done better. They did everything they could for me."













OUR CASEWORK IN 2018: A YEAR IN REVIEW

MLRC had an exceptionally busy year, with a significant increase on the number of individuals in distressing situations contacting us for free legal advice and representation. In 2018, we continued to provide legal advice and representation on a range of housing and homelessness matters and acted for clients in the District Court, the High Court and before the adjudicators and Tribunals of the Residential Tenancies Board. We also pursued remedies through the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, the Office of the Ombudsman, and through internal complaints.

In 2018, we had 48 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 2018

- 
 Unlawful refusal by housing authorities to provide emergency accommodation
- 
 The failure of the 'self-accommodation option' as a form of homeless accommodation
- 
 Completely inadequate and highly inappropriate emergency accommodation
- 
 Lack of transparency in relation to access to 'family hubs'
- 
 Unlawful barriers to getting on the housing list
- 
 Termination notices issued by approved housing bodies
- 
 Succession to tenancy
- 
 Access to elevated housing assistance payment for separated fathers



ISSUES ARISING IN MERCY LAW RESOURCE CENTRE CASEWORK IN 2018



CASES ON UNLAWFUL REFUSAL BY HOUSING AUTHORITIES TO PROVIDE EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

It is with alarm that we noted the continued rise in 2018 of refusals by housing authorities to provide emergency accommodation to families and vulnerable individuals.

The definition of homelessness is clearly set out in Section 2 of the Housing Act 1988 and determines a person as homeless in circumstances where:

- there is no accommodation available which, in the opinion of the authority, he, together with any other person who normally resides with him or might reasonably be expected to reside with him, can reasonably occupy or remain in occupation or, or
- he is living in a hospital, county home, night shelter or other such institution, and is so living because he has no accommodation of the kind referred to and he is, in the opinion of the authority, unable to provide accommodation from his own resources.

A housing authority is not permitted to add additional criteria when assessing people as homeless. The Council does however enjoy a certain discretion in relation to the homeless assessment.

Despite the clear definition of homelessness as set out in the legislation, frequently in our clinics we met families who were deeply distressed and in despair as

they were at risk of rough sleeping and living in their cars, vans or tents. These included families with young children and babies who had been refused access to emergency accommodation. Some were told by the housing authority that there were simply no rooms available; some were told to return to their estranged extended families who had no space for them. It is well-established that in the course of 2018, family breakdown was one of the main reasons why individuals and families became homeless.

Throughout 2018, MLRC solicitors strove to address these most urgent cases and support these vulnerable families where a child or children with their parents were at risk of sleeping rough or who were already sleeping in cars or vans.

We had several cases in 2018 involving single mothers with their newborn babies being refused emergency accommodation. We were referred these cases by medical social workers at maternity hospitals who had grave concerns for the welfare and health of these mothers and their new babies at risk of being discharged into rough sleeping. In these cases, we again found a misapplication of the definition of homelessness and an imposition of the housing authority of additional eligibility requirements not provided for by law. In these cases, the housing authority had sought confirmation that the mothers were on the social housing list, before permitting access to emergency accommodation.



Once we received the mothers' authority to act and full instructions, we engaged with the housing authorities in order to highlight the differences between the social housing assessment and the homelessness assessment and the different legislation applying to each. Fortunately, in 2018, our swift engagement with housing authorities secured prompt and positive outcomes, and the mothers and their newborn babies we supported were safely discharged into emergency accommodation. The experience did however cause deep distress onto the new mothers – all of whom were single mothers and non-Irish nationals with a right to reside in Ireland.



THE FAILURE OF THE 'SELF-ACCOMMODATION OPTION' AS A FORM OF HOMELESS ACCOMMODATION

In 2018, we continued to see the shortcomings of the 'self-accommodation' form of emergency accommodation in our casework. This form of emergency accommodation continues to be relied on by Dublin housing authorities, placing the burden on the homeless family to source their own hotel or B&B.

Through 2018, we continued to see this imposing impossible demands on larger families, Traveller families and non-Irish national families, who struggled to secure bookings in hotels, particularly during busy holiday periods. This exposed them to risk of rough sleeping and chronic instability in their accommodation.

CASES ON COMPLETELY INADEQUATE AND HIGHLY INAPPROPRIATE EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

Throughout 2018, we met with individuals and families who though accessing emergency homeless accommodation, were living in completely inadequate and highly inappropriate conditions. In many instances, the provision was having a direct and negative impact on the health and well-being of young children in particular.

One acute issue that continued to occur was the provision of emergency accommodation on a one night only basis to vulnerable families. Our casework indicated that non-Irish national families and ethnic minority families were disproportionately impacted and placed on such chronically unstable provision.

