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No Room at the refuge

Health board subsidises B+B owners

Patricia McCarthy

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An Eastern Health Board report published in December 1994, shows a huge increase in the number of homeless people put up in Bed and Breakfast accommodation by the Health Board.

Five years ago, the homeless unit run by the Board in Dublin's Charles Street spent £25,000 on Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Last year they spent just under £300,000. Homeless people who cannot get into the hostels because they are full, are put up in Bed and Breakfasts by the health board.

Most of them are women and children turned away from a Womens' Refuge because of lack of space. In a six week period in 1992, 101 women and 300 children were turned away from the Dublin Refuges because they were full.

An increasing number of homeless people put up in B&Bs are kids, as young as 12 and 13, again because there is nowhere else for them. A High Court case is being taken by one of the boys in this situation at the moment.

B&Bs are private enterprises run for profit. Nearly all of them make their unfortunate clients leave during the day, no matter how many children they have to drag around with them.

Recently even the B&Bs were full. Traveller women and children were put up in Grade A and B hotels by the Health Board, much to the disgust of the staff and management!

The homeless crisis is out of control in Dublin, especially for young kids. The lack of house building and the absence of any kind of a coherent child care policy has created this mess.

The B&B owners are making a profit out of the misery of the homeless, and the Health Boards are wasting money on useless “solutions” which should be spent on house building. It will take years to make up for the lack of a house building programme from 1986–1991 unless there is an emergency building programme and specialist services for homeless kids set up.