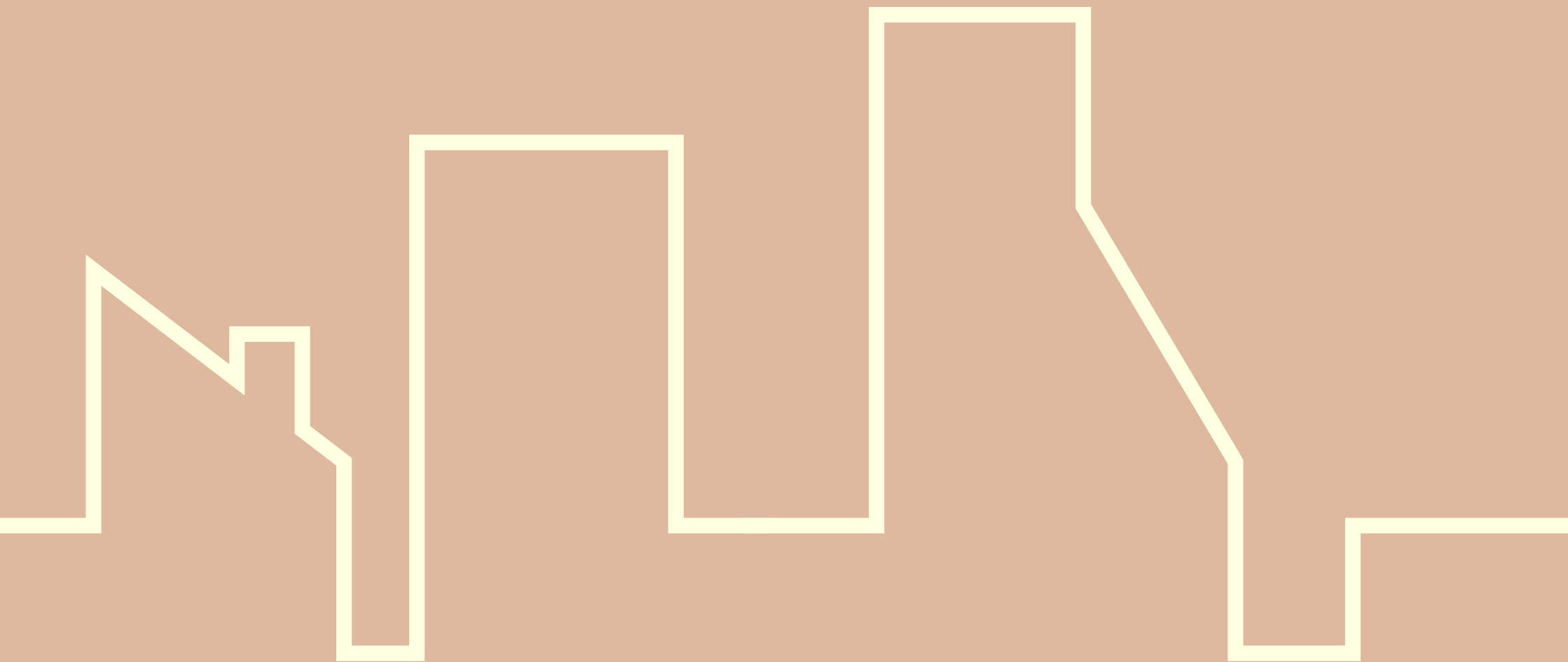


local action plan



homewards
northern ireland


**ROYAL
FOUNDATION**
OF THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS
OF WALES

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Executive summary



Homewards is...

A five-year, locally led programme, launched by Prince William and The Royal Foundation of The Prince and Princess of Wales in June 2023.

The aim of Homewards is...

To demonstrate that together, it is possible to end homelessness – making it rare, brief, and unrepeated.

Homewards will do this by...