A continuing issue in our casework in 2018 was the extremely prolonged stays of homeless individuals and families in hostels, B&Bs, and hotels. MLRC approached these cases strategically, collating expert evidence on the impact of such long stays on children in particular and making legal representations to local authorities pushing for adequate housing provision for such vulnerable groups. We noted that ethnic minorities including members of the Traveller community were particularly impacted, as they faced specific obstacles accessing the private rented market.

As well as considering High Court legal remedies on behalf of our clients, MLRC

increasingly explored alternative legal remedies during the course of 2018 including internal complaints, complaints to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, and complaints to the Workplace Relations Commission on equality issues.



LACK OF TRANSPARENCY IN RELATION TO ACCESS TO 'FAMILY HUBS'

MLRC also acted for several families residing in highly inappropriate hotel and B&B emergency accommodation who were unable to access 'family hub' accommodation, which they believed would better suit their families' needs. MLRC identified a complete lack of transparency in relation to accessing 'family hub': in working on these cases, we were informed by local authorities in the Dublin area that there exists no official mechanism for families to access a 'family hub' and that access depends on whether a relevant housing officer is aware of a family in need. Families on the so-called 'self-accommodation' form of homeless provision, where they have to book their own hotel and B&B accommodation, are not allocated key-workers, which made voicing their needs and linking in with the local authority particularly difficult.

MLRC was able to document the impact on these families of the inappropriate homeless provision and expedite their allocation of 'family hub' accommodation. Our experience with these families also informed our policy work on the issue of emergency accommodation provision to homeless families.



CASES ON UNLAWFUL BARRIERS TO GETTING ON THE HOUSING LIST

The misapplication of Circular 41/2012 continued to be an issue in many cases we worked on in 2018. The Circular, which is essentially a policy document issued by

the Department of Housing, Community and Local Government, purports to set out guidance on the circumstances in which non-Irish nationals can access the social housing list.

The Circular, however, is outdated, unclear, and provides poor guidance to local authorities on this important area. We saw the practical impact of the shortcomings of the Circular in the cases that presented at our clinics, meeting several individuals and families who had been refused access to the social housing list on the basis of their immigration status. In many instances these refusals were unlawful, as the applicants were settled migrants or EU workers, who are eligible for social housing support. In these cases, we made detailed written legal representations to the relevant local authority and where merited, sent pre-litigation correspondence.

CASES OF TERMINATION NOTICES ISSUED BY APPROVED HOUSING BODIES

Increasingly throughout 2018, MLRC saw a number of termination notices issued by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to tenants in the first six months of their tenancy. AHBs relied on the provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act which allows a landlord to terminate a tenancy without giving a reason in the first six months of tenancy. The provision which allows AHBs to terminate in this manner without giving a reason is of concern to MLRC. In several cases, tenants had been on local authority social housing list for many years or had transferred from a local authority tenancy to an AHB tenancy and the impact of the change in their tenancy had not been fully explained to the tenant. MLRC acted in these cases in the RTB and progressed one case to the High Court.



CASES ON SUCCESSION TO TENANCY

Several individuals presented to our clinics in 2018 who were residing in a local authority dwelling which was in the name of a relative recently deceased. The individuals who sought our advice had been refused permission by the local authority to succeed to the tenancy and were facing eviction by the local authority, through a relatively new District Court procedure.

MLRC was successful in securing suitable alternative accommodation in many of these cases. We noted the variation between local authorities of the rules that are applied to succession of tenancy. We also advised clients that in circumstances where they were over-accommodated, for example, residing in a three bedroom tenancy as a single person, the local authority may only be obliged to make an offer of suitable alternative accommodation.



ACCESS TO ELEVATED HOUSING ASSISTANCE PAYMENT FOR SEPARATED FATHERS

During 2018, MLRC acted for several separated fathers who had overnight access to their children but did not have access to accommodation where they could enjoy such access. In these cases, the fathers had been deemed eligible for the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) but at the single rate only. They were refused the rate that would enable them to rent a property big enough to have their children avail of the overnight access with their parent.

Two legal issues arose in relation to these cases: the eligibility criteria for HAP under the relevant statutory scheme and potential direct and indirect discrimination under the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2015. MLRC continues to work on these cases exploring in particular discrimination complaints under family status and gender grounds of the Equal Status Acts.

CONCLUSION

MLRC legal service was exceptionally busy and in demand in 2018. 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 and in the majority of cases secured positive and transformative outcomes for vulnerable families and individuals.



LEGAL TRAINING FOR ORGANISATIONS WORKING IN THE FIELD OF HOMELESSNESS

Housing and related social welfare law can be complex and 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, incorporating related social welfare law, to advocates working or volunteering in the field of homelessness and professionals working on housing issues. MLRC solicitors also provide informal legal support to organisations on specific queries.

