

*from homeless
to hopeful*

*Daisy
House*

"My involvement with Daisyhouse has been life-changing. These women are fighting the hardest battles imaginable and when you hear what they have been through, their successes are even more remarkable. They are true heroes and they reach their goals with the support and nurturing of the Daisyhouse program. To see the Daisyhouse women transform into proud, strong people is a privilege. I am so thankful that I am involved in Daisyhouse, it is an honor to stand beside these women."



CLAIRE BYRNE is a radio and television broadcaster with RTÉ Television where she hosts *Claire Byrne Live* a current affairs program. Claire served as MC at The Ireland Funds Tiffany Women's Luncheon where Daisyhouse was featured as a beneficiary of The Ireland Funds.

Daisyhouse Housing Association provides women with Supported Temporary Accommodation who otherwise would be homeless and equips them with independent living skills. These women have often been made homeless as a result of traumas such as domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, loss of income, ill health, etc. This service is provided over an 18-month period so that the cycle of homelessness can be broken and that the women are empowered to move forward to independent sustainable living.

An Ireland Funds grant has supported Daisyhouse's Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) workshop which teaches service users to identify things that make them well and use the wellness tools to relieve difficult feelings and maintain higher quality of life.

Here, two extraordinary women who are involved with Daisyhouse share their stories and the journeys that have brought them from homelessness to hope.

mandy's story

MY NAME IS MANDY. MY BABY'S NAME IS SAOIRSE. WE'RE FROM CORK CITY ORIGINALLY BUT WE'VE BEEN IN DUBLIN THE LAST THREE YEARS.

I didn't just become homeless. There was a pattern that led me up to it.

There was a lot going on in my family home. My dad was an addict and my mother suffered with depression. I have one brother and three sisters. I was the kind of child that would act out and get in trouble. I would self-harm. My parents just didn't know how to handle me so I was put into foster care. I was going to different counselors to figure out what was wrong. But when I look back now, I was just a child crying out to be loved. Yet no doctor said that. I was just always labeled with various problems. I was 13.

As I got older I got involved with drugs and ended up in nasty relationships with men that would beat me to a pulp. I thought it was normal as that was what I dealt with in the home when I was a child. So, it was just like a cycle. I was going around in circles. When the heroin and crack hit me, that's when my life was totally out of control. At the time I had six children.

All I ever wanted to be was a mother. I think I had depression from a very young age but it just wasn't

diagnosed. I would get to a place where I'd be okay, and then my depression would kick in. In the end I phoned the HSE (Health Service Executive) myself and asked them to come and take my kids because I knew I was either going to end up dead from suicide or from drugs. When I look back, it was the hardest and best decision I ever made. I wanted to keep them safe.

The psychiatric units and hostels wouldn't take me anymore because I brought drugs in. So I ended up in Dublin on the streets. At times it was so embarrassing. I would go to coffee shops and clothing shops to get dressed and wash myself down with baby wipes just to feel a bit normal. I was able to get into a drug treatment program and I got clean. It was then that I was offered the chance to go to Daisyhouse.

I had a lot of anger. I had a lot of hurt. I hated people. I hated the world. Then I found I was pregnant with Saoirse. Imagine being pregnant with your seventh child and all your other kids are in care. I was so scared. I thought, "This is it, here I go again."

Yet I also found myself thinking, "This is going to

change me. I'm going to prove I can do this." But there was still fear there. I was afraid when I told Daisyhouse that I'd have to go back to a hostel. But with Daisyhouse, I got everything. Doctor's appointments, medication, and it all made me stronger. The Daisyhouse staff was there for me every step of the way.

I hope to move on from here and just live independently on my own. I am working on being a good mother. And I want to write a book. That's my big goal. I loved to write books as a child, even on stupid things. But as I get older, the more I know what life is about. So I'd like to write a book about my experience. And not only addiction and being homeless, all around other stuff like mental health and mothers that have kids in care.

