

Lorraine's Testimony



I'm Lorraine I'm 29 years old and I'm from Dublin.

I want to start by giving you guys a little bit of my background. I was a drug addict for years, hopeless and feeling unworthy of anything in life.

4 years ago I walked into a recovery home and changed my life around. I always had a lot of support from my family even though I felt I had let them down.

3 years ago I met my husband and I was still taking methadone but he accepted me and believed in me. I never had somebody love me like the way he does.

We got pregnant with my daughter Heidi who is 1 year old now but it wasn't easy and I didn't think my past could ever come back to haunt me till the day I was in hospital only after giving birth to my child when a social worker walked in. I'll never forget it.

I pulled my baby girl up off the bed and held her so close to my chest because unfortunately when we hear the word 'social worker' what's the first thing we think? Well I thought she was coming to take my baby away from me I wanted to run out the door with my baby.

And it turned out because of my history and been on a methadone clinic, she had a write to make sure my daughter had a safe home to live. She called out to my mother's home and seen it was more than ok for my child and closed the case.

See I thought I was doing the right thing by going onto a clinic to make sure I didn't back slide on drugs but in the end a social worker still came after me I'll never forget that day it will always haunt me I had nightmares for weeks that my child was been took off me, not a nice experience for a new mum.

Now we're about to have are 2nd child and I'm giving no reason for that to ever happen again I wouldn't wish it on anybody. So I just want to say: do you think that was the right way to go with a new mother moments after giving birth wat did I do wrong?

My Hope's for my kids' future? All I can say is whatever they desire to do I'll support them. I'll make sure they get a good education and if they want to go to college I'll do everything I can to get them there. Whatever makes them happy.

My father was diagnosed with motor neuron disease last year and he gave me some great advice and when my kids are older I'll pass it on to them. He told me Lorraine make sure you do all the things you want to do in life, have no regrets, nothing is impossible and no dream is too big.

As a mother, we always want what's best for our kids but sometimes there's things we can't give them. Material things don't matter to me, the best thing you can give your child is love and support whatever they want to do because it's their dreams not ours.

I want a society that doesn't treat my children the way I was. I hope there's an end to discrimination I hope my kids are never discriminated against the way I was that's why I'm here and I'm sharing my story with you all. I'm standing up for my kids' future.

The lack of equal opportunities must end so that they won't suffer the hardship in life that I did. That experience made me a stronger person, I never thought I'd be able to do something like this, but I am here and I am fighting for my kids' future. I'm taking positive steps so that my children can follow in the footsteps I have laid down.

Monika's Testimony



Good morning everyone.

My name is Monika. I am happy to talk today.

Today I would like to talk about my experience within the homeless crisis in Ireland.

One day 4 years ago we got a letter saying that our apartment was being put up for sale and we have 30 days to move out. My world collapsed. I still remember that day.

I didn't know what to do and where to go for help. At that time I know I have to find accommodation for my family but it wasn't to be that easy. Every viewing ended with disappointment and frustration. We didn't find a place because rents were too high for our budget or in some places they didn't want to rent to children.

We had to leave our apartment. The worst period was still ahead for us. The day when we put our belongings into a storage room was very hard. We knew what was going to happen tomorrow.

The next day with two travel bags and 2 children we went to Parkgate Hall and waited for registration as homeless people. We were given a place in a Dublin hostel and we spent the next 26 months there.

They didn't say we would stay that long in there. Every month we had to go to the management of our hotel and ask for an extension. Every day we had to keep reminding the children to be quiet because we were worried we would lose our room.

All that time in emergency accommodation was hard for all of us. It was just one room and toilet. So, no-one from my family had any privacy in the accommodation. My eldest son was doing his homework on the bed or floor because there was no table in the room.

The first two weeks were fine – the children were thinking we are on holidays, but after that they started feeling the lack of space. I hope no-one of you or your family will ever experience that.

All of you know why is having a home so important. I believe that having a place to call home is the most important in our life's. During our time in a hotel our family life was upside down. We didn't have cooking facilities - such a simple thing but when you are in a place like that you start to appreciate such things. So as you can guess it was hard for me to feed my family. I love cooking so it was hard for me not to cook for them and watch what they have to eat. Every single day I was getting just more frustrated then I couldn't get them proper food. We had a breakfast included but how long you can eat Irish breakfast. We were first in our hotel so the management were very kind and helpful. We got a microwave and kettle. I was very appreciative because I could cook something in the microwave for my family and have a hot tea whenever I wanted to.