MLRC training and legal support 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. The training is designed to be interactive and responsive to the issues seen by the attendees, who are asked for anonymous case studies prior to training. 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 2018, MLRC trained 170 individuals, including both staff and volunteers working in the field of homelessness or whose clients' issues included housing and homelessness. We also provided specific training on Court room skills delivered by Nóra Ní Loinsigh BL to the staff of Sophia Housing.



WHAT OUR PARTNER ORGANISATIONS SAY ABOUT MLRC



Working with Mercy Law has been an invaluable resource to both clients and staff of Focus Ireland. Staff regularly face legal issues whilst supporting families and single people to access appropriate housing. The training and advice offered to us by Mercy Law has greatly helped us to resolve these issues on behalf of our clients. Furthermore, Mercy Law have shown dedication and compassion to our clients who are going through a very difficult period in their lives. Without Mercy Law's involvement, many of our clients would not achieve such positive outcomes. In the past year, our work with Mercy Law has given us access to a working partnership with Corporate Law Firm A&L Goodbody. Providing weekly legal clinics, our work with A&L Goodbody has meant that even more clients can obtain legal support which they would otherwise have great difficulty accessing. It has been extremely beneficial, for both staff and clients, to have the support of Mercy Law and A&L Goodbody and we look forward to continuing our work with them."

Focus Ireland



The Liberties Citizens Information Centre has worked with the Mercy Law Centre for many years. Both our service and the clients who access it have benefitted greatly from this relationship. With the ongoing housing and homeless crisis Mercy Law's legal expertise and commitment to human rights has been invaluable. The solicitors at Mercy Law have taken on many of our most complex housing cases and supported and advocated for families and individuals in very difficult circumstances. Our staff also had the opportunity to attend training provided by Mercy Law, which has proven hugely beneficial in dealing with complex housing queries. We commend your work and your commitment to upholding the rights of those seeking to access their most basic need – a safe and secure home. We look forward to working with you all in the coming year."

Liberties CIC



Based on my experience, I firmly believe that Mercy Law Resource Centre offers an invaluable service.

The team are professional and personable, while offering expert legal advice and representation to a cohort in need. They exhibit a passion and dedication to providing quality service and achieving the best outcomes for their client, and many members of the Travelling Community have benefited greatly from this service.

From the perspective of Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service the partnership developed with Mercy Law is a positive one, and I look forward to continuing this relationship that is so fundamental in empowering service users to achieve their desired outcomes."

**Exchange House Ireland
National Traveller Service**

Organisations which attended MLRC training in 2018:

- Balbriggan CIC
- Blanchardstown CIC
- Crosscare
- Daly Lynch, Crowe & Morris Solicitors
- Depaul
- Focus Ireland
- Housing Advisor, Dublin City Council
- Housing Agency
- Housing Coordinators, HSE
- Integration Project Worker, Kildare County Council
- Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission
- Irish Refugee Council
- Laois Traveller Action Group
- Ombudsman for Children's Office
- Rialto Community Drug Team (RCDT)
- Staff of TDs and local councillors
- Salvation Army
- Threshold, Galway
- Trinity College Dublin
- Waterford CIC
- Focus Ireland
- Cork CIC
- ICON
- Bar Council of Ireland

FEEDBACK ON TRAINING IN 2018

"Excellent presented. Thank you MLRC"

"Extremely knowledgeable and interesting speaker"

"Clear and incredibly useful"

"I found it very useful and informative"

"Brilliant"

"Helpful and informative. A lot covered"

"Really enjoyed the training. Competent and knowledgeable trainer. Very relevant for my role"

"Very informative day, time went well, enjoyable, thank you"

Are you interested in MLRC housing law training?

The main MLRC training consists of a full day 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
- Overview of social housing law including:
 - A review of social housing list eligibility
 - Priority applications and transfer lists
- Homelessness legislation and accommodation provision
- HAP
- Anti-social behaviour and evictions
- Equality
- Case studies
- Question and answer session

POLICY WORK



The focus of MLRC's policy work in 2018 was informed by the legal issues our clients presented to us at our outreach clinics. 2018 was an exceptionally busy year for our policy work, with the successful launch of two follow on reports on the right to housing and continued collaboration and advocacy with our partner organisations.

LAUNCH OF REPORT: "RIGHT TO HOUSING IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE"

On 26 of March, 2018 MLRC launched its second right to housing report: 'The Right to Housing in Comparative Perspective'. This report offers a comparative perspective on the right to housing considering how the right operates in other jurisdictions. The report examines the legal systems: Finland, Scotland, France, and South Africa. The report was officially launched by Dr Carol Coulter, with guest speaker Professor Paddy Gray from the University of Ulster.

Following the launch of the report, MLRC was invited to address the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government on 12 June 2018 to discuss the right to housing and made a presentation alongside Ms Leilani Farha, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing.





