

I am pleased to present this, my first annual report as Chair of Treoir.

In the year since I took up office there have been some significant legal developments in the area of families, prompting much discussion. The Law Reform Commission's Report on *Legal Aspects of Family Relationships* included a provisional recommendation that there should be a statutory presumption that a non-marital father would be granted an order for guardianship. They also invited submissions on such contentious issues as compulsory birth registration and automatic guardianship for all fathers. The Civil Partnership Bill 2009 introduced the possibility of a redress scheme for financially dependent cohabitants. The Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children published its final report entitled *Proposal for a Constitutional Amendment to Strengthen Children's Rights*. The Report proposed an amendment to the Irish Constitution which would represent a significant step forward in Ireland's commitment to realising the rights of children in Irish law. All of these issues have provoked discussion at Council and have challenged us to move forward in our views on these issues.

Information provides a critical role in decision making and Treoir will continue to provide a specialist and professional information service to unmarried families and those involved with them. To date we have been able to weather the financial storm with some judicious financial management and my compliments to Margaret Dromey, Chief Executive of Treoir who has guided Treoir through the crisis. My compliments also to all the other staff members who have responded magnificently to the challenges during the year.

My sincere thanks to council members, and particularly members of the Executive, who have guided and supported me in my first year as Chair.

Leonie Lunny
24th June 2010

2009 was a very challenging year for Treoir not least because of funding uncertainty, cutbacks in funding, and a hugely increased workload. We are very grateful to our funders for their continued support and we are happy to convey that we secured sufficient funding to

- provide an excellent quality information service, respond to in excess of 9,000 queries and provide 25 outreach information sessions to parents, extended family members and professionals
- publish a number of new booklets, including a ‘new look’ Information Pack for Unmarried Parents and a series of booklets on adoption
- enable us to contribute to policy debates on pertinent issues for unmarried parents e.g. children’s rights, rights of unmarried fathers in relation to their children, rights of cohabitants, social welfare issues for lone parents etc.
- undertake a “Pobal” project which involved producing a new set of information leaflets and hosting a series of workshops on shared parenting for workers with unmarried parents which included information on legal rights such as access, custody, guardianship, birth registration, establishing paternity, shared parenting etc.

I would like to thank Eilís Walsh, our previous Chairwoman, who contributed a huge amount to Treoir over the years. Eilís was also a founder member of the organisation. We were very delighted and honoured to welcome Leonie Lunny as our new Chairwoman. Leonie was formerly CEO of Citizens Information Board and her vast experience is greatly beneficial to Treoir at this challenging time.

I am very thankful to all the staff of Treoir, Margot Doherty, Brenda Forde, Margaret Morris, Veronica Black, Bella Maher and Joanne Hickey for their professionalism, enthusiasm and commitment. I am also very grateful to the Chairwoman and council members for their support and wisdom.

Margaret Dromey
CEO

Executive

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| Leonie Lunny | Chairwoman |
| Berit Andersen, PACT | Vice-Chair |
| Anne Kennedy, Life National | Secretary |
| Eilish Craig, HSE | Treasurer |

Council Members

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Phyllis Crowe | Limerick Social Service Centre |
| Marie Finn | HSE Ballinasloe |
| Louise Graham | Cura |
| Christina Hughes | Miss Carr's Home Housing Association |
| Mary McGovern | HSE Section 20 |
| Thomas Quigley | Bessborough Care Centre |
| Dearbhla Ní Riordáin | Cork University Hospital |
| Loretto Reilly | National Maternity Hospital |
| Siobhan Roddy | Doras Buí |

Staff of Treoir 2009

| | |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Margaret Dromey | Chief Executive Officer |
| Margot Doherty | Assistant Chief Executive |
| Brenda Forde | Senior Information Officer |
| Margaret Morris | National Coordinator, TPSP |
| Veronica Black | Information Officer |
| Bella Maher | Office Manager |
| Joanne Hickey | Office Assistant |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 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 |
| Foróige | National |
| 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 |
| 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 | Dublin |

- Treoir recognises the diversity of family life in Ireland.

- Treoir recognises that all families, including unmarried families, have a right to respect, care, support, protection and recognition.

