



Homeless shelter forced to turn people away

21-bed emergency shelter at disused civil building already running at full capacity

by Jennifer Hough

A 21-BED emergency shelter for homeless people which opened on a pilot basis in Dublin over the weekend is running at full capacity and already having to turn people away.

The shelter opened after calls from homeless campaigner and founder of Trust Ireland, Alice Leahy, called for disused buildings around the city to be used as emergency accommodation during the cold weather.

Ms Leahy, who has been working at the coalface of homelessness since the 1970s, said people who would not have expected to ever sleep rough, might be too ashamed to give their personal details at shelters.

Following her appeal in an article in the Irish Examiner, Minister for the Environment John Gormley moved to act on her suggestion and a disused civil building, run by Dublin Simon Community on behalf of Dublin City

Council, is working at full capacity.

"People said there was no need for this shelter, but it went from six people on the first night to full capacity," she said.

"Last night people had to be turned away. Obviously there is a great need for it."

Open from 11pm to 8am, the shelter is a wet facility, allowing drinking in two communal rooms and will accept people who are not admitted to other centres for reasons such as drug or alcohol issues.

The centre's location has not been identified to protect the clients' privacy and to avoid possible objections from local residents.

Crosscare, the Depaul Trust and Focus Ireland are also involved in the new venture.

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for Cork Simon Community said almost 150 emergency beds in the city were also

running at full capacity.

"At the moment we have enough beds, but we are concerned there will be an upswing in people sleeping rough as the economic crisis deepens," he said.

"The problem is that people end up staying in emergency accommodation long term and there are no move-on options. There is nowhere for them to go."

According to Met Éireann, the wintry weather is set to last with bitterly cold weather predicted to last until at least the weekend. It will remain very cold with wintry showers persisting in northern and western counties.

While it will be mostly clear elsewhere, severe or very severe frost is expected to set in widely as north-west winds slacken and rain, sleet and snow is predicted to spread to remaining parts of the country during Sunday.