



Annual Report 2006

14 Gandon House
Custom House Square
IFSC, Dublin 1.
LoCall: 1890 252 084
01 6700 120
www.treoir.ie
info@treoir.ie

Treoir is the national federation of services working with unmarried parents and their children.

Established in 1976, Treoir's main aim is to promote the rights and welfare of parents who are not married to each other and the rights and welfare of their children.

Treoir is a non-governmental organisation financially supported by Government, Health Service Executive, Crisis Pregnancy Agency, Citizens Information Board and other grants.

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 for those involved with them.

Treoir publishes many publications which are relevant to unmarried parents and those involved with them.

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.

Quotes used throughout this Annual Report are from users of Treoir services.



National information centre for parents who are not married to each other
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01-6700 120 info@treoir.ie www.treoir.ie

From the Chairwoman

2006 was a very significant year for Treoir. As well as celebrating 30 years as an organisation by having an anniversary conference, the Strategic Plan for 2007 – 2010 was developed. Treoir's first ever awareness raising campaign was undertaken (funded by the Family Support Agency), and Treoir's first multi-lingual publication was launched (funded by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency).

Opening the conference on 10th October was especially memorable for me personally, as I was involved 30 years ago in establishing Treoir as the coming together of all the agencies then working with unmarried parents in Ireland – the Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children. The number and type of services have significantly developed over the years in response to the increase in the number of unmarried families and their acceptance in society. However, unmarried families are still particularly vulnerable to poverty and the absence of fathers in the lives of their children is a concern. Hence the title of the conference – Co-parenting - the new challenge.

The development of Treoir's second Strategic Plan was completed with the support of the Comhairle mentoring scheme. We are deeply grateful to Ian Hood, Cora Pollard, Liam O'Sullivan and all those who assisted us in the preparation of the Plan. It was very satisfying to hear from others just how well-respected and appreciated the National Information Centre is right across the country. Staff were referred to as The Queens of information! We look forward to building on this significant strength and also to the further development of Treoir as outlined in the Plan. A summary is presented on pages 19 and 20.

As with any federation, the members of Treoir are highly valued. The constant feedback from members on current and developing issues (and indeed some old chestnuts), combined with queries from clients, ensures that Treoir is aware of issues as soon as they arise. The opinions of members are constantly sought in order to hone the submissions of Treoir concerning combating the social exclusion and inequity between different family types.

In 2006 I was supported by a very informed, energetic and involved Council and particularly its Executive. They have continued to support me, to challenge old ideas and contribute to lively debates at Council.

I was particularly sad to accept the resignations of Margaret Acton (Barnardos TPSP) and Cathy Fox (Pregnancy Counselling Service in Ballinasloe) both of whom were very committed to and passionate about unmarried families. I welcome Deborah Sutcliffe on to Council. Deborah is replacing Ruth Prendergast who has taken time out from Ecclesville.

As always, Treoir would not be the vibrant, visionary organisation it is today without the immense skills and talents of all the staff under the leadership of the CEO, Margaret Dromey. Her drive, energy and commitment not only to the work of Treoir, but also to the staff, is the foundation on which Treoir continues to thrive.

Without funding Treoir would not be in a position to provide the excellent services to unmarried families and those involved with them. We look forward to continuing the partnership with our funding agencies in supporting unmarried families over the coming years.

Eilís Walsh

Chairwoman



A note from the CEO

Staff at the National Information Centre dealt with in excess of six thousand information queries, undertook thirty outreach information sessions and continued to disseminate relevant information materials to parents and professionals.

A major Awareness Raising Campaign was launched on the needs of children in relation to both parents, thanks to the financial support of the Family Support Agency. Since its inception Treoir has focused on both parents in the unmarried family and in 2006, the campaign message was ***“it is good for children to know who their parents are and if possible to have a relationship with both parents”***. Many found the message challenging and it led to a significant number of calls to the National Information Centre from parents who wished to discuss issues around co-parenting. One outcome we had not anticipated was the number of adults contacting the Centre who had been raised apart from a parent and were seeking assistance to locate that parent.

As a follow up to the Awareness Raising Campaign Treoir hosted a conference on the theme of “Co-Parenting the new challenge” to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the organisation. It afforded the opportunity of reflecting on the very different attitudes to unmarried parents in the past, the social changes which have taken place over the thirty years and addressed some of the challenges to be faced going forward.

We met various Ministers and public servants and made a number of submissions in an effort to influence policy to improve the legal and social position of unmarried families.

The volume and quality of the work undertaken during the year is testament to the commitment, dedication and excellence of our very small team in Treoir. Thanks to Margot Doherty, Brenda Forde, Veronica Black, Bella Maher and Margaret Morris. We are guided and supported by an excellent Chairwoman and Council. I extend to them our sincere thanks.

Margaret Dromey

Council Members of Treoir 2005/6

Executive

Chairwoman	Eilís Walsh, National Social Work Qualifications Board
Vice Chairwoman	Dearbhla Ni Riordáin, Cork University Maternity Hospital
Secretary	Berit Andersen, PACT
Treasurer	Eilish Craig, HSE North Eastern Area (Adoption Service)

Ordinary Council Members

*Margaret Acton	Barnardos, Teen Parent Support Project
*Cathy Fox	Ballinasloe Crisis Pregnancy Counselling & Support Service
Louise Graham	Cura
Anne Kennedy	Life Group
Mary McGovern	Section 20 Office, HSE South Western Area
Niamh McHale	Cúnamh
Loretto Reilly	National Maternity Hospital
Deborah Sutcliffe	Miss Carr's Home Housing Association

*Resigned during the year

Honorary President

Dr. Dermot Walsh

Honorary Life Member

Gemma Rowley

Staff of Treoir

Margaret Dromey	Chief Executive
Margot Doherty	Assistant Chief Executive
Brenda Forde	Senior Information Officer
Veronica Black	Information Officer
Bella Maher	Office Manager
Margaret Morris	Teen Parents Support Programme National Co-ordinator



