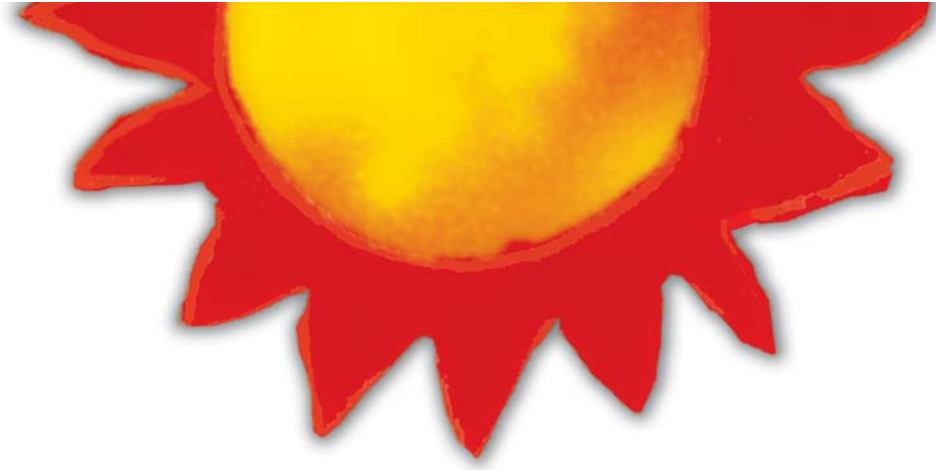


SONAS Housing Association **Annual Report 2004**





Sonas Housing Association Mission Statement:

To provide good quality safe accommodation or women and their children made homeless primarily by domestic violence and to provide a holistic support service to empower women and children to regain control over all aspects of their lives.

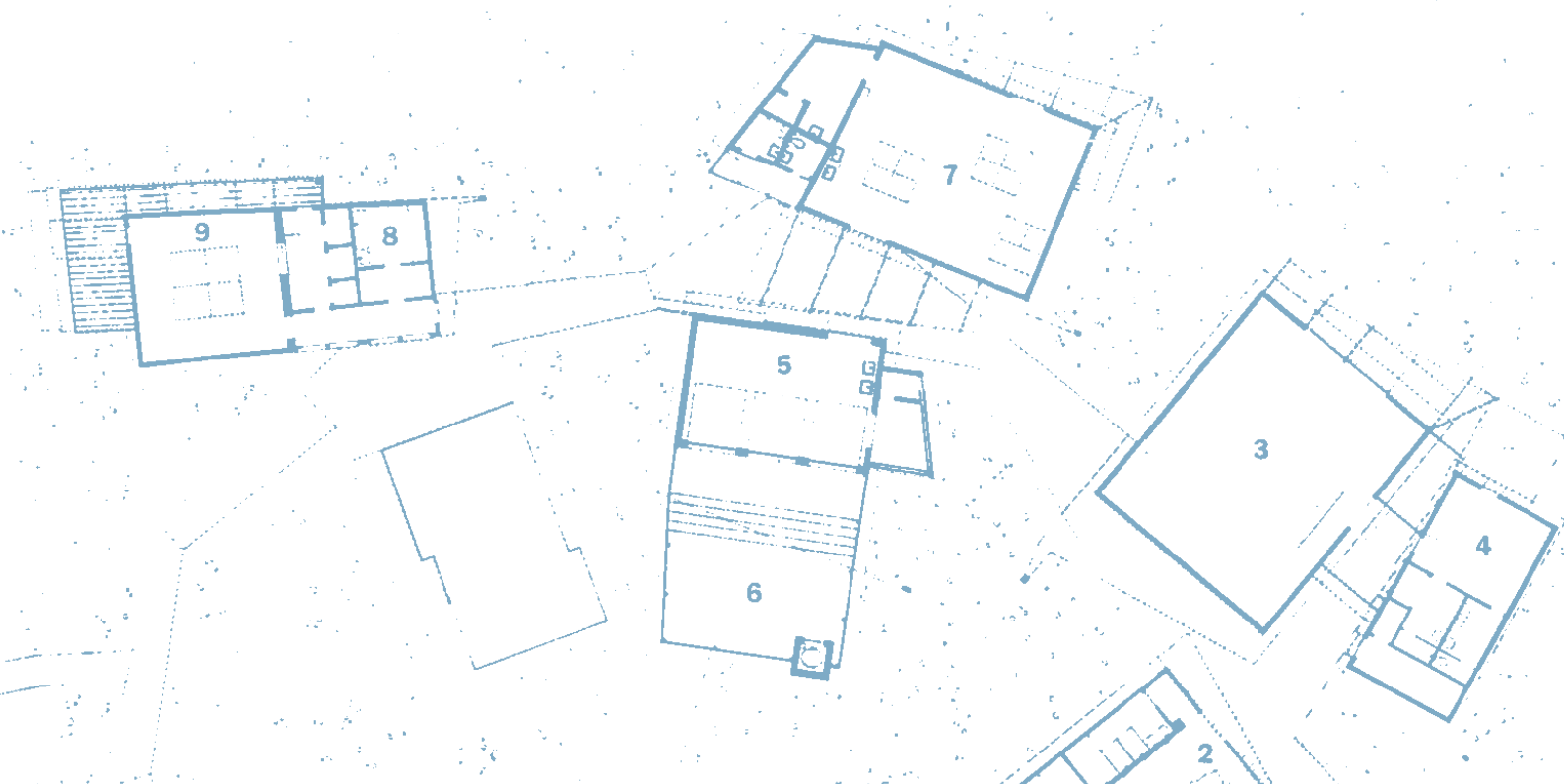
Furthermore, to influence housing and social policy and decision making as it relates to women and their children out of home due to domestic violence.



