Threshold
preventing homelessness

Annual Report 2021
Saving Homes in a Time of Crises

"The number of tenancy termination notice queries exceeded the levels before the pandemic. The number of private renters seeking advice on their lease increased in 2021. This points to an increased level of precarity in the rental sector.

Threshold's 'superpower' is homelessness prevention"

John-Mark McCafferty CEO

In 2021 Threshold saved **4,807** adults and **2,916** children from the chaos and trauma of homelessness

"Continuing on from their work in 2020, both the staff and the board of Threshold had to demonstrate creative and adaptive approaches to how they carried out their work supporting renters in Ireland in 2021. Threshold added to support mechanisms through the addition of video calls to enhance other online communication supports such as web chat. This face to face support was without doubt a welcome addition to the supports offered by Threshold to renters seeking advice. I want to commend Threshold on their approach. Both Threshold and I, as Minister, share the same vision, a society where everyone has access to affordable, secure, suitable and good quality housing. I look forward to continuing to support the work of Threshold in the future."

Darragh O'Brien, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage

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1. Message from the Chairperson

Like its predecessor, the year 2021 was one of extraordinary challenge for individuals, organisations and society in Ireland. We began 2021 with one of the most restrictive lockdowns in the world and as the year came to a close with hope on the pandemic front, new challenges in the form of inflation and war in Europe were coming fast into view.

And yet again it was the most vulnerable in our society who experienced the most severe impacts and fall-out from these enormous challenges, not least in their housing needs.

Threshold's services were needed more than ever in 2021, as the private rental sector continued to face enormous pressure arising out of the Housing crisis, with the situation deteriorating towards the latter end by the return of significant inflation into the Irish economy for the first time.

Throughout 2021 Threshold maintained and enhanced the support it provided, adapting to the unprecedented nature of the pandemic with renewed focus on our core services advocating on behalf of, and providing advice and support to, vulnerable groups in the private rental sector.

Despite the ongoing enormous challenges of Covid, staff across the organisation worked tirelessly to maintain the highest levels of service, regardless of lockdowns, through remote working, ensuring we were there for anybody who needed Threshold's help.

Threshold worked to improve our services to clients by adding to our telephone service with new communication innovations such as video calls to compliment other online tools including webchat, at a time when our help was greatly needed.

Regardless of eviction moratoriums and other special measures during lockdown, 2021 saw a further increase in the number of people seeking and receiving support from Threshold, with more than 60,000 contacts to our services via various channels such as telephone, email and webchat. Staff worked on almost 11,000 cases where people were at risk of homelessness.

Our Threshold colleagues continued to campaign for tenant rights and further investment in housing, engaging on the various pieces of legislation that came into being, including the Housing for All plan and two separate pieces of tenant legislation.

"Threshold's services were needed more than ever in 2021, as the private rental sector continued to face enormous pressure arising out of the housing crisis."

I would therefore like to thank all of our staff for the commitment, hard work and agility they have shown in 2021 making sure Threshold was there as and when it was needed. I would also like to thank our Board, in particular those who stepped down after phenomenal service to Threshold, not least outgoing Chair Dr. Aideen Hayden and Board members Professor Paddy Gray, Trocaire Joye and Martini Molloy.

Finally, I would also like to thank our funders, and the many very generous donors who make all of this work possible.

Liam Reid,
Chairperson

"Despite the ongoing enormous challenges of Covid, staff across the organisation worked tirelessly to maintain the highest levels of service advocating on behalf of, and providing advice and support to, vulnerable groups in the private rental sector."

2. Vision, Mission and Values

Threshold's Vision is an Ireland where everyone has access to affordable, secure, suitable and good quality housing.

Our Mission is to prevent homelessness and to campaign for housing as a right by:

i. Providing independent advice and advocacy to vulnerable people;

ii. Delivering housing and supports for those in housing need;

iii. Influencing housing policy and practice for the benefit of those in housing need.

Threshold's Values shape how we work. Key among these are:

Independence – we are an independent organisation and will pursue our agenda with courage and fairness.

Accountability – we are fully committed to the values of openness, transparency and accountability.

Dignity and respect – we will always treat our clients, stakeholders and our staff with empathy, dignity and respect in all of our work and interactions.

Right to housing – we believe that everyone has a right to housing.

The holistic nature of housing – housing, and lack of access to it, has consequences for other areas of people's lives and access to other services such as health and education.

3. Company Information

Directors:

Liam Reid (Chairperson)

Martin Whelan

Geoff Byrne

Patricia Sheehy Skeffington

Brian Murphy

Bernard Cronin

Mark Brangam

Sarah Sheridan *(Appointed 6 April 2022)*

Laura Harmon
(Appointed 17 February 2022)

Patrick Gray *(resigned 6 April 2022)*

Aideen Hayden *(resigned 1 March 2022)*

Trocaire Joye *(resigned 1 March 2022)*

Martini Molloy *(resigned 1 March 2022)*

Company Secretary:

Liam Reid *(resigned 20 December 2021)*

Geoff Byrne *(Appointed 20 December 2021, resigned 17 February 2022)*

Laura Harmon
(Appointed 17 February 2022)

Chief Executive Officer:

John-Mark McCafferty

Charities Regulatory Authority Number:

20011031

Company Number:

70660

Registered Office and Principal Address:

21 Stoneybatter
Dublin 7
D07 KV61

Auditors:

Whelan Dowling & Associates Chartered Accountants and Statutory Auditors

Block 1, Unit 1 & 4,
Northwood Court
Santry
Dublin 9

Bankers:

Bank of Ireland

2 College Green
Dublin 2
D02 VR66

AIB

66 South Mall
Cork
T12 Y822

AIB

Lynch's Castle
40 Shop Street
Galway
H91 W400

Solicitors:

O'Sullivan O'Dowd Solicitors

1 Blackhall View
Blackhall Place
Dublin 7
D07 FR59

4. Foreword from John-Mark McCafferty, CEO

What is distinct in the 2021 annual report?

It's the sustained resilience with which Threshold staff carried out their advice and home-saving work with tenants during the second year of the pandemic.

"3,500 households were prevented from entering homelessness. That's over 4,800 adults and 2,900 children whose homes in the private rented sector were saved."

What makes this year's annual report different to previous Threshold annual reports? It's the sustained resilience with which Threshold staff carried out their advice and home-saving work with tenants during the second year of the pandemic.

