



Mercy Law
Resource Centre

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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





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Chairperson's welcome statement



Welcome to the 2021 Annual Report of Mercy Law Resource Centre! Thank you for taking the time to read about what we do.

Our law centre works exclusively in the provision of legal advice and support to people who are experiencing or facing

homelessness. Our staff advocate for the legal rights of people faced with the fundamental deprivation of needing a home. The need for our service remained strong during 2021 and indeed increased toward the end of the year as Covid-19 protections lifted.

The continued worsening of the homeless crisis is a national tragedy. At the time of writing we know of the unforeseen events in Ukraine in early 2022 and the plight of millions displaced. Many factors, including solidarity and compassion, informed our welcome to Ireland of more than 40,000 people forced to evacuate their homes in Ukraine. It is the right thing to do as also is the prioritisation of permanent solutions to our homelessness problem.

Why were 3,071 children and 7,421 adults facing homelessness in June 2022? At MLRC we believe that the right to housing needs recognition in Ireland's Constitution to alter the lens through which housing is viewed by the State, away from purely economic interests to that of the obligation to fulfil a legal right. Such a constitutional change would be a vital step toward a more compassionate, caring society in which the right to shelter is recognised as fundamental. No child should be growing up in Ireland without the certainty of knowing where to call 'home'.

This year (2022) began for MLRC on a very sad note with the death of Sr Caitriona O'Hara in January. Caitriona worked tirelessly on behalf of those facing homelessness and disadvantage in MLRC since our earliest days.

Her loss is felt deeply by many. In other news, Sr Helena O'Donoghue retired as our chairperson in April 2022, having served for more than 12 years. Helena has given extraordinary service throughout that time and we are delighted that she will remain a member of MLRC. Our organisational strength, culture and ethos have derived in significant measure from the contributions of Helena and Caitriona.

As Chairperson, I wish to thank especially all who helped us in our work through 2021. We are deeply grateful to those who provided funds and who gave us generous pro bono services, including barristers, interns and volunteers. As an independent law centre providing a vital free service and relying on donations to function, we need the continuation of your support more than ever.

In conclusion I wish to thank and express our deep appreciation of the dedicated work of our staff; Managing Solicitor Aoife Kelly-Desmond, solicitors Paul Dornan and Sinead McGarrigle, and professional support team Nuala Monaghan, Miriam Nally and Siobhán Tracey. I also thank each of our Board members who serve MLRC with such personal commitment. I particularly thank Patrick Stagg and Niall Farrell who also retired from our Board over the past year having given many years of dedicated service.

To all who read this Report I hope you are encouraged to continue with determination our fight to prevent homelessness. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Gleeson', written over a horizontal line.

**Edward Gleeson, Chairperson
Mercy Law Resource Centre**



Managing solicitor's introduction



2021 was a tumultuous year.

While the world at large breathed a sigh of relief as pandemic restrictions lifted, for those at the brink of homelessness the easing of emergency measures led to even greater instability and uncertainty. We were saddened to see the reversal of positive gains

made to tackle homelessness during the pandemic.

Factors such as the reversal of the eviction ban, soaring inflation and constriction in the rental market combined to drive more people into homelessness. At the same time, capacity in state-funded homeless services became strained.

In the last three months of 2021 more than twice as many clients contacted MLRC because they were refused access to emergency homeless accommodation than in the rest of the year combined. Such cases are a top priority for our solicitors due to their urgency and the distress caused to clients by being denied access to basic shelter. While challenging, these cases are the very essence of what we do in MLRC, using our skills to remove legal barriers impacting those facing homelessness.

2021 continued to be a time of considerable disruption for service delivery, with our face-to-face clinics remaining suspended. The remote processes we established in 2020 ensured continued service to our clients throughout the year, but we missed the connection that face-to-face interaction provides. At MLRC we strive to recognise the individual needs of each client and were focused on ensuring our service not only remained available but that it was also truly accessible. With that in mind, in 2021 we commenced a project to examine how to deliver our service as accessibly as possible, combining the ease

of access of remote services for some cohorts with the benefits of traditional face-to-face clinics for others. Writing now in 2022 we have begun piloting this 'hybrid' model and the project results will be published later this year.

Our policy work in 2021 focused on highlighting the barriers facing vulnerable groups, with the launch of our report *Minority Groups and Housing Services: Barriers to Access* in March 2021. We also continued our work highlighting the need for recognition of a right to housing in our Constitution. We view this as an essential step toward a more caring, compassionate society that acknowledges housing as a human rights issue, rather than a purely economic matter.

Later in this report you will read about some of the cases we worked on in 2021. The experiences of these clients highlight the human reality behind the housing crisis as it developed in 2021. As I write this in mid-2022, the deterioration that began in late 2021 has continued and we are nearing all-time record levels of homelessness. While the challenges are significant, MLRC remains committed to working toward a more fair and just society for all.