SONAS

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Chairperson's Report

2004 was another challenging but successful year for Sonas. This was the ninth operating year and one which saw continuing, high demand for our service. Women continue to be

marginalised in all spheres of life and women's homelessness continues to be unrecognised and underestimated. Ada Chesterton put it like this **".....in the case of women, there is the rooted belief that they must be bad lots or they would have a home."** (Golden, 1992).

The Sonas Supported Transitional Housing Model of Work entails the provision of quality, secure accommodation, with support, for a period of time. The aim is to help women and families to move to independent living with restored confidence and control.

While not every woman or family who find themselves homeless because of domestic violence will need supported transitional housing, the outcomes for the women who use our services show clearly that for many, such support is vital to address the "revolving door" syndrome associated with domestic violence and homelessness.

In 2003 records¹ from 14 of the 18 Women's Refuges show that 1,586 women with 2,741 children sought shelter and support. The majority of women who used that

lifeline were repeat users. On a further 590 occasions the refuges had to refuse access to women and children because they were full. The number of refuges in Ireland is completely inadequate to meet the demand. However, while crisis accommodation is essential in meeting the immediate needs of women experiencing domestic violence, it does not resolve the complex and longer term effects that some women experience as a result of systematic violence and abuse.

Sonas has grown fast in the past eight years with housing now being provided in five areas of Dublin city and south county Dublin. Another complex is due to be opened later this year. 2004 saw the publication of an important piece of research "Safe Home" by Monica O'Connor and Niamh Wilson. This research clearly showed that Bed & Breakfast, as a response

¹ Sonas Housing Association with the National Network of Womens' Refuges and Support Services Survey 2004.

² O'Connor M., Wilson, N. Safe Home: Sonas Housing Association Model of Supported Transitional Housing. Sonas Housing Association, 2004.



Members of the Sonas Housing Partnership: L-R: Bernadette Byrne – Mayo, Josephine McGourty – Mayo, Una McGill – Dundalk, Muireann Morris- Dublin, Mary Dunlop – Dublin, Deirdre Murphy – Navan.

to women and children's homelessness, is inappropriate, expensive and unacceptable. The research provides clear evidence that access to a women's refuge and the Sonas Model of Supported Housing is the most appropriate and effective response to women and children out of home because of domestic violence.

The research was launched at a conference of the same name held in Dublin Castle in October 2004. The conference provided an opportunity for practitioners and policy makers in local authorities, health boards, and voluntary and community organisations to learn about this effective integrated model of work. This model has been replicated in Mayo, Navan and Dundalk.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff for their trojan work and commitment. They carried out their work

throughout the year in a totally professional and dedicated way, in a demanding, challenging and changing environment. Thanks also to my colleagues on the Board of Directors for their unstinting support and their generous and informed contributions to the work of Sonas.

As we enter our 10th year it remains a challenge to us to sustain and develop existing and planned services with the level of funding available to us, but we look forward with confidence to meeting the challenges and to continue our work in housing and supporting women who are out of home due to domestic violence.

Chairperson, Sonas 2005

Introduction

There are many routes into homelessness. The word 'home' should conjure up an image of comfort, warmth and safety, but for many women and their children home is a dangerous place; so unsafe that they are forced to leave. This can result in many women and their children becoming homeless in order to access safety and protection.