Our advisors assisted 19,947 households in 2021 – that's 26,176 adults and 13,561 children. Of these almost 20,000 clients, nearly 12,000 were seeking Threshold's assistance for the first time. We worked on just over 22,000 cases with these households, meaning that some clients – around two thousand – contacted us about more than one individual case during 2021. Our staff continued to respond to the needs of private renters in this challenging environment while working remotely.

The number of tenancy termination notice queries exceeded the levels before the pandemic.

The number of private renters seeking advice on their lease increased in 2021. This points to an increased level of precarity in the rental sector.

The issue of poor standards and repairs also increased this year. This may be due to delays in repairs during the public health restrictions throughout 2020 and 2021.

In this context, it's clear that **Threshold's 'superpower' is homelessness prevention**. In 2021, Threshold **worked on almost 11,000 cases**, where the household was at risk of homelessness. Many of these cases continued into 2022 due to their complex nature. Of the nearly 5,000 at risk cases closed in 2021, over 3,500 households were prevented from entering homelessness. That's over 4,800 adults and 2,900 children whose homes in the private rental sector were saved, partly due to our tenancy protection services. As part of our tenancy protection work, Threshold supported over 80 households to obtain an uplift in their rent supplement payment using a Tenancy Sustainment Protocol that we have with the Department of Social Protection.

Our vital representation work continued in 2021. We **advocated with and on behalf of over 250 households** at the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), and at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), two clients were represented, and three clients were assisted to submit cases And, in terms of **our work supporting the Citizen's Information Centres** (CICs), we assisted their staff and volunteers in their response to almost 270 queries from private renters.

Assisted 19,947 households in 2021 – that's 26,176 adults and 13,561 children.

"Our work depends on the generosity of our supporters and donors. Individuals and organisations who gave to Threshold during 2021 enabled us to better co-ordinate and support work to both serve tenants, develop services for them, and equally to advocate for a better private rented housing sector for them and their families."

Clients engaged with Threshold Services through a number of key channels. There were 46,632 **Freephone** calls answered, 4,835 cases originating from an **email** enquiry, 8,463 **webchats** with client across the year, and there were 75 **online video consultations**. Threshold established the video consultation service in June 2021 as part of a wider approach to develop and provide a range of contact channels with private renters to make it easier for them to contact us.

The way clients wish to interact with service providers and advice services is changing profoundly, driven by demographics and technology. Threshold is responding to these ongoing changes, and in the last quarter of 2021 we commenced a review process of our recent strategic plans with a view to informing the development of a new plan. The review aimed to consult stakeholders, including service users, considering the rapidly changing external environment in which Threshold operates. The findings of the review are currently being digested and will provide key insights to drive innovations in the way we deliver services. This is so that we will have the capacity to reach all private renters who need our assistance, in the ways and channels appropriate to them and used by them, while also retaining a focus on tenants who require more support, representation and intervention.

Almost 20,000 clients, nearly 12,000 were seeking Threshold's assistance for the first time.

Thank you to all statutory funders and donors – we can't save homes without you.

For all the staff and CE participants who have worked so hard to advise private renters and to keep them in their homes, I offer much thanks and appreciation. I thank members of our Board for all their support and guidance over such a varied and dynamic year. I wish to thank outgoing members of the Board who have been longstanding in their commitment to Threshold, in particular Dr. Aideen Hayden, who stepped down as Chair at the end of the year and whose service, research and policy insights, and media representation contributed to Threshold's profile and standing, both in the housing sector and in wider public life.

None of this vital work is possible without the statutory funding from the Department of Housing, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, Cork City and County Councils, Kerry County Council, Galway City Council, the HSE, the Department of Social Protection, Pobal's Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) and the Citizen's Information Board. Similarly, our work depends on the generosity of our supporters and donors. Individuals and organisations who gave to Threshold during 2021 enabled us to better co-ordinate and support work to both serve tenants, by developing services for them, and equally to advocate for a better private rented housing sector for them and their families. Thank you to all statutory funders and donors – we can't save homes without you.

John-Mark McCafferty
Chief Executive Officer

"Around 2,000 clients contacted us about more than one individual case during 2021."

5. About Us

1. **Prevent homelessness** through the provision of independent **advice**, **support** and **advocacy**.

2. Work towards a rights-based approach to housing through **policy**, **research** and **legal** work.

3. **Facilitate access to homes** for people in housing need.

Our Home Team Heroes

Threshold
preventing homelessness

It's our extraordinary team of housing advisors in Threshold who are the key to helping renters every day – and the key to stopping homelessness.

Threshold is a national housing charity, which provides frontline advice and support services to private renters facing problems in their tenancies. **Threshold prevents private renters from entering homelessness**, advocates on behalf of clients, empowers them to assert their rights and seeks to influence national housing policy for the benefit of all private renters.

Threshold has offices in Dublin, Galway and Cork, operates a National Freephone Helpline (1800 454 454) from 9am to 9pm, a webchat service from 9:30am to 5pm and an online video consultation service available 9am to 4pm, Monday to Friday.

Advice, Support & Advocacy | **Policy Research & Influence** | **Facilitate Access to Homes**

Threshold provides a number of services directly to tenants in the private rental sector; advocacy and policy work at a national level; and is a registered Approved Housing Body.

1. Advisors operating the **Tenancy Protection Service** (TPS) keep households in their home and prevent the occurrence of homelessness through **advice and advocacy**. This service can be accessed via the Freephone number, appointments at our regional offices, via our website and at our drop-in advice clinics in a number of locations around the country.

2. A dedicated section of the TPS operates the Interim **Tenancy Sustainment Protocol** (ITSP) on behalf of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and various local Authorities, **preventing rent supplement recipients from losing their home as a result of rent increases.**

3. The Access Housing Unit **(AHU) in Cork sources accommodation** for households experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

4. The AHU also provides a Tenancy Support service to help tenants to **sustain their tenancies.**

5. Threshold is a **provider of training** to to statutory and non-statutory bodies, company employees and student groups on a wide range of topics relevant to the private rental sector.

6. Threshold **provides second tier supports to other frontline services** ensuring access to quality advice and advocacy for tenants in the private rental sector.

7. The Policy and Legal team make appropriate **submissions to Government** and respond to legislative changes based on the experience of our clients.