Member Agencies

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)	Clare
Coombe Women's Hospital (Maternity services and social work)	Dublin
Cúnamh (Adoption, tracing, counselling and general support)	Dublin
CURA National Office	National
Doras Bui (A parents alone resource centre)	Dublin
HSE Northern Area (HSE services)	Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow
Eglinton House (Accommodation)	Dublin
Life (Pregnancy counselling service)	National
Limerick Social Service Centre (Social services)	Limerick
HSE Mid Western Area (HSE services)	Limerick, Tipperary North, Clare
HSE Midland Area (HSE services)	Longford, Westmeath
Miss Carr's Home Housing Association (Accommodation)	Dublin
National Maternity Hospital Holles Street (Maternity services and social work)	Dublin
HSE North Eastern Area (HSE services)	Meath, Louth, Cavan, Monaghan
HSE North Western Area (HSE services)	Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal
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
Bessborough Centre (Accommodation and support services)	Cork
Sligo Social Services Council (Social services)	Sligo
St. Catherine's Community Services Centre	Carlow
HSE South Eastern Area (HSE services)	Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary South, Waterford, Wexford
HSE Southern Area (HSE services)	Cork, Kerry
St Patrick's Guild (Adoption, tracing)	Dublin
HSE Western Area (HSE services)	Galway, Mayo, Roscommon



Information Service

National Information Centre for parents who are not married to each other

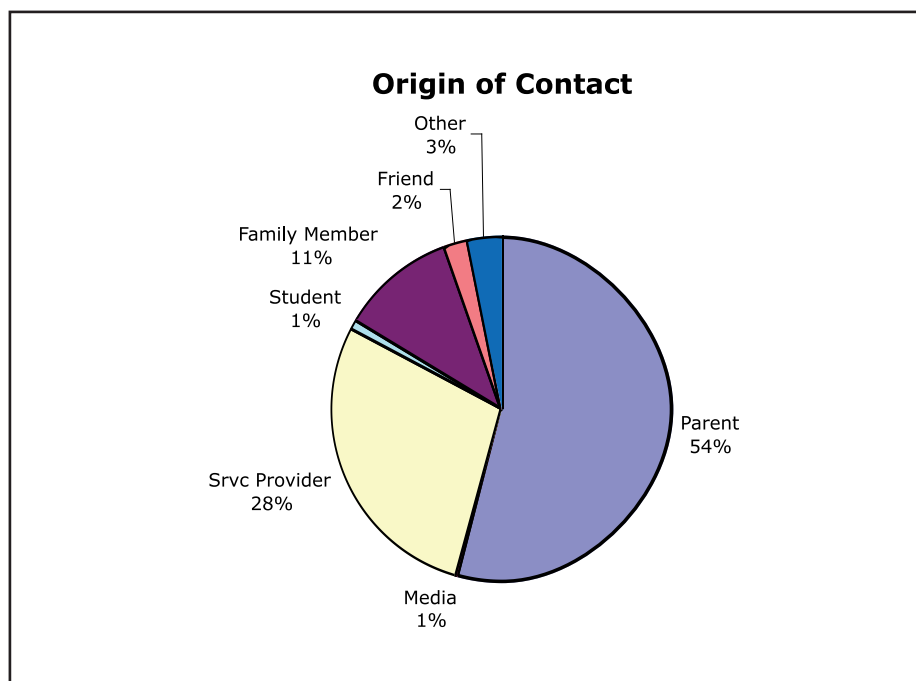
Information is power. In order to make informed decisions on matters of relevance to them and their children, unmarried parents and those working with them need accurate and up to date information on both legal rights and responsibilities of parents who are not married to each other and information on Social Welfare entitlements.

We are constantly concerned by the misinformation and myths which abound in relation to the legal position of unmarried parents and their children. The purpose of the National Information Centre is to address this information deficit.

There were 6,242 recorded queries to the Treoir Information Centre in 2006, an increase of approx 1,000 on 2005.

Chart 1 shows the breakdown of the categories of callers to our centre. 54% of the calls originated from parents, 28% from professionals and those providing services to unmarried parents and 11% of queries were from other family members.

Chart 1



“If Treoir doesn’t have the answer to your query there probably is no answer”

Senior Community Development Worker, HSE

Charts 2, 3 and 4 provide a more detailed breakdown of callers to the Treoir National Information Centre.

Chart 2 The highest percentage of calls to the Treoir Information Centre were from mothers at 36% followed by fathers at 27%. This shows quite a sharp increase in the numbers of fathers contacting our Information Centre, no doubt arising from the Raising Awareness Campaign held during the year. In 2005, 18% of calls were from fathers. Grandparents formed the largest group of family members, followed by new partners of the unmarried parent.

Chart 2

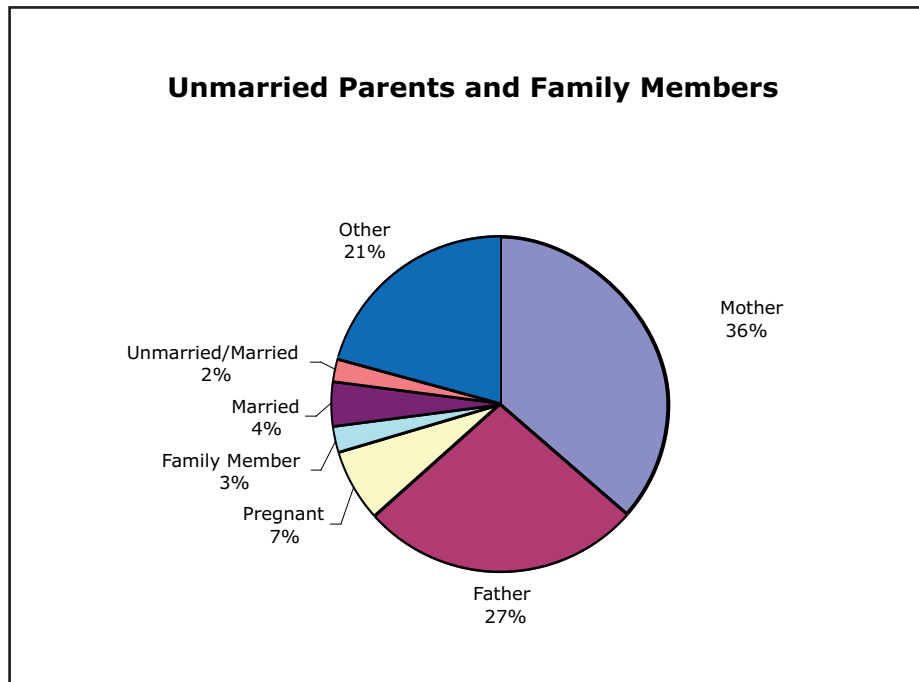


Chart 3 shows a breakdown of the age of parents, where this information was available.

