



The National Federation of
Services for Unmarried
Parents and their children

ANNUAL

REPORT

2007

From Eilís Walsh, Chairwoman



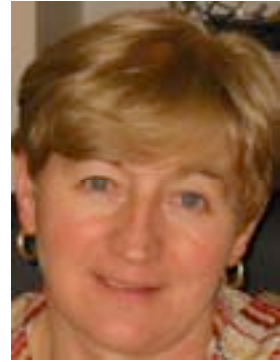
It is 21 years since the rights of unmarried families were given what was, at the time, significant legislative recognition under the *Status of Children Act 1987*. However, the importance of unmarried families having constitutional protection is essential in order to equalise the rights between all families. Despite the appointment of Joint Oireachtas Committees, the Equality legislation, the European Convention on Human Rights, the United Nations Convention on Human Rights equality for families not based on marriage does not exist. This is one of Treoir's main objectives and we will continue to pursue this objective vigorously.

We are now in the second year of our Strategic Plan 2007 – 2009 and are beginning to experience the benefits of developing that plan. Apart from affirming that the services of Treoir were very necessary and very much appreciated the two main areas which emerged as in need of development were making the public and service providers more aware of Treoir services and to develop the membership of Treoir.

Both of these areas have been addressed and good progress has been made. We plan to build on these achievements in the coming year and work towards affirming Treoir as the national provider of information services to unmarried parents and those who work with them.

I am extremely grateful to all Council Members, especially Executive Members, who supported me so positively throughout the year. I am also indebted to the staff of Treoir and in particular Margaret Dromey, Chief Executive, and Margot Doherty Assistant Chief Executive who continue to lead the Treoir team with vision, humour and dynamism.

From Margaret Dromey, Chief Executive



As can be seen from the report of activities of Treoir during 2007 the National Information Centre continued to respond to the significant number of enquiries to the Centre as well as disseminating publications and leaflets in huge numbers.

The Outreach Information Service was delivered throughout the country and the website was extensively used. There was a big increase in numbers using the Treoir Information service during the year and the need for the service by parents, those working with them in support services and the public is evident. We are constantly reminded of this when callers express their gratitude for the availability of the service and the way in which it is provided.

Our support for workers with young parents continues also and we are especially delighted to be associated with the Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP) which is continuing to expand throughout the country under the auspices of the Health Service Executive.

The small, specialist, competent and committed team at Treoir is second to none and my gratitude and compliments go to Margot, Brenda, Veronica, Bella and Joanne. Having Margaret Morris, National Co-ordinator of the TPSP based in Treoir is hugely beneficial for both Treoir and the TPSP.

Council Members of Treoir

Executive

Chairwoman	Eilís Walsh, National Social Work Qualifications Board
Vice-Chairwoman	Berit Andersen, PACT
Secretary	Anne Kennedy, Life National
Treasurer	Eilish Craig, HSE North Eastern Area (Adoption Service)

Ordinary Council Members

Phyllis Crowe	Teen Parents Support Programme, Limerick
Marie Finn	HSE Ballinasloe
Louise Graham	Cura
Mary McGovern	Section 20 Office, HSE South Western Area
Niamh McHale	Cúnamh
Dearbhla Ní Riordain*	Cork University Hospital
Loretto Reilly	National Maternity Hospital
Deborah Sutcliffe	Miss Carr's Home Housing Association

*Miriam Scanlan was co-opted in place of Dearbhla Ní Riordain who was on maternity leave.

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
Joanne Hickey	Office Assistant
Margaret Morris	National Co-ordinator, Teen Parents Support Programme

Member Agencies

Aislinn (Support service for those raised in care)	Dublin
Barnardos (Childcare agency)	National
Bessborough Centre (Accommodation and support services)	Cork
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 Buí (A parents alone resource centre)	Dublin
Eglinton House (Accommodation)	Dublin
Foróige	Dublin
Health Service Executive	National
Life (Pregnancy counselling service)	National
Limerick Social Service Centre	Limerick
Miss Carr's Home Housing Association (Accommodation)	Dublin
National Maternity Hospital (Maternity services and social work)	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
Sligo Social Services Council (Social services)	Sligo
St. Anne's Day Nursery	Cork
St. Catherine's Community Services Centre	Carlow
St. Patrick's Guild (Adoption, tracing)	Dublin
The Base Youth Service and Childcare Facility	Dublin