8. As a registered Approved Housing Body (AHB), Threshold is **a housing provider**.

6. Overview of Threshold's Impact - Preventing Homelessness in 2021

Provision of independent advice, support and advocacy.

How People Got in Touch

In 2021, Threshold advisors assisted 19,947 (26,176 adults and 13,561 children) households on 22,073 cases. **Threshold advisors carried out 159,955 individual actions in support of these clients.**

Threshold answered 46,632 calls to the National Freephone Helpline.

Threshold responded to 8,463 webchat queries, or 34 a day.

75 online video consultations were provided between June and December 2021.

4,835 people made initial contact by email.

Homeless Prevention

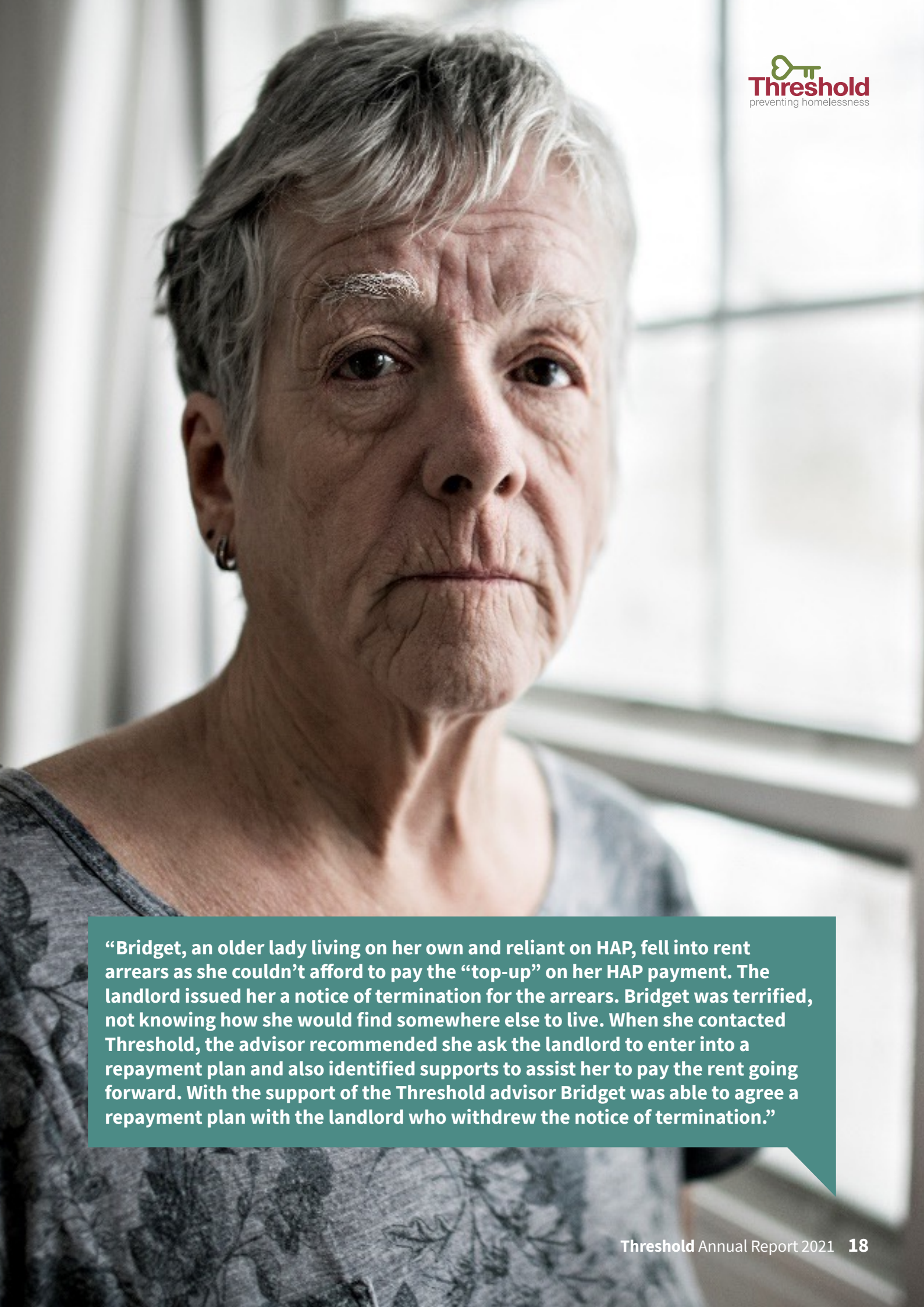
In 2021, Threshold prevented 4,807 adults and 2,916 children from entering homelessness. In total, Threshold advisors supported 10,729 households who were at risk of homelessness.

In 2021, 4,943 of these cases were closed. Of these 3,555 households, (4,807 adults and 2,916 children) were prevented from entering homelessness. Unfortunately, in 2021, 209 households entered homelessness and 72 were forced to stay with family and friends when their tenancy could not be protected, and they could not secure alternative housing. The outcome is unknown for the remaining clients. While efforts are made to follow up with all clients Threshold advisors are not always able to make contact.

Of those who entered homelessness, 69% had received a notice of termination from their landlord. The majority of these notices were valid and could not be challenged. These renters were unable to find alternative housing and so entered homelessness.

There was a decline in the number of households prevented from entering homelessness in 2020 and 2021. This is in part a result of the moratoria on evictions which prevented landlords from acting on or issuing notices of terminations for much of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021. While many households remained at risk of homelessness in this time, the outcomes of their cases were delayed as the moratorium pushed out their eviction dates. Just under 6,000 at risk cases carried over into 2022.

Threshold prevented 4,807 adults and 2,916 children from entering homelessness.