Chart 3

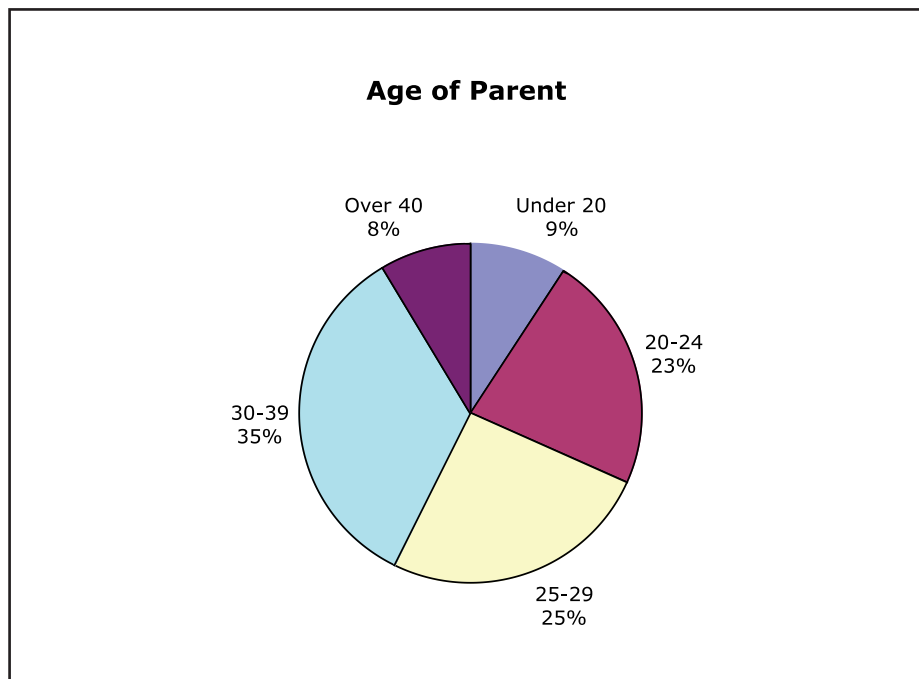
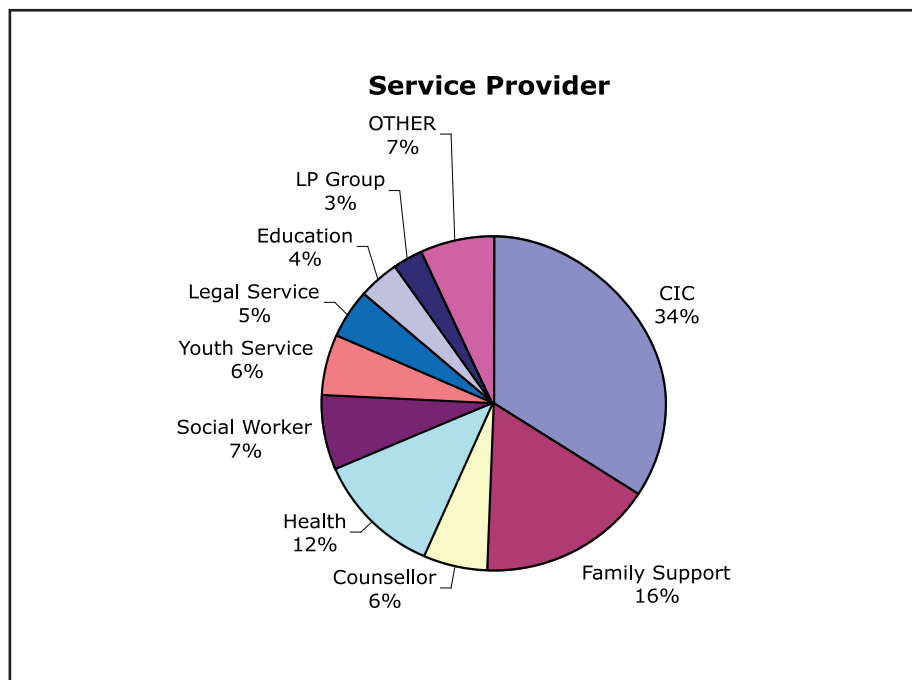




Chart 4 gives a breakdown of the service providers who contacted Treoir during 2006. As can be seen a very high percentage of queries were from the Citizens Information Centres at 34%. CIC's have become very significant information providers to the public and Treoir endeavours to support the Centres in the provision of accurate and accessible information to parents who are not married to each other. Treoir also provides a service to the Citizens Information Board (formerly Comhairle) ensuring that their website information on unmarried parents is both accurate and up to date.

Social Workers/Health Professionals accounted for 19% of enquiries received.

Chart 4



"If no one else will give you an answer – go to Treoir"

Brian Lenihan T.D., Minister for Children

Charts 5 and 6 provide a breakdown of the types of information provided.

Chart 5 illustrates the type of queries received. The majority of queries continue to be legal in nature with custody, access and guardianship calls accounting for the greatest percentage. There was a substantial increase in the amount of parenting (including co-parenting) queries received at the centre, most likely due to the Raising Awareness Campaign run in May 2006. The 'Other' queries in the main concerned Mediation, Housing, Adoption, Tax, Crisis Pregnancy, Childcare, Right to Travel, Changing a Child's Surname and Abduction.