The other night I came home and just laid there and thought, "Oh my God, I am so grateful for Daisyhouse."

Kerry's story

MY NAME IS KERRY*. I GREW UP IN A DEEPLY DEPRIVED PART OF DUBLIN.

My father never worked because he was a thief. Growing up, my mother was very violent. Her parents were both alcoholics. Finally, my mom left our home. I was the oldest girl, so the responsibilities came onto me. I had eight brothers and sisters.

I did a lot for my mother and my brothers and sisters. I would steal food and clothes. Anything they needed, I would steal. I didn't want them to go without but I was always terrified doing that. Caring for all of them meant I never got to go anywhere else. I didn't get much support at school either. So I left school when I was 16.

I was 19 when I first tried heroin. Other kids I knew had been on it since they were 12 and 13. I think I was the last one out of my group to take it. One day, I was talking to my friend about emotional stuff and she was like, "Try this; it will get rid of the pain." So I tried it, and it did, it got rid of the pain. And it also got rid of everything else.

When the addiction came, I was of no use so I was kicked out. I was out on the street. I was homeless. I slept in broken down buildings and cars. That went on for a long time.

I was always a very good person, I always knew that. But I felt I was disgusting because I was a drug addict. I was very hard on myself because I knew I had so much potential. I always knew I was very smart and I always knew I could achieve so much more. That strength was there but I could never get the opportunity. And I think in the end what saved me was that part of myself. It was that fighter that was always there.

I see now that for generations the women in my family were taught not to look out for themselves. They always came last. You were taught that everyone came before you: the children, your husband, everyone. If there wasn't enough, you didn't get fed, you didn't get looked after. Everyone was before you.

Being a woman and being homeless means you're terrified. You can be sexually abused and beaten because you're vulnerable. You have no one to protect you. There are days you're so weak because you haven't had proper nutrition so you just don't have the energy. You literally hide anywhere you can, in broken down buildings, broken down cars. I even snuck into my friend's house while they were away, and slept under her bed. When I was homeless I'd do what I could to find somewhere safe. I'd hide in the woods, under trees, making little nests. I actually felt safe there because it was nature all around and there were no people there.

I got into a Methadone program but I felt dull. On Methadone you're dead. There is no life. You're not even alive, it's like you're breathing, but there's no experience. There's no smelling. Your senses are all gone. The most beautiful human gift you get as a human being is your senses. I've experienced joy and happiness; but that's taken away from you with Methadone. That went on for 8 to 9 years before I got to see a counselor. That's where the next journey began.

* Name has been changed

I went through detox. Then I went into therapy to connect with everything from my childhood which was a whole new battle. I was finally letting myself feel emotional pain and at times I just felt collapsed with memories. When you take medication, the pain doesn't go anywhere. It just waits there for you. But that pain comes to the front when you come out of addiction.

Then I was accepted at Daisyhouse. I literally shake at the memory of coming here. When I came in those doors, something happened in that moment. I had an overwhelming sense of wholeness. It was the kindness, the nurture, the guidance and just allowing me to be.

I had a tiny little space and I loved that. I was actually happy because I couldn't invite any family down. So I didn't have to be like "Oh, I can't have you stay over." I didn't want to have anybody over! I needed that quiet tiny little space to be mine. It was beautiful. It was just for me.

Then I started to go to college, which is massively important to me. Eventually, Daisyhouse helped me get my own home. They brought me in and showed me and said, "Kerry, this is yours!" I cried and cried.

Daisyhouse is just pure love. To know that someone can love you unconditionally, just because you're a human being, is amazing. They want you to do well, and will do anything to help you get that way. They have allowed me to open up my heart, to me, and to the world, and to nature, and to know that I'm safe. I'm not afraid anymore. That's the gift that they've given me.

*We're all equal and we're beautiful. We're human.
And isn't it a beautiful thing to be human?*