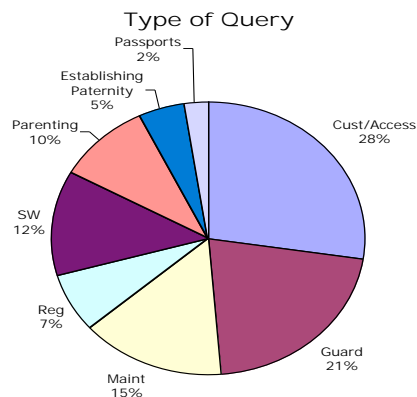
- Treoir supports and promotes the rights of all children as outlined in the United Nations Convention on The Rights of the Child.

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

The Treoir information service dealt with over 9000 queries during 2009. The majority (88%) of these calls concerned legal/parenting issues, the remainder (12%) being queries in relation to social welfare. Approximately 1,600 requests for publications were processed.

Chart 1 shows a breakdown on the subject matter of all queries received. As with previous years the majority of these calls were legal in nature and primarily in relation to issues concerning access and guardianship. As was the case in 2008, the service continues to see a notable increase in maintenance queries compared to previous years. In the current economic climate many parents are finding it necessary to seek a variation on their maintenance orders. Parents are also finding that there is a problem in processing claims for non-compliance of maintenance orders. A recent judgement in the High Court led to new legislation being introduced to prevent the prosecution of individuals who were in debt. It was not envisaged at the time that this would affect all those maintenance orders that are in place. It will require further legislation to address this problem.

Chart 1



Any time I need information I contact yourselves I think you have a great service there.

Unmarried father from Cork

Chart 2 shows a breakdown of the types of social welfare queries received. As in previous years, the greatest number of queries received was in relation to the One-Parent Family Payment at 55%. This is followed by Rent Supplement queries at 19% and Family Income Supplement at 9%. There was a significant number of fathers contacting us to enquire as to their eligibility for Rent Supplement in situations where they have considerable access to their child.

Chart 2

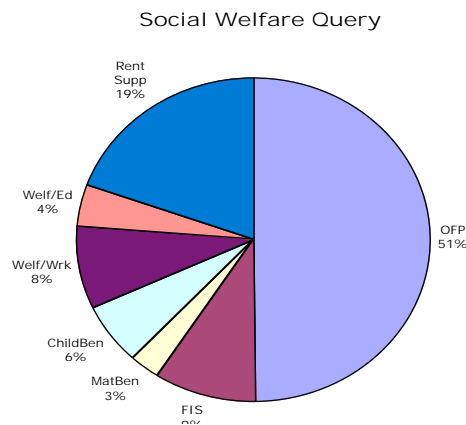


Chart 3 gives a breakdown of the category of caller that contacted Treoir. The majority of calls were received from mothers, followed by service providers and fathers. Traditionally Treoir has received the greatest percentage of its calls from mothers but the number of fathers contacting our centre is steadily growing. We believe this is due to fathers becoming more aware of their rights (or lack of!) and responsibilities. The majority of family members contacting our centre are paternal grandparents enquiring as to both their own rights to their grandchild and the rights and responsibilities of their son to his child.

Chart 3

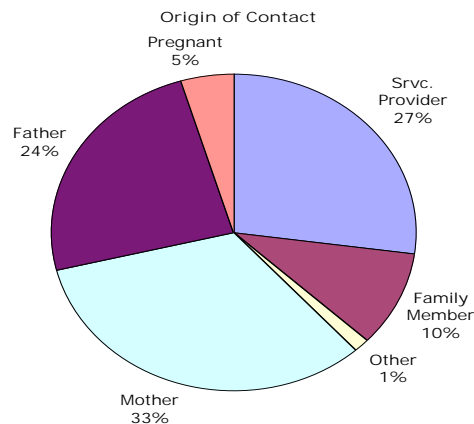
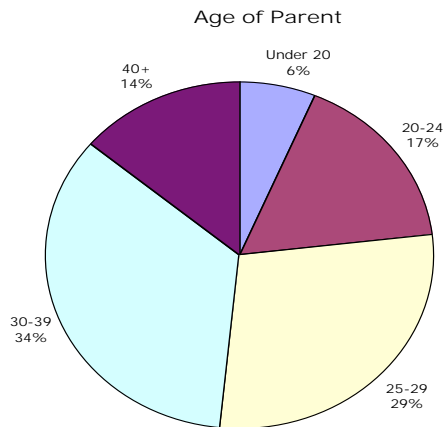


Chart 4 shows a breakdown of the age of clients contacting our National Information Centre. This question is only asked of mothers and fathers and may not always be recorded. As in 2008, the largest percentage (34%) of calls received were from parents between the ages of 30 and 39.

