

Alice Leahy Trust

*.....befriending, social and health service
for people who are homeless*

Bride Road, Dublin 8

Tel: 01-4543799 E-mail: info@aliceleahytrust.ie Web: www.aliceleahytrust.ie
CHY 7014

Personal Submission from Alice Leahy
Alice Leahy Trust

5th October 2017

SUBMISSION

TRUST now the Alice Leahy Trust has been active in a front line capacity providing a befriending social and health service for people who are homeless on the streets since 1975 - website www.aliceleahytrust.ie. The Trustees, after 40 years of TRUST decided that it was an opportune time to reconstitute TRUST as a company limited by guarantee without a share capital. For a number of different reasons, including that of the confusion sometimes caused by the existing name it was decided to rename TRUST "Alice Leahy Trust" and this came into effect on 1st March 2016. There has been no change to the ethos and work of TRUST. The philosophy of Alice Leahy Trust is based on the recognition of every individual's right to be treated as an autonomous and unique human being.

We are probably the smallest agency in Ireland working in the field of homelessness. We have a Board of 8 Directors who meet every 6 weeks. We are fully compliant with the Charities Regulatory Authority.

Since our formation we have had contact with all arms of the Criminal Justice System including Gardai, Prison Service, Probation Service and many men and women who spend time in and out of prison. **See Appendix 1**

Everyone is well aware of the housing shortage in our country and this has been allowed to develop over the years; it didn't happen overnight. This crisis has been well publicised. Women and children are living in cramped hotel rooms, with all the negative consequences that these circumstances involve. It should be pointed out however that there is a difference between houselessness and homelessness and no matter how many units of accommodation we provide, there will always be people who feel excluded and don't fit in. Many people too exclude themselves because of their behaviour. There are deeper problems which take time, patience and commitment to work through; the application of some simple solution from a distance will simply not work.

Some months people from up to 28 different countries use our service and present with huge problems. Many have been in prison here and abroad, very similar to the Irish homeless community. We frequently hear of the difficulties experienced by Gardai in dealing with people who are clearly the responsibility of the Health Services e.g. people suffering from addiction and/or mental health problems - all leading to huge challenges for those attempting to meet their needs. The lack of Garda visibility on the streets is worryingly obvious, leading to out of control levels of street drinking, drug taking and aggressive begging. The unacceptable level of anti-social behaviour is glaringly obvious in our Capital City and beyond.

Our contact with Gardai ranges from those working in the community to senior level however our main contact with the Gardai is with those working on the ground and this submission focuses on that group. Many of the Gardai we have had contact with over the years have moved on to different areas of responsibility within the force.

See Appendix 2

We ran a very successful training programme with trainee Gardai for a number of years before the recently lifted recruitment embargo which involved a two week placement. Currently a recent graduate from Templemore spends time with us when she is off duty. Our emphasis was based on trying to create an awareness of the complexities of homelessness and the problems they pose for the community and law enforcement agencies. Looking at and questioning ones' attitude was crucial and the findings were interesting. It can be easy to study the law if one is privileged enough to do so but attitudes are based on life experiences, where one is born, parenting influences, education and social circles. Challenging attitudes is difficult but essential and important when recruiting members of the public to the Force. **See Appendix 3**

The current atmosphere of mistrust in the Gardai often fuelled for political gain is a cause of concern and extremely dangerous for our democracy. It also causes huge problems to the morale of the Force. I note the absence of a serving or retired Garda, psychologist or ordinary member of the community in the membership of The Commission.

We regularly see and hear of acts of great kindness on the part of the Gardai and we too hear complaints and deal with them appropriately. It is crucial in this instance not to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Recommendations

- **Recruitment**: Must look outside academic achievements only and interview panels should be broad based.
- An awareness of the power, rights and responsibilities of the role
- An awareness of one's own vulnerability
- Awareness of the power of language and the uniform
- Willingness to learn about the community they work in and an awareness that we live in a very divided society
- Ability to seek help and advice from colleagues
- A greater understanding of stress involved when faced with tragedies needs to be acknowledged and appropriate help should be readily available
- Academia fails at times to capture the complexities of the human condition and this is crucial to the success of addressing attitudinal change.
- The hard earned experience of the past should not be dismissed lightly
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that the amount of bureaucracy (office work) required on a daily basis takes up valuable time that could be better spent working with and reassuring people in the community
- High profile cases warrant and get huge media publicity but the day-to-day work which would help prevent these cases usually starts at local level. Community Gardai, especially juvenile liaison officers need to be supported and acknowledged.

- Gardai clearly should be the ones dealing with the security of the State while areas like finance and management could be dealt with by professionals in those areas. Involving non-garda personnel poses challenges on both sides but these challenges should not be insurmountable.

The words of Maya Angelou are unlikely to be found in any training manual

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel”.

These words are important to reflect on as the experience of many people dealing with members of the Force in an unequal relationship can be very traumatic and not acknowledged.

ALICE LEAHY
Director of Services
Alice Leahy Trust

5th October 2017

Appendix 1

Links with the Criminal Justice System

Member of Lord Mayors Commission on Crime Chaired by Mr. Justice Michael Moriarty	1993
Appointed a member of the Sentence Review Group (replaced by the Parole Board) (Chaired it for a short while)	1996
Member of National Crime Forum chaired by Mr. Justice Bryan McMahon	1998
Appointed a Member of the Irish Human Rights Commission and later represented the IHRC on NAPAR (National Action Plan against Racism)	2006
Submission to An Garda Siochana: Diversity Strategy Public Consultation	Aug 2007
Appointed a Member of the Board of Oberstown	2010
Prisoners doing community work under supervision of Probation Service visited our centre and this is ongoing	2015

Appendix 2

Garda Review, No. 2 Volume 43, March 2015

Article attached

Appendix 3

Garda Assessment form on completion of placement

Sample attached