Sonas Housing Association (Sonas HA) provides supported transitional housing as a post crisis service for women and children who have left emergency accommodation or “may not reasonably occupy” their homes because of violence and have ongoing support needs as well as a need for safe, secure accommodation. As a response to women experiencing violence, Sonas Housing is unique in that it provides a range of supports to women and children whilst they live in high quality housing, for a period of time, before moving on to permanent housing.

The Sonas HA currently has 53 units in Dublin and a further 10 units under construction. Outside Dublin, the Sonas Housing Partnership manages a small number of units owned by Sonas. The Sonas Housing Partnership is an initiative extending the model of Sonas HA supported transitional housing to other parts of Ireland.

Principles underlying the work

Sonas Housing Association works from a human rights based approach to the issue of violence against women. This approach

recognises that violence against women is a denial of their human right to live free of “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment”.³ Sonas HA uses a feminist analysis of the causes of violence against women which recognises it as a gender-based crime and the ultimate expression of the unequal position of women in society. It embraces the diversity of women’s lives and experiences and aims to ensure that those voices and experiences are central to the development of Sonas HA’s responses. Sonas HA works to assist families to move from crisis to independence.

The core elements of the model of support for women using the Sonas service are:

- Safety, protection and security
- Re-gaining power and control
- Support to access, rights and entitlements
- Developing independent lives
- Trauma and abuse of their children
- Different levels of support needs
- Moving on
- Permanent tenancy

³ United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Report for 2004

Summary of strategic goals and achievements of Sonas HA in 2004

Goal:

- 1. To provide good quality, safe, supported accommodation for women and children out of home primarily because of violence**

Achievements:

- 10 new units were opened in Ringsend
- Sonas HA provided accommodation for 64 women and 84 children in 2004
- The Sonas Housing Partnership provided accommodation for 16 women and 34 children outside Dublin
- Sonas met the targets negotiated with Dublin City and South Dublin County Councils for 2004 - 12 'move-ons' to permanent housing
- 16 women were resettled in permanent accommodation - 12 women and 24 children to local authority housing and 4 women offered permanent accommodation by Sonas HA.
- Application made for capital funding for a Women's Refuge in Blanchardstown



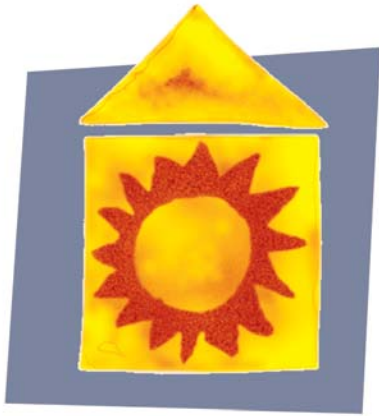
Goal:

- 2. To develop, deliver and monitor a quality-assured holistic support service**

Achievements:

- The Sonas HA model of support work was recorded and published⁴
- In 2004 Sonas HA developed the organisation's quality standards based on settlement, support and transitional housing
- The children's support staffing complement was increased to 4 workers
- The Sonas Housing Partnership continued to work jointly both at management and support worker level, meeting eight times in 2004

⁴ O'Connor & Wilson, 2004, Ibid.



Goal:

3. To develop, implement and monitor models of tenant participation

Achievements:

- Commencement of consultation process with tenants to develop a model of tenant participation to match needs of both transitional and permanent tenants.

Goal:

4. To influence housing and social policy decision-making, as it relates to women and children out of home primarily because of violence

Achievements:

- In October 2004, Sonas HA held a national conference 'SAFE HOME' at which its research into women's experience of homelessness as a result of violence and the model of Sonas' response was launched
- Sonas HA continued to represent women and children who are experiencing violence and homelessness on policy influencing fora at national and local level

Goal:

4. To ensure quality governance and management of the organisation

Achievement:

- The Board of Management of Sonas HA continues to oversee the implementation of the organisation's strategic plan, including the completion of organisational quality standards and performance indicators.

Highlights of 2004 for Sonas Housing Association

Publication of 'SAFE HOME' research & the Sonas model of supported transitional housing

The work of the organisation was documented in a publication 'Safe Home'⁵ published in October 2004, written by Monica O'Connor and Niamh Wilson. Using personal interviews of tenants, case reviews and worker interviews, it explored women's experiences of homelessness and the responses they had experienced to date and outlined the Sonas HA model of supported housing and how it had responded to their needs and the needs of their children.



