

'Rats, cockroaches and blood' behind 100 complaints over homeless accommodation

By Ciara Treacy, Irish News, 19 January 2016, Dublin, Ohio

More than 100 complaints were made about emergency homeless accommodation in Dublin last year, with reports of rats, cockroaches, mould and blood-stained mattresses.

The complaints were made to the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive by homeless people who had been placed in hotels, bed and breakfasts and other emergency accommodation.

People described living in cramped, damp, dirty accommodation. Details of the complaints were released to RTÉ News under a Freedom of Information request.

"There is a very serious problem with rats in the apartment. They are jumping on the beds, in the kitchen, all over the place ... This living situation is causing huge distress and has become unbearable," reported one complainant.

Another said: "All we hear most nights is people screaming at each other, none of us are getting any sleep and it's starting to affect my daughters' school work, as well as our family."

It comes as families living in temporary accommodation said they were "not living the life of luxury" in hotels and B&Bs.

Participants of RTÉ 1's 'My Homeless Family', which aired last night, filmed their lives over a three-month period to show the reality of living in a hotel.

For single mother Erica Fleming and daughter Emily (9), the hotel has become home while they wait to move up the social housing list.

"There are a hundred people in front of me, at least," Ms Fleming said. "Another six months of this, I will crack up."

"I have always worked, I continue to work but due to the difference between rent allowance and the actual rent, I couldn't make up the difference, and therefore I ended up being where I am today."

"I just want affordable rent. I can't hand out rent of €900; I'm never going to be able to afford that. Everybody seems to think that homeless people are people that are just on the streets or have a drug problem or an alcohol problem and that's not the way it is any more."

She spoke of the "mountain of fears" involved in staying in temporary accommodation.

"The hotel only has to take you for a week at a time. This week you could be on the northside, next week you could be on the southside," she said.

However, the hotel staff has become an important support network for the family. "They look after Emily; they show an interest in her, they go out of their way to do stuff for her."

Sandra and Brendan Hanley-Hand have been homeless for the last 11 months. "People out there think that [being] homeless is great, that you're living in a hotel and you have luxury, and you're living the life of Reilly," said Ms Hanley-Hand.

"You're not living the life of Reilly, you're not living the life of luxury," she said.