Chart 4



The majority of calls were received from the Dublin area followed by Cork, Galway, Limerick, Kildare, Monaghan, Kerry, Meath and other counties to a lesser extent with the least number of queries being received from Leitrim.

During 2009 staff at Treoir did 26 interviews for radio, 17 interviews with newspapers/magazines, one television appearance, 2 articles for other websites and 5 press releases.

I don't think we would have managed to get this far without you. I sincerely hope you don't get caught up on the pay cuts...you deserve more than you get!

Maternal grandparent



Brenda Forde, Senior Information Officer, Treoir and council member Siobhan Roddy, Doras Buí

In 2009 Treoir provided 25 information workshops to groups throughout the country. Five hundred and sixty eight people participated in the workshops which were attended by parents, grandparents, workers and students.

The aims of the Information Workshops were:

- 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 work out 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 and to offer practical hints on how to make shared parenting work.

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

Ten workshops were attended by groups of single parents. Eleven workshops were attended by workers from the community, youth, voluntary and statutory sectors. Two workshops were provided to groups of grandparents and another two workshops were provided to students.

The majority of the workshops provided to parents were attended by mothers. The workshop in Shelton Abbey Open Prison was attended by fathers and the workshop held in Soilse Drug Free Programme in Dublin was attended by both fathers and mothers. The Kildare Community & Education Partnership provides information and support services to grandparents and the two workshops held there were attended by grandparents.

*Dear Veronica
We are writing on behalf of both Cork City South and Cork City North Citizen Information Services to say thank you for the excellent training presentation of Monday 20th April. Everyone who attended has commented on how much they enjoyed the session, and on how they will be able to put the information learnt to practical use.*

Lorraine Griffin, Manager, CIC 80 South Mall Cork.

Outreach services were provided to a number of groups including:

- *Ballymun Community Training Workshop*
- *Newbridge Family Resource Centre*
- *Dublin Soilse Drug Free Programme*
- *Trinity College Midwifery Students*
- *Galway Tógail Training Programme for Parents*
- *HSE Social Work Team Dublin*
- *Finglas Teen Parent Support Programme*
- *Limerick Teen Parent Support Programme*
- *Carlow Moving On Programme*
- *Cork Citizens Information Services*
- *Limerick Community Mothers Programme/ Teen Parent Support Programme Staff*
- *Cura Monaghan*
- *Cura Kerry*
- *Cura Galway*
- *Life Dublin*
- *Carlow Institute of Further Education*
- *Shelton Abbey Open Prison Arklow*
- *Kildare Community & Education Partnership*
- *Cuidiú Annual General Meeting in Maynooth*

The workshops responded to the needs identified by participants for information on a variety of issues including:

- Access, custody and guardianship of children
- Passport applications for children
- Cohabitation
- Legal rights of grandparents
- Maintenance payments for children
- One-Parent Family Payment
- Habitual Residence Condition
- Rent Supplement/Mortgage Interest Supplement
- Back to Education Programmes
- Community Employment Schemes
- Family Income Supplement
- Back to Work Programme
- Birth registration where parents are not married to each other
- Establishing paternity/paternity testing
- Step-parent adoption
- Shared parenting
- Talking to children about the family situation where both parents are not living with them.

One of the key strengths of the outreach workshops was that Treoir is made aware of the many and varied issues that impact on the lives of unmarried parents and their children. This re-enforced the issues which were identified through the queries to the National Information Centre. Treoir policy is informed by and reflect these identified issues. Participants were also made aware of all the services provided by Treoir including its publications and the National Information Service etc.

Hi Veronica,

Thank you for coming to our Grandparents Programme in Kildare today. I thought it was our best session so far because I felt that the grandparents got so much from it. This was confirmed by the grandparents themselves who told me that they got more information today than they ever got before re their various situations. Also what people shared, showed how much you touched on their real life issues. They could have and would have liked to stay on longer (according to themselves) only for their commitments. One Grandparent said to me "It really opened my eyes to so many things". Thank you, Veronica, for all of that.

Kildare Community & Education Partnership (KCEP)



Veronica Black, Information Officer, Treoir

i 2009 **Information Pack**

for parents who are not married to each other

**Guardianship,
Access, Custody**

Single & Pregnant

**One-Parent
Family Payment**

**Cohabiting
Parents**

treoir

Funded by
crisispregnancyagency
Formulating & Implementing a National Strategy

The publications of Treoir continue to be widely used by parents, their families and those who work with them, particularly citizen's information centres and crisis pregnancy agencies.

