

The National Federation of
Services for Unmarried
Parents and their children



ANNUAL

REPORT

2008

Chairwoman's Foreword

During 2008, Treoir, as with most organisations in Ireland, had to meet the challenge of a reduction in funding. However due to judicious and astute management we have been able to maintain our level of service to parents who are not married to each other and those involved with them. It will continue to be a challenge during 2009 but I have every confidence in the in-coming Chairwoman, council and staff of Treoir to respond appropriately to the challenge.

Despite the financial constraints imposed on Treoir, we continue to lobby on behalf of unmarried parents, and particularly their children – our primary concern. The rights of children in Ireland continue to be a topic for discussion within the government and the media. In its submission to the Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children, Treoir recommended that any constitutional amendment should embrace children's rights in a broader sense than was suggested in the Twenty-eighth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2007. Treoir continues to recommend that the best way of doing this is to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into the Irish Constitution.

In addition Treoir recommended that the rights and best interest of children should take precedence over the rights of families.

While cohabiting parents have always been on Treoir's agenda it is interesting to note that the CSO report that over 50% of births registered to unmarried parents are to parents who are living at the same address. Many queries to the National Information Centre reveal that these parents are not aware of their rights (or lack of them) as unmarried parents. With the advance in legislation on partnership rights Treoir has a job of work to do in communicating the implication of these changes to cohabiting parents.

I would like to thank the council members of Treoir who have been most supportive and committed to Treoir and a joy to work with and I would also like to compliment Margaret Dromey and all the staff for their enduring dedication to Treoir in providing a high level service and also particularly in their co-operation in addressing the difficult funding issues facing us all.



Eilís Walsh,
June 2009

A note from the CEO

The enormous output from the small, dedicated team of Treoir continues to astound and amaze. Each staff member is committed to the objectives of Treoir – “promoting the rights and welfare of unmarried parents and their children”.

In excess of 9,000 queries were responded to during the year, a significant increase on 2007. Several new publications were launched, numerous training sessions were hosted for parents and professionals and policy changes were promoted on a number of issues.

The importance of accurate reliable information on the complex legal position of unmarried parents in relation to their children as well as guidance on parenting issues when parents are living apart is evident at the National Information Centre on a daily basis and as a specialist agency Treoir is well equipped to provide the information and guidance.

We are particularly proud of our award winning radio campaign early in the year alerting parents to the fact that in unmarried situations there were “terms and conditions” attaching to fathers acquiring rights to their children. We also endeavoured during the year to host training/information activities specifically for our members.

Funding proved the greatest challenge for Treoir during the year. Overall funding has been cut so prudence is called for and staff have taken a reduction in salary. Great credit is due to staff for the manner in which they responded to the funding crisis.

Having Margaret Morris, national co-ordinator of the Teen Parents Support Programme based in Treoir is hugely beneficial for both Treoir and the TPSP.

I wish to thank our Chairwoman and Board members for their support, guidance and affirmation throughout the year and a huge thank you to the staff, Margot, Brenda, Veronica, Bella and Joanne, all of whom have an amazing amount of knowledge, wisdom and expertise which they are more than willing to share.



Council Members of Treoir 2008/2009

Executive

*Eilis Walsh, NSWQB	Chairwoman
Berit Andersen, Pact	Vice-Chair
Anne Kennedy, Life National	Secretary
Eilish Craig, HSE	Treasurer

Ordinary Council Members

Phyllis Crowe	TPSP Limerick
Marie Finn	HSE Ballinasloe
Louise Graham	Cura
Mary McGovern	HSE Section 20
*Niamh McHale	Cúnamh
Dearbhla Ní Riordáin	Cork University Hospital
Loretto Reilly	National Maternity Hospital
*Deborah Sutcliffe	Miss Carr's Home Housing Association

*Denotes those due to retire

Honorary President

Dr. Dermot Walsh

Honorary Life Member

Gemma Rowley

Staff of Treoir

Margaret Dromey	Chief Executive Officer
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 Coordinator, TPSP

Member Agencies of Treoir

Aislinn (Support service for those raised in care)	Dublin
Barnardos (Childcare agency)	Dublin
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
HSE Northern Area (HSE services)	Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow
Foróige	Dublin
Life (Pregnancy counselling service)	National
Limerick Social Service Centre	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 (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
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
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
The Base Youth Service	Dublin
HSE Western Area (HSE services)	Galway, Mayo, Roscommon

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

National Information Centre

There were 9,498 queries responded to by the Treoir Information Centre staff in 2009, a significant increase on the previous year, and 1,877 requests for publications were processed.