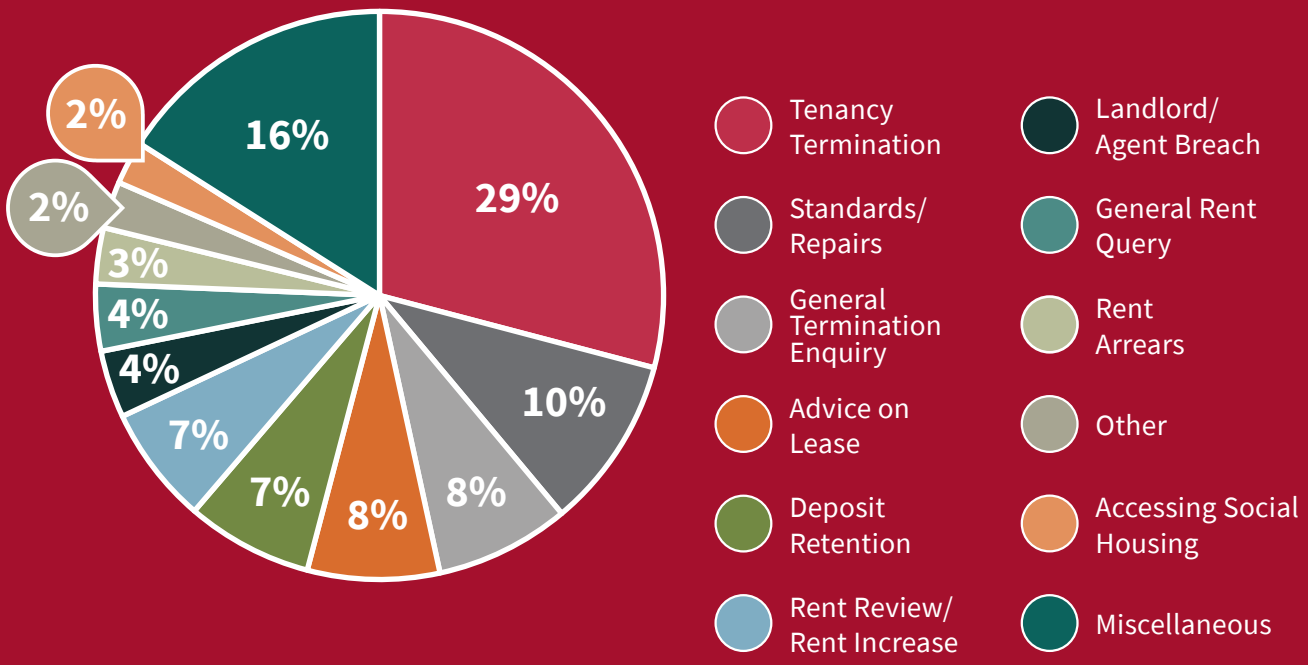


"Bridget, an older lady living on her own and reliant on HAP, fell into rent arrears as she couldn't afford to pay the "top-up" on her HAP payment. The landlord issued her a notice of termination for the arrears. Bridget was terrified, not knowing how she would find somewhere else to live. When she contacted Threshold, the advisor recommended she ask the landlord to enter into a repayment plan and also identified supports to assist her to pay the rent going forward. With the support of the Threshold advisor Bridget was able to agree a repayment plan with the landlord who withdrew the notice of termination."

Why People Got in Touch

The main issues tenants required support with, in 2021, are presented in the below chart. As in previous years, tenancy terminations are the primary issue facing private renters. In addition to the 4,391 queries about tenancy termination, almost 1,500 private renters got in touch to ask how their landlord can end their tenancy.

Top 10 Issues Facing Clients in 2021



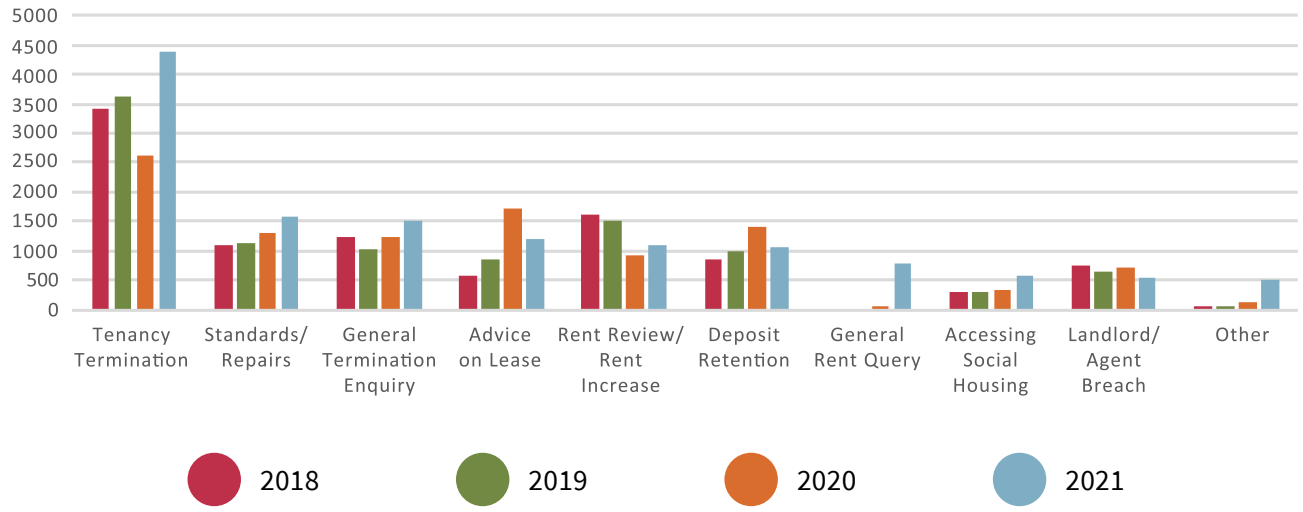
Despite a moratorium on evictions being in place for the first four months of 2021, the number of cases relating to tenancy termination exceeded pre-Covid-19 figures.

The issue of poor standards and repairs surpassed the 2019 figures. This may be a result of delays in repairs during the public health restrictions throughout 2020 and 2021.

The number of cases related to rent reviews decreased in 2021 compared to 2019 and 2018. Just over 1,000 queries related to an actual rent review received by a tenant from their landlord in 2021. An additional, 788 tenants got in touch to enquire about how the landlord may increase their rent.

The number of private renters seeking advice on their lease increased in 2020 and the numbers remained higher in 2021, compared to pre-pandemic levels. The increase in 2020 was primarily driven by private renters enquiring as to how they may end their lease, as many workers lost their jobs and sought to move home to family. However, with job losses less of an issue in 2021, it is surprising to see these queries remain high. Combined with the increase in general termination queries this may point to an increased level of precarity in the rental sector.

Primary Issues Facing Clients 2017 - 2021



"Marija and her partner were renting their home for a year when they asked their landlord to accept rent supplement, as there had been a change in their employment. Marija contacted Threshold and an advisor liaised with the landlords' agent in an attempt to resolve the issue with no success. Marija was left with no choice but to launch a case with the WRC. On doing so the landlord agreed to accept rent supplement and provided the necessary paperwork."