Home means many things to many people. I believe that the word 'home' means a safe and secure place where you can be yourself. But imagine if you woke up tomorrow to the news that you would lose your home. What would you do? Where would you go? What would it mean for your children?

You can just imagine how hard is it for a child to be in emergency accommodation. When we were there my oldest son kept away from their classmates. He was worried to have close friends; he was thinking they will find out that he doesn't have a home. He was ashamed. It was hard for me as a mother to watch him. It was just in the hotel that he could share his fears with the other kids and be like a normal child they were on this same boat.

But in this century it shouldn't be like that. Every child should have a place to call home and get a proper dinner not just a pizza from a microwave or take away.

Jamie's Testimony



My name is Jamie Managan and I have lived in the inner city since I was six years old. Both my parents were born and raised in the inner city. I found it difficult in school and in the community as I had some personal issues. I started to attend the NYP 1 and then the NYP (2). My mam brought me down and got me into the NYP. My uncle and father were also members in the past and told my mam what the club was like and the way the help young people. I really love football and the club really built on this and encourage me to play more and join different footballs teams were I went on the represent my country Ireland in Austria. The NYP has been very helpful to me as it has thought me many things and encourage me to further my education were I went on to Leaving cert level 3 4 5 in sports recreational and youth work. I have also completed the youth leadership programme with the NYP were i am now a volunteer in the NYP programme. It was difficult for me growing up in the inner city but with the help and support of the NYP staff it has helped me to make a real contribution to my community via my volunteer work in different projects. I feel it is

really important that youth clubs are properly funded and staffed and also give young people more of a chance as I know from myself that my behaviour at times was disruptive but the NYP staff help and supported me through these difficult times and never gave up on me and this is why i feel it was important for me to speak here today.

So thanks for giving me this opportunity to speak and been part of this ceremony.

Nadia's Testimony



My name is Nadia Navarro, I am from the Philippines. I came here around November 2013. I worked as a carer from December, until now. Originally I came on an entertainment visa, and I brought local artists from my country, and then I decided to stay here with my partner, who is also from the Philippines. I have two daughters and three grandchildren. I am a single mum, and I have always struggled to provide for my daughters. In my country as a single mum, you do everything. When I separated, my youngest was 2 years old and now she is 24. I needed to provide them with everything: shelter, clothes, sending them to school. From time to time I had to move from one place to another just to look for affordable apartments. This meant that my children had to move schools, start again, and find new communities. It was hard.

In 2001 I worked in Dubai for 8mths, and I also worked in Venezuela for 5 months. I did that because of the salary. I could earn more in different countries than at home in the Philippines. Many philippinas do that, they become nurses and teachers and domestic workers in other countries just to provide for their families.

I used to work in an agency where we sent domestic workers to the Lebanon, that's how I know people are willing to do those kinds of jobs to help their families. Even though they are well educated they are willing to sacrifice prestige and their self-esteem in order to provide for their families. As a domestic worker, not all employers treat you well, it is hard. Even Phillippino nurses here, sometimes they get demoted to domestic workers. It is very hard to go through that. We try to look after our extended families also, and send money home. We choose to do this, it is part of our tradition, our culture, but that doesn't make it easy.

I admire Irish people here. When you reach 18 years old, you can go your own way, decide your own future, you don't need to support your families. It is not the same in my country.

It is very hard to be apart from my children. There were times when my youngest daughter needed to be hospitalised, she needed comfort and attention, but only her sister was there to take care of her. I worry about her all the time. Even if I want to go home to her I can't, because I have to provide for her. The medical care is expensive there.

It's in my nature to overcome these problems. My point of view is that we need to be strong. I always set aside my own feelings just to be strong. It's very hard to be away from my family, but I don't want my daughters to see that I face problems, or to know that something is wrong. We are all sensitive people. My daughters always say come home now, come home. I had saved enough for a mortgage in the Philippines now. I'm looking forward to the future now, in time I will go back. It's good now, with the internet. I see my grandchildren every day, I talk to my daughters. It wasn't like that before.