Aoife Kelly Desmond

Aoife Kelly Desmond, Managing Solicitor
Mercy Law Resource Centre



About Mercy Law Resource Centre

Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) is an independent law centre, registered charity and company limited by guarantee. MLRC 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 advocates for changes in laws, policies and attitudes which unduly and adversely impact its client group.

MLRC provides a unique service that is accessible and shaped to meet the individual needs of each client. Where possible, we meet clients in their own environment. We work with other organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors to ensure clients have the appropriate supports they need.

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 human being. MLRC strives for 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 for people who are homeless or facing homelessness by phone and in centres that are easily accessible to them**
- 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 are in need of additional support**



The Need for Our Service

Everyone deserves the dignity and security of a home. Housing is a fundamental right and safe, secure housing provides the foundation to our wellbeing as individuals and as a society.

Legal intervention should not be required for people to access safe and secure housing. Unfortunately, this is not the reality for many people facing housing distress, who find themselves unable to assert their rights without recourse to the law. When this happens free, accessible and compassionate legal advice is essential.

State-funded legal aid does not generally provide legal support for social housing and related social welfare law issues. The assistance which is available tends to be limited to legal advice only, with no follow up representation. Services can be fractured meaning that people seeking assistance need to go to multiple places to get the advice they need. Homelessness is often not an isolated issue and obtaining rounded, person-centred support and advice is essential for those experiencing a serious housing crisis.

MLRC seeks to meet this need through providing a truly accessible and holistic service in this sorely under-resourced area.

In an ideal society, no one would need legal advice and representation to access social housing, homeless accommodation and related housing supports. Sadly, we have instead seen demand for our service remain strong as the housing crisis has become entrenched. Each day our team strives to meet the continuing need for our service and works hard to deliver real value to our clients.



How We Provide Our Service

Our core services are delivered by a team of six permanent staff supported by our dedicated and compassionate volunteers.

Every client presents with their own unique needs and circumstances. We aim to meet the needs of our clients in as accessible a manner as possible, by providing advice at outreach clinics. We meet clients where and how they need us, both remotely and through on-site clinics, and work directly with other support organisations across Ireland, such as domestic violence refuges, disability support groups and homeless hostels, to combine our expertise and deliver effective, holistic support.

In 2021, the effects of Covid-19 were still being felt even as society began returning to a more regular way of work and life. MLRC followed government advice on restrictions at all times, necessitating the continued cessation of in-person clinics and face-to-face meetings for most of 2021. But by continuing with our phone and video services established in 2020 we were able to offer our legal services without interruption. As we discovered in 2020, an unexpected benefit of this approach was that it allowed us to expand

our geographical reach to new client groups outside our clinic areas. It has also helped some clients who

find face-to-face clinics difficult to access for various reasons. We are working to ensure we continue to maintain this additional reach into the future. With that in mind, in late 2021 we commenced a project to examine how we can make our service as accessible as possible by combining the benefits of remote services with traditional face-to-face clinics. The project results will be rolled out later in 2022.

Throughout 2021 we maintained our partnerships with other organisations working on issues related to homelessness. The collaborative and collegial way in which those in the sector look at the end result and put the needs of our clients above promoting their own professional interests or organisations is deeply encouraging.

Our impact

The core of MLRC’s work is providing free legal advice and representation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Since we began in 2009, MLRC’s network of legal advice clinics and outreach with other organisations that work with homelessness has had a big impact. Our legal casework connects us to the real needs of those experiencing housing distress and informs everything we do, from setting organisational strategy to the emphasis of our policy and advocacy work, and the focus of our training provision.

2021 in numbers



In 2021, in accordance with public health advice, our team continued to work remotely for much of the year. Our remote working practices were well in place from 2020 and we were proud to continue to provide essential legal advice and representation to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness without interruption.

In 2021 we continued to see a trend whereby the cases presenting to our service were often more complex and more entrenched, with less clear solutions. Situations that were unthinkable five years ago, such as families living in emergency accommodation for over a year with no end in sight, have become commonplace in the referrals we receive. This reflects the reality of the scale and depth of the housing crisis in Ireland today. Our expert solicitors continue to meet these challenges head-on and to strive for a just resolution for every client.

Since establishment MLRC has been committed to working with and supporting other organisations working with those facing homelessness and 2021 was no different. It was encouraging to see how organisations working in the area of homelessness, and other areas such as domestic violence, addiction recovery, disability and health, banded together to overcome the challenges of 2021 and support our mutual clients through the trauma of homelessness.

“MLRC is a vital support to our service. They bring clarity to complex cases and solutions to situations that seemed hopeless.



We have seen first-hand the positive impact their legal support has on our client group. When they encounter MLRC they feel respected, listened to, understood and more hopeful about the future.

