

Open Door

Sarah and Isaac's Story

Election Time

Carols in the City

Issue 05 | Autumn 2026

NEW VENUE for 2026!

Childhoods lost to homelessness



Hello, my name is Elaine and I have worked with Simon Community for the past 23 years, including 15 years in our family temporary accommodation service. In that time, I have met countless families and children, each with their own story. Yet they all share one thing in common; they are homeless and living in temporary accommodation.

These families are just like families everywhere else. They get children to school, cook dinners, help with homework and try to keep family life feeling normal. But beneath those everyday routines is a painful reality; the place they are living is not truly their own.

The children I meet are funny, chatty, imaginative and full of life. They make people laugh, ask endless questions and show a resilience that is both inspiring and deeply unfair. No child should have to face homelessness.

In the six months between April and September 2025, 4,837 children were living in temporary accommodation. Imagine every child in 16 primary schools suddenly facing homelessness.

These are not just numbers. They are children trying to concentrate in class, keep up with homework and enjoy childhood.

The rise since January 2020, when 2,685 children were living in temporary accommodation, should stop us in our tracks. More children are spending precious years without the security of a permanent home.

As a society, we need to do better. We need politicians and decision-makers to take meaningful action, including increasing the supply of social and affordable homes. At Conway Court in Belfast, our temporary accommodation provides a safe place to stay for up to 24 families at any one time. During 2025/26, we supported 42 families, including 77 children.

While we are proud to be part of the solution, no child should have to grow up without the security of a permanent home. To all our supporters, thank you for believing, as we do, that every child deserves better. Every child deserves a front door, a bedroom, a safe place to play and the comfort of knowing where they belong.

Elaine Ellis
Accommodation Manager
Family Service

One Voice. One Message.

In the run-up to the Assembly Elections in May 2027, we have been developing a new manifesto that will set out the changes we believe our political parties and the next Executive need to prioritise in tackling homelessness.

Drawing on conversations with people across our communities and the experiences of those we support every day, including children and families affected by homelessness, the manifesto will highlight the issues that matter most and outline the actions we will be calling for from decision-makers.

We know that childhood homelessness can have a lasting impact on a young person's health, education and wellbeing.

That's why ensuring every child has the opportunity to grow up in a safe, stable home is central to our vision for change.

The launch of our manifesto is coming soon, and we are excited to share our priorities for change. We hope it will spark important conversations and encourage as many people as possible to add their voice to the call for a better future.

Keep an eye on our website and social media channels over the coming weeks to find out more about what we'll be calling for and how you can get involved.



Sarah & Isaac's Story

Written by Elaine Ellis

For seven years, Sarah and Isaac have been waiting for a home. They are a hardworking, devoted couple who, like any parents, want the very best for their three children, aged 6, 8 and 9. When people hear that this family has been living at Conway Court for so long, they are often surprised. The reality is that this is not where Sarah and Isaac imagined they would be raising their family. Yet, because of the severe shortage of suitable social housing and the rising cost of private renting, finding a permanent home remains desperately out of reach.

One of the things that has always struck me about Sarah and Isaac is their determination to provide stability for their children, despite so much uncertainty about their future. Isaac leaves for work before many people are awake, setting off at 6am each morning, while Sarah manages the school runs, appointments and the countless tasks that come with raising a young family. She also volunteers several days a week at a local charity shop, making a valuable contribution to her community and keeping a routine that works for her family.

As Isaac explains:

"Our housing points are good, but not good enough to be offered a property in the area our kids go to school. We need a three-bedroom home and we've been looking at areas just outside Belfast to see what's available. I work full-time, but buying a home of our own is impossible. We could never afford it."

During the time I have known the family, I have seen their children grow from babies into happy, thriving children. What is particularly difficult to comprehend is that almost their entire primary school journey has taken place while living in temporary accommodation. Years that should have been filled with the security of a family home have instead been spent waiting for one to become available.



For Sarah, the possibility of having to move away from the area they know brings its own worries.

"We like living in Belfast. The children go to school in the area, and I can walk to the charity shop while Isaac is at work. I don't know how I would feel if we had to move away and change the children's schools again. The children have had enough upheaval in their lives. They have friends, after-school activities and it's what they know and love."