Chart 5

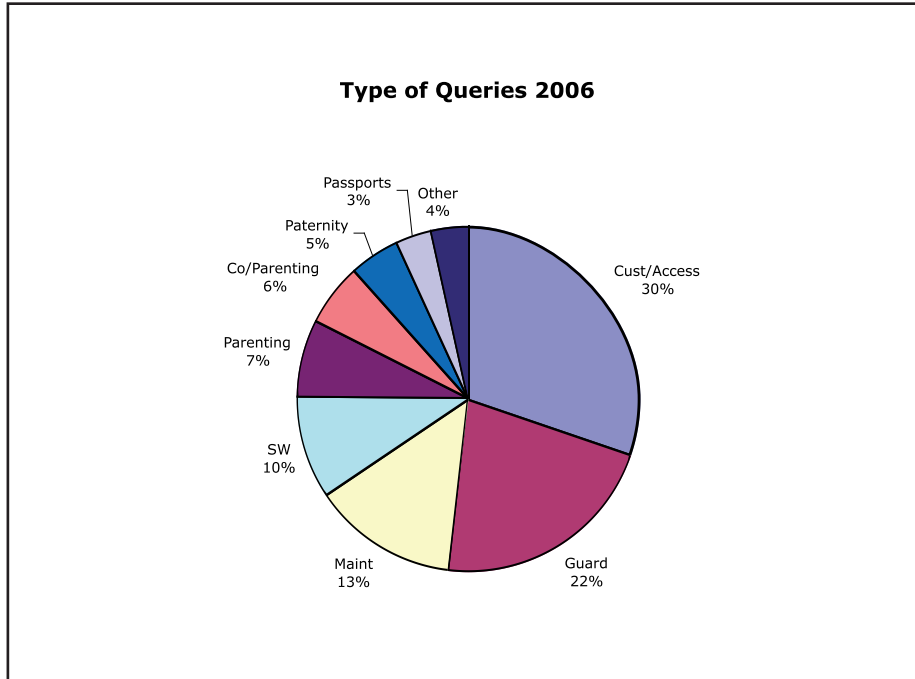
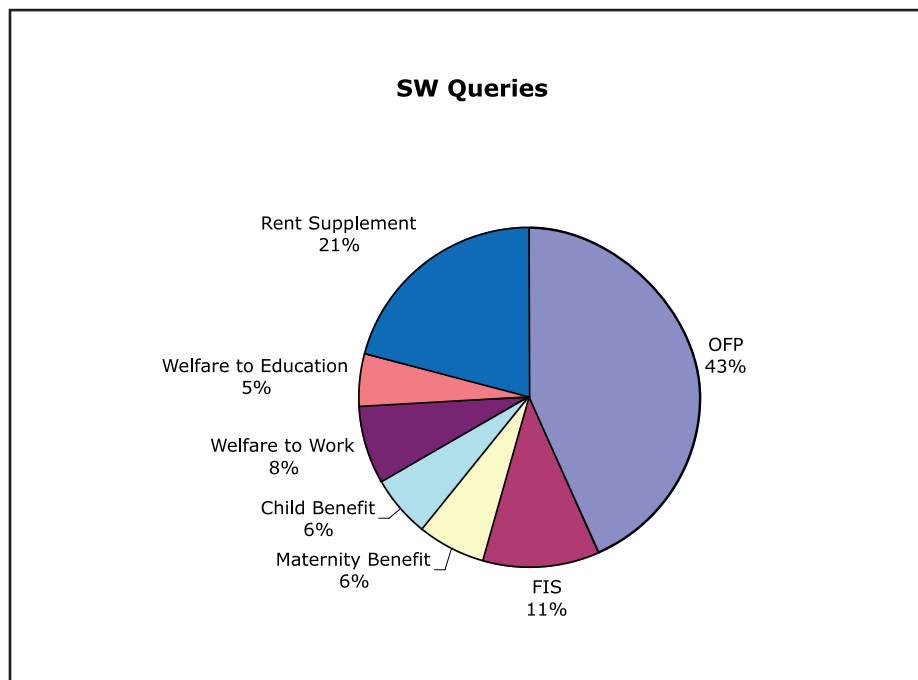


Chart 6 shows a breakdown of the Social Welfare queries received. The majority of social welfare queries received in the Centre concerned One-Parent Family Payment at 43% followed by Rent Supplement at 21%. Welfare to education/work accounted for 13%.

Chart 6



Website

Treoir's new website has proved enormously successful and there were 120,072 hits on the site from Ireland and Europe alone in 2006.

"We use the Treoir website all the time - that's where I get all my information about entitlements for the young people"

Project worker, TPSP

Media

Staff of the Information Centre participated in many radio interviews during the year and contributed to many newspaper articles.

Outreach Services

Treoir provides outreach information workshops to groups of unmarried parents and those working with them.

The aim of the workshops is to provide accurate and up to date information on matters of relevance to parents and their children, including information on the legal rights and responsibilities of parents who are not married to each other and information on employment and training/education opportunities which are available to parents.

The workshops cover the following topics:

- Establishing paternity / paternity testing
- Access, custody and guardianship of children
- Birth registration of children whose parents are not married to each other
- Passport applications for children
- Family adoption (mothers and husbands)
- Cohabitation
- Legal rights of grandparents
- Shared parenting
- Talking to child about an absent parent
- One-Parent Family Payment
- Employment Schemes, Back to Work Programme, C.E. Schemes
- Back to Education Programme
- Rent Supplement
- Maintenance Payments

In 2006 Treoir provided 30 workshops throughout the country mainly in Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick, Louth, Wicklow. The workshops were attended by a wide spectrum of lone parents such as members of lone parent support groups, parents participating in rehabilitation programmes for drug users, fathers in prison, young mothers on FAS Community Training Workshops and mothers in supported accommodation units for single parents.