Treoir launched the first digital publication in 2009. Our *Information Pack for parents who are not married to each other* was redesigned and made digital. This means that if you are looking at the *Pack* on-line you can move to different pages with just one click. No more scrolling! All the websites referred to in the *Pack* are live which means when you click on one you go directly to that website.

Congrats on the digital information pack for lone parents, it's absolutely excellent and a top-class production. Well done to ye all on a fantastic piece of work.

Yvonne Woods, FLAC

Treoir has for a number of years printed their series of *Information Leaflets* in-house as we did not have funding to have them professionally printed. However, in 2009 Treoir received funding from Pobal for an outreach programme for workers on shared parenting. Part of this funding was for materials to present at the outreach sessions. The *Information Leaflets* were rewritten to incorporate recent changes and to make the language more accessible. They were then designed and printed.

During this transition we decided to make two leaflets from the *Shared Parenting* leaflet – keeping the information on shared parenting in one leaflet and creating a new one called *Explaining family relationships to children who are not living with both parents*.



These leaflets have been a fantastic success.

In 2009 Treoir, in collaboration with the Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital, Cúnamh, the HSE, the National Maternity Hospital, Pact and The Rotunda Hospital, produced and published three adoption resources for birth parents considering adoption with funding from the Crisis Pregnancy Agency:

Introduction to adoption for birth parents outlines briefly what is involved in adoption for birth parents - how long it takes, who is involved, changing your mind, contact following adoption etc. This booklet is also available online in Latvian, Lithuanian, Mandarin Chinese, Polish and Romanian.

Adoption in Ireland today for birth parents considering adoption, outlines the process of adoption in detail - who can place children for adoption, who legalises the adoption process, giving final consent, the obligations of consulting fathers etc.

Workbook for parents in the adoption process is for parents, both mothers and fathers, who are deep into the adoption process with adoption social workers and encourages parents to examine in detail the implications of both placing a baby for adoption and parenting the baby.

All 3 publications are available from Treoir's National Information Centre or downloadable from www.treoir.ie.



Treoir's *Information for Young Parents in Education* was updated and reprinted during the year with funding from the Crisis Pregnancy Agency.

Congratulations - it's absolutely fabulous, superb.

LES Co-ordinator, Dun Laoghaire.

There were 4 information Bulletins written and widely distributed in 2009 which contained much useful information to service providers working with unmarried parents.

It is always very useful to get your bulletins and very informative. Thank you.

Sheila Gallagher, Chairperson, Council of Irish Adoption Agencies

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.

Your website is brilliant - really informative!

Family Support Worker, Kildare

Sub-committee of Treoir Council

The visibility/membership sub-committee, which is chaired by council member Mary McGovern, met several times during the year to plan members' meetings and to raise the visibility of Treoir's information service. This resulted in a number of Members' Meetings including:

- Briefing on the Adoption Bill 2009 by Dolores Moran of the Department of Health and Children
- Briefing on *Legal Aspects of Family Relationships* published by the Law Reform Committee with Natalie McDonnell, barrister
- Presentation by the Hon Mrs Justice Catherine McGuinness at the AGM in 2009 on *Family Relationships – the changing landscape*.

“Paving your way to work”

FÁS has been endeavouring to increase participation of lone parents on their FÁS training programmes and Treoir together with OPEN and One Family participated in a steering group with FÁS to oversee the implementation and outcome of a pilot programme “*Paving Your Way to Work*” specifically for lone parents. The eight week programme offers a first step to lone parents who are thinking of returning to education, training or work.

Four very successful pilot programmes were run, two each in Finglas and Tallaght. There were modules in personal barriers, manual handling, budgeting, internet and email, communications and presentation skills, information sessions, parenting etc. The outcomes were excellent for participants and most have gone on to further education or employment.

Investing in Parenthood

Treoir was represented on the group which was brought together to update *Investing in Parenthood* which was published in 2002 by Best Health for Children. This was co-ordinated by the HSE in Donegal.

Other collaborations

Treoir is also represented on the Consultative Committee of the Crisis Pregnancy Agency (now the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme) and is involved in their group looking at the accommodation needs of unmarried parents.