LAUNCH OF REPORT: "CHILDREN & HOMELESSNESS: A GAP IN LEGAL PROTECTION"

On 5 September 2018 MLRC launched its third right to housing report, 'Children and Homelessness: A Gap in Legal Protection'. The report highlights the failure of the State to provide adequate statutory or constitutional protection for children in homeless families. Speakers at the launch included Tanya Ward, CEO of the Children's Rights Alliance, Mike Allen, Director of Advocacy, Communication and Research, Focus Ireland, Professor Ursula Kilkelly, Dean of Law University College Cork, and Dr. Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children. Those in attendance included Mrs Sabina Higgins and Lord Mayor of Dublin, Mr Niall Ring.

The report highlights the failure of the State to provide adequate statutory or constitutional protection for children in homeless families. Currently, local authorities have discretion but no duty to provide emergency accommodation for children in families. The report considers

potential legal protections available to children who are homeless. It outlines the attempts to rely on the courts to vindicate the rights of homeless children, which have proven broadly ineffective due to the fact that there is no right to shelter in Irish law. The report also identifies the lack of legal aid for housing and homelessness matters, which ensures that accessing legal advice and representation for homeless families is extremely difficult in the first instance. Furthermore, it examines non-judicial forms of redress, and considers the role of the Children's Ombudsman, and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. The final section of the report considers best practices for legally protecting homeless children in other jurisdictions such as Scotland, England, and France. This report outlines and proposes potential domestic legal reforms in light of the evidenced research and provides clear recommendations that could be used as a guideline to fill Ireland's gap in legal protection for children experiencing homelessness.



TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION EXPERT WORKING GROUP

In 2018, MLRC solicitor David Joyce was appointed to the Traveller Accommodation Expert Working Group. The working group was established under Rebuilding Ireland to undertake an “independent review of capital and current funding for Traveller-specific accommodation.” The expert group’s work included review of the Traveller Accommodation Act 1998 and legislation that relates to the provision and delivery of accommodation for Travellers. David was joined on the group by Professor Michelle Norris, Head of Social Policy at UCD and Dr Conor Norton, Head of School at DIT and was appointed Chairperson of the group.

MLRC’s own work with members of the Travelling Community has shown up huge deficiencies in housing provision to this marginalised community. Many clients live in deplorable conditions with little prospect of housing solutions becoming available. MLRC was delighted to be able to lend the expertise of our solicitor to strengthen the important work of the group. The report of the group was published in July 2019.

COLLABORATION ON POLICY

MLRC identifies serious and recurring issues from our casework to inform our policy work and works through collaboration with organisations working in the field of homelessness and human rights.

Throughout 2018, MLRC continued to hold regular focus groups and roundtables with organisations working in the field of homelessness such as Focus Ireland, Crosscare and Liberties Citizens Information Centre.

In 2018, MLRC also became a member of the newly formed Home for Good coalition. The coalition is advocating specifically on the right to housing in the Constitution.

Additionally, MLRC meets regularly with the lawyers of the independent law centres. This informal network discusses case work and policy work to identify current issues and areas of useful policy collaboration.



BEFRIENDING SERVICE

The Befriending Service is an invaluable asset to MLRC. We recognise that the legal system can be alienating, difficult and frustrating to negotiate. 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 her/him to court, helping her/him to attend appointments and being a listening ear. Training and ongoing support is provided to all befrienders.

In 2018, MLRC initiated the expansion and remodelling of the befriending service to meet the changing needs of our client

group. The current needs of our clients differ to when the service was initially established: they are now more acute and require quicker interventions. To meet these needs, a restructured befriending service will seek to capitalise on the contribution of older persons. Some of our most effective volunteer befrienders are retirees, who have life experience and flexibility with their time. They regularly have personal and professional experience that equips them to support our clients with compassion and patience, and approach the volunteering with maturity and perspective. MLRC believes that these volunteers can bring a wealth of experience and skills from their personal and professional backgrounds to the role of the befriender. Going into 2019, MLRC is actively linking in with Volunteer Ireland and a range of voluntary groups to expand our network and community of befrienders.



ORGANISATION

STAFF

In 2018, MLRC had seven staff members: Maeve Regan, Managing Solicitor, Rebecca Keatinge, Solicitor, Sinead Kerin, Solicitor, David Joyce, Locum Solicitor, Danielle Curtis, Administrator & Caseworker, Nuala Monaghan, Legal Secretary and Shauna Curran, Administrator.

Sinead Kerin was Acting Managing Solicitor for the first half of the year. In June 2018 Maeve Regan left MLRC and Rebecca Keatinge became the new MLRC Managing Solicitor. MLRC extends sincere thanks to Maeve Regan and Sinead Kerin for their hard work and enormous dedication to work of MLRC.