Staff from Citizen Information Centres, MABS, Family Resource Centres, Teen Parents Support Programmes, Probation and Welfare Services, Family Support Programmes, Community and Youth Work Services and Social Work Services also availed of the outreach information workshops.

The workshops provided an opportunity to address misinformation regarding the legal situation of parents who are not married to each other. For example it was widely believed that where parents are cohabiting the father is automatically a guardian of his child/children. Participants also presumed that cohabiting parents have the same property rights as married parents.

A number of parents attending the workshops assumed that family law matters such as maintenance, access, custody and guardianship of children are held in courts which are open to the general public. They were not aware of the in camera rule governing family law proceedings which protects the privacy of the families involved in court proceedings.

All Treoir publications are made available at the workshops.

“Thank you very much for your training session – all participants expressed deep satisfaction with what they learned and the clarification of issues surrounding lone parents...we extend our thanks to you and Treoir for the time and effort involved”

National NGO

Networking

During 2006 Treoir worked jointly with many agencies to further its objectives. Staff of Treoir worked with various committees and boards including the Children’s Rights Alliance, Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, Integrating Ireland, Family Law Users Group, Teen Parents Support Programme, The Adoption Board, The Crisis Pregnancy Agency, The Wheel and Dublin City Council Childcare Advisory Group.



Publications

Treoir's **Information Pack for parents who are not married** to each other was updated in January 2006. Our aim is to ensure that the Pack is updated each January to reflect the changes in the Annual Budget and we are very grateful to the Crisis Pregnancy Agency for its on-going funding. The Information Pack continues to be Treoir's main publication with 20,000 copies distributed annually.

“One of the best informative booklets I've seen in a while”

Youth Worker

All the Treoir **Information Leaflets** are continually updated and the demand for them is ever increasing. In excess of 40,000 were disseminated during the year – a significant number through the Citizens Information Centres. A new campaign leaflet was also produced as part of the Awareness Raising Project on co-parenting.

“I have read and printed off your various information leaflets about my rights and my son's father's rights in Ireland and they are of great help....your website has been a great help already”

Parent

Treoir, in partnership with the Crisis Pregnancy Agency, launched **Reproductive Health Information for Migrant Women** in the Chester Beatty Library in March 2006, on the eve of International Womens Day. It is part of the Key Contact series of the Crisis Pregnancy Agency. The manual is aimed at those working with migrant women and contains information on

- pregnancy prevention
- crisis pregnancy options
- other related health matters such as domestic violence, female genital mutilation, STIs, HIV, male circumcision, miscarriage, stillbirth, sudden infant death and rape.

It is available in six languages: Arabic, Chinese, French, English, Romanian and Russian both as a manual and a CD. It was extremely well received. The initial print run of 300 ran out very quickly and in the Autumn of 2006 a further print run was ordered and Polish was included in the new edition.

A revised edition of **Taking the Stand – a guide for parents in dispute regarding the care of their children** was produced during 2006 as it went out of print.

Six Treoir Information **Bulletins** were produced during the year and disseminated to our mailing list of in excess of 3,500 readers.

“I've just finished my regular read of your latest newsletter and bulletin and wanted to register my appreciation. I always find a few minutes to read the newsletter and find it a very useful, concise overview, of a range of important issues. Invariably something new is brought to my awareness.”

Principal Social Worker, HSE

Three **Newsletters** for workers with young parents were also disseminated during the year.

Treoir worked with the Crisis Pregnancy Agency on a number of publications including the *Key Contacts – responding to crisis pregnancy*. This is an information and service directory for community and health professionals at regional level.

The first report of the **Teen Parents Support Programme** (2000-2005) was published in May.

Funding was received from the Department of Social and Family Affairs to produce a new edition of **Work it Out**. This publication is a guide for parents on One-Parent Family Payment re/entering the workforce or education. It will be published on finalisation of the social welfare changes in the Budget

Anniversary Conference

To celebrate 30 years since its foundation Treoir hosted a conference in October on **Co-Parenting – the new challenge** in Croke Park. Over 100 people attended the conference. To complement the conference staff in Treoir prepared a series of newspaper clippings from the previous three decades as a storyboard for the occasion. It made for most interesting reading.

The Conference was launched by Seamus Brennan T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs. Treoir's Honorary President Dr. Dermot Walsh gave an opening address on the development of Treoir over the years. Dr. Tony Fahey of the ESRI gave a most interesting paper on 'Glimpses of the Past' outlining changes in thinking (about marriage, the family and sex before marriage) and changes in behaviour (family formation), and concluded that the cultural context for Treoir's work is less fraught now than in 1976 but there are new issues facing Treoir, and indeed Irish society, for instance in the area of co-parenting.

Norah Gibbons, Director of Advocay, Barnardos, opened her talk with the quote *“An ongoing meaningful relationship with each parent is in the child's best interest”*. Norah also outlined a child's needs including security, and a sense of belonging and went on to illustrate what helps children cope where parents are living apart. Exclusive, shared and co-operative parenting were discussed with Norah outlining what helps to make co-parenting work. Norah presented a series of principles for co-parenting.

Other excellent papers were presented by Polly Phillimore of the Family Mediation Service, John McDaid of the Legal Aid Board and Louise Crowley a Lecturer in Law, UCC, and are available to download at treoir.ie

Policy Development/Submissions/Campaigns

In keeping with its objective of promoting policy change Treoir made a number of submissions to relevant government departments and others on issues affecting unmarried parents and their children. Following are brief summaries of some of these submissions. Copies of the full submissions are available at treoir.ie

Department of Health and Children

During 2006 Treoir made representations to Mr. Brian Lenihan T.D. Minister for Children, concerning the initiation of a Central Register for Guardianship Agreements. Treoir had already made representations to the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform for the initiation of such a Central Register, to no avail. Indeed the Department of Justice stated that “the Minister has no proposals to provide for the establishment of a Central Register for joint guardianship agreements in legislation sponsored by his Department. While he is not convinced of the need for the establishment of such a Register he is of the view that any such Register would more appropriately be dealt with in the context of the Civil Registration legislation which is primarily a matter for the Department of Health and Children”.