The actions of MLRC improve things not just for the individual but for the many people in our society facing homelessness”

Anne Hetherington, Information & Advocacy Officer, Crosscare

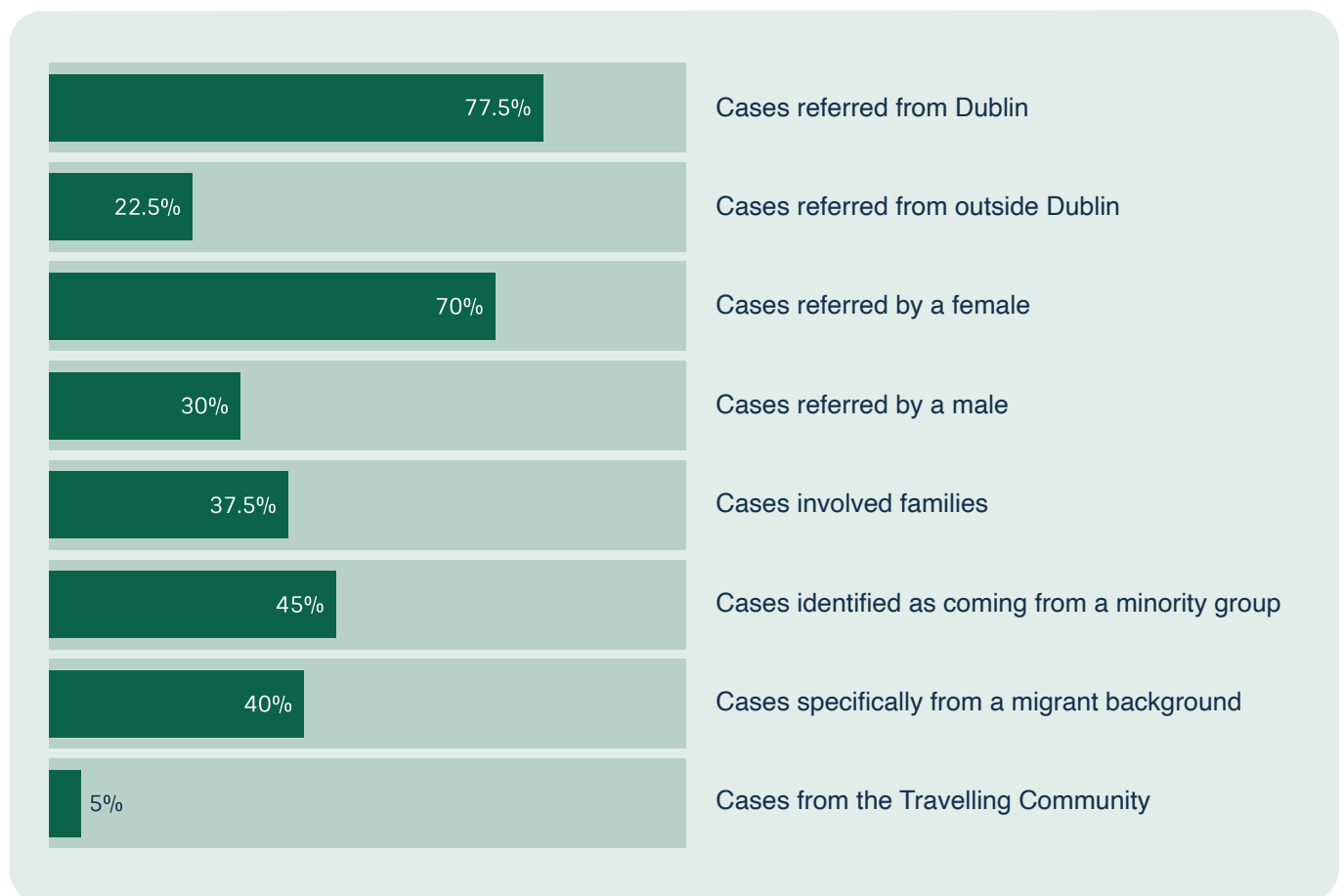
Legal outreach clinics

In addition to the legal clinics operated by MLRC staff directly, since 2018 MLRC has operated a pro-bono partnership with A&L Goodbody and Focus Ireland. A&L Goodbody solicitors staff the clinic, with support and training from MLRC. A&L Goodbody took 40 new referrals through the clinic in 2021.

- 77.5% of cases referred were from Dublin, 22.5% from outside Dublin, with the next most common referrals coming from Kildare and Wicklow.
- 70% of cases referred were by a female, 30% were male and 37.5% of these cases involved families.

- 45% of cases identified as coming from a minority group, 40% specifically from a migrant background and 5% from the Travelling Community.*

* Based on data available



- 25% of cases referred concerned issues around access to homelessness services, while 62.5% concerned social housing (including 13.25% which related to HAP), 15% concerned issues around homelessness and social housing combined.

- The most common issues encountered were applications for medical priority (15%), domestic violence (15%), anti-social behaviour (12.5%), difficulties in accessing emergency accommodation due to Covid-19 restrictions (12.5%), assistance requesting transfers in local authority housing (10%) and general advocacy for social housing applications and emergency accommodation.



Our casework in 2021: A year in review

Refusal of access to emergency accommodation

As Covid-19 pandemic restrictions lifted toward the end of 2021 we had a significant increase in queries relating to the refusal of access to emergency accommodation. Often these refusals affected clients from a minority background, with many young families facing huge uncertainty around where they would sleep that night.