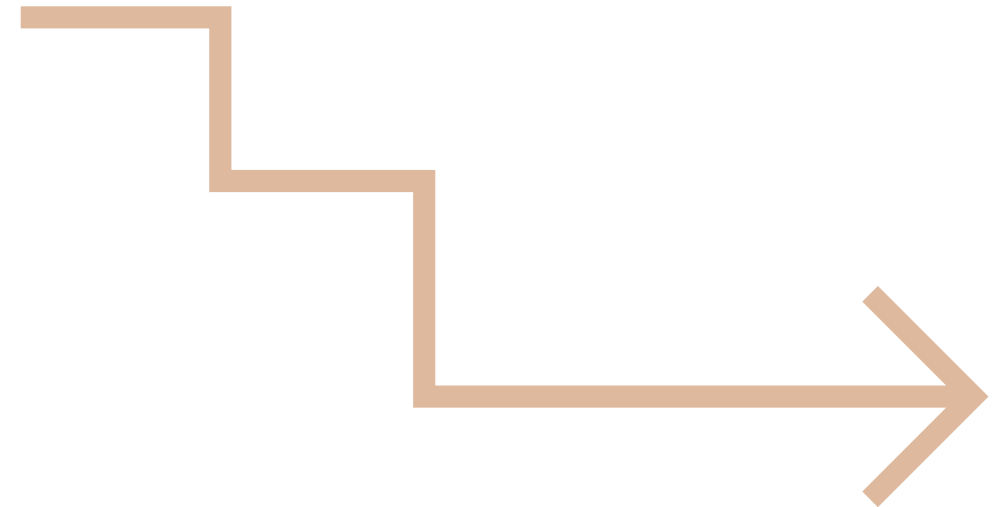
Preventing homelessness for at risk groups, whilst challenging stigma, inspiring optimism and ensuring this work is sustainable and replicable.

The six Homewards flagship locations are...



Success looks like...

- Each flagship location will be on a trajectory to end homelessness for target groups – making it rare, brief and unrepeated,
- The flagship locations will have an increased focus on sustainable prevention and collaboration,
- Communities will feel optimistic that it is possible to end homelessness and will recognise that it is beneficial to do so,
- The impact of Homewards will reach beyond the six flagship locations, with learnings being used to adopt tried and tested models in other areas.



Coalitions of organisations and people, from the public, private and voluntary sectors – have come together across the six flagship locations, committed to demonstrating that it's possible to end homelessness.

Each local Coalition has created its own Local Action Plan. They're delivering initiatives to support at-risk groups, identified by each location, where Homewards can help most.

Each Local Action Plan encompasses solutions. From housing to data to employment – and aims to make the prevention of homelessness 'business as usual'.

The Homewards Partnership, brought together by The Royal Foundation, creates an unprecedented network of individuals and organisations – including top experts and leading homelessness organisations. It continues to support the Coalitions to deliver their Local Action Plans, and to galvanise national and international momentum.

‘By demonstrating what is working to prevent homelessness with these groups and across these key areas, Homewards will demonstrate it is possible to end homelessness, together.’

**Homewards
National Expert Panel**

All the Local Action Plans will be reviewed every year...

To reflect on progress and capture new opportunities. Activities in the Local Action Plans vary, from testing a new scalable pilot, to fundamentally changing how people in the location work together.

These are ambitious plans. As delivery progresses, some elements may need to be adjusted or updated, so the Local Action Plans are agile documents, growing alongside our Coalitions. This ensures that the Local Action Plans remain focused on delivering tangible change, with maximum impact.





The Royal Foundation is supporting each of our six flagship locations to achieve this with...

Additional capacity

A Local Delivery Lead and project management support in each location.

Homewards fund

£500,000 in seed funding to back each Action Plan.

Expertise

Access to a cutting-edge network of global experts, business and more.

The Royal Foundation is also supporting our flagship locations, in the areas that we know are the most crucial to preventing homelessness, so that they can:

- Unlock impactful projects,
- Build strategic partnerships,
- Establish sustainable connections,
- Harness data to prevent homelessness,
- Test new ways of improving access to homes, for those who need it the most,
- Create employment pathways,
- Unlock appropriate finance to support homelessness prevention.