The research identified a number of key ways in which the Sonas HA model of work met the needs of the women and children, ways in which the Sonas HA service to the tenants met their needs and aspirations:

These were:

- **Safety, protection and security**

For the majority of women, the primary need for protection and safety was met. Every woman had a risk assessment and safety plan worked out from the beginning with her key worker. Women said that men who had abused them realised that they were not alone and that they had the support of other residents and workers. Abusive men very quickly realised that Sonas HA had developed a close liaison with the Gardaí and solicitors, enabling women to avail of legal and Garda protection. Women with support were encouraged and enabled to follow through with prosecutions resulting in some sanctions of the courts. It is the combination of these factors which women identified as leading to safety for them and accountability of the perpetrators.

⁵ O'Connor & Wilson, 2004, Ibid

- **Re-gaining power and control**

Most women had been subjected to years of abuse and violence. Many women described feelings of depression, anxiety and fear. Some women had difficulties with alcohol and drug abuse as a result of coping with physical and sexual violence. Women's experience of Sonas HA was overwhelmingly positive. They described skilled, experienced and respectful workers who understood the complexity and pain of recovering from abuse. Whilst Sonas workers offered ongoing emotional support, women also accessed long-term counselling and therapy where it was identified as a need. Women said that they had space and time to recover and overcome the impacts of abuse and plan for the future.

- **Support to access rights and entitlements**

As a result of years of violence, abuse and homelessness, many basic rights of women and their entitlements have been denied them. In addition, the impacts of violence resulted in women needing the support of various agencies. The key areas identified were in relation to the mental and physical health of both the women and their children, social welfare entitlements and housing.

“ I was 63 when I left and signed on in the labour exchange. When they asked me if I was available for work I said no as I has spent all my life at home looking after the children and I didn't feel at this stage I would do this. They stopped my payment. My key worker helped me prepare and write my appeal and supported me to build the confidence to go back down to the Labour with it. They looked at the appeal and reversed the decision immediately and I got my payment.” Cliona

- **Developing independent lives**

Women spoke with enthusiasm about how Sonas staff identified opportunities for training and education and actively encouraged women to return to the workforce and gain an independent income. The majority of women have participated in a range of courses and activities and have made connections with women's groups, community groups and other community based services during the period of their stay in Sonas.

- **Trauma and abuse of their children**

Women with children consistently spoke with sadness and regret about the damage and pain their children had experienced as a result of their partners' violence and in some cases because of their experience of homelessness. The fact that Sonas had a specialised service for children was of major importance to them.

They named the following things that Sonas provided, as being important for their children:

- Safety and freedom for their children
- An opportunity for their children to be happy and have fun
- Support for themselves as mothers to deal with the impacts on them as parents
- Direct support for children in recovering and overcoming the impacts of both witnessing and experiencing abuse
- Linkages with schools and specialist support agencies for children

- **Different levels of support needs**

Women recognised the value of the Sonas model that offers different levels of support and contact based on each person's needs at a given time. Women appreciated the need for intensive support at the beginning, to establish a relationship of trust, but understood that it was important to gradually lessen contact and have fewer meetings to build independence.

“The staff are great, they leave you alone, but they are always there if you need them. At first I saw my key worker every week and then every two weeks and now I check-in with her every month.” Belinda

- **Moving On**

There was a general view that the two year period was a fair and appropriate time for women to be in Sonas. Almost all women said they had fears and anxieties about moving out of Sonas and being on their own, but they believed that for most women it was right. The timing and circumstances of the move was seen as critical and unique for each woman. Getting a permanent tenancy in a safe suitable area was of crucial importance.

Those women who had left Sonas or who had come to the end of their tenancy were supported or were being supported by Sonas to access local authority or housing association houses. Sonas liaised with the Councils and housing associations, recommended them for housing and wrote references on their behalf.

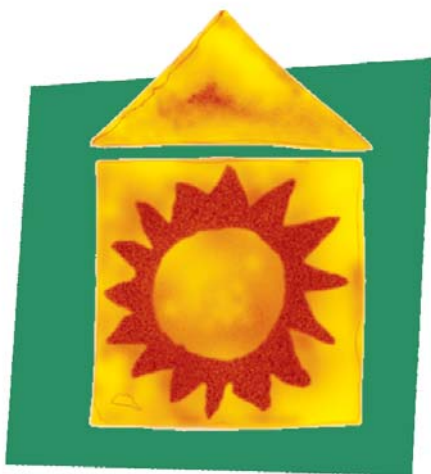
- **Permanent tenancy**

While Sonas is a transitional housing provider there is provision for a smaller number of permanent tenancies which are made available to women who have completed a period of

transitional housing, and who do not require ongoing support.