Chart 1 shows a breakdown on the subject matter of queries received. The majority of queries received were legal in nature and were in the main seeking information in relation to ‘Custody/Access’ and ‘Guardianship’. Parenting issues often arise in the course of discussing access arrangements or in circumstances where a parent is seeking assistance in explaining the absence of a parent or introducing a new partner. In dealing with such queries Treoir Information Officers will often recommend resources, including the Treoir publication *Family Links* and will also refer callers to relevant services - mediation, counselling and legal services.

We are seeing a steady increase in the number and a change in the nature of maintenance queries which may be explained by the current economic climate in Ireland. Many of the queries received are from fathers wishing to reduce the amount of maintenance paid in respect of their child. Where there is a maintenance order in place they are seeking variation orders through the courts.

There still exists much confusion amongst both parents and the professionals in relation to passport applications.

Chart 1

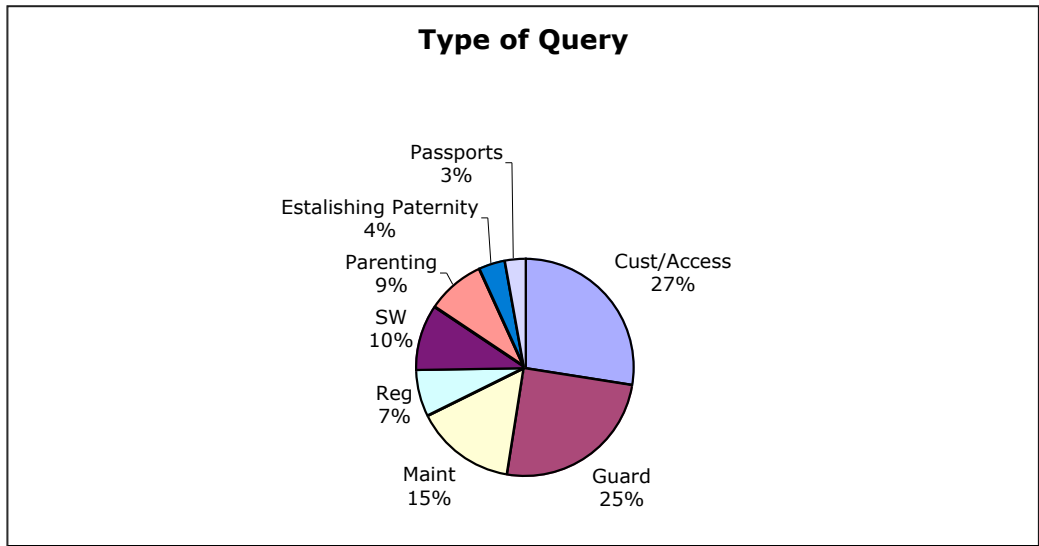
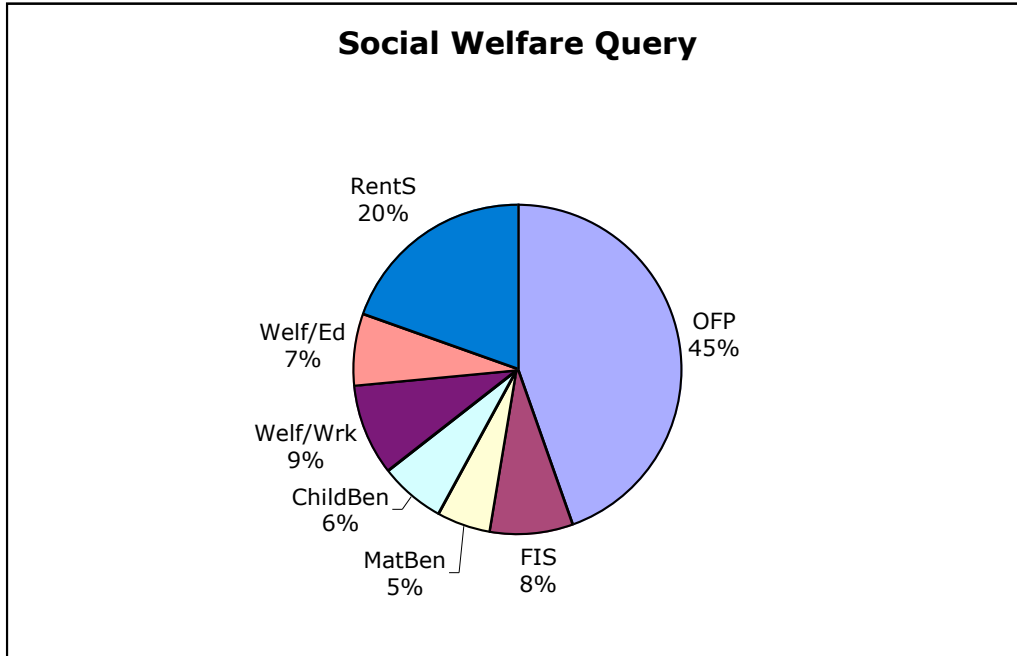


