



# Annual Report 2004/5

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**Treoir** is the national federation of agencies working with parents who are not married to each other and their children.

Membership is open to agencies who work with parents who are not married to each other and their children.

**Treoir's** main aim is to promote the rights and welfare of parents who are not married to each other and their children in Ireland.

**Treoir** recognises the diversity of family life in Ireland.

**Treoir** recognises that all families, including unmarried families, have the same rights to respect, care, support, protection and recognition.

**Treoir** supports and promotes the rights of all children as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Treoir** believes that all children have a right to know, be loved and cared for by both parents.

**Treoir** operates a free, confidential National Information Centre for parents who are not married to each other and those involved with them.

**Treoir** has many publications which are listed on the back cover.

**Treoir** promotes policy change, commissions research projects and holds conferences and workshops on a regular basis.

**Treoir** provides information and support through its National Resource Centre for those Working with Young Parents and the National Co-ordination of the Teen Parents Support Programme.

**Treoir** is a non-governmental organisation supported by Government, Health Service Executive and other grants.

## *From the Chairwoman*

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As I reach the end of a three-year term as Chairwoman of Treoir it offers a good vantage point to review activities during that time. The last three years have been a time of significant change and development for Treoir. A Three Year Plan had been put in place just prior to my election in 2001 as Chairwoman and it is good to be able to report that almost all of its objectives have been achieved in particular

- The move to new premises and the on-going challenge to fund the office
- The expansion of the National Information Centre arising from the continuing increase in the level and complexity of queries and the increase in staff.
- The increase in the number of publications now provided (mostly free of charge) by Treoir in response to specific needs
- The initiation of support services for those working with young parents. Treoir now has a full-time worker in the National Resource Centre for Workers with Young Parents.

In addition to successfully achieving the objectives of the Three Year Plan a range of other activities has been undertaken by Treoir including

- At the request of the Department of Health and Children and Health Service Executive Treoir hosts the National Co-ordinator of the Teen Parent Support Programmes.
- Treoir has responded to the needs identified by workers with migrant families for information in their own languages on the legal aspects of unmarried parenthood in Ireland.

A major part of this expansion in the work of Treoir has been funded by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency.

Treoir has as its main aim to promote the rights and welfare of parents who are not married to each other and their children in Ireland and effective lobbying is seen as an integral part of achieving this aim. The All Party Committee on the Constitution is currently reviewing the Articles in relation to the family. Families not based on marriage are outside constitutional protection and the review presents an opportunity to rectify this. It is a core principle of Treoir that all families, including unmarried families, have the same rights to respect, care, support, protection and recognition. Treoir also promotes the rights of all children as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and it is on the basis of these two principles that Treoir is calling for change.

I would particularly like to thank the Council and Officers of Treoir whose support and advice during a period of rapid change in Treoir has been invaluable. I would also like to salute the determination and efficiency of all the staff in meeting the challenges of the last three years. In particular I would like to commend the quality of leadership provided by the CEO Margaret Dromey and the Assistant CEO Margot Doherty.

*Eilis Walsh*

April 2005



## ***From the CEO***

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The Annual Report reflects the enormous amount of work undertaken by the committed yet small team employed by Treoir. Calls to the National Information Centre continue to increase and their complexity requires staff who are skilled and empathetic, attributes which are abundant in the information staff. Numerous parents and professionals continue to avail of the outreach information sessions provided by Treoir.

I very much look forward not only to the continuing development of both the National Resource Centre for those Working with Young Parents and the coordination of the Teen Parent Support Programme but to the richness of the interaction between these two projects.

As ever Treoir endeavors to be responsive to the emerging needs of parents who are not married to each other. We continue to produce information publications for unmarried parents and a new dimension was added to our work during the year - that of developing publications for migrant parents who are not married to each other. Web-based information on legal issues for these families is available in six languages. Currently we have in preparation a manual for workers with migrant women *Reproductive Health Information for Migrant Women* (funded by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency) which will also be available in six languages.

Thanks are due to all my colleagues, Margot, Brenda, Veronica, Natalie, Bella and Margaret, for all the support during the year and for a job exceptionally well done. My particular thanks go to Margot Doherty, Assistant CEO, who continues to be the backbone of the organisation. Our Chairwoman and Council members are very supportive, affirming and generous with their time – for this we thank them sincerely.

