



New homeless shelter opens in Dublin

ALISON HEALY

PEOPLE FROM eastern Europe accounted for five of the six people who stayed in a new emergency homeless shelter which opened in Dublin city centre at the weekend.

The Wolf Tone night shelter has opened on a pilot basis in a bid to dissuade people from sleeping rough.

The centre was first mooted by Minister for the Environment John Gormley three weeks ago after he heard homeless campaigner Alice Leahy on the radio talking about people sleeping outdoors in below-freezing temperatures.

She said her Trust centre met up to 60 people every morning who had slept in parks and under bushes the night before.

They did not want to access available accommodation due to fears about bureaucracy and rules.

The new 21-bed shelter is being run by Dublin Simon Community on behalf of Dublin City Council in a Civil Defence building. 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. The centre will open from 11pm to 8am each day, and will accept people who are not admitted to other centres for reasons such as drug or alcohol issues.

Its manager, Eimear O'Neill, said some people were dissuaded from attending hostels or shelters because of the form-filling involved and the amount of personal information sought. This shelter would seek very little information from clients before admitting them.

It is a wet facility, allowing drinking in two communal rooms. However, it does not allow drug use on the premises.

Ms O'Neill said there was a clear need for the centre, but demand would build slowly because of its self-referring nature.

Its first six clients arrived between 11pm and 11.30pm on Saturday. Two were newly-homeless, having arrived from Hungary to look for work in recent days. Some

indicated that they would return last night.

She said homeless people from abroad were more likely to sleep rough as many of them did not have very good English and had difficulty accessing hostel services.

Dublin Simon's chief executive Sam McGuinness said the centre was up and running in a matter of weeks because a number of charities had worked together to make it possible.

Dublin Simon also opened two emergency shelters last year in Dublin city and Dún Laoghaire.

Mr McGuinness pointed to the Government's commitment to end long-term homelessness by 2010, and said the date was rapidly approaching.

He said it was essential that the statutory bodies and voluntary agencies worked together to make this happen.