The reasons given for refusal of emergency accommodation varied. On some occasions, refusals were on account of an individual's supposed lack of a "local connection" to the local authority's area, while increasingly in the second half of 2021 refusal of accommodation often appeared to be due to a lack of availability of suitable emergency accommodation.

MLRC assisted a number of families from minority backgrounds who had been evicted from private rented properties that had been secured through the HAP scheme. Given employment and education commitments, these families sought access to emergency accommodation with local authorities other than the one who provided them with HAP. They were then refused access to emergency accommodation by the local authority where they now found themselves homeless.

"I came to MLRC after being offered emergency accommodation that was not suitable to the needs of my child and I. Paul, the solicitor I dealt with at MLRC, was really helpful and was able to help me get a more suitable flat and assist me in getting on to the housing list."

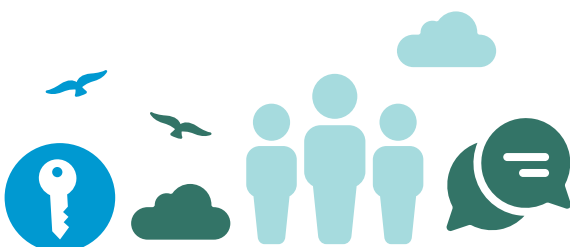
MLRC stressed to the local authorities that there is no "local connection" test under the Housing Act 1988 when an individual or family are seeking access to emergency accommodation. After strong advocacy on behalf of these clients, the original local authorities agreed to accept them back onto their housing lists and to approve them for inter-authority HAP. MLRC's intervention enabled this compromise solution to be reached and avoided the need to litigate the issue.

"I was homeless before I came to MLRC. I got in contact with Sinead and she helped me to get emergency accommodation and helped me to get more secure accommodation afterwards. If it was not for Sinead's help I would not have been able to get the accommodation. Overall, I had a very good experience with MLRC."

Challenging evictions of social housing tenants by Approved Housing Bodies

In 2021 MLRC continued to assist families who had been issued with notices of termination by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) in the first six months of their tenancies. As MLRC have highlighted previously, AHBs are permitted to do this, relying on the provision of the Residential Tenancies Acts 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 Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) and High Court in cases of long-term social housing tenants, particularly those who have transferred from local authority-provided accommodation to AHB-provided accommodation.

One example concerned a former local authority tenant who transferred to AHB-provided accommodation and whose case resolved favourably following our intervention.



The client was a local authority tenant for 13 years before transferring to an AHB tenancy due to overcrowding. The family received a notice of termination in the first six months of her AHB tenancy with no reasons given as to why the tenancy was being ended. At the RTB mediation hearing it was agreed that the AHB would withdraw the notice of termination and that the family be allowed to remain in the tenancy.

“I had only been living in Approved Housing Body accommodation for a year and I got notice that my lease was being terminated. I then contacted MLRC who helped me through an RTB mediation process. In the end I got sorted and was allowed to stay on the lease.”

Transfer applications from unsuitable local authority accommodation

Throughout 2021 MLRC engaged with numerous clients seeking a transfer from unsuitable local authority accommodation. These clients often sought priority transfers on medical grounds or on ‘exceptional social grounds’, such as where they had been subjected to serious anti-social behaviour.

In cases of medical priority grounds, an applicant must provide evidence from healthcare professionals as to their condition, how it is impacted by their accommodation

and how a change in accommodation would benefit the management of the condition. Typically, one of the healthcare professionals would be a consultant doctor. In 2021, a new standardised medical priority application form, the HMD-Form 1, was introduced across all local authorities. While some clarity in the application process is welcomed, the difficulties and delays in getting an appointment with two medical professionals, no doubt exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic, have caused problems for clients.

In MLRC’s experience, it is difficult for applicants to be approved by local authorities for a transfer under ‘exceptional social grounds’. Typically, such transfers are only granted where the local authority believes there to be a significant risk to the applicant’s safety or a threat to their life. Proof of such risk is usually required from An Garda Síochána. This can create problems from applicants who fear that reporting anti-social behaviour to An Garda Síochána will draw further attention to them and heighten the risk.

While there are legitimate policy reasons for having a high threshold in both medical and social ground priority applications, what has concerned MLRC is the lack of transparency in the way such applications are dealt with by local authorities and often the lack of reasons that applicants are given when their applications have been refused.

One example concerned a family seeking a transfer on medical grounds to allow their 8 year old son, who has a diagnosis of autism, his own bedroom. MLRC assisted with the medical priority application, which was refused by the local authority, and an appeal of the refusal. In the appeal, MLRC stated that the decision to refuse the medical priority was not adequately articulated and failed to give sufficient reasons for the decision.



MLRC argued that such failures amounted to the local authority failing to adhere to the principles of administrative law and that a lack of reasons for the refusal seriously inhibited the applicant's ability to challenge the decision further. Following MLRC's intervention the family were awarded a medical priority for their transfer application.