Chart 2 shows a breakdown of the type of social welfare query dealt with. The highest number of social welfare queries received was in relation to One-Parent Family Payment, Rent Supplement and queries in relation to welfare to work.

Chart 2



“ You fill me with so much information – you’ve made my day” – caller

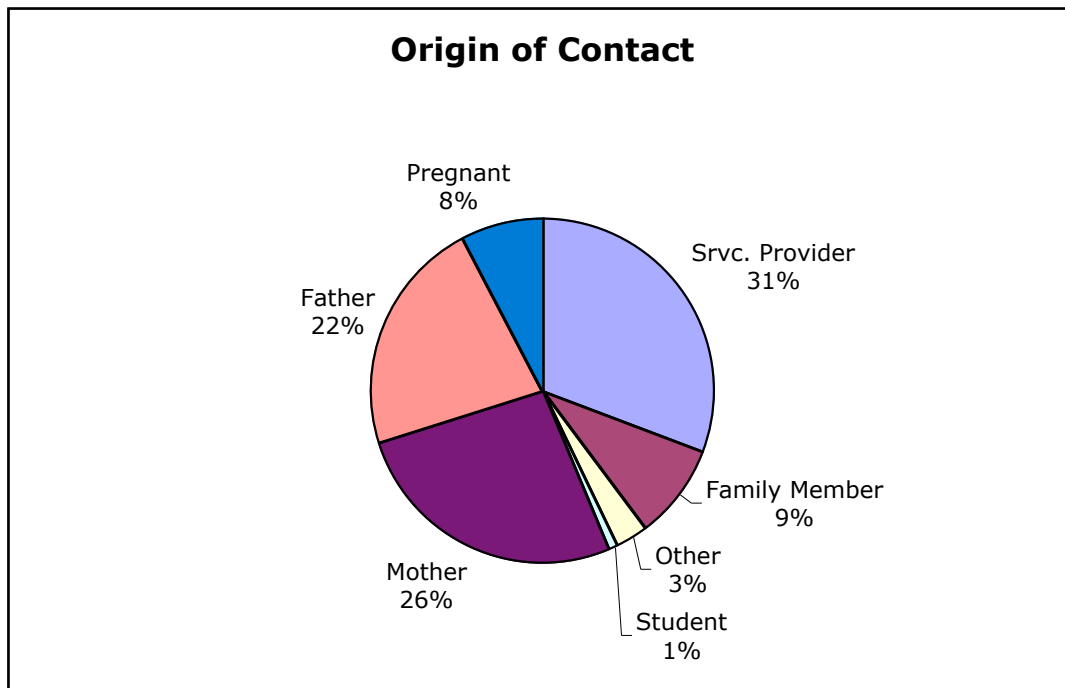


**Veronica Black
Information Officer**

Chart 3 gives a breakdown of the type of caller that contacted Treoir. The greatest percentage of calls received were from parents, followed by service providers and then family members. To note here is the considerable increase in the number of fathers contacting the Treoir Information Centre which may be explained by Treoir's raising awareness campaign early in the year. This campaign centred on fathers' rights to their children. We continue to receive a significant number of calls from both parents and family members, usually grandparents, in relation to establishing paternity.