Treoir expressed its concern that responsibility for a Central Register was being passed from one government department to another and will continue to seek the establishment of such a Register.

Registrar of Births Marriages and Deaths

During the year a difficulty came to light in relation to re-registering births. The difficulty arose where a parent wished to use a court order to add a father’s details to their child’s birth certificate where these details has not already been registered. As a result of a new interpretation of the Civil Registration Act 2004, the General Register Office is not processing these re-registrations. Treoir has attempted to resolve this issue through regular communication with the Registrar General during 2006 and will continue to lobby until this situation has been resolved. In the interest of children it is important that every effort is made to encourage and support the entry of both parents names on their child’s birth certificate.

Department of Social and Family Affairs

Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents The Department of Social and Family Affairs launched comprehensive and dramatic proposals for supporting lone parents in this discussion paper. The proposals, if implemented, would have very far-reaching implications for marital and cohabiting families as well as lone parent families. Treoir was invited to participate in discussions on the proposals with the Minister and his staff at Farmleigh House in April of 2006. Treoir welcomed the broad thrust of the proposals contained in the Report, particularly the underlying principle of treating all families equally, and the removal of the disincentive to forming two parent families. Treoir also welcomed the proposals in relation to education, training and childcare supports in this report. However, Treoir argued, there are serious issues that would have to be addressed if the proposals are to be a success, for example the level at which the proposed Parental Allowance is set, sufficient affordable and flexible childcare, choice rather than compulsion in encouraging lone parents to return to work, simplicity within the system.

Treoir congratulated Minister Brennan on taking the lead in proposing radical changes in the Social Welfare system but similar commitment is required from other government departments such as the Departments of Education and Science and Enterprise Trade and Employment, and the Office of the Minister for Children if these proposals are to succeed.

Budget 2006: Summary of Recommendations to the Department of Social and Family Affairs

Treoir re-iterated the contents of its response to the Discussion paper on lone parents in its Pre-Budget Submission (see above) to the Minister.

In addition, in recognition of the fact that employment is one of the main routes out of poverty Treoir argued that there should be no disincentives in the welfare system to taking up employment. The particular difficulties experienced in relation to loss of the secondary benefits such as rent supplement, medical card etc. must be addressed.

Treoir recommended continuing the policy of increasing Child Benefit to adequately reflect the actual cost of rearing a child in Ireland.

Currently there is no benefit to the family if the maintenance is paid directly to the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Treoir recommended that it should be possible for an unmarried parent in receipt of maintenance payments for their child to benefit from the maintenance irrespective of whether it is paid to the mother or directly to the Department.

Law Reform Commission

In response to a call for submissions on “restatement of legislation’ Treoir drew attention to the fact that there is a great deal of misinformation concerning the legal position of unmarried parents. Misinformation and myth exist among professionals, parents, and the public generally regarding custody, access, guardianship, maintenance and adoption.

Legislation on family law is spread across a series of Acts, each amending its predecessor. Searching through these is challenging and time consuming and is not helped by the fact that there are no up to date indices to the legislation and there is no means of knowing if a particular piece of legislation has been amended.

Treoir put forward recommendations for restatement of legislation in Guardianship (including access, custody, maintenance and abduction). Treoir recommended that as well as restatement of the legislation consideration should also be given to including references to the relevant Conventions which have been ratified by Ireland. While we are aware that some Conventions are not enshrined in Irish Law, the principles of the Conventions need to be promoted and widely understood so they may help in interpreting legislation.

Joint Committee on Child Protection

Treoir outlined its concerns regarding the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006 in its submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Child Protection.

While recognising that legislating for sexual activity among young people is complex and fraught with difficulties, nevertheless Treoir questions the necessity of categorising consensual activity among young people as a criminal offence, particularly where the sexual activity is in the context of a relationship of equals in terms of age and maturity and where there is clearly no abuse. The current legislation does not distinguish between abusive and consensual sexual activity. Treoir believes strongly that this is a flaw in the current legislation.

While the gender neutral purpose of the Act is welcome, Section 5 provides that a girl under 17 cannot be guilty of an offence by reason only of engaging in an act of sexual intercourse, thus introducing a new gender divide in the area of underage sexual activity. While understanding the reasons for not criminalising young mothers, we question the validity of not applying the same treatment to young fathers. We believe that this new Act will further compound the exclusion of fathers, particularly young fathers, in the lives of their children.

In addition, the 2006 Act could deter young fathers from entering their names in the Register of Births, a vital piece of information for children in terms of identity and the presumption of paternity.

In keeping with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is vital that the views of young people be sought with regard to this legislation. Indeed Treoir strongly favours the introduction of express rights for children in the Irish Constitution and stated this in our submission to the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution in January 2005.

Awareness Raising Campaign

The needs of children in relation to both parents

Treoir hosted an Awareness Raising Campaign in May 2006 on ***“It is good for children to know who their parents are and if possible to have contact with both parents”***. It involved a radio advertisement, Dart and bus advertising, an updated website and a leaflet. The Campaign was funded by the Family Support Agency and was launched in May by Pat Bennett, Chief Executive Officer of the Family Support Agency.

The campaign was challenging and generated much discussion and controversy. It can be difficult to balance the needs of the child and the needs of the parents when parents are not living together and especially where the relationship between the parents has broken down. Parents may not wish to be involved with each other and in these situations enabling the child to have a relationship with both parents can be enormously difficult.

Analysis of Calls

900 calls were received in the National Information Centre in response to the campaign. 58% of calls were from parents, almost evenly divided between mothers and fathers, 9% were from family members. 24% of calls were from professionals on behalf of parents or family members. Surprisingly a small but significant percentage of calls were from adults who had been raised separately from their fathers.

A flavour of the calls

The vast majority of people who contacted Treoir were genuinely moved by the campaign. Callers were very anxious to talk about their situation and felt that they did not know where to go for information until they heard the radio ad.