Maeve Regan



Sinead Kerin



Rebecca Keatinge



David Joyce



Danielle Curtis



Nuala Monaghan



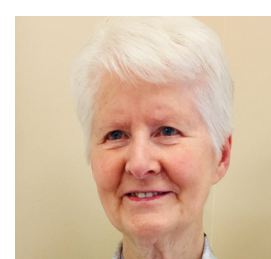
Sr Caitriona O'Hara



Shauna Curran



Geraldine Hynes



Sr Kathleen Byrne

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteerism is at the heart of the good work that MLRC does. We have a number of administrative, legal and befriending volunteers working with MLRC, who greatly enhance the work of MLRC. 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 and Befriending Service Coordinator

Sr Kathleen Byrne, Volunteer Administrator

Geraldine Hynes, Volunteer Solicitor.

APPOINTMENT OF NEW MANAGING SOLICITOR

In 2018, MLRC was delighted to announce the appointment of its new Managing Solicitor, Rebecca Keatinge. Rebecca was previously a Solicitor with the Centre.

Rebecca is a solicitor with extensive experience in human rights and immigration law. She has previously worked for the International Organisation for Migration, the legal aid charity Refugee and Migrant Justice and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Cambodia. In 2010, Rebecca joined Brophy Solicitors in Dublin as an apprentice. Rebecca excelled in her apprenticeship, receiving the Law Society EU law prize for the highest mark in the First Examination EU law exam; she was a prize-winner in the Law Society Client Consultation competition. Rebecca qualified in 2013 and during her time at Brophy solicitors, worked predominantly



in the areas of immigration and human rights.

Rebecca has been involved

with several charities including the Medical Foundation for Victims of Torture, Legal Aid of Cambodia, mental health charity Aware, and Irish charity Ruhama. She was previously a member of the Anti-Trafficking Legal Group (ATLEP). Rebecca is currently a member of the Public Interest Law Alliance (PILA) and a board member of National Traveller MABS. Rebecca was recently a consultant to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in the area of housing, homelessness and migrant integration.

INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

MLRC is always delighted to welcome interns to work with us as they bring such vitality 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.

During the summer of 2018 we warmly welcomed and would like to thank:

Bessy Zhu, Rebecca Ross, Ciara Wallace, Saoirse O’Dea, Mark Cullen, Emma O’Farrell, Mary Hastings.



THE EXPERIENCE OF MLRC INTERNS IN 2018

“

My name is Bessy Xinye Zhu and I am a 3rd year law student studying in Trinity College Dublin who interned at MLRC during June 2018. Interning at Mercy Law is one of the most rewarding experience in my life as I have had the opportunity to contribute to the 3rd right to housing report which advocates for a right to housing in Ireland and I have learnt practical skills that are not taught in lectures. I am very thankful for the guidance I received from everyone at MLRC during my internship and the friendliness of MLRC's staffs really added to my experience. Interning at MLRC was definitely a valuable and gainful experience.”

Bessy Zhu



“

I have a keen interest in housing law and housing policy. I am also very interested social welfare law and social welfare policy. In my role as legal intern with Mercy Law Resource Centre I was given every opportunity to learn the law in these areas. I was given hands on practical experience including attending consultations and court, reviewing files and court pleadings. I drafted legal letters, progressed files and wrote attendance forms. The Mercy Law Resource Centre is a great place to do an internship. My only complaint - I wish I could do the internship for longer ;) Many thanks to a wonderful team of people.”

Emma O'Farrell



YALE BERNSTEIN FELLOW

In 2018, MLRC hosted Conor Casey, Yale Bernstein Fellow. MLRC is hugely grateful to Conor for his immense contribution over the course of the year.

My name is Conor Casey, I am a PhD candidate at the School of Law, Trinity College Dublin. In 2017-2018 I was a Yale Law School Robert L. Bernstein Human Rights Fellow. I carried out my fellowship at the Mercy Law Resource Centre.

I chose to undertake my fellowship with MLRC as it is the only public interest law centre specifically dedicated to homelessness in the country. I had also completed an internship with them after completing my undergraduate degree at Trinity, where I was struck by the staff's selflessness, professionalism, warmth, and empathy for clients, all of which left me with a strong desire to work with them again. My time with MLRC spanned both law and policy areas, which reflects the diverse nature of the Centre's work.

On the legal front, MLRC advises hundreds of clients every year and takes dozens of cases before tribunals and Courts of all levels. Assisting the Centre with case-work was an invaluable and rewarding experience and profound insight into the barriers and challenges of advising and litigating in a complex and chaotic area of life and law.

Policy-wise, MLRC's focus on casework gives the organisation a good vantage point to see what policy changes are needed to help their clients - allowing them to assess government policy and statutory frameworks in a systemic fashion.