The reason why I am still here is thanks to my partner. Here, in Ireland, if you are not too choosy, you can find work, and converting the currency to Philippino peso, it becomes a lot, and it helps my family a lot.

Through the MRCI, I've learnt to be sociable. I'm not very sociable in the Philippines. I've learnt a lot from the stories of other migrants. The way of life here is very easy, it's easy to get along with the people here. People are polite and nice. It's like that in the Philippines too. People are polite there too. When I work in the countryside here, I see it. The children look after their parents, they live close by them, and they care for them. That's what I like about here. I like the countryside, it's very peaceful and the people are nice.

What I like here most is how people help the homeless. I saw some people at night time in the post office, the GPO, they had people helping the homeless. We don't do that in my country. Here you are very good at helping people, and even the homeless can greet you here, it's not like that in my country.

If you decide to be apart from your family like I did, make sure that you have a strong will to survive. Because if you don't have this kind of feeling you will end up depressed, and you won't survive. Make sure that you also mingle with people that will help you a lot, not in terms of money, but as a person. People who will support you, and people who understand. People who are in the same situation as you. Even if they are from different nationalities, you can feel at home. You can feel the warmness from people like that.

I hope especially in the future that people like us, the undocumented, will have a place here in Ireland, that we can be regularised so that we don't need to be afraid.

Paula's Testimony



Hi everyone, my name is Paula Kearney and I'm here to talk to you about my experience of growing up and raising children in an area that is deprived on a socio-economical level.

I was born and raised here in the North Inner City, this is a place that experienced generational poverty among other issues. With these issues other problems such as criminality exist.

I grew up in a family with my mother, father, four brothers and one sister. My mother and father worked hard and did the best they could. We might not have had everything we wanted but we had what we needed. We weren't one of those families who had annual holidays or the best runners and things, but my mother always made sure we didn't go hungry.

While this was fine, there were problems at home as my father was an alcoholic and could be quite abusive to my mother. I don't blame him as because there was so much poverty, this can cause a person to feel less than and in turn they can act out in ways they normally wouldn't, for him it was drinking and taking it out on my mother.

I remember going to the police with my mother on several occasions and they would just come out and talk to my dad but in an area such as this, that behaviour wasn't taken serious by the garda because for the most part, the woman would drop any charges. I think it was viewed as being regular or even normal. And I think for a lot of homes it was. You could ask why she didn't leave him but there are many reasons she stayed, and it was mostly because at that time, men still had a lot of power over their wives which meant that she wasn't financially stable enough to leave him.

While school should have been a place to learn, I found that a lot of the teachers hadn't got the greatest of time for people like myself. I would go to school some days exhausted because something had kicked off at home the night before and I would try to explain why to them, but they just made you feel like you were lazy or even stupid, when I was neither. I don't think the teachers were equipped with the skills to handle delicate issues that arise when a school is in a socio-economically deprived area. Maybe they didn't realise that with poverty, comes low self-esteem, depression and other problems. Or maybe they just didn't care.

I start using any excuse not to go to school until just before my 14th birthday I finally dropped out.

I start working when I was just 14 years of age but because I was earning my own money, it gave me a bit of freedom. That, along with issues that were going on in my life led to me self-medicating to the point that I found myself addicted to hard drugs. For years I was in and out of the criminal justice system, I had my first child and although I was drug free for a couple of years I slipped. I spent the next few years getting drug free and falling back again.

Then in 2010 my father died but at the time of his death, I had told him that I was drug free, knowing full well I was anything but. So I think the guilt of that pushed me to go ask for help.

I turned to the SAOL project and with the help of my key worker, I finally opened up about a trauma that had occurred in my past. After this my life took a turn for the better. I haven't took a drug since 2011 and I went on to have my 2 youngest sons.

Everything was going great until 2015, this is when I lost my home due to a small electrical fire. Thank god no one was hurt but when the electrical engineer came out, he informed me that there was some electrical work that had been done in my apartment that put us in danger. The whole apartment block was closed for almost 2 months. I went to DCC because I had been on the housing list for almost 13 years at the time, but they told me that I had to go on the homeless list.