Many mothers had made heroic efforts to involve fathers who just opted out of the lives of their children. It was very hurtful to these mothers that their children were being rejected. ***“I did everything to get him to take an interest in her but he is too interested in going out with his mates. At least her grandparents are good to her”***.

A large number of mothers believed that children should have the right to be in contact with their fathers despite the difficulties in managing this contact. ***“I hate having to deal with his dad and I would love never to see him again but he has a right to see his dad”***.

On the other hand, fathers who were alienated from their children were genuinely unaware of the remedies open to them. ***“I knew it was unfair but I did not know what to do”***.

“I thought my name being on the birth certificate gave me rights – it was only when we separated and she said I couldn’t see him that I found out that I had no rights”.

Some, particularly adults who had been raised separately from a parent, wished to know how to go about searching for a parent, usually the father. While being very complimentary about the wonderful job the mother and extended family had done, they nevertheless felt the loss:

“I am 27 years of age and I think of my father every day. How can I make contact? I could not talk about it to my mother as it was too painful for her”.

Complaints

Running a campaign can be provocative and it is difficult to avoid giving offence. A very small number of parents were critical of the advertisement and said it had caused upset – ***“he now asks where his father is”***. Complaints referred to the Broadcasting Commission were not upheld.

Activities of the National Resource Centre for those Working with Young Parents (NRCWYP)

Children First Guidelines

A survey was undertaken among members and others involved in the provision of services to children on the Children First Guidelines. Twenty two agencies, voluntary and statutory, were consulted on their perspectives of the guidelines. The outcome of this research formed the basis of Treoir's submission to the Minister for Health and Children who is updating the Guidelines.

The main recommendations of the submission were:

- For the Guidelines to be effective, there needs to be clarity in relation to the age of consent especially for those working in voluntary organisations.
- Service providers from voluntary organisations recommended a national legal framework within the Guidelines that workers could use in assessing whether individual cases, particularly pregnancies in young women aged 15-17, constituted a child protection issue. With certain procedures in place, workers would feel more confident in assessing cases and would be able to justify their decisions effectively rather than simply through intuition, experience etc.
- Some service providers stated that the guidelines needed to be amended in order to facilitate culturally sensitive issues and to be more inclusive of more recent developments within child abuse e.g. trafficking, internet abuse and cyber bullying.
- Although not unanimous, some respondents believed that the guidelines are not effective because they are implemented on a voluntary basis and recommended that they be placed on a statutory footing thus removing any ambiguity around the reporting of child abuse. However, this could have negative implications for those involved with young parents, as it would, in effect, mean the implementation of mandatory reporting of all cases including consensual sexual intercourse under 17 years. In so doing it could deter pregnant teenagers from availing of services (e.g. antenatal) or could promote the concealment of pregnancies due to fear of involvement of social services and An Garda Síochána.

Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006

Much time was spent monitoring this emergency legislation which was rushed through the Dáil in the beginning of June 2006 and allowed for a defence of 'honest mistake' in cases of Sexual Offences.

A meeting for members was held on 14th September to provide information to member agencies on The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006. Paul Murray from the Criminal Law Division of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Liam Curran from the HSE Child Care Training Unit spoke about the legislation. It was a very useful and informative meeting for members.

Education meetings

One of the objectives of the NRCWYP is to bring workers together to share information and expertise. In keeping with this objective two meetings took place of those who provide training to young parents outside the statutory sector. Those participating gave a brief overview of their work and discussions took place on resources for personal development skills and on areas of common concern. These included: emotional bullying, Back To Education Initiative funding, childcare, third level education, dependency on staff, non-Irish nationals.

TPSP

Treoir's commitment to the Teen Parents Support Programme continues with Treoir housing its National Co-ordinator, Margaret Morris. Treoir, through the NRCWYP, is represented at every level on this very successful Programme:

- on the National Steering Group of the TPSP
- on the National Advisory Committee of the TPSP
- on the Education Sub-Group of the TPSP

These structures are in the process of change as in 2006 the TPSP has been mainstreamed into the HSE.

Newsletter

Three newsletters of the NRCWYP were produced and distributed to over 3,200 recipients in February, June, December .

Statistics on young parents in Ireland

The Statistics Leaflet on young parents was updated and is available to download from treoir.ie

Moving On Carlow

The NRCWYP was represented at the 10th anniversary graduation of the Moving On Programme in Carlow. Treoir was one of the original consortium which established this highly successful Programme in 1996.

Student

The NRCWYP hosted a masters student from TCD, Declan Flanagan, in 2006. Declan undertook a survey of Treoir Members and others in relation to the Children First Guidelines referred to earlier.



Teen Parents Support Programme

The Teen Parents Support Programme continues to support young parents under 20, their families and their children up to two years of age. The First Report (2000-2005) was launched by Brian Lenihan T.D. Minister for Children on May 22nd 2006

New Developments

Three new TPSPs were established in 2006. These cover Carlow/Kilkenny, Cork and parts of Donegal. This brings to 8 the number of TPSPs funded in 2006. Total funding for the TPSP in 2006 was approximately €1,094,000. A meeting took place in the Department of an Taoiseach between the National Co-ordinator of the TPSP and the Senior Officials Group charged with implementing the non-income aspects of the Discussion Paper on Lone Parents. The outcome of this meeting is that the TPSP has produced a Draft 5 Year Plan for the TPSP which is currently with the Department of Health and Children.

Budget 2007 allocated a further €1m to the TPSP and three further projects will be developed in 2007 as well as mainstreaming some existing programmes.

Support to local TPSPs

The National Co-ordinator continues to support the local TPSPs directing them to sources of information and support and exploring policy issues which the TPSPs identify in relation to teen parents. There were quarterly meetings of all TPSP staff.

Policy

The TPSP participated in a Forum in Farnleigh House where organisations representing lone parents were given an opportunity to respond to the **Government Discussion Paper: Supporting Lone Parents**.

Following consultation with TPSP Project Leaders, the National Co-ordinator made a submission to the Oireachtas All Party Working Group on Child Protection.