***Margaret Dromey***

April 2005

## ***Acknowledgements***

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We would like to acknowledge the support of our funders -

The Health Service Executive (formerly the Health Boards)

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency

Comhairle

The Katherine Howard Foundation

A particular thanks to all who provided a service to enable us to achieve our objectives during the year particularly Geoffrey Shannon, staff of the Crisis Pregnancy Agency, staff at the Family Law Office, staff of the Department of Social and Family Affairs, Siobhan Roddy, Kieran McKeown and Dave Ellis.

## **Council Members of Treoir 2004/5**

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### **Executive**

Chairwoman	Eilis Walsh, National Social Work Qualifications Board
Vice Chairwoman	Dearbhla Ni Riordain, Erinville Hospital, Cork
Secretary	Eilish Craig, North Eastern Health Board (Adoption Service)
Treasurer	Margaret Acton, Barnardo's Teen Parent Support Project

### **Ordinary Council Members**

Anne Bowen	One Family
Cathy Fox	Ballinasloe Crisis Pregnancy Service Western Health Board
Frances Jones	South Eastern Health Board
Anne Kennedy	Life Group
Mary O'Neill	Section 20 Office, South Western Area Health Board
Loretto Reilly	National Maternity Hospital
Sinead Whiting	PACT
Ruth Prendergast	Ms. Carr's Housing Association

### **Honorary President**

Dr. Dermot Walsh

### **Honorary Life Member**

Gemma Rowley

### **Staff of Treoir**

Chief Executive Officer	Margaret Dromey
Assistant Chief Executive Officer	Margot Doherty
Office Manager	Bella Maher
Senior Information Officer	Brenda Forde
Information Officer	Veronica Black
Project Officer, NRCWYP	Natalie McDonnell
Co-ordinator TPSP	Margaret Morris

*Our best wishes go to Nicola Mulvany and Rosie Toner who resigned during the year.*



## **Member Agencies**

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Aislinn (Support service for those raised in care)	Dublin
Barnardos (Child care agency)	Dublin
Boyle Family Life Centre (Family support service)	Roscommon
Clarecare (Adoption, tracing, counselling and general support)	Dublin
Coombe Women's Hospital (Maternity services and social work)	Clare
Cúnamh (Adoption, tracing, counselling and general support)	Dublin
CURA National Office	Kildare
Doras Bui (A parents alone resource centre)	Dublin
Eastern Regional Health Authority (Health board services)	Dublin, Kildare,Wicklow
Eglinton House (Accommodation)	Dublin
Life (Pregnancy counselling service)	Dublin
Limerick Social Service Centre (Social services)	Limerick
Mid Western Health Board (Health board services)	Limerick, Tipperary North, Clare
Midland Health Board (Health board services)	Longford,Westmeath
Miss Carr's Housing Association (Accommodation)	Dublin
National Maternity Hospital Holles Street	Dublin
North Eastern Health Board (Health board services)	Meath, Louth, Cavan, Monaghan
North Western Health Board (Health board services)	Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal
One Family (Support service for one-parent families)	Dublin
Pact (Adoption, counselling and general support)	Dublin
PASS (Parents Alone Support Service)	Dublin
RGAS (Adoption, tracing, counselling and social work)	Dublin
Rotunda Hospital (Maternity services and social work)	Dublin
Sacred Heart Home (Accommodation and support services)	Cork
Sligo Social Services Council (Social services)	Sligo
South Eastern Health Board (Health board services)	Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary Sth, Waterford, Wexford
Southern Health Board (Health board services)	Cork, Kerry
St Patrick's Guild (Adoption, tracing)	Dublin
Western Health Board (Health board services)	Galway, Mayo, Roscommon