CICs made up the greatest proportion of service provider contacts at 23% followed by professionals providing family support at 20% and counsellors at 15%.

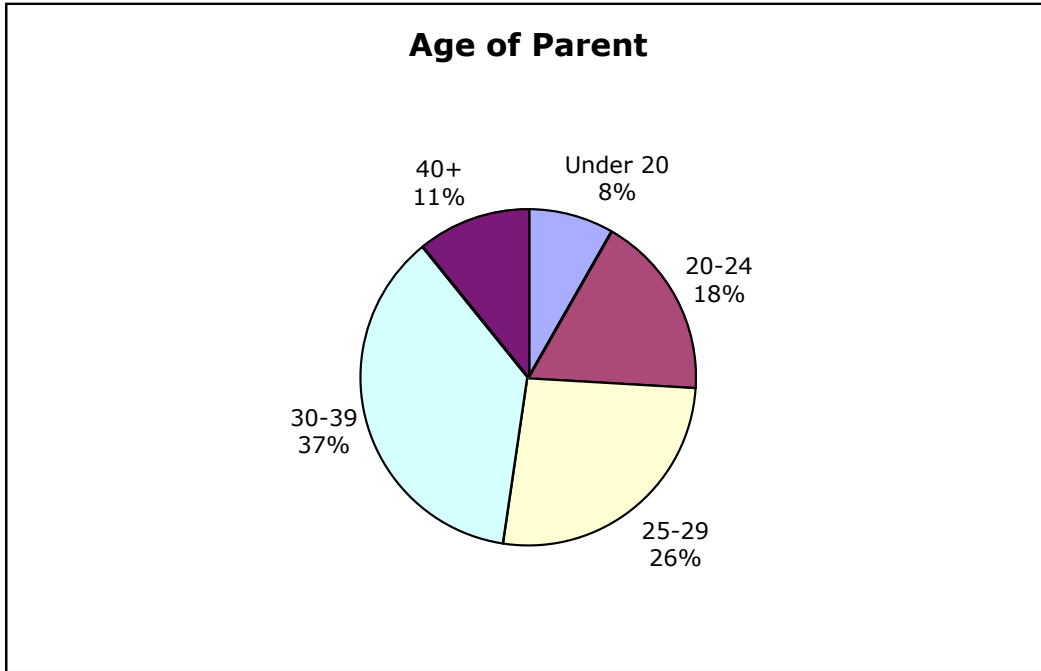
Chart 3



Brenda Forde
Senior Information Officer

Chart 4 shows the age of those for whom information was recorded on age. The vast majority were between thirty and thirty nine. There were 8 percent under twenty years and 11 per cent over forty years.

Chart 4



The majority of calls received were from the Dublin area followed by Cork, Galway, Limerick, Kildare, Kerry, Meath and all other counties to a lesser extent.

“I wish to commend you on your great work” – letter from social studies student

Website

The website continues to be updated on a regular basis and all Treoir publications may be downloaded from our website. New items including publications, submissions, press releases are added to the 'Newsroom' section.

There were over 130,000 hits on the website in 2008. We always welcome comment on the site so we can continue to improve its layout.

“Very good, very helpful website – keep up the good work!”

Useful Services Database

This database is located on Treoir's website and 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 counselling services etc.

Treoir Outreach Services

Five hundred and twenty people participated in Treoir workshops during 2008. They included unmarried parents and those providing services to them in the community, voluntary and statutory sectors.

The aims of the Information Workshops are:

- to provide accurate and up to date information on the legal rights and responsibilities of parents who are not married to each other
- to provide information on employment and training/education opportunities which are available to lone parents and to examine how these schemes interact with social welfare entitlements/ earnings/secondary benefits etc.
- to raise awareness of the importance of both parents in the lives of their children

Workshops are tailored to respond to the needs of the individual groups.