A note from Homewards NI SSG Chair Alyson Kilpatrick



The challenge of homelessness in Northern Ireland, as in the United Kingdom and beyond, remains significant. The first two years of Homewards has built a strong foundation for the future, by recognising how critically important it is to understand context, need and unique circumstances. Homewards is careful to work only where it can truly add something special.

Once the foundation was laid, we began the development of strong cross-sectoral relationships. To be effective and rewarding, those relationships depend on trust and a shared understanding of our mission. We aim to demonstrate that it is possible to end homelessness, making it rare, brief and unrepeatable. Homewards continues to gain momentum.

As we move into year three of the programme, our focus is most certainly on delivery.

The voice of people with lived experience of homelessness will be at the heart of the programme. The Homewards Fund is funding Northern Ireland's first Lived Experience service, delivered by Homeless Connect, Housing Rights and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. This will provide the resources to ensure that those with lived experience of homelessness have a critical and central role. They will help to design, deliver and evaluate the services (and support system) that should be there for them.

This service will underpin our work for care-experienced young people, and for women at risk of becoming chronically homeless.

During year three, because of the strong foundations built to date, we will be able to unlock new homes and employment opportunities for care-experienced young people. This work demonstrates the power of cross-sector co-operation and partnership. It will complement the already significant efforts from the Housing Executive and Department for Health, through their New Foundations Programme.

We will also work alongside a range of colleagues in Northern Ireland, to strengthen the existing women's support hub in Belfast. Homewards' work here will focus on strengthening coordination and collaboration. At the same time, we will develop a stronger understanding of how, when and where services have the greatest impact for women.

This work is crucial. Collectively, we will demonstrate new ways to prevent homelessness. They can be applied for all who are at risk, starting with (and learning from) our own focus groups.

There is still much work to be done. But I am confident in the strength of our collaboration, shared determination and concerted action. We will take significant strides this year and deliver tangible results, which will improve people's lives.

Together, we will drive real change across Northern Ireland.





1. Prevention of homelessness for care-experienced young people

Local context

Figures published by the Department of Health indicate that, as of 31 March 2024, Northern Ireland had 3,999 children and young people in care. This was the highest number recorded since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

Across the UK, it is estimated that 25% of the homeless population have been in care, and that one-third of those leaving care will experience homelessness within the first two years.

United Kingdom
homeless population
that has been in care

25%

‘We might have a job, a house etc. but that does not mean we are not struggling. Check in to help us resolve small problems before they get bigger.’

Comments from young people,
The National Leaving Care
Benchmarking Forum

As statutory care responsibilities can end when a young person turns 18, there are examples of people with care experience becoming homeless on their 18th birthday. Once a young person experiences homelessness, it can have a lasting impact. It also increases the likelihood that they will experience repeat homelessness.

However, there are examples showing that, by working directly with young people leaving care and providing support, we can prevent them from experiencing homelessness. In Northern Ireland, approximately 140 young people each year leave care and present as homeless. This is a minority of those leaving care. We need to better understand why this is happening, and what can be done to prevent it.

Homewards Innovative Housing Project in Northern Ireland will develop a new housing pathway that diverts care experienced young people away from the statutory homelessness system, helping them to access properties in the private rented sector alongside wraparound support.

This project has been developed with a broad range of partners, including care experienced young people with lived experience of homelessness and will be delivered via a partnership with the Community Foundation Northern Ireland.

The Innovative Housing Project has been designed to complement the Northern Ireland Executives New Foundations programme announced by Ministers on the 1st of December. Combined, these two projects aim to make homelessness both rare and brief for those who are or have aged out of the care system and demonstrate a collective approach to preventing homelessness.

What are we going to do over the next 12 months?

1.1 Innovative housing project

Rationale: The private rented sector can play a vital role in preventing homelessness. Care-experienced young people often face barriers to accessing it, leaving them at risk of entering the adult homelessness system.