One of the permanent tenants said:

“What I appreciate most about Sonas is that they gave me a lovely safe place to live and gave me the space and the peace to become myself again. I look around the house and realise that everything in the house is mine and I can hardly believe it. Before this I never had anything. There should be many more places like Sonas for women in my situation.” Deirdre



Analysis

‘Safe Home’ reaffirmed that women’s refuges are critically important as the first frontline response to prevent women’s entry into homelessness because of domestic violence. The study clearly highlights that refuges provide a focus on women and children’s safety, based on their knowledge that the point of attempting to leave and post separation are the most dangerous times for women, often resulting in escalated violence, sexual assault and homicide.

Access to workers with expert knowledge on risk assessment, safety planning, and the trauma of violence and the complexity of women’s struggle to leave a violent relationship, enabled women to make informed decisions for the safety of themselves and their children.

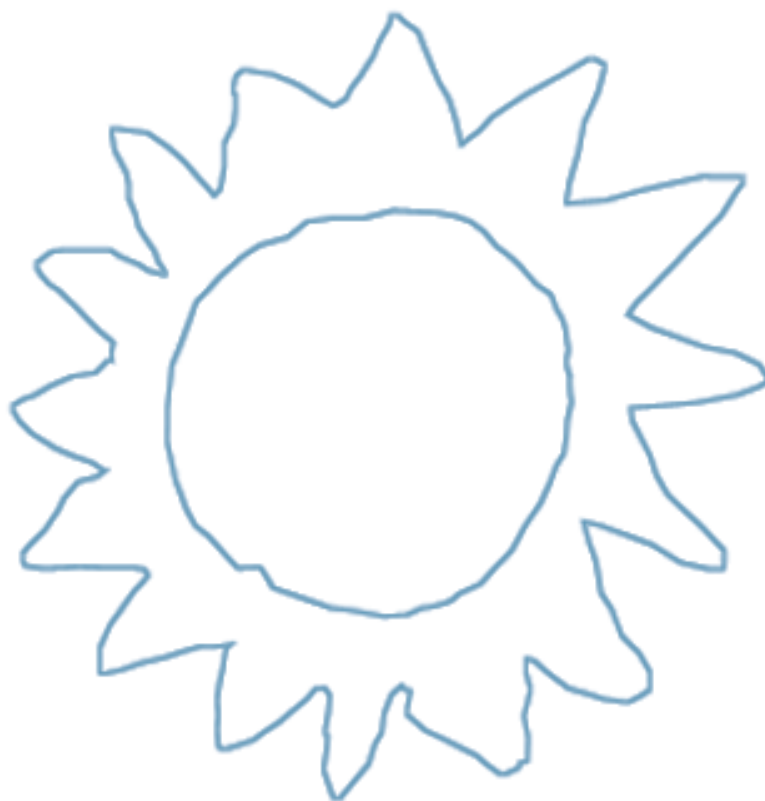
The findings of this study reflect evidence and knowledge, which show that without the integrated response of crisis refuge and transitional housing that many women’s chances of escaping from violence and abuse are greatly reduced. Furthermore, the risk of incidences of repeat and prolonged periods of homelessness is greatly increased.

What Sonas HA offers women is an integrated, holistic, specialised service, which incorporates support and safe accommodation. Women’s stories and the outcomes for women and children clearly illustrate the effectiveness of the Sonas HA model of work. The key elements of high quality, safe, secure homes, a trusting and healing relationship with workers over a long period of time, specialised children’s work

and the ability to understand and respond to the complexity of the impacts of violence and abuse of women.

The findings of this study demonstrate that there exists a model of work that results in long term positive outcomes for women and children out of home because of violence. Crisis refuge, the Sonas HA model of supported transitional housing and permanent safe appropriate social housing are the three core elements of this integrated response.

A copy of SAFE HOME Sonas Housing Association Model of Supported Transitional Housing may be ordered on info@sonashousing.ie or downloaded from www.sonashousing.ie





Case Study

Ciara came to the a Women's Refuge with three young children, aged 8,6 & 4 years, and pregnant with her fourth child. As a child Ciara had witnessed severe violence against her mother and had spent part of her childhood in an

Orphanage. She had her first child with a partner about whom little is known. She then met and had three children with the partner whom she fled following years of systematic abuse including severe sexual abuse.