Goal 1: *Treoir will maintain the high level of performance in the delivery of current services*

National Information Centre



Brenda Forde, Senior Information Officer

2007 was another busy year for the Treoir National Information Centre. There were 7,414 contacts recorded in the Centre's enquiries database. The majority of queries were legal in nature with over 50% of queries relating to custody, access and guardianship. Other legal queries received were mainly in relation to maintenance, birth registration, establishing paternity and passports.

A significant number of complex queries in relation to Birth Registration were dealt with by the information team. In dealing with these queries, it came to our attention that the General Register's Office was interpreting a piece of legislation in such a way as to make it difficult, if not impossible, for a father to re-register his child's birth to enter his details using a court order. With active lobbying by Treoir the issue was resolved.

The numbers seeking information on DNA testing have also increased. Treoir now has a specific Information Leaflet on *Paternity Testing* containing the names and addresses of services which offer paternity testing and it is in great demand.

“Hi Brenda,

Thank you so much for your time. i have contacted the social welfare, and i'm very positive things will be just fine. got an awful panic when i found out at first, but am feeling much better now. thanks again for replying, i am very grateful.”

Chart 1

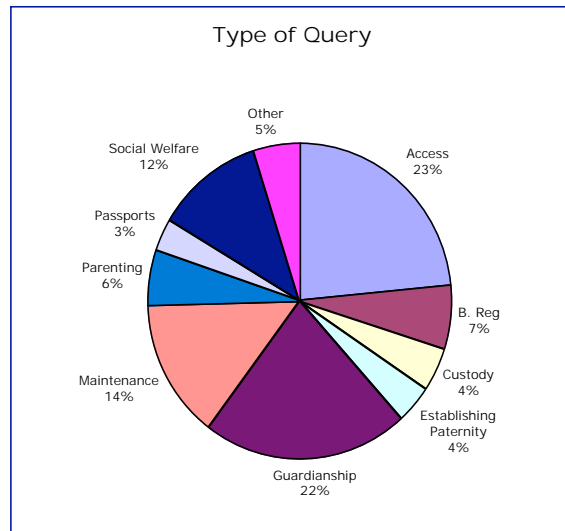


Chart 1 shows a breakdown of the type of queries received in the National Information Centre during 2007. Abduction, adoption, the right to travel etc. make up some of the ‘other’ types of queries dealt with.

Chart 2

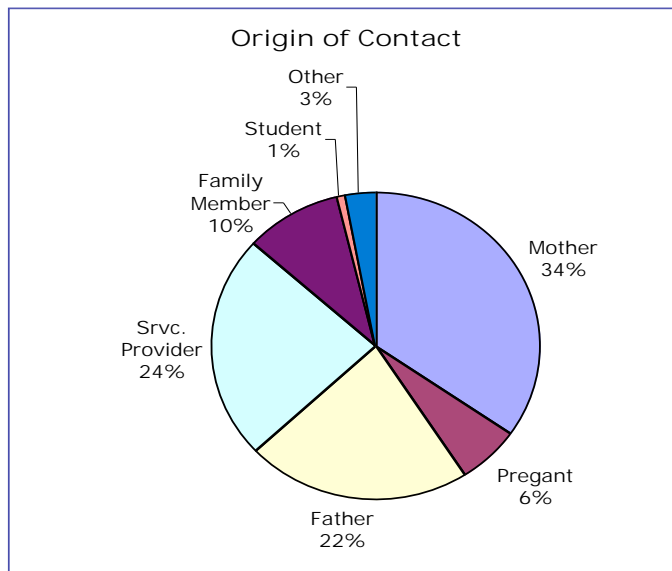


Chart 2 shows that the highest percentage of calls received by the Treoir National Information Centre were from mothers at 34%, followed by service providers at 24% and fathers at 22%. The category 'Service Provider' is made up of family support workers, 38% CICs, 26%, the remainder being made up of calls received from HSE staff, legal services, employment services, maternity hospitals.