"I got in contact with Sinead from MLRC looking for advice on the next steps we should take after our initial application to succeed our late mother's tenancy was unsuccessful. At the start, it didn't look like we had any case at all but Sinead was so on top of everything and so quick to help us with any issues we had. Ultimately, Sinead helped us to obtain permission to succeed our mother's tenancy. Overall, Sinead was lovely to deal with and MLRC were very helpful."

"I and my family were in a situation of overcrowding and urgently needed a transfer to a larger council house as we would have been homeless if we couldn't get another house. However the council was not being cooperative and a ping-ball between different bodies followed. When we contacted Paul at MLRC he approached the county council and got them to help us arrange a transfer to a larger house. Overall my experience with MLRC was very good."

"I became homeless in one county, however that council refused me emergency accommodation and told me to return to a county I had lived in previously. I was in dire straits and had to live in the car with my children. During this time I got in contact with Paul from MLRC who was very helpful and advocated on my behalf to the council. Even though I did not succeed in obtaining accommodation in the county where I became homeless and had to return to my home county, I am very grateful to MLRC as they were really very helpful."



Legal training for organisations working in the field of homelessness

Providing training to individuals and organisations working with our client group is a strategic priority of MLRC. By providing this training we can increase the capacity of others to understand the rights of people facing homelessness, to advocate for themselves, their families and their clients, and to identify where legal assistance should be sought.

In 2021 we provided our housing law training in private sessions to representatives from a variety of organisations including law firms, housing and homeless charities and local authorities.

This included a free tailored housing law training programme for people working in the area of domestic violence which was generously funded by the Our Lady of Charity (OLC) Ireland Trust Fund administered by The Community Foundation for Ireland. When asked for comments on that training, the feedback was “More, please!”.

In June 2021 our Board member Professor Gerry Whyte delivered his highly respected Social Welfare law training to a variety of participants including Citizens’ Information Services, Approved Housing Bodies, charities and law firms.

During 2021 MLRC worked on a project to overhaul our training offering to ensure that our training could be widely accessible. Supported by the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission Grant Scheme 2020 and assisted by Lewis Mooney B.L. with additional assistance from Shóna O’Donovan, our training materials were reviewed and updated and we designed and delivered a series of 4 free online legal training sessions called the ‘Know your Housing Rights’ series. The topics covered were:
 Module 1: Introduction to Social Housing law
 Module 2: The Public Sector Human Rights & Equality Duty
 Module 3: Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Homeless HAP
 Module 4: Traveller Accommodation and the Law



Policy work

MLRC's policy work is informed by our casework. For many years we have identified that minority groups are disproportionately represented in our client group. This is also reflected in general research regarding homeless populations in Ireland. In March 2021 we published a policy report 'Minority Groups and Housing Services: Barriers to Access'. This report highlighted the direct and indirect ways in which minority groups are excluded from housing services. The report launch was attended by Joe O'Brien TD, Minister of State for Community Development and Charities. We subsequently held a constructive meeting with Minister for Housing Darragh O'Brien to discuss our recommendations from the report.*

All our clients are ultimately seeking a stable and appropriate home. MLRC believes that every person has the right to a home, which is fundamental to our wellbeing and to our ability to meaningfully participate in society. For many years MLRC has advocated for recognition of a right to housing in the Constitution and this work continued in 2021. We continued to be an active member of the Home for Good coalition, which we co-founded to bring together individuals and organisations committed to the promotion of the right to housing. In September our Managing Solicitor spoke on the right to housing at the Simon Community Annual Conference.

MLRC contributes to public consultations on topics impacting our clients, to offer our unique perspective as lawyers dedicated to homelessness. Consultations we contributed to in 2021 include:

- National Action Plan Against Racism Consultation
- Office of the Children's Ombudsman Strategy Consultation
- Children's Rights Alliance Annual Scorecard
- Submission on Ireland's draft State Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child



Befriending service

At MLRC, we recognise that legal support and advocacy can only go so far to assist those in great difficulty. An additional service we offer is our befriending service which matches clients with particular needs with our trained befrienders who are able to accompany them and provide them with emotional and practical support as they stand up for their rights.

The role may entail assisting a client to complete application forms, helping him/her attend appointments, attending court or being a listening ear. Training and ongoing support is provided to all of our befrienders and careful consideration is given to matching clients with befrienders so that the relationship can flourish.

Unfortunately, as a result of the continuing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 our befriending services remained largely suspended. Writing now in 2022 we are aiming to renew our befriending program to enable us to provide this meaningful support service for our clients once again.



Our team

The second year of the pandemic was another challenging year for society but our wonderful staff and volunteers rose to the occasion to continue their dedicated service to our clients.

We would like to pass on our sincere thanks to all MLRC staff for their tremendous dedication and hard work.

There were a number of changes to the MLRC team in 2021;

Managing Solicitor **Aoife Kelly-Desmond** joined us in March.

Administrator and caseworker **Danielle Curtis** left us in April after 5 years with MLRC.

Katherine Finn joined in May as locum solicitor covering a period of maternity leave.