## National Information Centre

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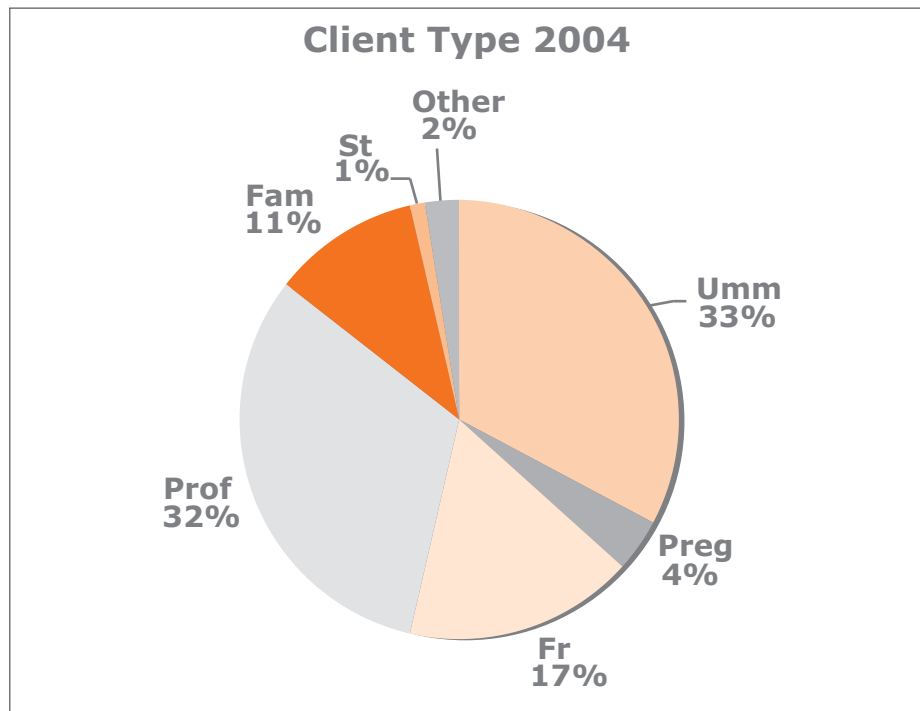
### Queries to the National Information Centre

The number of those accessing the National Information Centre continues to grow. There were at least 4600 recorded calls to the National Information Centre in 2004. Treoir is currently working on the design of a new database system which should streamline the recording of calls to facilitate the analysis of queries to the Centre, to capture their complexity and to facilitate analysis of those using the Centre.

There were 243,429 hits on the Treoir website in 2004. This was an increase of approx. 150% on the previous year. This significant increase in hits to our website may have come about as a result of a very large mail out of one of our newest publications "*Being there for them*". Also, Treoir was involved in a number of media interviews during the year which drew attention to our website details. We have noticed a drop in the numbers of students contacting the Centre in the last couple of years and would presume that students are now accessing information on the website.

As can be seen from Chart 1 below, 54% of calls were received from parents who are not married to each other, both mothers and fathers and single pregnant women. The numbers of professionals contacting the centre has grown and is now at 32%. Eleven percent of calls are from family members.

**Chart 1**



**Chart 2**

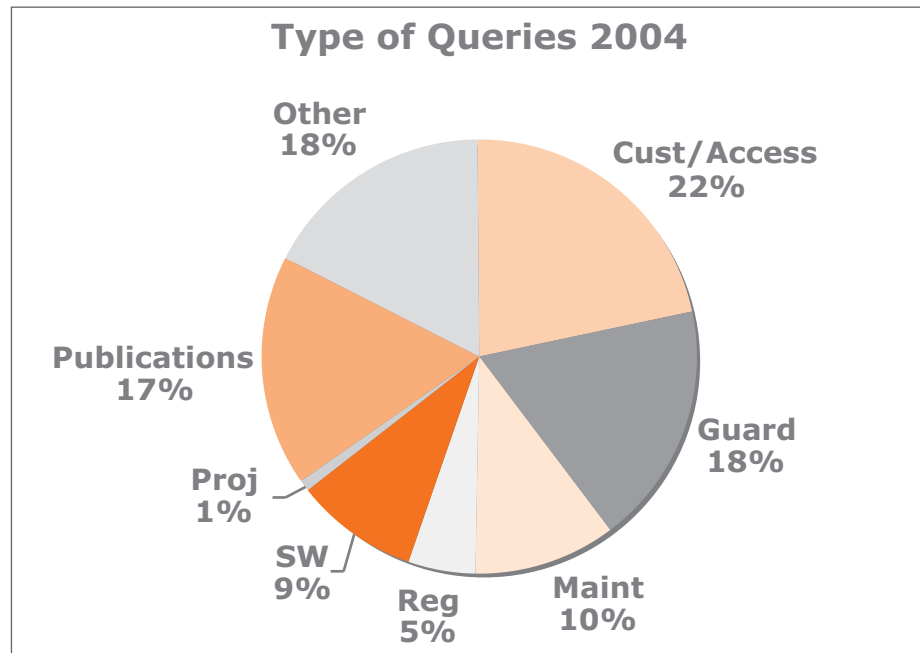


Chart 2 illustrates the nature of queries received. Legal queries in relation to Custody, Access, Guardianship and Maintenance make up the bulk of queries at 50%, followed by requests for Treoir publications at 17% and Social Welfare at 9%. The category 'other' which makes up 18% of queries includes adoption, parenting, establishing paternity, childcare options, mediation etc. The large number of legal queries mainly concern the rights of fathers. This illustrates the lack of information that is available on the rights of fathers among parents who are not married to each other be they co-habiting or not.

