

STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE

Paddy lives in Dublin. He has just recently come out of a correctional youth facility. The aim of this centre is to encourage children out of crime. As soon as Paddy got out he began stealing again. This is not what he wants. He had high aspirations, even talking about becoming a doctor. Now that can never be as schools are reluctant to have him because of his past. His parents split up when he was nine. Since then they have not had enough money to get by. He dropped out of school at 12 to try and earn money. This was nearly impossible. He took to stealing. He knows he is ruining his future but he cares more about his four younger siblings who are still in school. To him they come first and he is willing to sacrifice his choices for theirs.

STUCK IN HOSTEL ACCOMMODATION

My name is Ana. I came to Ireland with my parents two years ago to escape war and hardship in my own country. We were told that jobs would be plentiful and that life would be good.

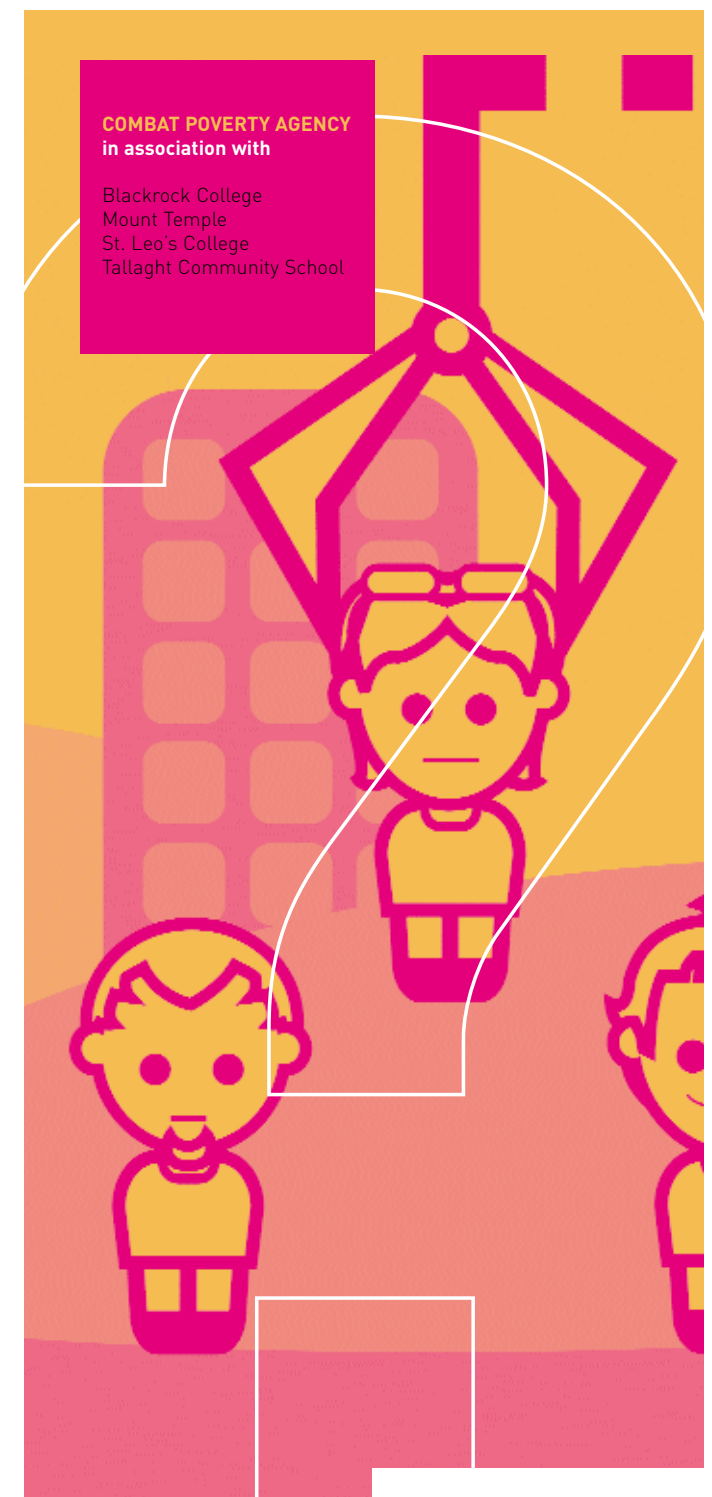
When we arrived my parents were refused the right to work until our case had been processed. We were forced to live in hostel accommodation where all meals were provided and we received a minimal social allowance. We have experienced great financial hardship and psychological pressures have been great.

The hostel is overcrowded, our diet is inadequate and inappropriate and we cannot afford to buy everyday materials. This has seriously affected the general physical and mental health of all the children in the hostel. The school and church groups have supported my family with schools books, equipment and clothes. We would be lost without them.

Two years later we are still stuck in hostel accommodation and our case still hasn't been reviewed. We have no idea what our future holds.

This leaflet is one of four, written by students in Blackrock College Dublin, Mount Temple Comprehensive School Dublin, St. Leo's College Carlow and Tallaght Community School Dublin. The Combat Poverty Agency funded this initiative.

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 **Combat Poverty Agency** working for a poverty-free Ireland

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INTRODUCTION

When we were given the task of writing the personal stories for this campaign, our reaction was one of "deadly lads, 10 minutes work and we're off". This was a painful misconception, as was later revealed by the depth of the tragedies which are commonplace in our society. These go relatively unnoticed and we like to believe that this is not due to the death of human compassion but to a lack of information. We have taken a step, not to remedy this but to spread a little education. It's not just the homeless that we're dealing with. Many people are born into poverty, others slide into it. Unemployment, illness (physical and mental), disability, addiction, isolation, personal tragedies, stress, lack of education, lack of opportunities: any of these factors may be a cause – or, indeed – the result of poverty. The four stories below illustrate the experience of living in poverty.

CONSTANT STRUGGLE

Patrick and Mary have five children. Their income is reliant on social welfare payments. They are constantly struggling to pay bills. They have been threatened with eviction from their home, as they are in arrears with their rent. They often have to turn to moneylenders for help.

The family's diet is very basic. The weekly budget does not stretch enough for clothes. Though friends and neighbours are generous with 'hand me downs', the children's shoes are always in terrible condition. The house is too small for the requirements of the family.

Patrick and Mary have applied to the local authority for a transfer to a larger house, but because of their rent arrears, this is unlikely to happen.

For Patrick and Mary, there seems to be no way out.

Adapted from Barnardos, (2003) Every Child Matters, Children Living Without

SARAH'S STORY

I have six children, four girls and two boys. We live in a local authority housing estate in a rural town in Ireland. I am a full-time mother. Our low income comes from the Lone Parent Allowance and Child Benefit.

In our area there is no playground or community centre. The schools and shopping centres are over a mile away. The only safe area for my children to play is in our small garden at the front of the house. The children's diet is poor and there is no variety. There is no public transport to our area so I have to buy my food in local more expensive shops. Most of our food has almost reached its sell-by date, as this is cheaper. My family's poverty means that special occasions such as birthdays and Christmas are ruined by the worry of money.

In order to pay for Communion and Confirmations, I have to apply for help from the social welfare office and school. My children get abused at these occasions, as they don't have new clothes or presents. School is also expensive. The hidden costs of books, school trips, and exams fees make it difficult for both my children and me. Often my children don't get to go on school trips, and sometimes they don't even tell me about them because they don't want to offend me.

Adapted from Barnardos, (2003) Every Child Matters, Children Living Without.