Like many families affected by the housing crisis, Sarah and Isaac are not looking for anything extraordinary. They simply want the opportunity to provide their children with a place of

their own, somewhere they can put down roots and plan for the future.

Until that opportunity comes, they continue to make the best of their circumstances with remarkable patience and resilience. But no family should have to spend seven years waiting for a home. Their story is a reminder that behind every housing statistic is a family hoping for the same thing most of us take for granted: the security, stability and sense of belonging that comes with having a home of your own.



"Conway has lots of people and I never feel lonely."

N, age 9

"I would like to have sleepovers sometimes and invite my friends from school, but I can't."

S, age 10

"When I do get a new house, I would like it to be made out of sweets." **J, age 8**

"The staff are nice and really friendly."

N, age 9

"I like living at Conway. I think I will be sad when I have to leave." **G, age 11**



"I get embarrassed when my friends at school ask me where I live." **B, age 13**

"I would like my own back garden to play in."

F, age 6

Through a Child's Eyes

The children I meet at Conway often say the things adults struggle to put into words. Through seemingly simple comments, they tell us what homelessness means from a child's perspective: not being able to invite friends over, worrying about what others think, or wishing for something as ordinary as a garden to play in.

Working with the children and families at Conway is one of the most rewarding parts of my role. Every day I see children learning, playing, building friendships and finding joy despite the uncertainty they are experiencing. Their creativity, humour and resilience never fail to impress me.

Conway provides more than just a place to stay. It offers families support, stability and a safe environment while they work towards finding a permanent home. Parents can access practical and emotional support, while children have opportunities to play, learn and simply be themselves during what can be an incredibly difficult time for the whole family.

The children regularly remind me of the importance of these supports. One minute we're talking about what makes a house feel like home and the next we're debating whether a house made entirely of sweets should be built from jelly babies or chocolate buttons.

These conversations are often fun, but they also show some of the challenges children face. Even while talking about their dream homes, they know what they're missing.

At the same time, children also tell us what Conway means to them.

These comments mean a great deal because they reflect the sense of community, care and belonging that Conway strives to provide. But they also remind us that however supportive temporary accommodation may be, it is not the same as having a home of your own.

Every child deserves the security of knowing where they'll sleep, the freedom to invite friends over, and a place where they can put down roots. The voices of the children at Conway show us that homelessness is not just a housing issue; it is a childhood issue. Their experiences are a powerful reminder of why every family deserves a safe, secure and permanent place to call home.



Services for Families

Interview with Wojtek Mietkiewicz,
Accommodation & Community
Support Worker at Conway Court

How long have you worked for Simon Community?

I have been working for Simon Community for 8 years

Where did you work before coming to Conway Court?

I worked in a Simon Community single adult temporary accommodation hostel and moved over to our family service in Conway Court almost a year ago.

What is the biggest difference between the types of hostels that you have worked at?

Families have different needs from those in single adult hostels. I've learned how to support parents with issues such as school places, benefits and health, while also working directly with children for the first time.

Do you enjoy working with families?

Yes, I definitely do. Children have an element of playfulness, and they bring a lot of energy.

Do you think that homelessness has an impact on children?

Since starting at Conway Court, I've seen how homelessness can affect children, from missing out on sleepovers with friends to adjusting to new schools and communities. Despite this, there is a strong sense of togetherness at Conway, where families support one another and children play together. I find that inspiring.

Could our Government do more?

I think that building more social homes would be a good start along with protections for people who rent privately. More funding for extracurricular activities for children would also be helpful, especially over the summer months. A lot of parents can't afford to take their children on regular days out over the school holidays, so this would help with affordability and take some of the stress away from the families.

As a new face to the family service, could we be doing more to support the families?

We run a weekly summer scheme for children, but additional funding for family activities would make a real difference. We're also keen to see Simon Community's Creating Homes service expanded to include family-sized properties, helping more families move on from temporary accommodation.

Every Child Needs a Home

While many people associate homelessness with rough sleeping, most children experiencing homelessness are not on the streets. Instead, they may be living in temporary accommodation, staying with family or friends because they have nowhere else to go, or living in housing that is overcrowded, insecure or unsuitable.

In Northern Ireland, **4837 children** are currently living in temporary accommodation, the majority are under the age of nine.

Research highlighted by Simon Community shows that childhood adversity, including family breakdown, neglect and trauma and experiencing homelessness can increase the risk of homelessness later in life.

