

## Chapter 14: Belmont Flatlets

### Introduction

- 14.1 The Daughters of Charity (who worked in Pelletstown - see Chapter 13) bought adjoining houses on Belmont Avenue in 1980 to provide flatlets or hostel type accommodation for unmarried mothers and their children. There were 11 flatlets in total. The current Provincial of the Daughters of Charity told the Commission that the flatlets were established at the suggestion of CURA and its director, Bishop Dermot O'Mahony who was an auxiliary bishop of Dublin. This was not a mother and baby home in the traditional sense. It was more akin to a hostel or supported living facility than to a mother and baby home.
- 14.2 The Commission has not seen records of the residents of Belmont. It is not clear what records were maintained at the time but there would have been no reason to retain such records when it closed. All the mothers were there with their babies and left with their babies so the issue of tracing would not have arisen. The information in this chapter is based on the report of a social service consultant who conducted a review of the Belmont Flatlets in 2000 at the request of the Daughters of Charity and on a few brief references to Belmont in the minutes of the Eastern Health Board.

### Living arrangements

- 14.3 Belmont provided short term accommodation for unmarried mothers and their children. The public health nurse and social workers visited but it was mainly independent living. There was a Sister who supervised but did not live there. The women paid for their keep and were expected to look after their babies themselves. The mothers would have been eligible for Unmarried Mother's Allowance at the time and may also have received assistance with rent payments (see Chapter 1). The women and babies stayed for between six months and a year. The accommodation was not suitable for crawling children. Sometimes women who had been in Eglinton House moved there.
- 14.4 In 2000, a social service consultant conducted a review of the Belmont Flatlets at the request of the Daughters of Charity. There were nine women and children resident at the time of the review. The accommodation was described as 'basic but adequate for short-term accommodation'. There were some problems with

laundry facilities, heating and availability of hot water. It was transitional housing but also provided various supports such as education in childcare, budgeting and household management as well as emotional and social support.

- 14.5 While mothers were responsible for the care of their children, in practice the staff did assist and provided the mothers with some breaks. They also provided assistance with accessing social welfare entitlements and getting accommodation to which they could move after their time in Belmont.
- 14.6 Women were referred to Belmont by Eglinton House, social workers, health boards and maternity hospitals. They did not routinely refer mothers who might be at risk of being unable to parent and of having the children taken into care. Social workers saw the need for a facility for such mothers but they did not see Belmont in that role. A few such mothers did spend time in Belmont and integrated reasonably well with other residents; there were some unsuccessful such placements.
- 14.7 There was much discussion during the 1980s about the issue of 'inadequate' mothers and about how unmarried mothers could manage to live and work in the absence of affordable childcare.
- 14.8 The mothers signed a licence agreement with the Daughters of Charity for the use of the flats. It was not a landlord/tenant relationship. There were house rules but they seem to have been reasonably flexible.
- 14.9 In 1985, the Eastern Health Board paid £10,600 to Belmont.
- 14.10 The service was closed in 2001.