Administrator **Shauna Curran** left us in August after 8 years – you can read Shauna’s reflections on her time with MLRC over the page.

Heber Rowan joined us as Communications and Fundraising officer for part of the year.

Miriam Nally joined us as Finance Administrator in November.

MLRC extends sincere thanks to Danielle, Shauna, Katherine and Heber for their hard work and dedication on behalf of MLRC in 2021.

Current team:



Aoife Kelly-Desmond,
Managing Solicitor



Paul Dornan,
Solicitor



Sinead McGarrigle,
Solicitor



Nuala Monaghan,
Legal Secretary



Miriam Nally,
Finance Administrator



Siobhán Tracey,
Communications and Fundraising



Shauna Curran – reflections on my time at MLRC



I had the privilege of working as MLRC Administrator from March 2013 to September 2021, with a much needed and very much appreciated 2 year Carers Leave break. During my time with MLRC I worked with 4 different Managing Solicitors, 5 Office Secretaries/Administrators, 5 solicitors, multiple interns, legal volunteers, administrative volunteers and a wonderful Board of Directors. All such lovely people, all making a difference to improving the lives of people with complex legal issues surrounding their housing needs. I remember fondly my two fantastic MLRC colleagues who have passed on from this world, Denise Fitzgerald and Sr. Caitriona O'Hara. They are often in my thoughts.

I so enjoyed my time as Administrator at MLRC. The work was challenging at times, but extremely rewarding. As most administrative roles, my work was firmly in the background, but always in the knowledge that in supporting my colleagues as they dealt with very complicated legal issues for clients, I too was helping to make a difference in people's lives.

You need to be a certain type of person to want to work or volunteer for a charity like MLRC, which commits to the principles of human rights and social justice. If I had to choose one word to describe a trait of the staff and volunteers of MLRC it would be 'kindness'. People who work and volunteer at MLRC exude kindness, which provides an empathy to make it possible to strive to achieve the best outcomes for clients; to continue to troubleshoot all problems and barriers; to treat each person who comes looking for help with dignity and compassion. Plus, the solicitors are just so clever – it's a winning combination!

The MLRC staff and volunteers are a small tight knitted team. Working in a very meaningful way, this charity punches way above its weight and is highly respected in so many circles. MLRC is a very busy office, with a hustle and bustle, but with a gentle calm to get things done. Then Covid came and very quickly we were all working remotely. This curve ball threw up all sorts of hurdles, but I have so much respect for the way the staff overcame obstacles to maintain their highly professional legal advice and representation.

I will never forget the fabulous lunches in Trevor's bistro; the annual wellness staff outings; the supporters Christmas thank you nights; the annual reports and the frantic report launches that always went off so well; the housing law training – such an important element of the MLRC service; the Comedy fundraisers; the funding applications; the payroll run; learning how to use the accounts package; the dreaded preparation for the annual audit; the Finance & Risk Committee meetings; the Governance Code, Guiding Principles of Fundraising, SORP; the website; the blogs; the annual leave schedule; the cold of the office; the heat of the office; the fun and chat in the office, the biscuits and the way too many thank-you chocolates; the support from colleagues in the office; the sadness in the office when a really tough case emerged for yet another person or family in crisis; the delight in the office when that case was resolved.

I have been so lucky to have worked for MLRC, an amazing charity, with amazing people, amazing ethos, amazing outcomes. I miss you and I wish all the team at MLRC the very best in continuing your essential work in the fight for people's rights and justice.

Shauna Curran



Volunteer & internship programme

Volunteering is a critical part of the ethos of MLRC's impact and work. We have a number of administrative, legal and befriending volunteers working with us who greatly complement and enhance our work.

The continuing effects of pandemic restrictions unfortunately meant we had to continue to curtail our volunteer programme through 2021 as our office remained closed, with some volunteers working remotely and others on hiatus. Writing now in 2022 we are delighted that our volunteers have been able to resume their work on a face-to-face basis. We have been particularly glad to welcome our long-time volunteer Sr Kathleen Byrne back to 25 Cork Street.

Interns

MLRC relishes the chance to impart a spirit of civic activism and professional experience with its internship programme. We are extremely thankful for the professionalism, enthusiasm and energy our interns bring to our office. Interns assist with and learn about legal research, case work, administration and policy development. In 2021, we welcomed the following interns and work experience participants and thank them for their service: Anna Fitzgerald, Ciara Walsh, Sinead Mulcahy, David O'Keeffe Ioiart, Gregory Doyle, Hugh O'Laoide Kelly and Sarah McDonnell.



A reflection from Sarah McDonnell, legal intern

I interned with Mercy Law Resource Centre in July 2021.

As a recent law graduate of Trinity College Dublin, my studies sparked an interest in human rights, refugee and immigration law, as I learned how the lives of billions are shaped by public international law.

From that interest, I've decided to continue study in this area by pursuing an MA in Public International Law at the University of Amsterdam later this year. What's more, I've made it my mission to become an informed and active citizen, volunteering for a number of organisations such as Suas Educational Development, CDETB Youth and Education Service for Refugees and Migrants, and Trinity Voluntary Tuition Programme.