Activity: Homewards NI, with the Housing Executive and the Department of Health, is developing an innovative housing pathway. It enables access to private rented properties alongside tailored support. Thanks to The Multibank and others, all young people helped into a tenancy will receive essential household goods, helping them to settle into and sustain their new home.

Measure:

- The number of care-experienced young people successfully housed and sustaining tenancies in the private rented sector
- The reduction in care experienced young people entering the adult homelessness system

Who is leading this work? The Royal Foundation and the Community Foundation Northern Ireland, The Multibank

1.2 Embed lived experience

Rationale: The evidence shows that involving people with lived experience leads to more effective and relevant homelessness support services.

Activity: Homewards NI will co-create opportunities with young people who have experience of the care system. This will help to inform the development and delivery of strategies, policies and Housing Executive services that affect them, especially in relation to housing and homelessness.

Measure:

- The number and quality of co-creation opportunities established
- Homewards NI will track how much lived experience shapes service design, policy development and delivery outcomes

Who is leading this work? Homeless Connect, Housing Rights & the Housing Executive

1.3 Establish NEON – a private-sector-led employment network

Rationale: Northern Ireland's strong private sector presents an opportunity to create inclusive pathways into employment.

Activity: Homewards NI will launch the New Employment Opportunity Network (NEON) This private-sector-led group – including employers and other partners – will aim to create inclusive, sustainable jobs for people at risk of homelessness. This will ensure there is a coordinated approach to securing opportunities for jobs and training.

Measure:

- The number of employers engaged
- The number of training and job opportunities created
- The number of individuals supported into sustained employment through NEON

Who is leading this work? Price Waterhouse Coopers, supported by The Royal Foundation

1.4 Strengthen local employability pathways

Rationale: Sustained employment is key to preventing homelessness. Stronger coordination of local employability support can improve outcomes for both individuals and employers.

Activity: Homewards NI will convene organisations offering employability support, to identify and strengthen the most effective routes into sustained work for our cohorts. We will focus on strong communication, sharing best practice and potential funding.

Local job brokers will be encouraged to match great candidates from the Homewards cohort with suitable job opportunities. They will also support both employers and individuals to sustain employment.

Measure:

- Number of coordinated employability partnerships established
- Number of job placements and sustained employment outcomes achieved for Homewards participants

Who is leading this work? The Royal Foundation

Key partners:

- Action for Children
- Barnardo's
- Centre for Homelessness Impact
- Homeless Connect
- Housing Rights
- Include Youth
- MACS Supporting Children and Young People
- PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)
- The Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner
- The Northern Ireland Youth Forum
- The Simon Community
- Voice of Young People In Care (VOYPIC)

2. Prevention for women at risk of chronic homelessness

Local context

250

Northern Ireland
women in chronic
homelessness

Each year, there are
around 250 women in
chronic homelessness in
Northern Ireland.

‘Simon Community have noted a growing number of women using their support services. During 2020-21, 301 females were supported in Simon Community accommodation projects; 48% were under 25 years of age.’

‘Access to Healthcare for Women Experiencing Homelessness’, Simon Community Report, 2024

Homelessness can present additional challenges for women. They report additional stigma of how they will be perceived, as well as the fear of losing current or future access to their children...

This can mean that some women only seek assistance when they see no alternative. Women are more likely to be part of the ‘hidden homeless’ population, and less visible to support services. They are therefore also under-represented in statistics. Women are also more likely to rely on informal (and often unsuitable) support networks to prevent homelessness.

In Northern Ireland, chronic homelessness is understood as ‘individuals with very pronounced and complex support needs, who find it difficult to exit from homelessness’.

Historically, women experiencing chronic homelessness have struggled to access (and engage with) the right support at the right time.

In Belfast, a number of organisations that support this cohort have come together to form a Women’s Hub. Alongside people with lived experience, they are working to review the support that is available and to identify opportunities for improvement. Broader issues affecting this group include family dynamics, mental health and addiction. These will also be considered, as will the provision of suitable homes in appropriate locations.