### **Outreach service**

Treoir provided over 30 outreach information workshops to groups of parents who are not married to each other, to groups working with the parents and to other interested parties. Over 500 people participated in the workshops which took place throughout the country from Donegal to Cork. The workshops provided information on legal issues e.g. custody, access, guardianship and on social welfare entitlements and parenting issues.

### **New Publications 2004/05**

- ▶ *"Being there for them"* - a booklet for grandparents of children whose parents are not married to each other
- ▶ *Information for Young Parents in Education* - a web-based information resource on supports for young parents continuing in education. This will be available in print early in 2005.
- ▶ A web-based database of 'useful contacts' which includes lone parent and young parent groups nationally.
- ▶ Legal information for migrant parents on access, guardianship, custody and birth registration of children. The information is available in 6 languages – Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Romanian and Russian. This is a web-based resource only.

### **On-going publications**

- ▶ *Information Pack for Parents who are not married to each other* (new edition)
- ▶ Six information *Bulletins* were issued during 2004 (February, April, June, August, October and December of 2004).
- ▶ 12 *Information Leaflets* on various topics which are constantly updated.





## Submissions

### *Department of Social and Family Affairs*

- ▶ Pre-budget submission – the usual call was made to introduce measures to alleviate poverty and poverty traps for parents who are not married to each other.
- ▶ Strengthening Families – among the recommendations were that Article 41 of the Constitution be amended to include recognition of diversity of family forms, the individualisation of social welfare payments, cohabiting parents be treated for income tax and social welfare purposes in the same way as married parents.
- ▶ Extending the Widowed Parent Grant to cohabiting bereaved parents

### *The Law Reform Commission on the Rights and Duties of Cohabitees.*

Treoir welcomed the proposal of the Commission to introduce a presumptive scheme which would impose certain legal rights and duties on cohabitees who live together in a marriage-like relationship for a certain period. However Treoir believes that in addition to the presumptive scheme there should also be a registration scheme. Recommendations were also made on property rights, maintenance, social welfare, pensions, taxation etc.

### *Submission to the Registrar General re the Civil Registration Bill 2003*

There is no Central Register for Joint Guardianship Agreements. Treoir believes that an opportunity has been missed in that the Act does not allow for the setting up of a system of registering such Agreements. Treoir also raised concerns about the two tiered system of birth registration which is developing - parents who are not married to each other attend the Registrar's office while married parents can register in hospital. Registrars are now being placed in the main maternity hospitals and all parents, married and unmarried, will be able to register in hospital.

### *Submission to the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution*

The following recommendations were made

- ▶ The enumeration of children's rights within the Irish Constitution
- ▶ The protection of family life in all of its forms based on Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights
- ▶ That parental rights, if enumerated in the Irish Constitution, apply equally to all parents and be subject to the principle that children's rights are paramount
- ▶ The retention of Article 41.2 in a revised form to recognise the contribution of either partner within the home.

## *Networking and inter-agency work*

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Treoir believes in working co-operatively with other organisations to promote our objectives. In addition to the networking which takes place with our Member Agencies, Treoir also has an involvement in

- ▶ The Adoption Board
- ▶ The Crisis Pregnancy Agency
- ▶ The Children's Rights Alliance
- ▶ The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
- ▶ The Equality Coalition
- ▶ The Family Diversity Initiative
- ▶ The Teen Parent Support Programme
- ▶ The "User Group" of the Courts Service.

## National Resource Centre for those Working with Young Parents

The Centre was formed in 2003 in order to provide support to those working with young parents in health, education, social and youth services. The Centre also aims to promote and disseminate models of good practice in working with young parents.

The Centre provides a support service to those working with young parents, and alongside the stellar work of the National Information Centre for parents who are not married to each other, also provides frontline information to young parents themselves. Queries in 2004 centred around funding for childcare and education, statistics and evaluation tools and support in setting up a young parent group or project.

The Newsletter for workers with young parents goes out four times a year and many contributors added to the breadth and substance of issues covered in the area of young parents. The Newsletter highlights and reviews research projects and readers are kept up to date with statistics in relation to births under 20 and social policy issues such as education and social welfare.

During 2004, with funding from the Crisis Pregnancy Agency, we published a booklet on supports for young parents in education as a web-based document *Information for Young Parents in Education*. This booklet contains information on general financial supports for young parents at secondary and third level as well as information on childcare and accommodation options. While intended to be a practical resource to young parents and those working with them, the booklet highlights the paucity of supports available and the difficulty in accessing these disparate supports. It will be available in printed format during 2005.