Despite working remotely throughout the internship, I gained invaluable legal research experience at MLRC. Additionally, I had the opportunity to sit in on meetings, draft letters, a blog post, and complete communications tasks. While I was aware of the scale of the homeless crisis in Ireland before, it wasn't until I interned with MLRC that I understood the tremendous legal obstacles facing the homeless. Learning at the 'coalface' of housing law and social welfare law, I began to appreciate the gravity of Ireland's homeless crisis in a profound way. I could not be more delighted to have been able to contribute to MLRC's work and understand the invaluable service they provide.



Communications

Communications are an important tool to raise awareness about MLRC and the issues facing our clients.

In 2021 the scope of MLRC's communications continued to grow. We published two ezines, each being distributed to nearly 1,000 subscribers. We also continued to engage across various social media channels to reach different audiences such as potential clients, funders, collaborators and supporters.

Some of our communications highlights in 2021 included the launch of our report *Minority Groups and Housing: Barriers to Access*, discussed further in the Policy section. The Report gained coverage in national news, giving us the opportunity to highlight barriers that are faced by vulnerable groups seeking housing supports and to advocate for positive improvements in this area.* Another important area for our communications in 2021 was highlighting the need for a right to housing to be recognised in the Constitution. This continues to be a focus area into 2022.

To stay in touch with our latest news and updates, please subscribe to our e-zine and follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.

Website: www.mercylaw.ie

Email: info@mercylaw.ie

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

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

LinkedIn: [@mercylaw-resource-centre/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mercylaw-resource-centre/)



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 Companies Registration Office (Co. Reg. No: 471072).

MLRC is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors. The Board of Directors meets with the Managing Solicitor every six to eight weeks. In 2021 MLRC held 6 Board meetings. Due to Covid-19 restrictions the Board meetings were held via Zoom. The Managing Solicitor presents a report to the Board on all matters concerning governance of the organisation, including finance, compliance, case work, policy work, befriending, employment matters and strategic considerations on the future development of MLRC. The Chairperson of the Board liaises frequently with the Managing Solicitor between Board meetings.

MLRC has two specialist Board sub-committees that meet between Board meetings; the Finance & Risk Committee and the Policy Committee.

The Finance & Risk Committee comprises 2 Board members with expertise in finance and risk matters and is attended by the MLRC Managing Solicitor, Finance Administrator and Communications & Fundraising Officer. The Finance & Risk Committee met 6 times in 2021, via Zoom.

The Policy Committee comprises of 3 Board members and is attended by the MLRC Managing Solicitor & solicitor team. The Policy Committee met 3 times in 2021, via Zoom.

Strategic Plan

MLRC's work is governed ultimately by the direction set out in its Strategic Plan 2019-2024. The Strategic Plan was created after extensive consultation with our staff, Board and other stakeholders. The Board is regularly appraised of the progress towards achieving the goals as set out in the plan at each meeting and a mid-term review will be conducted to ensure the Strategic Plan remains current in light of developments since it was introduced.

Charities Governance Code

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

The Charities Governance Code is the standard that a community, voluntary or charitable organisation is expected to maintain in order to effectively manage and control its affairs. By maintaining good governance, systems and processes, MLRC is committed to meet the core standard as outlined in the Governance Code.

MLRC operates in compliance with the Governance Code and is committed to continuing and further improving policies and procedures on an ongoing basis.

The Directors of the MLRC Board in 2021 were:

- Helena O'Donoghue RSM - Chairperson since 2009 Retired April 2022
- Eamonn Casey – Director since 2019; Project Officer, Advocacy and Human Rights, Misesan Cara
- Catherine Dooley RSM – Director since 2019
- Niall Farrell – Director since 2011; Managing Partner, Solicitor, PJF Solicitors Retired 2022
- Ciara McGrath – Director since 2009; Project Leader, Crosscare Information and Advocacy Service.
- Cara Nagle – Director since 2020; Religious of Christian Education
- Deirdre Quigley – Director since 2011; Senior Programme Manager, Central Bank of Ireland.
- Stewart Reddin – Director since January 2022; Senior Information Officer, Dublin South Citizens Information Service
- Patrick Stagg - Director and Company Secretary since 2009. Retired November 2021. Formerly Manager, Bluebell and Dublin 8 Citizens Information Service.
- Liam Twohig – Director since 2011; Retired Chartered Accountant & Business Partner RSM Ireland.
- Gerry Whyte – Director since 2009; Professor, Law School, Trinity College.



Finance

MLRC considers stewardship of its resources to be of the utmost importance. As part of our commitment to best practice in financial reporting and accountability, MLRC produces its accounts in accordance with FRS 102 “The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland” and “Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice” (the Charities SORP).

We are also committed to best fundraising practices, promoting high levels of accountability and transparency, and providing clarity and assurance to our other major donors in 2021, the Archdiocese of Dublin, the Religious of Christian Education, Mason Hayes & Curran and A&L Goodbody.