The TPSP Pre-Budget Submission made recommendations regarding childcare provision for parents in Second Level Education, a review of 'second chance' schemes and the Rent Supplement where they act as disincentive to returning to education and the need for supports for young parents in Third Level Education.

Teen Parents and Education

The National Co-ordinator continues to liaise with both the Social Inclusion Unit and staff of the School Completion Programme to ensure a continued 'joined up' approach between the TPSP and the Department of Education and Science. For the academic year 2006/7 the School Completion programme provided €236,700 to the TPSP which is used to support participants with education related expenses. This collaboration is vital in supporting young parents to remain in or return to education.

During 2006 the TPSP also met the Home Tuition Section of the Department, the Education Welfare Board and Education Welfare Officers. There was also contact with the Schools Inspectorate regarding the dissemination of the **Guidelines for Best Practice in Supporting Pregnant or Parenting Students** developed by the Limerick TPSP.

Other Activities

The National Co-ordinator represents the TPSP on the Steering Group of the NDP Gender Equality Unit's 'Initiative for Lone Parents' and has participated in a workshop jointly organised by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency and the HSE Population Health on Developing Quality Standards for Youth Sexual Health Services.

The National Co-ordinator acts as a source of information for agencies, other than the TPSP, who are involved with young parents. During 2006 telephone support and information was given to schools, public health nurses, maternity hospitals, youth groups, training centres as well as to teen parents themselves who live outside a TPSP catchment area.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2007 – 2010

This is a brief summary of Treoir's Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010 which has been developed in consultation with members and others associated with Treoir.

The main aim of Treoir is to promote the rights and welfare of parents who are not married to each other and the rights and welfare of their children. There has been a significant increase in the demand for Treoir services in recent years.

Even though attitudes today are more tolerant and open there are still many issues facing parents who are not married to each other.

The independent consultation process undertaken in preparation of this Strategic Plan informed us that the National Information Service, including the outreach and publications service, is highly valued and respected by parents and service providers and there was a strong demand to continue with these services.

The main issue that arose from the consultation concerned the need to make Treoir much more widely known and therefore making the information which Treoir provides more widely available to a much larger number of people.

A second area identified for development is the area of membership of Treoir. There have been many changes in the provision of services to parents generally and this includes unmarried parents. New specific services for unmarried and lone parents have also been developed. In order to become more representative of services now being provided to unmarried parents in Ireland the membership of Treoir needs to be further developed.

Treoir Plan 2007 - 2010:

1. To maintain the high level of performance in the delivery of current services by:
 - a. maintaining the accuracy of the information available as well as skillfully communicating this information to the public
 - b. expanding the outreach service to parents, their families and those working with them to cover every county in Ireland
 - c. continuing to increase the number of new, targeted publications as well updating annually all publications
 - d. expanding Treoir services to those working with young parents in the provision of training, networking and publications
 - e. continuing to support the TPSP by being a rigorous, compliant employer
2. To raise the visibility of Treoir's Information Service so as to reach a wider audience to address the lack of information and counteract the serious level of misinformation which abounds among unmarried parents, their families and those working with them by:
 - a. developing and delivering a new regionally based information/promotional programme in each HSE region annually, 4 counties per year or 12 counties over the lifetime of this plan
 - b. finding new ways of contacting parents at an earlier stage in the pregnancy
 - c. promoting the LoCall telephone number for the National Information Centre
 - d. delivering the next stage of the co-parenting raising awareness campaign
 - e. identifying and targeting new outlets for disseminating Treoir publications, including the regular information Bulletin
 - f. developing and maintaining the website as an important and valuable tool in the provision of information

3. Develop Treoir membership to more accurately reflect the range of services available to parents who are not married to each other.
4. Raise awareness of the issues affecting unmarried parents and their children through
 - a. influencing the media and the general public in relation to unmarried families
 - b. increasing the capacity of Treoir to develop policy

These plans will be underpinned by

- good governance of an organisation which is fully compliant with all legislative and financial requirements
- an active and committed Council elected from a diverse membership
- a dedicated, loyal and highly skilled staff providing an excellent service which is extremely good value for money.

A copy of the full plan is available at treoir.ie

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The Crisis Pregnancy Agency

Citizens Information Board (formerly Comhairle)

Family Support Agency

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Mr. Seamus Brennan, T.D. Minister for Social and Family Affairs

Dr. Tony Fahey, Dr. Dermot Walsh, Norah Gibbons, Polly Phillimore, John McDaid,

Louise Crowley, Pat Bennett, Anna Lee, Sylva Langford.

Treoir has many Publications available

Being there for them – booklet for grandparents of children whose parents are not married to each other. Funded by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency

Bulletin – regular information for parents who are not married to each other and for those involved with them - send your name and address to editor@treoir.ie

Establishing Paternity – information for parents who are not married to each other

Family Links: steps and stages – positive pointers for lone parents who are helping their children to understand their family situation

Information for young parents in education

Funded by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency

Information Pack for parents who are not married to each other

Funded by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency

Reproductive Health Issues for Migrant Women – a resource for workers in seven languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Polish, Romanian and Russian. Available in a manual and/or CD format
Funded by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency

Newsletter – for workers with young parents – send your name and address to editor@treoir.ie

Resource Manual for Key Workers with parents who are not married to each other

Funded by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency

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
Funded by the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Treoir Information Leaflets

1. The Children Act 1997 (guardianship by agreement)
2. The Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act 1997 (harassment and abduction)
3. Guardianship
4. Access, Custody
5. Shared parenting for parents who are not married to each other
6. Unmarried fathers - rights and responsibilities in respect of their children
7. Maintenance of children whose parents are not married to each other
8. Family adoption (mothers and husbands)
9. Passport applications for children whose parents are not married to each other
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 - 2005 statistics
14. Birth statistics: women under 20

Web based only publications

Legal information for unmarried migrant parents

available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Polish, Romanian and Russian
Funded by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency

Pregnant and thinking about adoption

Useful Services Database

All publications
can be
downloaded
from our
website
www.treoir.ie