The two boys who were then 6 & 4 years were acting out the violence and chaos they had witnessed from their father and were unmanageable, violent and aggressive. The eldest girl had contracted dysentery and underweight and not thriving. The baby who was subsequently born while her mother was in the Refuge benefited from the attention of other women in the Refuge and advanced quickly as a result of the stimulation. Having been referred to St James hospital for a determination on whether their out of control behaviour was caused by brain disorder or was behavioural, it was confirmed that no physical disorder was identified. The Refuge staff called a Case Conference as they were concerned about the lack of input from social workers. Refuge staff were concerned that the effects of violence on the mother and children were dismissed and that

other professionals were blaming of Ciara's behaviour. Ciara was a difficult person to work with, she could be quite volatile and challenging to care staff.

Ciara had had a barring order against the violent partner and had custody of the children. Social workers insisted on unsupervised joint access visits by the father of three of the children and also the girl who was not his child. The boys' behaviour deteriorated and Ciara was admitted to hospital threatening suicide. While there, she attempted to harm herself. She was discharged to the Refuge and again threatened to hurt herself or her children. Once that occurred the social workers became involved and realised the high level of support which was required for their care and safety. They were placed in a health board with a very high staff to child

ratio. From then on Ciara mounted a campaign to have her children returned to her.

The Women's Refuge realised that with all the difficulties in Ciara's life she needed ongoing support and referred her to Sonas Housing Association. Ciara could neither read nor write, or manage money, was in ill health, two of her children were in care, her eldest daughter was attending the Mater Child Guidance clinic with depression and her ex-partner remained a significant threat to her safety. While in the Refuge and Sonas the family was in contact with a large number of agencies. While in Sonas, Ciara was required to work to a contract with the support workers.

During her two years at Sonas Ciara was a good tenant, maintained her house and paid her rent. She took literacy classes, attended family therapy with her children to address the many issues which had developed over the years. She fought hard, taking a case against the health board for the return of her children. While in Sonas she was attacked by her former partner demonstrating his ongoing danger to her. Sonas advocated on her behalf for a permanent tenancy with another housing association which reports her continuing well being and the return of her two boys to her care.



Involvement of Sonas HA in building development successes

- The Old Presbytery complex in Cambridge Road Ringsend was opened as an extension of our service in February 2004. This was a refurbishment and new build project and comprises 10 units from 1 to 4 bedroom apartments and town houses
- A consortium of four housing associations (Cluid, HAIL, Sophia I & Sonas) committed to the provision of 101 social rented units in Fortunestown, Tallaght in partnership with South Dublin County Council. Sonas will provide 10 units on this new estate, 5 transitional and 5 permanent



The Old Presbytery complex in Cambridge Road Ringsend



- Addressing the under-provision of women's refuges in the Dublin area, Sonas submitted an application for funding for a new refuge in Blanchardstown, Dublin 15 to Fingal County Council and the Department of the Environment in July 2004. All party support for planning permission on this site was acquired in 2003 and Sonas looks forward to working in partnership with the Blanchardstown Women's Refuge Company who will provide the service.

Successful provision of transitional supported accommodation and move-ons to permanent accommodation by Sonas HA

- In 2004 Sonas provided accommodation for 64 women and their 84 children, 53 of the women with their children, were in the support service. The remaining 11 women were in Sonas permanent tenancies.
- Transitional housing cannot work without permanent housing being made available when the support period is completed. In this regard Sonas has been very successful in negotiating agreements with Dublin City Council and South Dublin County Council for an agreed number of move-ons in a given year. In 2004 of a target figure of 14 move – ons Sonas HA achieved 16 move-ons. 12 went to the above named Councils and four went to Sonas permanent tenancies. Thanks are due to the housing and allocations staff in both Councils. Sonas hopes to make similar arrangement with other local authorities in the coming year.
- In response to the need for permanent housing for single women for whom it is difficult to access secure long-term tenancies, the four units in Ranelagh were changed from transitional housing service to permanent housing.
- Sonas applied for funding, as developers, of a women's refuge in Main Street Blanchardstown.



Planning and delivery of the Sonas HA 'Safe Home' National Conference

200 delegates attended the Sonas national conference in Dublin Castle in October 2004. The conference provided an opportunity for practitioners and policy makers in local authorities, health boards and voluntary and community organisations to learn about the Sonas model of supported transitional housing as an effective response to women and children out of home because of violence. Speakers addressed the implications of the findings of the research and outlined the responses developed in the United Kingdom which have placed domestic violence as a central concern in housing and homelessness policy and practice.