This annual report incorporates the audited accounts for the following year/period.

- 1st January 2021 to 31st December 2021

Cost of our service

Cost to our Service

The cost of running MLRC for the financial year 2021 amounted to €330,299. During 2021 MLRC received no direct state funding. MLRC’s total income for 2021 was €265,698, which was down substantially on the comparable 12 month period ended 31st December 2020. There were a number of factors for this, including that in contrast to 2020 no exceptional Covid-19 supports or significant legal costs awards were received in 2021.

The majority of MLRC’s 2021 income was comprised of donations (€221,049) and grants (€22,887) with the remainder derived from fees charged for delivering training on housing and social welfare law and general fundraising.

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 & utilities
- Free conference and reception facilities
- Pro bono legal services by Barristers
- Pro bono expert reports from Doctors/ Engineers etc.
- Pro bono auditing & accounting services
- Volunteers & Interns

Our Main costs include:

- Core salaries and employer cost of staff to include TWSS tax liability in 2021
- Office Expenses to include; - Rent incorporating light & heat, Telephone & Broadband, Postage & Courier, Stationery & Office supplies, Photocopying & Printing, Cleaning & Maintenance.
- Professional Indemnity Insurance
- ICT Expenditure
- Client outlay
- Volunteer & Intern Expenses
- Training
- Casework Research
- Policy Research
- Publication and launch of Reports & Information materials
- Training Materials
- Travel



Funders

MLRC would like to acknowledge and thank our funders for their generous support in 2021. MLRC’s funders are a combination of corporate and philanthropic organisations and individuals.

In particular, we would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Sisters of Mercy who have substantially supported our legal service from inception, and to our other major donors in 2021, the Archdiocese of Dublin, the Religious of Christian Education, Mason Hayes & Curran and A&L Goodbody.

We are extremely grateful to every organisation and individual who supported our work in 2021, whether through financial or in-kind donations, pro bono services or volunteering.

Our main funders in 2021 include:

- The Sisters of Mercy
- Religious of Christian Education
- Archdiocese of Dublin
- Mason Hayes & Curran
- A&L Goodbody
- Our Lady of Charity (OLC) Ireland Trust Fund (administered by The Community Foundation for Ireland)
- The Community Foundation for Ireland
- Electric Ireland
- Hilton Fund
- Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission



Appendix: Finance Report/Balance Sheet

Fixed Assets	2021	2020
Intangible Assets	-	1,325
Tangible Assets	5,375	9,236
	5,375	10,561
Current Assets		
Debtors	6,004	18,028
Cash at bank and in hand	453,425	506,486
	459,429	524,514
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	-35,427	-41,097
Net Current Assets	424,002	483,417
Total Assets less Current Liabilities	429,377	493,978
Funds		
Restricted Trust Funds	0	0
General Fund (Unrestricted)	429,377	493,978
Total Funds	429,377	493,978

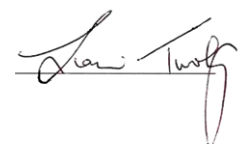
*The January – December 2021 financial statements were approved by the Board on 21st June 2022.

The Financial statements for the year ended 31st December 2021 and the 8 month period ended 31st December 2020 have been prepared in accordance with the Companies Act 2014, FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland" and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their financial statements in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102).

Signed on the Board's behalf by:



Edward Gleeson, Director



Liam Twohig, 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 provision of free conference and reception facilities and assisting with maintenance.

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 in Residential Tenancies Board hearings, Circuit Court Applications, High Court Appeals and High Court Judicial Reviews:

Cormac O'Dúlacháin SC
Derek Shortall SC
Suniva McDonagh S.C.
Alan DP Brady BL
Eoin Coffey BL
James Rooney BL
Lewis Mooney BL
Marie Flynn BL
Nóra Ní Loinsigh BL

Auditor

Crowleys DFK

Volunteers

Volunteer Administrator: Sr Kathleen Byrne
Volunteer Solicitor: Geraldine Hynes
Other volunteers: Shóna O'Donovan

2021 Interns and Work Experience:

- Sinéad Mulcahy (UCD, Leiden University)
- Anna Fitzgerald (UCD CLE placement)
- Sarah McDonnell (TCD)
- David O'Keefe Loiart (TCD)
- Ciara Walsh (UCD)
- Hugh O'Laoide Kelly (TCD)
- Gregory Doyle (UCD)

Annual Report Designer

Whitespace Design | www.whitespacedesign.ie

Others:

John Gaynor & Co Solicitors
Paul D'Alton, clinical psychologist
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
Pol O'Murchu, Solicitor
The PILA team
Liam Thornton









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

25 Cork Street, Dublin 8, D08 YD91, Ireland

T: 01 453 7459

F: 01 453 7455

Email: info@mercylaw.ie

Website: www.mercylaw.ie

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

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

Linkedin: [@mercy-law-resource-centre/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mercy-law-resource-centre/)



Mercy Law
Resource Centre