Representation at the Residential Tenancies Board

Threshold advisors have expertise in housing law, in particular the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2021. They are highly knowledgeable and experienced in the various options available to tenants who require support to remain in their home.

In 2021, **Threshold advisors represented 255 households at the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) and assisted 291 households to submit disputes**. There had been a drop off in representation cases in 2020, as the RTB moved to virtual hearings. However, in 2021, the RTB streamlined the virtual hearings process which resulted in a greater volume of hearings than anticipated.

Representation at the Workplace Relations Commission

Threshold has identified that many people eligible for HAP or rent supplement struggle to find a landlord to accept either. The Equal Status Acts prohibit discrimination in the provision of accommodation services against people who are in receipt of rent supplement, housing assistance, or social welfare payments. Tenants or prospective tenants can lodge a complaint with the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) to challenge this discrimination.

Threshold advisors assisted three clients to submit cases to the WRC, and represented two clients at the WRC, in 2021. During 2021, Threshold identified 121 private renters who had been discriminated against because they were seeking HAP. In many cases, the Threshold advisor was able to assist the client to resolve the situation with the landlord. In some cases, however, the client was forced to find another home.

Threshold has identified that many people eligible for HAP or rent supplement struggle to find a landlord to accept either.

"Jamie had been renting his apartment for two years when the landlord issued him a notice of termination for breaching the tenancy agreement. The landlord claimed that Jamie was not keeping the property in good order. When Jamie contact Threshold, the advisor was able to advise that the notice was invalid on a number of grounds and could be challenged. The landlord refused to withdraw the notice so Jamie lodged a dispute with the RTB. The RTB adjudicator found in Jamie's favour and he was able to remain in his home."

Working with Single People

In December 2019, Threshold commenced a pilot service for single persons and couples without dependent children in Dublin, who are renting and at risk of becoming homeless. In 2021, the Single's and Couple's Homelessness Prevention Project continued in a 100% remote capacity due to Covid-19 public health restrictions. It is hoped that this service can return to delivering an in-person service as well as an Outreach clinic.

In 2021, 477 unique clients were assisted by the project. The majority of clients were single individuals, 15% were couples. In 2021, 351 of these cases were closed. Of these, 87% of households were prevented from entering homelessness. The outcome is unknown is for 10% of clients and unfortunately 3% entered homelessness.

As with all of Threshold's clients, the primary reason this group were at risk of homelessness was their landlord had issued them a **notice of termination**. However, the second most common cause was difficulties in finding a suitable home to rent and the third most common was difficulty in accessing HAP or Rent Supplement.

Threshold commenced a pilot service for single persons and couples without dependent children, in Dublin who are renting and at risk of becoming homeless.

Christmas On Call Service

To ensure a service is available to tenants throughout the year, Threshold provides a Christmas On Call Service between the 24th of December and the 31st December. In 2021, 137 calls were answered, up 76% on the previous year. The increase can be attributed to additional staff cover between the 28th and 30th of December. In addition, the advisors had access to email queries which was not the case the previous year. As in other years, the primary issue for those making contact was that they had been issued a **notice of termination**, accounting for 28% of queries.

Working with Students

Threshold has had a longstanding, positive working relationship with students from undergraduates, postgraduates to international students. Engagement was limited during the pandemic, while many students were not on campus and attended class remotely. Threshold hoped to increase its engagement with students in 2022, now that they are back on campus. This engagement will be primarily via Threshold's designated Student Liaison Officers.

In 2021, Threshold provided training to the Union of Students of Ireland representatives, the Free Legal Advice Society of the National University of Galway, to the overseas students in Trinity College Dublin and participated in a session organised by the Junior Common Room/Student's Union in Trinity. These sessions are designed to ensure students are aware of their rights and responsibilities whether they are renting from a private landlord or from a Student Specific Provider.

In 2021, Threshold provided training to ensure students are aware of their rights and responsibilities whether they are renting from a private landlord or from a Student Specific Provider.

Working with the Citizen's Information Centres (CICs)

Threshold continued its specialist second tier support service to the staff and volunteers of the Citizen's Information Centres (CICs) across the country. The queries from the CICs broke down as follows:

- **25% of the queries related to tenancy terminations**
- **13% related to advice on lease**
- **10% related to HAP and rent supplement.**

This service has been operating since 2012 and in 2021 assisted staff of the CICs support to respond to 269 queries from private renters.

In addition to the support via the Advice service, Threshold delivers training to the staff of the Citizen's Information Centres. In 2021, Threshold staff delivered three sessions across the country. The plan is to deliver additional sessions in 2022.

Facilitate access to homes for people in housing need

The Access Housing Unit

The role of the Access Housing Unit (AHU) is to secure private rented tenancies for individuals and families residing in emergency accommodation in the Cork Region, as well as support households to sustain their tenancies.

In 2021, the Access Housing Unit (AHU) supported 32 households (including 38 adults and 40 children) to exit homelessness into their own home. These homes were secured in the Private Rental Sector (PRS), via the Place Finders Service, via the Local Authority, Approved Housing Bodies, transitional housing projects and supported housing projects. Tenants are able to avail of Homeless HAP, whereby an increased rent payment, a deposit and one or two months' rent is paid up front. Homeless HAP is provided in the hope that it will make it easier for these tenants to access the PRS.

The Resettlement and Tenancy Sustainment Support ensures households the supports they require when exiting homelessness. Some practical examples of this support are a local information pack to help the client become familiar with their locality and support to apply for funding for essential household items. In 2021, this service provided support to 56 households (including 94 children).

In addition, the AHU offers Tenancy Sustainment Support to those who require additional support within an existing tenancy. In 2021, 24 households (28 adults and 23 children) were supported by the Tenancy Sustainment worker.

The Resettlement and Tenancy Sustainment Support ensures households the supports they require when exiting homelessness.

Approved Housing Body and Delivery of Social Housing

As an Approved Housing Body (AHB), Threshold continued to own and manage 13 houses and 5 apartments in Cork City in 2021. Despite the ongoing challenges of Covid-19, there were no new vacancies in any of the units; with one apartment rented for the first time following acquisition in 2020 and renovations thereafter.