Chart 3

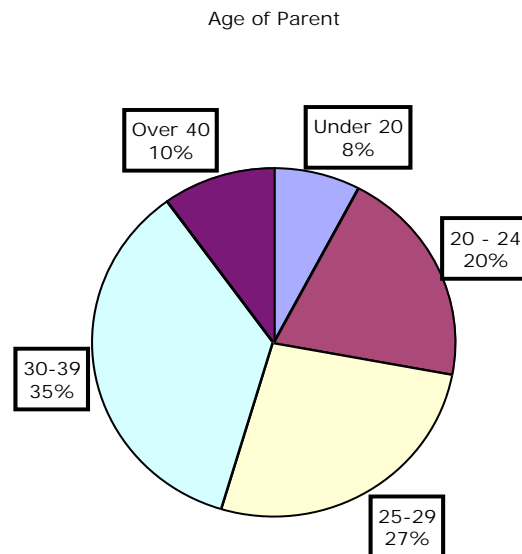


Chart 3 shows a breakdown of the age of parents, where this information was available.

The greatest number of calls received came from Dublin followed by Wexford, Cork, Kildare, Galway and Limerick. The large increase in the number of calls from Wexford was due to the Treoir leaflet drop in that county.

“Thank you very much for your assistance and advice. It is much appreciated”

Treoir Outreach Service (TOS)



Veronica Black, Information Officer

Treoir provides an outreach information and training service to groups of unmarried parents and those involved with them. The TOS aims to provide accurate, up-to-date relevant information on the legal rights and responsibilities of parents who are not married to each other.

“That was a super presentation you gave in the Galway Bay Hotel last Thursday”

In 2007 Treoir provided 22 Outreach Services in Carlow, Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kerry, Kildare, Waterford, Wexford and Wicklow which were attended by just under 400 people. These included groups of lone parents, youth and community workers, counsellors, family support workers, probation officers, teachers, Local Employment Service, Money Advice and Budgeting Service, Citizens Information Centre workers, students and social workers.

Topics covered included paternity testing, access, custody, guardianship, birth registration, maintenance, co-habitation, passports, legal rights of grandparents, guidelines to help make shared parenting easier and talking to a child about an absent parent. Information was also provided on social welfare entitlements, employment supports, education and training programmes available to parents, daycare and accommodation

“Treoir is a great service – you are always there”

Website

Treoir’s website is constantly updated so as to ensure accuracy. The website received over 60,000 hits in 2007.

All of Treoir publications are available to download from the website.

“Thank you for providing such a wonderful service for the likes of myself and many others in the same situation. I found your website most helpful when looking for the information”

“I came across your website by chance and I think it is a great website with lots of practical information for unmarried parents”

“I just wanted to write to you informally to congratulate you on your web site. I have over the years referred many professionals and service-users to the web site. I think it is a particular credit to your organisation that you have included translations of the health information leaflets on your site which are easily downloaded. This is a service that is sadly lacking particularly in areas where there are high concentrations of non-national communities. I will continue to point the HSE to your web site as an example of how it should be done!”

Useful Services Database (USD)



Bella Maher, Office Manager

This Database which is located on Treoir's website contains a broad range of services, both local and national, which unmarried parents and professionals involved with them can access. It covers a wide range of services including young parent and lone parent groups, parental support services, pregnancy counseling services etc.

Publications

While Treoir did not develop any new publications in 2007 many of our existing publications were updated. The *Information Pack for parents who are not married to each other* is now updated annually, thanks to a regular grant from the Crisis Pregnancy Agency.

"We call the Information Pack 'The Bible' here"

Reproductive Health Information for Migrant Women was also updated. It was already in 6 languages and a polish version was added. The web-based *Legal Information for Unmarried Migrant Parents* was also updated with Polish added. Both of these publications are also funded by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency.

All of Treoir *Information Leaflets* are updated as soon as changes occur. These are prepared, and placed on the website in house. These are also disseminated in their thousands throughout the country.