What are we going to do over the next 12 months?

2.1 Data insight project

Rationale: Current data on women at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness is inconsistent and incomplete. This limits understanding and effective service design. Improved insight is needed to ensure support meets women's specific needs.

Activity: Homewards NI will convene third-sector partners to explore opportunities for collective data recording and reporting. We will align this work with data initiatives led by statutory agencies.

Measure:

- Improved consistency of data on women experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness
- Stronger evidence base to inform service planning and delivery

Who is leading this work? The Royal Foundation, Salesforce, Crisis

2.2 Embed lived experience

Rationale: When people with lived experience help to develop services, it leads to more effective and relevant support.

Activity: Homewards NI will co-create opportunities with women who have experience of homelessness. They will inform the development and delivery of strategies, policies and Housing Executive services that affect them, especially in relation to housing and homelessness.

Measure:

- Number and quality of co-creation opportunities established
- Evidence that lived experience has influenced service design, policy development and delivery outcomes for women

Who is leading this work? Homeless Connect, Housing Rights & the Housing Executive

2.3 Pilot a navigator role for women's services

Rationale: Women at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness often face fragmented support services. Stronger coordination can lead to holistic, trauma-informed care and better outcomes.

Activity: Homewards NI will pilot a Navigator role, to co-ordinate and strengthen support across Women's Hub services. The Navigator will:

- Link homelessness, housing and health partners
- Coordinate trauma-informed training for staff
- Develop shared learning, to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.

Measure:

- Improved coordination between services
- Delivery of trauma-informed training across partners
- Evidence of better outcomes and more seamless support for women

Who is leading this work? The Women's Hub Group

2.4 Complete research into homelessness prevention for women

Rationale: Women's pathways into homelessness, and through it, are often shaped by critical life events. These can include hospital discharge, release from prison or experience of domestic abuse. Understanding these points of risk is essential to designing effective prevention and support.

Activity: Homewards NI will complete research, using existing data and qualitative case studies. It will identify key intervention points where outcomes can be improved. The study will examine how services and partnerships (particularly around mental health) can respond more effectively, and the findings will inform future service development and pilot interventions.

Measure:

- Research completed and findings published
- Evidence-based recommendations to inform future service design
- Pilot new interventions to prevent homelessness among women

Who is leading this work? The Women's Hub Group

Key partners

Women's Hub Members include representatives from:

- Housing Executive
- The Simon Community (NI)
- DePaul
- The Welcome Organisation
- Public Health Authority
- The Belfast Complex Lives Model

Strategic Initiatives

As these activities are developed, they will be aimed at Northern Ireland's cohort of focus.

Rationale: There is a shortage of affordable housing. We need to consider options for accessible funding to deliver impactful housing initiatives.

Activity: We will launch Connecting Capital with Community, which seeks to connect strategic housing projects that work to end homelessness with relevant investors and funding opportunities. Alongside this we will support the deployment of £50 million of new lending to help small and medium-sized housing providers and charities.

These funds are being committed by Lloyds Banking Group, helping to increase local funding streams in Northern Ireland and the other Homewards locations.

Measure: New sources of funding deployed in Northern Ireland and housing providers connected to new funding options

Who is leading this work? The Royal Foundation, Lloyds Banking Group



Get in touch

If you are a business or organisation that wants to find out more about working with Homewards, please contact homewards@royalfoundation.com and one of the team will be in touch.