Threshold's housing is designated as social housing through either the Rental Accommodation Scheme('s) (RAS) payment and availability agreements; or the Capital Advance and Lending Facility (CALF) loans, administered by Cork City Council on behalf of the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage.

Threshold has a particular focus providing homes for people who are experiencing homelessness, while providing attendant tenancy sustainment supports where necessary.

"Mary is separated with two children. She was forced to leave her home because of domestic violence. She had never rented or dealt with landlords or letting agents before. She engaged in Threshold's Pre-Tenancy Programme, which enable clients to develop the skills and knowledge required to secure and sustain tenancies in the private rental sector. This built up Mary's confidence and she set about finding a rental home, with the support of the Access Housing Unit. Through remaining in contact with, and building up a relationship with, the local letting agent, Mary secured a home for her and her children.

Mary has settled well into her new home and is looking forward to engaging in different educational, spiritual, and recreational activities in 2022. Mary is currently receiving tenancy sustainment support from her support worker at the AHU. Regular contact is made with Mary by phone and/or home visits, to support her with any tenancy, social, health, or financial issues which arise."

Policy, Research and Legal Work

Legislative Changes and Achievements

Submissions

Research

Conferences

Partnerships and Memberships

Threshold is the leading agency influencing legislation and policy to protect and support tenants in the private rental sector to ensure they have access to affordable, secure, suitable and good quality housing.

The right to housing underpins Threshold's work as it strives toward tenure neutrality, whereby private renters will have the same level of security and protections as those in other tenure types such as owner occupation or traditional social housing.

As the primary support service for those living in the private rental sector and a leader in primary and secondary homeless prevention, Threshold is uniquely placed to carry out this work, drawing on the experience of private renters, to inform its policy and advocacy positions. Threshold can quickly spot emerging trends in the private rented sector, point to likely obstacles in the future and formulate solutions.

Threshold participates in a range of networks and fora working in partnership with other organisations, responding to calls for submissions to Government and contributing to the development of an improved private rental sector and housing situation for all.

Threshold is the leading agency influencing legislation and policy to protect and support tenants in the private rental sector to ensure they have access to affordable, secure, suitable and good quality housing.

Legislative Changes and Achievements

Residential Tenancies Act 2021

This Act extended the timeframe of the protections afforded to private renters who had fallen into rent arrears as a result of the income loss on foot of the Covid-19 public health restrictions.

Threshold engaged with members of the Oireachtas as this piece of legislation was passed, and recommended that the protections be extended to a wider cohort of private renters and for a longer duration. This unfortunately was not achieved.

Residential Tenancies (No. 2) Act 2021

This Act limits the amount of upfront rent and/or a deposit that landlords can ask people to pay to secure a tenancy. This change was long advocated for by Threshold, which had previously highlighted the growing practice among landlords to request multiples of months' rent upfront.

The Act also extended the timeframe of the protections afforded to private renters who had fallen into rent arrears as a result of the income loss on foot of the Covid-19 public health restrictions. In addition, the Act restricted rent increases in the Rent Pressure Zones from exceeding general inflation, as recorded by the Harmonised Index of the Consumer Price (HICP).

The Act provides that students do not have to give more than 28 days' notice to terminate their rental arrangement. This was an important protection introduced after many students had difficulty ending their leases when their colleges and universities closed down during the public health restrictions in 2020.

Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2021

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2021 included changes to create tenancies of indefinite duration, which was warmly welcomed by Threshold as it had long advocated for the creation of tenancies of indefinite duration.

The Act also capped rent increases in Rent Pressure Zones at 2% or at the HICP, whichever is lower. Given the rapid increase in HICP, this Act passed through the Oireachtas quickly.

Threshold participates in a range of networks and fora working in partnership with other organisations, responding to calls for submissions to Government and contributing to the development of an improved private rental sector and housing situation for all.

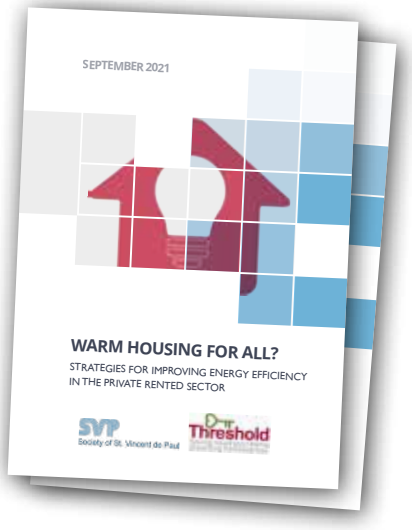
Submissions

Housing for All

In 2021, the Government called for submissions to its housing plan "Housing for All". Threshold's submission contained a series of recommendations across seven areas to improve the security, affordability and quality of rental housing in Ireland as well as increase the provision of affordable and cost rental homes. This submission was informed by Threshold's work with private renters as well as its research, policy analysis and expertise in housing. Below is a selection of the recommendations put forward by Threshold:

Enshrine the Right to Housing in the Irish Constitution
Create tenancies of indefinite duration (this was done by legislative change in December 2021)
Establish a rent arrears scheme
Increase investment in homeless prevention
Review the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)
A Tenancy Sustainment Protocol for the Housing Assistance Payment
Implement a "NCT" for housing to improve standards.

Warm Housing for All



Threshold, in partnership with the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, held a roundtable to identify the actions necessary to improve the energy efficiency of the private rental sector. This is an issue of concern for both organisations as it impacts our respective clients in many ways. Improving energy efficiency in rented homes can alleviate energy poverty and improve the thermal comfort of the renter, which leads to improved physical and mental wellbeing. Threshold and the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul identified the need for specific measures to ensure retrofits are undertaken in the private rental sector.

Academics, Departmental officials, members of State Bodies, landlord representatives, academics, energy efficiency and retrofit professionals, among others, were invited to participate in the roundtable. From this event Threshold and the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul devised a series of recommendations to improve the energy efficiency in the private rental sector. These were published as a briefing paper "Warm Housing for All", and submitted to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

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Research

Tenant Sentiment Survey

Threshold conducted its fourth Annual Tenant Sentiment Survey in 2021. This survey provides Threshold with a valuable insight into people's experience of the private rental sector, their housing expectations and aspirations. The findings inform Threshold's policy development and supports its advocacy work.