For these children, homelessness can mean uncertainty, disruption and instability during some of the most important years of their development.

Without the right support, homelessness can become part of a cycle that passes from one generation to the next.

Frequent moves can interrupt a child's education, making it difficult to maintain friendships, attend school consistently and achieve their full potential.

Homelessness can also take a significant toll on mental health, increasing feelings of anxiety, stress and isolation. Children often carry the emotional burden of not knowing where they will live next or witnessing the pressures faced by their parents or carers.

At Simon Community, we believe children deserve the safety and security of a place to call home. By tackling the root causes of homelessness, providing early intervention and supporting families before crisis point, we can help ensure that children have the stable foundation they need to thrive. Together, we can work towards a future where no child grows up without the stability of a home.



Carols in the City 2026

New
Venue for
2026!

Join us on Wednesday 9th December 2026 at Assembly Buildings Conference Centre, Belfast, for an evening of festive music and reflection in support of Simon Community.

As the city prepares for Christmas, Carols in the City will bring together our supporters, partners and friends for a special evening of seasonal music and readings, from across our work. Featuring performances from local choirs and musicians, it is a chance to celebrate the impact we can make together.

At a time of year when many of us think about the importance of home, the event also highlights the vital work being done to prevent homelessness and support people to find a safe place to call home.

**Doors open
at 6.15pm**

Guests are invited to stay afterwards for tea, coffee, and shortbread.

We are also delighted to welcome back Specsavers as headline sponsor of this year's event.



**Tickets are
£12 per person**
(children go free)

SPONSORED BY

Specsavers

Carols
IN THE CITY 2026

Wednesday 9th December, 6:45pm

Assembly Buildings Conference Centre
Fisherwick Place, Belfast

500 PEOPLE ATTENDED LAST YEAR'S EVENT

Thank you for helping us build a community working towards an end to homelessness.

Opening Doors to a Place to Call Home

This month marks the first anniversary of our five-year partnership with Progressive Building Society and already their support is helping people take important steps out of homelessness and into a home of their own.

Through a commitment of £20,000 per year to Simon Community's Tenancy Deposit Scheme, alongside additional staff fundraising, they are helping remove one of the biggest barriers faced by people trying to access the private rented sector – the upfront costs of securing a tenancy. For many people, this support provides a crucial stepping stone out of homelessness and into a place they can call home.

Over the past year, the team at Progressive have thrown themselves into the partnership, spending a night under the stars at our One Big Sleepout, stepping over the edge at our Europa Abseil, and supporting families and individuals through our Christmas Hamper Appeal. Their energy, generosity and willingness to get involved have helped make this partnership about much more than funding alone.

Progressive Building Society's Finance Director Gareth Robinson said:

"Our partnership with Simon Community is helping to remove the barriers faced by people trying to access the private rented sector in a practical and immediate way, while supporting an organisation that understands the challenges facing people across Northern Ireland."

"We also wanted the partnership to go beyond financial support, which is why it has been encouraging to see colleagues at Progressive give their time, energy and practical help."

"One year on, we are proud of what the partnership has achieved so far and remain fully committed to the work ahead."

We are incredibly grateful to Progressive Building Society for their partnership and look forward to continuing this journey together over the years ahead.



PROGRESSIVE

BUILDING SOCIETY

Supporter Survey

Help Us Be Better in 2027 – Take Our Supporter Survey!

Your feedback is incredibly important to us. By sharing your thoughts, you'll help us better understand what matters most to our supporters and how we can improve the way we communicate, share our impact, and involve you in the work you care about.

Our online supporter survey takes around 10 minutes to complete, but the insights you provide will help shape our fundraising and engagement activities throughout 2027 and beyond.

This is your opportunity to tell us what's working well, where we can do better, and how you'd like to hear from us in the future. Every response helps us become a stronger, more responsive organisation that reflects the values and priorities of the people who make our work possible.

By taking part, you're helping us ensure that supporter voices remain at the heart of everything we do.

Need a paper copy?

If you would prefer to complete the survey on paper, please email supportercare@simoncommunity.org and we'll be happy to send one to you.

Speak to our team

Call us on 028 9023 2882 and select Fundraising.



Scan to take
the survey

Thank you for helping us make an even greater impact in 2027.