If you are worried about someone experiencing or at risk of homelessness, you can support them by:

- Connecting them with local support services
- Donating food, clothing, and other supplies
- Giving your time volunteering in your local community

For more information on homelessness across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, please visit the following link: <https://homewards.org.uk/help-resources/>

If you would like to donate, please consider supporting one of the Homewards Sector Partners, who can be found listed here: <https://homewards.org.uk/partners/>

Source list

Information in this Action Plan is based on data collected by The Northern Ireland Housing Executive about people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, as well as the following sources:

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Department for Communities, Northern Ireland Housing Statistics, 2024
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<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-05/No-Place-Like-Home-Report-IKEA.pdf>

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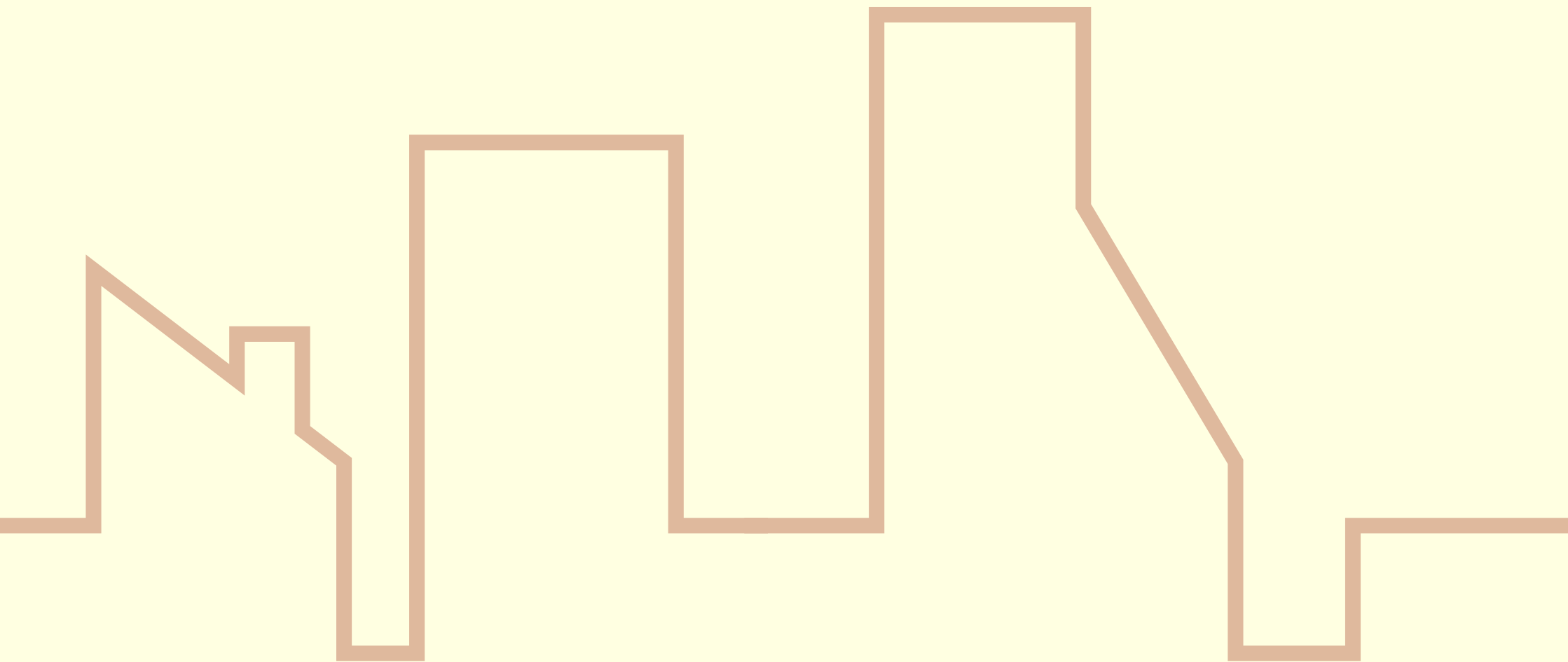
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<https://simoncommunity.org/homelessness/knowledge-hub/hidden-homelessness>

'Access to Healthcare for Women Experiencing Homelessness', Simon Community Report, 2024
<https://simoncommunity.org/assets/pdfs/Access-to-Healthcare-for-Women-Experiencing-Homelessness-Report.pdf>

Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland, 2023/24'
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/publication-childrens-social-care-statistics-northern-ireland-202324>



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