I drafted two policy reports during my time with MLRC. The first report, entitled 'The Right to Housing in Comparative Perspective', applied a comparative legal lens to the right to housing and was published in



March 2018. MLRC provided testimony based on the report to the Oireachtas Committee on Housing in June 2018.

I also drafted a second report on the legal and administrative redress that are available to children, who find themselves residing in emergency hostel accommodation, often in poor conditions and for long periods of time, and best practices elsewhere for caring for children. This report concluded that existing forms of redress and dispute resolution lack the bite to compel policy change. This report was published in September 2018.

My time in the MLRC centre filled me with both dismay and hope. Dismay because it impressed upon me the somewhat limited role for public interest law in combatting social exclusion - it may do no more than ameliorate the worst excesses and misery of the housing crisis. Substantial change can only come from the political will of those in power, which currently remains lacking.

However, my time with MLRC also inspired hope for several reasons. It was encouraging to see large numbers of local law students wanting to volunteer with MLRC - many of whom have a strong desire to forgo corporate law work for public interest law careers. It was also wonderful to see the work of pro bono barristers and solicitors who helped us out with legal cases and clinics. Most of all, my coworkers' inexhaustible energy to keep going was, and remains, a source of profound inspiration. Their emotional courage, grace, and strength of character, even under the most trying of conditions, provided an example I will always aspire to in my professional career.



CORPORATE AND PRO BONO PARTNERSHIPS

Mercy Law Resource Centre are very grateful for the support of our corporate partners Mason Hayes & Curran and A&L Goodbody.

PRO BONO HOUSING LAW CLINIC

In 2018, MLRC built upon an existing project with the assistance of our corporate partners A&L Goodbody to develop a pro bono housing law clinic. The project is an innovative housing law clinic operated from the Focus Ireland service in Temple Bar. The housing law clinic is a partnership between Focus Ireland, A&L Goodbody (ALG), and Mercy Law Resource Centre which was supported and facilitated by the Public Interest Law Alliance. It consists of legal advice given by ALG solicitors at weekly clinics and follow up legal representation. The support of ALG assisted MLRC in building upon the pre-existing housing law clinic which was established by MLRC in 2010.

In 2018, 225 clients attended the clinic and received advice on a range of complex housing and homelessness issues. ALG solicitors supported by MLRC solicitors worked on these cases with commitment and compassion securing many positive outcomes.

A&L Goodbody Managing Partner, Julian Yarr, speaking about the project said:

“Access to justice lies at the heart of our pro bono practice. All our lawyers are encouraged to use their legal skills to tackle the most complex and challenging social issues in our community. The work at the housing clinic is challenging but this collaboration has enabled us to apply our skills and knowledge to support individuals and families out of homelessness. The partnership we have with Focus Ireland and Mercy Law allows us to do just this and we’re incredibly proud of the difference we can make together.”

In order to facilitate the programme, MLRC continues to work closely with ALG Pro Bono Associate Eithne Lynch.



We believe lawyers have an inherent professional responsibility to ensure that people have access to the legal system. The contribution of the private profession acting pro bono can make a vital contribution to access to justice in Ireland. As the housing crisis escalated we were approached by Mercy Law to support the law centre in delivering legal services to those experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. In December 2017 sixty seven of our solicitors, trainees and paralegals undertook legal training in housing law provided by Mercy Law. The training programme was an important element and ensured we were well equipped to respond to the legal issues presenting at the clinic. The skilful guidance and support by the solicitors at Mercy Law was instrumental in our ability to upskill and deliver impact to those most in need of legal services. Navigating the social housing system is complex. Through our partnership with Mercy Law we have a deeper understanding of the important role lawyers provide to individuals seeking a basic right to shelter. The team at Mercy Law are some of the most tenacious and diligent people I’ve had the pleasure of working with.”

ALG Pro Bono Associate Eithne Lynch

COMMUNICATIONS

In 2018, MLRC's communication capacity and presence continued to expand.

MLRC was vocal in the mainstream media following the launches of our two right to housing reports during the course of the year. This included extensive media coverage of these publications.

In 2018, we published eight e-zines that went out to our hundreds of subscribers with updates on the work of MLRC.

During the year, we welcomed our first intern to specifically help to develop our communications and who produced a video detailing the work of MLRC, its history and services.

In 2018, our website was updated to reflect our expansion and development. We continued to be very active on social media platforms and enjoyed strengthening our cross-sector relationships with colleagues from across civil society, non-governmental and charity organisations.