“Your books are invaluable”

The highly informative bi-monthly *Bulletin* was written and distributed by post and e-mail to over 3,000 recipients.



Joanne Hickey, Office Assistant



Goal 2: *Treoir will support those working with young parents in Ireland by developing and promoting the National Resource Centre for those working with young parents*



Margot Doherty, Assistant Chief Executive

During 2007 the National Resource Centre for those Working with Young Parents continued to publish its Newsletter, now being distributed three times a year, to over 2,500 recipients. This is a very useful way for those working with young parents to keep up-to-date with developments. Relevant reports are summarised and new services described. A report from the Teen Parents Support Programme is also included in each Newsletter.

Funding was secured from the Crisis Pregnancy Agency to publish an information magazine for young parents. Much time was spent during 2007 in initiating this exciting development. A committee was assembled consisting of Margaret Acton (TPSP), Margot Doherty (Treoir), Deirdre Keegan (Rotunda), Margaret Morris (TPSP), Maureen Murphy (St. Catherine's Moving On Programme, Carlow) and Teresa McElhinney (TPSP). And so the work began with the assistance of designers PCC. Young mothers on the St. Catherine's Moving On Programme, 2006-2007, Carlow were consulted about the magazine and changes were made to reflect their views. The process was more lengthy than anticipated and the magazine will be published in 2008.

Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP)



Margaret Morris, National Co-ordinator, TPSP

The TPSP continues to grow from strength to strength. Treoir is very pleased to be associated with such an important project. The 2006 Annual Report of the TPSP is available on the Treoir website www.treoir.ie

The inclusion of fathers is a growing concern for the TPSP and the theme of the 2007 TPSP national conference was *Teen Dads, the neglected parents*. The aims of the conference were to raise awareness of the need to support young fathers' involvement in the lives of their children and to provide models of engaging with and supporting young fathers.



Sylda Langford, Director General of the Office of the Minister for Children, Fergus Hogan, Co-ordinator, Centre for Social and Family Research, Waterford Institute of Technology and Francis Chance, Assistant National Director of Children's Services, Barnardos at the TPSP Conference.

Goal 3: *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*

Visibility Project

- A leaflet drop was undertaken to all houses in Wexford. The leaflet contained information on Treoir publications, the National Information Centre and LoCall number. This resulted in Wexford being the second highest county from which calls emanated during 2007.
- Treoir commissioned the dissemination of a leaflet in the Eumom pack distributed through maternity hospitals to expectant mothers over a six months period. The focus of this campaign was to alert parents to their legal position vis-a-vis their children and also to alert them to Treoir services which they may need to use.

"Thanks very much for being so helpful"

- Treoir commissioned Setanta to produce a TV advertisement aimed specifically at fathers, alerting them to their importance in their children's lives.
- Treoir secured funding from the Family Support Agency for a radio campaign on foot of the G Case to raise awareness of the lack of rights of fathers with regard to their children. The campaign is to run in January 2008.
- A number of key staff in other organisations were invited to informal information exchanges with the staff of Treoir.

"I would just like to say that I found the Treoir website one of the best sites I have ever used. It had everything I wanted to know about anything (family orientated). I spoke with a lady called Veronica who was every bit as helpful as the site itself -keep up the good work"

Goal 4: *To develop Treoir membership to more accurately reflect the range of services available to parents who are not married to each other*

The real strength of Treoir is that it is a federation of member agencies and as such it has the potential to have a major influence on policy. In making major policy submissions the views of members are always sought on contention issues.

Innovations in 2007 included:

- the introduction of informal members' meetings either Tea-Time @ Treoir or Lunch-time @ Treoir. Topics during the year included the implications of the Baby Ann Judgment and an information session for professionals on the legal rights of unmarried parents

“Many thanks for all the ‘what it says in the papers’ over the past year Bella. It is a wonderful help and greatly appreciated”

- A new “Members’ corner” in the regular Information Bulletin
- “It says in the papers” emailed to members each day.

“I wanted to say thank you all for such a really interesting AGM and meeting”

We are happy to welcome Foróige as a member and look forward to working collaboratively with them.