The Sonas Housing Partnership presented the work of the four services making up the Partnership and published the model of support work shared by the four services – Sonas Housing Association, Mayo Women's Support Services, Meath Women's Refuge and Women's Aid Dundalk. The conference was complemented by a short but sensitive drama piece from The Bosco Drama Group, Newry.

A copy of Sonas Housing Partnership - A partnership of services responding to women and children who are out of home because of violence may be ordered from info@sonashousing.ie or downloaded from www.sonashousing.ie



Sonas HA Web site developed and on-line

Sonas was delighted to launch its web site in the summer of 2004. Sonas HA can be found on www.sonashousing.ie



At the Sonas national conference: Muireann Morris, Director Sonas Housing HA, Noel Ahern TD Minister of State Housing & Urban Renewal, Helen Mortimer, Chairperson Sonas Housing HA, Una Mc Guill, Director, Dundalk Women's Aid

Challenges for 2005 & onwards

Working in both the violence against women sector and the homeless/housing sector Sonas currently identifies a number of challenges as it moves into its 10th year.

While supported transitional housing for women and children out of home because of violence has increased to provide focused support, the first vital safe response available in women's refuges remains inadequate. The aim to reduce the use of B&B's for families must be met within the period of the next Homelessness Plan. The absence of an appropriate number of dedicated family spaces in women's refuges needs urgent attention by the planners and funders. Sonas HA looks forward to the

necessary funding support to allow it develop the refuge in Blanchardstown, Dublin 15. The favouring of "floating support" as a preferred method of tenant support by funders is a challenge to Sonas HA model of transitional support which has proven outcomes for women and children. Sonas HA believes that floating support may not be the appropriate response bearing in mind the necessity of putting the safety of the tenant and her children as central.

Along with other homelessness service providers Sonas HA sees the need for a comprehensive primary assessment of all persons presenting as homeless and anticipates a close involvement in developing such assessment protocols.

Sonas regards the absence of the assessment, recording and appropriate placement of men who have a history of violence against women and children as a challenge which can be met and acknowledged in any new preventative strategies.

The move-on record of Sonas is excellent but presents constant challenges to the organisation and the local authorities in meeting targets. Sonas will continue to extend its negotiated agreements with both statutory and voluntary permanent housing providers to optimise settlement for our service users.



Acknowledgements

Sonas wishes to acknowledge the support of the following in 2004

The Homeless Agency

Dublin City Council

South Dublin County Council

HSE Northern area

HSE South Western area

Dundalk Town Council

Mayo County Council

Meath County Council

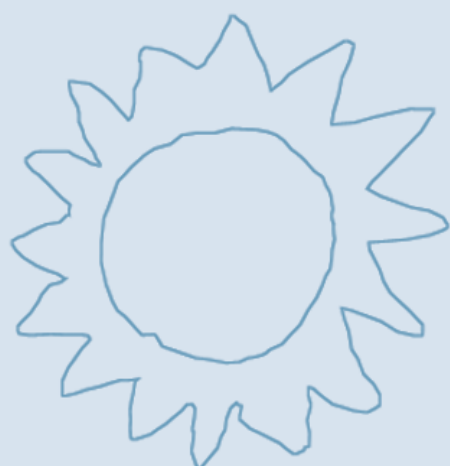
A generous donor who does
not wish to be named

Frances & Iain Mac Donald – The Bay
Garden, Camolin Co. Wexford

All our Marathon runners

The Society of St Vincent de Paul

The Dept of the Environment Voluntary
Housing Unit



About Sonas Housing Association

Sonas Housing Association has nineteen employees. The central office is located at 148, Phibsboro Road Dublin 7 01 830 9088 info@sonashousing.ie www.sonashousing.ie

Staff are located where we provide our services in:

Ballymun - 8867952
ballymun@sonashousing.ie

Clondalkin - 4579367
south22@sonashousing.ie

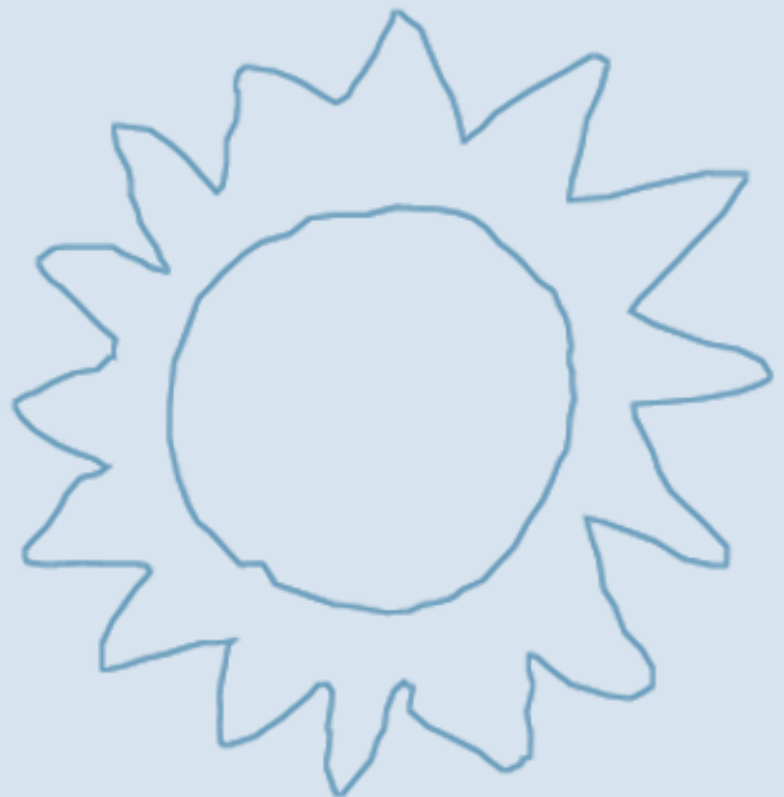
Killester - 8510380 -
north5@sonashousing.ie

Ringsend - 6687150
ringsend@sonashousing.ie

Tallaght - 4623694
tallaght@sonashousing.ie

Sonas Board of Management - 2004

Helen Mortimer – Chairperson
Paula Fagan
Gearoidin Charlton
Maire Mulcahy
Patricia Cleary
Deirdre Murphy
Rachel Mullen



Summary of Account

Sonas Housing Association Ltd.
Limited by Guarantee

Income and Expenditure Account
For the year ended 31 December 2004

	2004	2003
	EUR€	EUR€
Income		
Funding received via Homeless Agency		
Eastern Regional Health Authority	377,737	333,268
South Dublin County Council Grants received	92,435	98,854
Dublin City Council Grants received	300,685	156,137
Sonas Housing Partnership Grants Received		
Dundalk Town Council	36,300	35,049
Meath County Council	39,371	44,580
Mayo County Council	43,838	43,778
Other Income		
Rent receivable	79,346	68,416
Private donation for development	100,000	-
Donations received	590	4,876
NAHB – Fostering Childcare Worker Grant	29,638	21,170
NAHB – Blanchardstown Development Worker	10,000	5,000
NAHB – Childcare Development Grant	15,000	-
Dept of the Environment grant received	20,000	17,000
Sonas Conference income	24,720	-
Government Grants Amortised	127,179	117,807
Total Income	1,296,839	945,935
Operating expenses	1,196,593	964,776
Operating surplus/(deficit)	100,246	(18,841)
Provision for sinking fund	(31,736)	(27,366)
Bank deposit interest	2,957	4,818
Net surplus/(deficit for the year)	71,467	(41,389)
Accumulated surplus brought forward	307,999	349,388
Accumulated surplus carried forward	379,466	307,999



Sonas Housing Association Ltd
Limited by Guarantee

Balance Sheet
As at 31 December 2004

	2004 EUR€	EUR€	2003 EUR€	EUR€
Fixed Assets				
Tangible assets		5,725,935		5,413,584
Current Assets				
Debtors	7,657		242,598	
Cash at bank and in hand	1,183,451		1,042,035	
	1,191,108		1,284,633	
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(153,796)		(347,849)	
Net Current Assets		1,037,312		936,784
Total Assets Less Current Liabilities		6,763,247		6,350,368
Government Grants		(6,383,781)		(6,042,369)
Net Assets		379,466		307,999
Accumulated Surplus		379,466		307,999

Full set of accounts available on request



Sonas Housing Association

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Sonas Housing Association

1 Longdale Terrace, Ballymun
Dublin 9
Tel: 8867952

Sonas Housing Association

3 Killester Court, Killester, Dublin 5
Tel: 8510380 Fax: 8510042
Childrens; Worker Office: 8512788

Sonas Housing Association

4 The Old Presbytery, Cambridge Road
Ringsend, Dublin 4
Tel: 6687150 Fax 6605732

Sonas Housing Association

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Clondalkin, Dublin 22
Tel: 4579367 Fax: 4579513

Sonas Housing Association

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Fortunestown, Tallaght, Dublin 24
Tel/fax: 462369

