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Conrad's story: How in two years he went from full-time work to the streets.

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CONRAD LEFT his home in the city of Tychy, Poland, in July 2007 to find work in the Republic as a window fitter. He worked for several months before injuring his hand. This setback forced him to give up work and claim welfare.

When he lost his job, he also lost his flat and became homeless. His claim for supplementary welfare allowance was refused in 2008 on the basis that he was not habitually resident in the State. This decision was overturned on appeal and the payments were restored.

In October 2009 his welfare payments were refused again, prompting Conrad, who does not speak English, to seek the help of the Crosscare Migrant Project, a care project of the Dublin archdiocese. Crosscare runs a migrant advice centre with Polish interpretation on Tuesdays and Fridays.

“I came here to work and lead a normal life,” Conrad says. “I initially wanted to bring my sons over but when I injured my hand and later my leg, I had to give up work.”

He shows off the scars of several operations on his hand and leg. He says the injury to his hand occurred while he was working but at the time he did not disclose it for fear he would be sacked.

This failure to disclose a workplace injury created major problems for him when he later went to claim social welfare.

“I have spent two years on the streets now, sometimes sleeping in the city centre of Dublin and other times in homeless hostels. At the moment I am staying in one in Tallaght. I have two weeks to find a flat before I have to leave the hostel and I need a deposit, but they have cut off my payments, which makes me really bitter . . .

“I also have to pay back all the people that have helped me out on the streets. I’m trying to look after my health and get a job, but without the language no one will give me one,” he says.

He says he has been offered a repatriation flight by the Government but would prefer to stay here. “I have nothing there, nothing to go back to,” he says.

The name has been changed to protect the identity of the person.

<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2010/0111/1224262053947.html>