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

Please find our website: www.mercylaw.ie

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

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



Mercy Law MLRC
@MLRCLaw

Following

Listen back to our client, a single mother of one infant and one baby, bravely sharing her traumatic experience of one night only #homeless accommodation & our @RebeccaKeatinge calling for an end to such provision @TodaySOR this morning



The Plight Of Some Homeless People
Adeola Adeniyi, Homeless Mother, Rebecca Keating, Managing Solicitor with Mercy Law Centre
rte.ie



Mercy Law MLRC @MLRCLaw · 3 Oct 2018

We advocate that the #RightToHousing in Irish law would not give a right to a key to a home for all. It would provide a clear floor of protection in respect of basic, adequate housing for all. #RaiseTheRoof #ESCRights



Mercy Law MLRC Retweeted



OmbudsmanForChildren @OCO_Ireland · 5 Sep 2018

Today @MLRCLaw are launching their 'Third Right to Housing Report'. #YourOCO is delighted to be speaking at this event with @Tanya_Ward, @UKilkelly & @MikeAllenFI. Under #UNCRC every child has the right to shelter. As a society, we need to ensure no child gets left behind.



Mercy Law MLRC @MLRCLaw · 6 Sep 2018

MLRC was delighted to have Mrs. Sabina Higgins and @LordMayorDublin present at the launch yesterday! Thank you again to Dr. Niall Muldoon, @OCO_Ireland for launching the report.

bit.ly/2M8QsyY

#Homelessness #Right2AHome #ReportLaunch #RaiseTheRoof



Mercy Law MLRC

@MLRCLaw

Following

"I got the keys for a 3 bed house today. I'm delighted. Thank you for your help. Happy Christmas." A good day at the Mercy Law office. We're so happy for this client who has had a long journey to this point.
#goodnewstory #thisiswhatwedo

7:18 AM · 17 Dec 2018

GOVERNANCE

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).

Since its establishment, MLRC has been governed by a Board of Directors. The Board of Directors meets with our Managing Solicitor Rebecca Keatinge and the Volunteer Administrator every six to eight weeks. In 2018 the MLRC team, in partnership with the Board, commenced planning for the

implementation of a new Strategic Plan 2019-2024. The plan will be adopted and formally launched in 2019.

CHARITIES GOVERNANCE CODE

Previously MLRC was on the 'Adoption Journey' of the Governance Code, the voluntary code of practice for good governance of community, voluntary, and charitable organisations. The new Charities Governance Code was published in November 2018. MLRC is implementing, and improving policies, systems, and processes to ensure compliance with the new code by 2020.

MLRC strives to achieve its charitable objectives with integrity and is managed in an effective, efficient, accountable, and transparent way.

MLRC BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN 2018



Helena O'Donoghue
(Chairperson) since 2009;
Mercy Sister.



Jo Kennedy
Director since 2009;
Mercy Sister.



Anne Doyle
Director since 2009;
Mercy Sister.



Gerry Whyte
Director since 2009;
Professor, Law School,
Trinity College.



Margaret Roche
Director since 2014;
Administrator.



Daire Guigley
Director since 2011;
Project Management.



Niall Farrell
Director since 2011,
Managing Partner,
Solicitor, PJF and
Company Solicitors.



Liam Twohig
Director since 2011;
Chartered Accountant
& Business Partner RSM
Ireland



Patrick Stagg
Company Secretary since
2009; Manager, Bluebell
& Dublin 8 Citizens
Information Service.



Ciara McGrath
Director since 2009;
Project Leader, Crosscare
Information and Advocacy
Service.

FINANCE

MLRC is registered with the Charities Regulator and is listed on the Public Register of Charities.

Since 2013, MLRC has been signed up to the ICTR's Guidelines of Principles of Fundraising. MLRC is fully committed to maintaining the standards contained within the Statement of Guiding Principles of Fundraising, to improve fundraising practice, promote high levels of accountability and transparency, and to provide clarity and assurances to donors and prospective donors.

FINANCE

COST OF OUR SERVICE

MLRC's financial year runs from 1 May to 30 April. In 2019, we will be transitioning to the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) in our financial reporting. This change is consistent with our commitment to best practice in financial reporting and accountability.

The cost of running MLRC in 2018 amounted to approximately €319,315. MLRC is completely dependent on fundraising and to date has not received any substantial public grants or State monies. In 2018 we received some €366,194 in grants, donations, court costs and from fundraising.

Our main costs comprise of: office expenses including telephone, postage, IT services, stationery/printing and equipment/maintenance; core salaries and employer costs; publication and launch of reports, cost of publishing advertising/explanatory booklets/leaflets, and project costs principally related to our outreach clinics.

THE VALUE OF OUR SERVICE

The value of our service far exceeds the cost as a result of a large number of in-kind donations we receive including reduced rent and utilities, free conference and reception facilities, pro bono legal services by barristers and other professionals, pro bono auditing and accounting service, support from our volunteer befrienders, volunteer administrators and volunteer part-time solicitor. We estimate the value of these donations to be approximately €150,000 for which we are very grateful.

