

# NACD Community and Voluntary Sector Research Grant Scheme



## Heroin - the mental roof over your head.

*Links between homelessness and drug use (2004)*

### Research conducted by:

Tallaght Homeless Advice Unit (THAU).

### Aim:

To examine the issues, policies and practices faced by homeless drug users in Tallaght; to explore the reasons behind their homelessness; the policies and practices of local authorities in relation to the housing of homeless drug users; and the experiences of homeless drug users with special reference to the policies and practices of homeless services.

### Method:

An emancipatory research approach which aims at confronting oppression was followed. This allowed for the involvement of some of the service users in the design of the research and in the final drafting of the report. Seventeen interviews were conducted with service users (homeless problem drug users) and thirteen were held with service provider representatives from a range of Statutory, Community and Voluntary Organisations.

### Key Findings:

- In Tallaght, there are strong links between homelessness and drug use. This link is not adequately acknowledged or reflected in either government policy or agency responses.
- Homelessness contributes to both continued drug use (because of the easy availability of drugs), and the nature and extent of drug use; becoming homeless is associated with a transition from smoking drugs (including heroin) to intravenous use.

- At local level, the lack of homeless services in Tallaght exacerbates the problem for local drug users as they are directed into city centre hostels where drugs are freely available.
- Becoming homeless as a result of the 1997 Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act has led to drug users being barred from rent allowance, re-housing and most emergency accommodation. Some homeless drug users are excluded completely from all sorts of accommodation.
- The treatment of 'Anti-Social Behaviour' (ASB) clause is problematic; it does not provide emergency accommodation for drug users and makes it difficult to access council or other social housing in the future. Procedures for dealing with ASB should be formally stated and published.

### Recommendations from the Report:

Three main areas were identified:

- The need for adequate financial and human resources to enhance service provision;
- Address national policy co-ordination to positively include homeless drug users in the planning and development of service provision;
- Improve local service provision in Tallaght.