Part of the Centre's policy work for 2004 and moving forward into 2005 is to lobby along with other interested parties for the introduction of a payment for young parents wishing to return to education. The Centre included this and other recommendations relating to young parents in a pre-budget submission to the Department of Social and Family Affairs and ensured an emphasis on young parents in submissions to the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution and the response to the Law Reform Commission's Consultation Paper on Cohabitees.

The Resource Pack for Workers with Young Parents has had an excellent response from workers who are using it. It has been updated and expanded to include information on other areas such as mediation and shared parenting.

The Directory of Local Services which was developed by Dave Ellis for the project has now been incorporated into the Useful Services Database which is now available on the Treoir website. Programmes and initiatives for young parents are also available on the database.

We look forward to keeping the issues and priorities of young parents on the agenda and together with the Teen Parent Support Programme working on policy issues for young parents.



## National Co-ordinator of the Teen Parent Support Programme

The Teen Parents Support Programme was established by the Department of Health and Children. The Programme was a recognition of the vulnerability of families headed by teen parents and in particular the perceived increase in the rate of social admissions to hospital of children of teen parents. The Programme aims to provide a range of additional support services for teen parents during pregnancy and until their child/ren reach 2 years of age. All teen parents, both fathers and mothers, up to and including 19 years of age are eligible to participate in the Programme. To date 1,125 teen parents have been referred to the Programme.

The TPSP was presented as one of the four examples of good practice in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003 – 2005.

The programme was initially available in Galway, Limerick and West Dublin. During 2004 two new projects were established in Louth and North Dublin. Funding has been approved for two further projects in 2005. A national co-ordinator was appointed in 2004 and at the request of the Department of Health and Children and the Health Service Executive is housed in Treoir and funded by The Crisis Pregnancy Agency

*The main tasks of the co-ordinator are to:*

- ▶ Collate information gathered within local projects and produce regular reports on the progress of the Programme
- ▶ Work with the Advisory Committee and others in addressing policy lessons and issues emerging in relation to teen parents
- ▶ Assist in the identification of new sites for the development of new projects according to agreed criteria
- ▶ Draw up guidelines for best practice in relation to the Programme
- ▶ Assist in the development and implementation of national guidelines for evaluation and monitoring of activities
- ▶ Undertake a promotional role in relation to the Teen Parents Support Programme.

*Work undertaken to date includes:*

- ▶ Supporting the existing projects
- ▶ Strengthening Teenage Families – submission to the Department of Social and Family Affairs
- ▶ Contributing to the 3rd Consultative Forum on the National Review of Family Support Services
- ▶ Initiating a system for data collection.
- ▶ Developing a national identity for the Programme.

We look forward to working not only with all the projects, the National Advisory Committee and the National Steering Committee but also with the National Resource Centre for those Working with Young Parents to promote the rights and well-being of young parents.



## *Treoir* has many Publications available

**Being there for them** – booklet for grandparents of children whose parents are not married to each other

**Bulletin** – regular information for parents who are not married to each other and those involved with them - send us your name and address

**Family Links: steps and stages** – shared parenting and step-families

**Information for young parents in education**

**Information Pack for parents who are not married to each other**

**Newsletter** – for workers with young parents – send us your name and address

**Resource Pack for workers with young parents**

**Taking the Stand** – a guide for unmarried parents resolving disputes regarding care of their children

**Work it Out!** – a guide for parents on One-Parent Family Payment (re)entering the workforce or education

### *Leaflets*

1. The Children Act 1997 (guardianship by agreement)
2. The Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act 1997 (harassment)
3. Guardianship, Access, Custody
4. Shared parenting for parents who are not married to each other
5. Unmarried fathers - rights and responsibilities in respect of their children
6. Maintenance of children whose parents are not married to each other
7. Family adoption (mothers and husbands)
8. Passport applications for children whose parents are not married to each other
9. Ante/post natal accommodation
10. Birth registration for children whose parents are not married to each other
11. Cohabitation
12. Unmarried parents and equality legislation
13. Births outside marriage 1990 - 2003 statistics
14. Birth statistics: women under 20

### *Web based only publications*

**Pregnant and thinking about adoption**

**Useful Services Database**

**Legal information for unmarried migrant parents** – available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Romanian and Russian

All publications can  
be downloaded  
from our website  
[www.treoir.ie/  
publications](http://www.treoir.ie/publications)