“Congratulations on your summary. This is a fantastic service.”

Goal 5: *To raise public awareness of the issues affecting unmarried parents and their children in order to improve the situation of unmarried families in Ireland.*

(1) Social Welfare

Major changes are proposed in the social welfare system for lone parents. On a number of occasions Treoir has expressed the view that it is very favourably disposed to many of the proposals. From Treoir's point of view a number of the proposals are particularly welcome e.g. removing the bar to cohabitation, the proposal to encourage and support recipients of OFP to enter into education or training and employment, the provision of childcare etc. We have stated on numerous occasions and did so again at the Pre-Budget Forum that we do not agree with compelling parents to enter the workplace when their child reaches eight years (or whatever age is finally agreed upon). Despite the lack of supports and indeed the obstacles e.g. lack of childcare, loss of secondary benefits, lack of flexibility in the workplace etc a very significant number of recipients of OFP are in employment. It is likely then that if the supports proposed were introduced the vast majority of recipients would seek employment and eliminate the need for compulsion.

Treoir has over the years raised with the Department of Social and Family Affairs the complexity of the social welfare system and has again appealed to the Department to ensure the new system is more simple and streamlined.

***You are without a doubt very professional
and an expert in that whole area.***

(2) Family Matters

Since its foundation Treoir has promoted the rights of children in relation to both parents where parents are not married to each other. As well as the activities listed below, a great deal of work is done by the information team in encouraging parents to facilitate the involvement of both parents in the lives of their children.

- A delegation from Treoir met Mr. Brendan Smith, Minister with responsibility for Children to impress upon him the importance of ensuring that policies take account of the value of both parents in children's lives.
- Discussions took place with officials of the Labour Party on draft legislation to grant rights to unmarried fathers.
- A great deal of contact took place with the Registrar General of Births, Marriages and Deaths in relation to difficulties in birth registration. The difficulties reported in last year's annual report on re-registrations have now been ironed out.
- Treoir appealed to Brian Lenihan, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and also to the Registrar General to initiate a Central Register of Joint Guardianship Agreements. Treoir is deeply concerned that Joint Guardianship Agreements that are hugely significant for fathers and children are given such little priority by policy makers.



Niamh McHale, Cúnamh, Council Member of Treoir

Goal 6: *In order to more fully understand and illustrate the situation of unmarried families in Ireland Treoir will promote appropriate research in issues affecting unmarried families*

Treoir continues to have a keen interest in the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland 'Growing up in Ireland' and had input to the development of the questionnaire.

"It is such a progressive service and one that I am delighted to be involved with"

Goal 7: *Treoir will exercise good governance and will be fully compliant with company law. The Council of Treoir will have the necessary skills to ensure effective governance and compliance and also the development of the organization.*

Treoir will provide committed, well-trained and respected staff who are key in the provision of good services

During 2007 Council of Treoir focused on governance issues. We are confident that we are meeting all our governance responsibilities and also that the staff provide an excellent client centred service.

"You're the best thing going"

Gemma Rowley, Honorary Life Member, left and Anne Kennedy, Life National, Secretary of Treoir



Acknowledgements

Without the continued support of the Health Service Executive, the Crisis Pregnancy Agency, the Citizens Information Board, the Family Support Agency, the Katherine Howard Foundation, Treoir could not continue to provide a service. We are extremely grateful to these agencies for continuing to fund Treoir.

As usual the staff in government departments, especially the Department of Social and Family Affairs have been extremely helpful when called upon to assist with our queries.

Geoffrey Shannon, Family Law Expert, has been hugely supportive to Treoir and we are most grateful to him for so generously sharing his expertise.

Thanks to Boardmatch, Treoir has benefited from the expertise of Anna Coyle in relation to governance matters. She has proved extremely helpful in providing a broader view when we get bogged down in the detail.

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death, in February 2007, of Dave Ellis a long time friend and supporter of Treoir. Dave, Treoir's legal advisor, gave most generously of his time and expertise in specialised legal areas and was very slow to seek payment for his services. We miss him sorely.



Berit Andersen, PACT, Vice-Chair of Treoir