The survey was expanded in 2021 to include questions about overcrowding, the renter's relationship with their landlord and the experience of renters who moved home to live with their family. The findings were launched in July 2021.

Impact Reports

Threshold launched its first Impact Report in July 2021. This edition gave an overview of Threshold's services and impact during the first 12 months of the Covid-19 pandemic. The report set out how the pandemic and public health measures impacted private renters, how Threshold adapted its services in response, and what action was taken. Tracking and reporting on the trends, as they emerged, during the pandemic has ensured Threshold has been able to put forward the most appropriate proposals for solving issues faced by those living in the private entered sector.

This was followed up with the Q2 2021 and Q3 2021 Impact Reports. These are short, concise reports highlighting the main issues facing tenants, the number of clients supported and the number prevented from entering homelessness in each quarter.

Discrimination Against Private Renters

Threshold assists many people a year who have been refused a property or have lost a property because the landlord does not accept the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), or in some cases Rent Supplement.

Threshold published a report on this issue in July 2021 and submitted it to the Oireachtas Committee on Housing. Tracking the cases of 63 clients who had experienced this type of discrimination Threshold identified a number of ways to resolve this issue for those in receipt of HAP or Rent Supplement.

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Conferences

The Private Rental Sector in Ireland – through the pandemic and beyond

Threshold and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) hosted an online conference in July 2021. Both Threshold and the ESRI had observed the unique impact the Covid-19 pandemic and related health restrictions had on private renters and the sector. This conference provided a space to discuss and learn from what occurred and to look toward policy options for the future. The event was well attended with good debate and discussions among those in attendance.

Partnerships and Memberships

National Homeless Action Committee

The CEO of Threshold was invited to sit on the National Homeless Action Committee. This committee was convened by the Minister for Housing in 2021. “The primary objective of the Committee will be to bring together key Government Departments, agencies and stakeholders, to oversee implementation of the homeless inter-agency measures committed to under Housing for All and to ensure for coherence and co-ordination of homeless related services in delivering policy measures and actions.” The CEO attends meetings of the Committee and Threshold has made appropriate submissions to the Committee in advancing their work.

The Right to Housing

Threshold is a member of the Home for Good coalition who wish to see the inclusion of the right to housing in the Constitution. In 2021, the coalition's work was primarily focused on determining how to raise awareness of the right to housing and what it means. The topic is now under review by the Housing Commission and it is hoped there will be a recommendation to hold a referendum on the right to housing.

Threshold is a member of the Home for Good coalition who wish to see the inclusion of the right to housing in the Constitution.

Work with Arthur Cox Law Firm

During 2021, Threshold continued its pro bono relationship with Arthur Cox. This arrangement has proved beneficial to both Threshold and Arthur Cox. The relationship has two parts. The first involves Arthur Cox providing legal support to vulnerable clients of Threshold who require representation before the courts. This resulted in a number of Threshold clients being taken on as Arthur Cox clients during 2021. The second limb of the arrangement is the placement of legal interns with Threshold. During 2021, Threshold benefited from the placement of two legal interns in our Galway Office. The placement of legal interns has proved very successful, both in assisting Threshold with its work, and in providing valuable and varied experience for the interns in question.

7. How We Create Impact and Make a Difference

Stopping homelessness with our partners

Threshold believes in partnership. We always have. Greater impact is always achieved through working together.

The role and contribution of all our partners is critical to our work and something we are extremely grateful for and would like to acknowledge. In 2021 we strengthened and deepened our existing partnerships while also beginning to build new ones.

Threshold believes in partnership.

Threshold participates in The Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) Homeless Consultative Forum, the Dublin Homeless Network, the Dublin Homeless Prevention Subgroup, the Housing Linkage Group (Galway), the Northwest Homeless Forum, Galway City's Voluntary Housing Group, the Cork Homeless Forum, the Cork Homeless Network, the Cork Social Housing Forum, North Cork Homeless Forum, Irish Homeless Policy Group, the National Housing Consultative Forum, the End Youth Homelessness Coalition and the Community Platform.

These groups are comprised of other NGOs and statutory bodies working in the area of housing, homelessness and homelessness prevention. We raise awareness of the importance of prevention services and use these spaces for shared learning to improve upon and further develop effective homelessness prevention services.

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Own Your Rights Campaign

In addition to collaboration with the partnerships listed above, to discuss the solutions, raise awareness on issues and publish research conducted on the housing sector to inform and influence government policy, Threshold has launched its own awareness campaign, now in its second year, to help renters in the private rental sector to know and own their rights as tenants.

With funding from the minister and Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Threshold developed an 8-week, nationwide campaign (October – December) with the primary objective to increase the awareness of all renters of their rights, and to empower and encourage people to exercise their rights by engaging with Threshold's services when they are faced with illegal and unfair actions or conditions.

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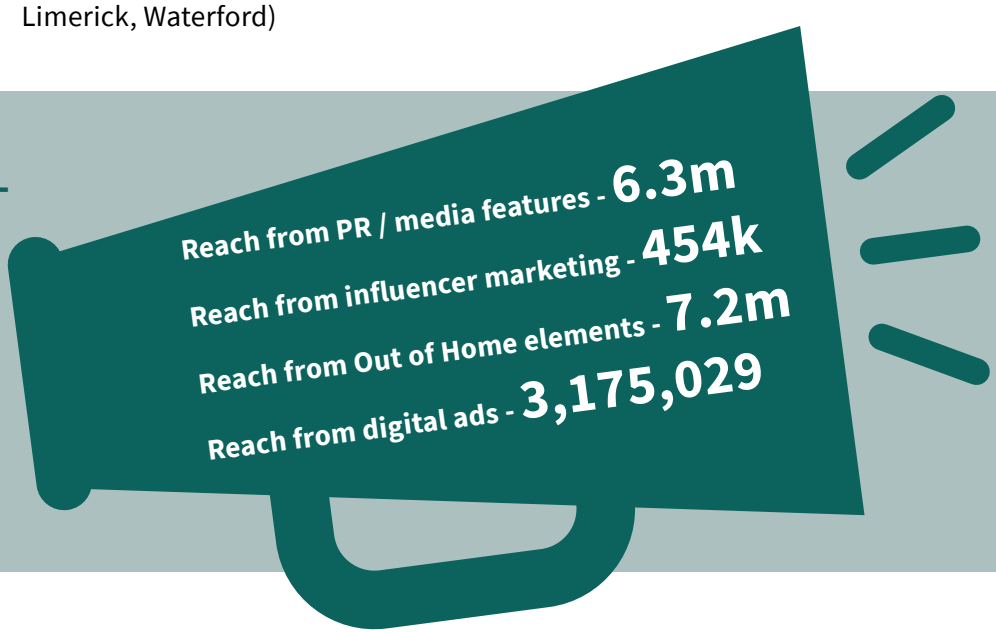
The Own Your Rights campaign promoted Threshold's Freephone, webchat and other services, targeting audiences that need to know about Threshold's services and how to access them. Via multiple online and traditional advertising media, private renters in need were made aware of how they can avail of these services and in particular, reduce the risk of homelessness among this population. Key demographics were identified to target:

- Young Irish contingent - young couples, students, sole renters
- Families - single parents, families with children
- Recently unemployed, specifically those aged +24
- Employees engaged in sectors impacted by Covid
- Migrants, focusing on the Brazilian, Chinese and Eastern European communities in Ireland
- All renters in key locations (Dublin, Cork, Galway, Midlands, Waterford, Limerick, Waterford)

Total reach from campaign elements -

17,129,771



Impact of campaign on services:

Freephone calls up 23%

New cases up 16%

Email contacts up 17%

8. Looking to The Future - The Challenges and Goals

Threshold and our donors in 2021 - Stemming the tide

Saving homes and families. It feels ironic marking Threshold's achievements in 2021 when Ireland is feeling the trauma of the worst housing and health crisis in living memory. Every year the battle gets tougher. The numbers asking for help rises. Rents are now higher than ever before. Illegal evictions are increasing and continued despite the enhanced protections introduced by Government. Renters in Ireland are suffering the consequences and are on the brink of losing the very foundation of their lives.

In 2021 so many have already had to endure the most challenging year of their lives, and with that the uncertainty of having a place to call home. But our donors played a huge part in the fight against homelessness and 2021 was no exception. Thanks to the kind and visionary individuals, businesses, and trusts and foundations who donate to Threshold, we raised an incredible €1.7 million in 2021.

And with the amazing help of our supporters, Threshold was able to switch to online service delivery, providing full continuity of our vital Freephone support line. In addition, our supporters and donors enabled Threshold to expand our services by introducing webchat and video consultation supports, which were used by over 8,000 people over the course of 2021.

So to our supporters, in every story, fact, statistic and quote, we hope you recognise yourself – and the powerful contribution you made in 2021 – and continue to make with Threshold.

Every year the battle gets tougher. The numbers asking for help rises. Rents are now higher than ever before. Illegal evictions are increasing and continued despite the enhanced protections introduced by Government. Renters in Ireland are suffering the consequences and are on the brink of losing the very foundation of their lives.

Thank you so much. When you make such a valuable gift to Threshold, you're trusting us to ensure it is put to best use. We want to ensure that we deliver on your trust.

And that's why Threshold is fully committed to our Donor Promise to our supporters. Thank you for standing with Threshold in the fight against homelessness and joining the #HomeTeam

THE IRELAND FUNDS

The Community Foundation for Ireland

RETHINK IRELAND Our Social Innovation Fund

Thanks to the kind and visionary individuals, businesses, and trusts and foundations who donate to Threshold, we raised an incredible €1.7 million in 2021. With the amazing help of our supporters, Threshold was able to switch to online service delivery.

Governance and Transparency

Threshold worked towards compliance with the Governance Code issued by the Charity Regulator. This work involved the whole organisation and was a substantial undertaking. Threshold is fully committed to meeting our obligations under the governance code and exceeding the statutory obligations in relation to best practice in the sector.

Threshold is an approved Triple Lock Standard certified member of the Charities Institute Ireland.

Threshold is proud to have been a leader in the area of good governance and is committed to continuing that tradition. When you make such a valuable gift to Threshold, you're trusting us to ensure it's put to best use. We want to ensure that we deliver on your trust. The resources and time required for compliance with regulatory obligations is increasing within the charity sector. While Threshold welcomes increased scrutiny and transparency, the cost in time and resources for compliance imposes a burden that is often unmet by funders.

Threshold's Postbox

From Our Clients and Donors

"A fantastic service! Well done"

So helpful and fast. Thank you

"Sharon was a great help. thank you!"

As a renter I am well aware of the poor housing so many people live in, their difficulty accessing help and their struggles to keep going. I admire the work you do.

What an amazing resource! Thank you!

"5 stars all round thanks for the advice"

"When I see people lying on the cold streets it goes through me. Every person should have a home. God bless you all for caring."

"Extremely helpful & reassuring."

"Because it could be me or one of my family one day."

"just would like to say thank you so much for all the help. It's great to have someone in our corner to do the right thing and be fair for both ways."

"Maeve is incredible. What an absolute legend. So knowledgeable. So helpful and also SO friendly - the best online chat service i've ever experienced hands down."

Your customer support via chat is excellent, keep up the good work!

Andrew was very helpful during a worrying and stressful time.

"I have always been appalled by the existence of homelessness. It's such a fundamental right and necessity. It's so frighteningly easy to become homeless and the situation keeps deteriorating. It's so good that Threshold exists and helps. I have rented for 30 years and now a pensioner. I wish I could give more, but can't. I have recommended Threshold to others to assist them. Please keep up the good work."

"I found Karina very helpful and knowledgeable and very prompt on replying. I would highly recommend her she was very nice. Thank you again."

I hate to think of families made homeless, there is nothing worse than not having your own home to come to and the key to your own door.

Stephanie was really kind and helpful. She made sure to have me calm when I was really stressed and scared of my previous landlord. she also helped me to understand what I was not sure of.

"Because I'm living in a very comfortable home with no mortgage to pay. I have never been homeless but I feel strongly about the tragedy of being without someplace to call home."

"Because the kindness and the hard work of the people in Threshold keeping thousands of people in homes and not in the streets homeless. Thank you very much for your dedication."

"I am relieved now, very helpful, much appreciated."

I am deeply upset about the human cost of homelessness and the threat of homelessness. I try to help when I can.

Basic housing should be available and reasonably priced for all.

Threshold
Solving housing problems, preventing homelessness

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

pobal
government supporting communities

The Scheme to Support National Organisations is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Rural and Community Development.

National Free phone Helpline:
1800 454 454
9am to 9pm Monday to Friday

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