Outreach services were provided to groups including :

- Aislinn Aftercare Service – Dublin
- Citizen Information Board National Training Programme - Newbridge
- Clonmel Citizen Information Centre
- Crisis Pregnancy Agency & NUI Maynooth Certificate Course in Crisis Pregnancy Counselling- Cork
- The Defence Forces -The Curragh
- Hill Street Family Resource Centre Dublin
- Obair LES Mediators, Tullamore
- Rialto Community Drug Team Dublin
- School of Nursing & Midwifery Trinity College Dublin
- Secondary Schools in Mullingar and Dublin
- Soilse - HSE's Addiction Rehabilitation Service, Dublin
- South Tipperary Lone Parent Initiative, Clonmel

- Tógail Local Training Initiative Programme for young lone parents – Galway
- VEC – Further Education Centre Wicklow
- Waterford Citizen Information Centre
- Youthreach Drogheda

Information was provided on:

- Guardianship, Custody and Access
- Registration of Births/ adding the father’s details to child’s birth certificate
- Fathers’ Rights
- Cohabitation / property rights
- Passport Applications / parental consent
- Rights of Grandparents
- Shared Parenting / Positive pointers for lone parents who are helping their children to understand their family situation
- Family (step-parent) Adoptions
- Maintenance payments for children
- Social Welfare Payments
 - ❑ One-Parent Family Allowance
 - ❑ Rent Supplement
 - ❑ Family Income Supplement
 - ❑ Back to Education Programme
- VTOS
- Youthreach Programme
- Home Tuition Programme
- Community Employment Schemes
- Income Tax
- Childcare

The workshops were attended by lone parents groups, students and by groups providing services to parents who are not married to each other.

“Thank you for the excellent training presentation.....everyone who attended has commented on how much they enjoyed the session, and on how they will be able to put the information to practical use” – Citizens Information, Cork

Publications

“Family Links is an excellent publication. It is easy to read and covers just about everything to do with separation. Key sentences highlighted in bold help to make the essential information available at a glance” – email from a service provider



The 3rd edition of ***Family Links Steps and Stages – positive pointers for lone parents who are helping their children to understand their family situation*** was launched by Pat Bennett, CEO of the Family Support Agency in October 2008.

Among the issues dealt with in ***Family Links*** are the following:

- how to talk to children about their family situation
- how to manage the parenting at a practical level where two parents are living apart
- how this might affect the children
- what place do both parents have in the lives of their children
- how, or if, both parents should stay in touch with their children
- what is the role of a new partner in the lives of the children.

The Family Support Agency funded this publication.

“Family Links is like a bible – you could search the libraries and wouldn’t find a book as good as this” - caller



The 3rd edition of ***Work it Out*** - a booklet to help lone parents receiving One-Parent Family Payment to look at the options/schemes which are available when considering (re)entering the workforce, education or training was launched by Mr. Martin Cullen, T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs. Speaking at the launch the Minister said, “Information initiatives such as this booklet empower people to consider their options and access their rights. I am happy to launch this easy-to-follow guide

which will prove invaluable to lone parents looking at their options when they are starting work or re-entering the workforce, or returning to education and training”.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs funded this publication.

The 2nd edition of ***Information for Young Parents in Education*** became available in 2008. This new edition has been expanded on the previous one and there is now a separate section on *Financial Supports for Higher Education*. Other contents include a list of Youth Cafés, Young Parents Programmes, General Financial Supports, Back to Education/Training, Childcare and a list of useful organisations. For pregnant students attention is also drawn to the *Home Tuition Scheme* and *Exams during Labour*.

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency funded this publication.



*Young mothers from the Carlow Moving-On Project launching the **Young Parent Survival Guide***

The first issue of the **Young Parent Survival Guide** was launched in March in the Rotunda Hospital by the young mothers from the St. Catherine's Moving On Programme in Carlow. These young mothers acted as consultants in the preparation of the *Guide* and their help proved invaluable. Topics covered in the *Guide* include *pregnant and panicking?*, *coming home with your baby*, *survival tips for mums and dads*, *money for you and your baby*, *safer sex*, *legal jargon*, *is there school after baby*, *easy food for you and your baby* and much more.

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency funded this publication.



The annual update of Treoir's *Information Pack for parents who are not married to each other* was produced in March 2008. Nearly 15,000 copies were distributed during the year.