I spent the best part of 2 years living in a tiny hotel room, myself, my partner and what was supposed to be 3 children. This split my family as my then 13-year-old son would not stay. What boy that age wants to sleep in the same room as his mother, never mind the fact that my partner was not his biological father.

This was very hard on me as a mother as I felt I was letting my children down. I had put all this effort into working on myself, to make me a better person, and more importantly a better mother. But here I was, not even able to provide them with their most basic needs such as a home or even a home cooked meal. While the staff at the hotel were lovely, the owner was so discriminative and judgemental of the people who were living there due to homelessness. I remember going down to the kitchen one morning and my children were in their pyjamas and he came and told us that they had to be dressed. I looked at him funny because there were other people including adults in loungewear, but I was told that they were paying guests. I was disgusted and wanted to tell him in not such a nice way where to go but I wasn't able to because I needed somewhere for my children to stay.

Eventually I got my forever home in a social housing estate in Finglas. My youngest son had difficulty with his speech from when he was a baby, so I made an appointment with a speech therapist. But soon after I moved into my home it began to improve and I assumed it was because he had started pre-school, but the therapist informed me that there are so many young children who are not meeting their milestones because they haven't got room to grow socially and mentally when living in cramped spaces such as hotels and hostels. This is not the way our children should be brought up. Its inhumane and they deserve better, but our government are the ones who are failing them and placing the onus on the parents who have no choice but to live like this.

I might not have had the best start but one thing that my life has done is make me resilient, while I was living in that tiny hotel room, I completed a level 8 certificate in community education and equality studies accredited by Maynooth University. And now I'm currently in the second year of an honour's degree in Community and Youth work with Maynooth. I am going to set an example for my children so that they can see that just because opportunities don't just come to you, it doesn't mean you can't go out and make them for yourself.

Yemi's Testimony



My name is Yemi. I am a mother of three, and my children are 6, 4 and 3. We live in Direct Provision which is the name for the hostels where people who are seeking asylum live until the government decides if they can stay in Ireland or not. In the beginning, they said that people would live in Direct Provision for no more than six months, but we have been living there for six years.

Living in the Direct Provision system is terrifying because you don't know what life holds for you. One day you could wake up and find a letter from the government saying that you're being sent back to the country you ran away from. When you wake up each day you keep doing the same things over and over – you eat, take the kids to school, come home, eat, pick up the kids, eat, sleep and start over. There is nothing in the day for you to look forward to.

My children were all born in Ireland. But they have spent their entire lives in Direct Provision. It is the only home they know, but it isn't a home. We can't cook for ourselves, and so my children have never seen me make them a meal. We all share one small room. My children can't invite friends home. They don't have the same things that the other children have at school, and that's hard for me as their mother. Other kids after school have a place to play, a place to keep their bags, they have a table to do their homework, they can have privacy and quiet time. But my children don't have these things. Children who live in Direct provision don't get to have a normal childhood.

So many times, my children have seen me cry but I couldn't tell them the reason why I was having those tears. I've seen other children living in Direct Provision going through difficult times because their parents are really struggling, just like I was struggling. It's not right for children to see their parents like this.

My children don't understand why we are there. Sometimes they see their friends move out and so it makes them ask questions like "when are we going to our own house?" I told them that there was only a little time left. My daughter said to me recently "do you remember that you said last year that we would be out by Christmas?" Every Christmas, I always hope that by the following year I'll have my papers, but this year is rounding up already and I'm still waiting. They want to know why we can't go on holidays like other children. Sometimes I take them to the airport to see the planes arrive and take off, and I tell them that I'm saving for a ticket for us to go on holiday, just to give them hope.

When I see my children, they give me hope. I'm not doing this for myself, I'm doing this for my children. I've taught them that we're not the only one struggling, that there are lots of people who have difficult lives, like us. It's helpful just to know that other people are also going through the same things. People just need to know that they're not alone.

Direct Provision is damaging people like me and my children. It kills the dreams you have for yourself and for your children. It renders you useless and you feel you can't build a future for your children. But I tell my children that one day we will come through and be in that better place that we have always dreamed of. But for now, we have to make the better use of the opportunities we have, and to build the future we want for ourselves.

I'm not shy to share my story because I think if others like me hear my story it might give them hope, they might know that someone, somewhere, is going through the same thing as them.

Thank you.