MLRC continues to work towards becoming self-financing. We aim to do this by developing a training programme and other income streams. We continue to apply for appropriate grants and to expand our fundraising programme, including our donor programme and internal fundraising events.



St Stephen's Green Trust asked MLRC to help with technical support needed for our grantees on how the Housing Assistance Payment is made to people transitioning from Direct Provision Centres. To address this, a practical solutions-driven workshop was provided to grantees, increasing the quality of their work. We were extremely pleased with the outcome, which proved illuminating to both our organisation and grantees. The information MLRC produced is also now available to others thus ensuring longer-term impact for the work we commissioned."

**Orla O'Neill, Executive Director,
St. Stephen's Green Trust**

FUNDERS

MLRC would like to acknowledge and thank our funders for their generous support in 2018. MLRC's funders were a combination of corporate and philanthropic organisations and individuals acting in a private capacity. We gratefully received grants and donations ranging from €20 up to €90,000.

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 most grateful to Mason, Hayes and Curran and the Archbishop for the most generous support.

OUR MAIN FUNDERS INCLUDE:



The Ireland Funds



St. Patrick's Cathedral



Loreto Foundation



Mercy Sisters



St. Stephen's Green Trust



THE CHARITABLE INFIRMARY CHARITABLE TRUST

Infirmary Trust



Archdiocese of Dublin



Mason Hayes & Curran

CHRISTMAS THANK YOU EVENT

In December 2018, we held an event at the Wisdom Centre for our funders, friends and supporters. At the event, we thanked all our supporters and funders for their most generous assistance and encouragement of the work of MLRC over the course of 2018. We were honoured to have Father Peter McVerry speak at the event. Father McVerry commended the work of MLRC and acknowledged the transformative impact that the work has on vulnerable individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.



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.



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

info@mercylaw.ie,

or call the MLRC office on

01 4537459

CORPORATE PARTNERSHIP

Do you think your company can help?

MLRC are looking for new partnerships with businesses that can make an impact. We would be delighted to engage with your corporate social responsibility team or committee and share information on MLRC's much needed service.

DONATE

MLRC is totally dependent on charitable funds to continue to provide free legal advice and representation to those who are homeless and at risk of homelessness. We are most grateful for any financial support. You can donate by post, bank transfer or via our website.

VOLUNTEER

At MLRC volunteers are an integral part of our work and we really do 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 and expertise, either in a small way or regular times we would be very interested in speaking with you.



Balance Sheet as at 30 April 2018

	Notes	2018 €	2017 €
Fixed Assets Tangible assets	6	9,680	4,949
Current Assets Debtors Cash and cash equivalents	7	9,839 <u>270,937</u> 280,776	11,026 <u>224,653</u> 235,679
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	8	(8,267)	(5,318)
Net Current Assets		272,509	230,361
Total Assets less Current Liabilities		282,189	235,310
Reserves Income and expenditure account		282,189	235,310
Equity attributable to owners of the company		282,189	235,310

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' 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 20th November 2018 and signed on its behalf by:



Helena O'Donoghue
Director



Patrick Stagg
Director



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 by providing us with free conference and reception facilities.

Barristers & pro bono support

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the following barristers who provided us with pro bono opinions, drafting, and advocacy and representation in tribunals, the District Court, the Circuit Court, the High Court and the Supreme Court.

Alan DP Brady BL
Andrea Mulligan BL
Colin Smith BL
Cormac O'Dúlacháin SC
David Leonard BL
Derek Shortall BL
Eoin Coffey BL
Kevin Baneham BL
Lewis Mooney BL
Michael Kinsley BL
Michael Lynn SC
Nóra Ní Lionsigh BL
Rosario Boyle SC
Siobhan Phelan SC
Teresa Blake SC
Aideen Collard BL
Conor Dignam SC
Eugene Hill BL
Feichín McDonagh SC

We are also grateful to Paul D'Alton, clinical psychologist for his support over recent years.

Auditor & Legal Costs

We are hugely grateful to our auditors Anne Brady McQuillans DFK, in particular Natalie Kelly, Lisa Millett, and Luke Gannon for their ongoing support. Many thanks also to Cormac Breatnach, Cormac J Breatnach and Associates and Noel Guiden, Behan and Associates.

Volunteers

Volunteer Administrators: Sr Caitriona O'Hara & Sr Kathleen Byrne

Volunteer Solicitor: Geraldine Hynes

To our many volunteer befrienders

Volunteer Interns: Bessy Zhu, Rebecca Ross, Ciara Wallace, Saoirse O'Dea, Mark Cullen, Emma O'Farrell and Mary Hastings.

Photographer: Derek Speirs

Annual Report Designer: Persuasion Republic



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)