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency funded this publication.

“As my position with the HSE involves writing Section 20 Reports for the Courts, your booklets are a godsend and I can assure you that they will be put to good use”

Our Information Leaflets are printed in-house by Treoir staff which means that they can be kept constantly up to date.

There were 5 information Bulletins written and widely distributed in 2008 which contained much useful information to service providers working with unmarried parents.

Copies of Treoir publications are available free of charge from Treoir, info@treoir.ie, LoCall: 1890 252 084 or 01 – 6700 120. They can also be downloaded from www.treoir.ie in the publications section.

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

National Resource Centre for those Working with Young Parents.

“Congratulations on the young parent magazine.....it’s a powerful, accessible and very creative piece...”

Publications were to the forefront in the work undertaken in the National Resource Centre for those Working with Young Parents. The highlight of 2008 was the launch of the *Young Parent Survival Guide* in March. This was followed in June with the *Information for Young Parents in Education* (see Publications section). Two Newsletters were published during 2008 and widely distributed free of charge.

Policy development also featured with meetings, in conjunction with the TPSP, with Brian Hayes on the Student Support Bill. The opportunity was taken to propose a Second Level School Child Care Grant for young mothers to assist them in completing their second level education.

The NRCWYP was also heavily involved in preparing the submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children. Treoir recommended that the constitutional amendment should embrace children’s rights in the broader context. Treoir also recommended that children’s rights should be paramount notwithstanding any other article in the Constitution.

The NRCWYP continues to support the TPSP through representation on the National Advisory Committee, meetings with Barry Andrews, Minister for Children, seeking funding for research etc.



Margot Doherty
Assistant Chief Executive
Margaret Morris
National Co-ordinator TPSP



teenparents
support programme

Treoir continues to manage the National Co-ordinator post for the Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP). There are now 11 local TPSPs throughout the country which during 2008 supported 1,231 young parents and their families.

The TPSP is increasingly focusing on young fathers and during 2008 the Louth TPSP received funding from the Crisis Pregnancy Agency to develop a resource pack for fathers aged 16-25 years of age. The resource pack will explore areas such as Parenting as a New Experience, Pregnancy and Birth, Coping with Stress and the Legal Situation of Fathers.

The TPSP is also very committed to encouraging young parents to stay in secondary school. During 2008 the National Co-ordinator distributed *Guidelines for Best Practice* to all second level schools in the country. These *Guidelines* were developed by the Limerick TPSP in consultation with local schools for supporting students who are pregnant and those who are parenting within our education system.

The Education Subgroup of the TPSP lobbied both the Department of Education and Public Representatives in relation to the Student Support Bill. The Student Support Bill will transfer sole responsibility for student grants to the VECs and aims to make it easier for students to access grants. Among other issues, the TPSP highlighted the current situation whereby young parents living in their original family home are assessed for grants on the income of their parents despite the fact that other Government Departments, particularly the Department of Social and Family Affairs, treat them as a separate family. Student parents up to 23 years of age are also assessed for grants on the income of their parents even if they are living away from those parents. The TPSP asked that young parents be treated as a family in their own right regardless of age or where they live.

*“I view the teen parent support programme very highly...thanks again for your time –
letter from student to TPSP National Co-ordinator*

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

Treoir hosted a radio advertising campaign in January 2008 the purpose of which was to alert unmarried parents, fathers in particular, to the fact that fathers have no automatic rights to their children irrespective of whether their name is on the birth certificate. The advertisement highlighted the fact that there were “terms and conditions” attaching to fathers acquiring rights to their children.

The campaign was a huge success and resulted in a significant number of enquiries to the National Information Centre of Treoir. The advertisement also won a bronze bell award at the annual ICAD awards. The campaign was funded by the Family Support Agency.

Awareness was raised on a number of topics addressed during the year including the initiation of a Central Register of Joint Guardianship Agreements, paternity testing, government cutbacks and social welfare issues. Press releases were issued on these matters.

