

Citation for Alice Leahy

Alice Leahy, a former nurse and midwife, is also a former Chairperson of the Sentence Review Group, and a former Irish Human Rights Commissioner. She is also a writer, commentator, broadcaster and lecturer, promoting understanding of the needs of outsiders in society and daily in practical ways helping to combat social exclusion.

Most importantly, in 1975 she co- founded TRUST now the Alice Leahy Trust and the work and ethos remains the same. It provides health and related services to people who are homeless.

Alice Leahy is well aware that the condition of being homeless implies much more than not having a home. Being homeless implies being on the border of society, being vulnerable.

Her daily toil centres around the Alice Leahy Trust. She has made it into an extraordinary nurse-led service that offers respite, shelter, recognition, advice, fresh clothes, warm showers, healthcare and friendship to the men and women who live and sleep outdoors in Ireland's capital city.

When the day's caring is done, Alice takes up the challenge of letting the outside world know about the lives of the people she encounters each morning. She fights their corner. She challenges the status quo. She queries orthodoxies. She highlights hidden abuses. Where others see problems, Alice sees people. She is on their side every time.

The marginalised and excluded people and those who possess little self-worth have few champions. But they do have Alice. Every morning, every day, every week, she makes time for them. She visits prisoners, speaks to school children, attends funerals where mourners are few. She lectures to nurses and doctors, checks on old friends, meets politicians, writes to newspapers, thanking supporters, publishes books, promotes human rights, and makes a difference.

Now in the fifth decade of her work, Alice Leahy's dedication to anyone less fortunate grows only stronger. Her human rights work is known and recognised locally, nationally and internationally. But those who know Alice best of all, are those who have, or once had, no homes to go to. To them, she is simply Nurse Alice. And there is nobody else quite like her.

It is Alice who created this unique Trust, and it is the Trust who continues to empower its users by encouraging them to use the statutory services and to obtain their entitlements, while at the same time working to ameliorate society by acknowledging that everybody is important, promoting awareness on the issues of homelessness and vulnerability, on-going training of specialist groups and involvement in relevant research on the issues relating to homelessness. For this same reason, the Alice Leahy Trust is also very involved with people who have been in prison and in psychiatric institutions and the people who work with them.

She works from early each morning and shines light on her chosen field of homelessness until the night light goes out.

'Sometimes one word can recall a whole span of life' said Edna O'Brien (Irish novelist), and the word that sums up the life span of Alice Leahy is without doubt 'advocacy', applying to the most vulnerable people in our society.

Alice has finished a memoir *The Stars are our only Warmth* written with well-known journalist Catherine Cleary, due for publication by O'Brien Press in October 2018.