“It's been a difficult journey but with your information it's been a great help in guiding me on the way. You have a great service, it's brilliant” – caller

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

- Treoir hosted a series of meetings throughout the year for members on relevant topics - Lunchtime@Treoir / Teatime@Treoir:
 - ❑ In February Geoffrey Shannon, Child Law Expert, gave an input on the Constitutional Amendment on Children.
 - ❑ In June, Roisín Webb, Barrister, gave a presentation on the dilemmas arising from the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006 and Article 42(A) 5.2 of the proposed Twenty-eighth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2007.
 - ❑ Ivan Cooper of The Wheel gave a session on the Charities Bill and its impact on voluntary and community organisations.
 - ❑ In October Dara Breathnach from the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform gave an input on the Partnership Bill 2008.
- Regular Information Bulletin continued to keep members informed of relevant items of news through its ‘members corner’
- “*It says in the Papers*” item highlighting topics of note from the three national daily newspapers was emailed to members daily.

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.

Submissions

In its submission to the **Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children** Treoir concluded that “the proposed Twenty-eighth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2007 as a child protection measure appears to be significant when in fact it is very limited. It does not sufficiently address the imbalance between the constitutional rights of children and those of parents/families and the rights of children of married and unmarried parents”. Treoir regretted that the Bill did not provide for the broader rights contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Putting an inadequate and ill-thought out amendment to referendum serves no good purpose. It is imperative that the final wording is clear, unambiguous and well discussed before being put to the people.

Working Group on Domestic Partnership on the General Scheme of Civil Partnership Bill. Treoir broadly welcomed the draft proposals contained in the General Scheme of Civil Partnership Bill. We particularly welcome the proposal that will make agreements between cohabitants enforceable and the provision whereby qualified cohabitants can apply for redress. However, there are areas in the Bill with which Treoir has concerns e.g. combining proposals for Civil Partnerships and Cohabitants within the same Bill causes confusion and is regrettable. Some children will be left in a vulnerable position where only one of the parents/custodians has legal rights. Treoir recommends that provision should be made for those acting ‘in loco parentis’ to gain legal rights to the children in their care.

The issue of the child’s succession rights and the tax implications of succession should be addressed. It was not clear from the Bill what the tax implications of inheritance received by a surviving partner under the redress scheme might be and into which category it is envisaged a cohabitant who has made an agreement might fall.

Treoir made two submission to the **Department of Social and Family Affairs**. As usual in its *Pre-Budget Submission* the main recommendations centred on the inadequacy of social welfare payments, the difficulties of moving from welfare to work and the disincentive in the social welfare system to form two-parent families.

Treoir’s second submission to the DSFA to the *Technical Review of the Social Welfare Code to Examine its Compatibility with the Equal Status Acts 2000-2004* highlighted inequities in the areas of paid paternity benefit, widowed parent grant, disincentives in the social welfare system to form two parent families, income limits for back to school clothing and footwear allowance, rent supplements, qualifying conditions for some schemes etc.

All submissions are downloadable from www.treoir.ie

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 be involved in the national longitudinal study *Growing up in Ireland* and follows closely the progress of the study.

The National Lottery provided funding for an analysis of data collected on young parents who avail of the Teen Parent Support Programme.

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

The Board is confident that Treoir is meeting all its governance responsibilities. Membership of the Wheel and the Community Sector Employers' Forum is very beneficial to Treoir in keeping us informed of good practice in the governance area.



Berit Andersen
Vice-Chair of Treoir



Anne Kennedy
Secretary of Treoir

Acknowledgements

Treoir wishes to acknowledge in particular our funders, without whom it would not be possible to provide the service. In particular thanks are due to the Health Service Executive for core funding, the Crisis Pregnancy Agency for funding an information post, *Young Parents Survival Guide*, *Information for Young Parents in Education*, *Information Pack for Parents who are not married to each other*, the Citizens Information Board for supporting ongoing work with the Citizens Information Centres, the National Lottery through the Department of Health and Children for a grant towards an analysis of TPSP data, the Department of Social and Family Affairs for *Work it Out* and the Family Support Agency for funding the radio campaign as well as the latest edition of *Family Links*.

Our sincere thanks to those who supported Treoir through giving talks and training to members including Geoffrey Shannon, Ivan Cooper, Roisín Webb and Dara Breathnach.



Bella Maher
Office Manager



Joanne Hickey
Office Assistant