In 2009 Treoir's Pre-Budget Submission was undertaken in collaboration with OPEN. OPEN and Treoir have agreed to collaborate further on issues of mutual interest.

Margaret Dromey is a member of the Adoption Board.

Teen Parents Support Programme

In 2009 the 11 TPSPs received 485 new referrals and throughout the year they supported a total of 1,147 young parents and their families.

In addition to working on a one-to-one basis, local TPSPs organised a wide variety of group activities such as young mothers' groups, parent and child groups, antenatal classes, parenting programmes, group revision for Leaving Cert students, outreach clinics and courses in personal development, including sexual health.

In January 2009, one of the most recently established TPSPs, covering Ballyfermot, Bluebell and Inchicore, was launched by Barry Andrews, T.D. Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

In 2009 the TPSP received funding from the National Lottery (through the Department of Health and Children) to analyse the TPSP database. This database started in 2005 and contains socio-demographic information on over 1500 young parents, the supports they received during their engagement with the TPSP and the outcomes from this.

In addition to collecting and analysing the TPSP database, the National Co-ordinator provided the HSE with quarterly figures regarding referrals to the TPSP and the number of young parents and their families who are supported in that quarter.

The TPSP National Advisory Committee was reconstituted in 2009 with representatives from four Government departments and met twice during the year.

David Coleman, Clinical Psychologist and presenter of RTE's *Families in Trouble* and *Teens in the Wild*, visited Cork to launch a new website for teenage parents. Developed and managed by the Cork Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP), www.teenparents.ie went live to mark the third anniversary of the service in Cork.

During the year the National Co-ordinator organised 3 two-day national meetings of the full TPSP team. The first of these days provided staff with an opportunity to share information and discuss issues in common

and the second day consisted of a Foundation Course in Mediation Skills which was available to all TPSP staff and for which they received certification.

Throughout 2009 the National Co-ordinator also met with and supported individual TPSPs as the need arose.

In addition to the above, the TPSP National Co-ordinator responded to queries relating to teen parents outside TPSPs area and referred them to other sources of support where this exists. She also contributed to the ongoing work of Treoir such as the development of the *Young Parent Survival Guide*.

During 2009 Treoir made submissions to various government departments, the Law Reform Commission and other bodies.

Pre-budget submission.

Treoir's pre budget submission to the Department of Social and Family Affairs for Budget 2010 was made jointly with OPEN. We believe working together on common policy issues strengthens our proposals.

In summary we suggested -

DON'T CUT

- One-Parent Family Payment
- Child Benefit
- Family Support Agency

DON'T ROLL BACK

- Family Income Supplement
- Community Employment

RE-INSTATE

- Christmas Bonus
- Rent Supplement

RE-IMAGINE

- Cohabitation
- Childcare for mothers in second level education

The full submission can be viewed on our website www.treoir.ie.

Central Register for Joint Guardianship Agreements

The case for a Central Register of Joint Guardianship Agreements was made at every opportunity, including to the Family Law Reporting Project Committee and the Department of Justice.

The Children Act 1997 Section 2 provided that an unmarried father could be appointed a guardian of his child with the mother's agreement if both signed a statutory declaration (S.I. 5 of 1998) to that effect in the presence of a peace commissioner or commissioner for oaths.

However, there is no obligation on, or facility for the Peace Commissioner or Commissioner for Oaths to record such agreements. Treoir believes this is unacceptable and must be addressed as guardianship is the most significant right and responsibility a parent has in relation to her/his children.

Legal Aspects of Family Relationships – Law Reform Commission

Family relationships can be complex and sensitive and the Law Reform Commission must be congratulated on producing the Consultation Paper “Legal Aspects of Family Relationships” in 2009. Treoir is confident that the impact of the report will be as powerful as was “Abolishing Illegitimacy” published by the Commission in 1982, if enacted.

The report deals with issues such as rights and responsibilities of non-marital fathers and extended family members, changing terminology such as custody and access to parental responsibility and contact. They also recommended the establishment of a central register for guardianship agreements.

Treoir has actively engaged in the consultative process with the Law Reform Commission and our response to the consultation paper can be viewed on www.treoir.ie. Treoir has further developed its thinking on many of the issues and a supplementary submission will be made in the near future.

We believe the real challenge is to develop a system that promotes rights and responsibilities of both parents in respect of their children but which also introduces safeguards for those situations in which there is abuse.

Constitutional Amendment on Children

We corresponded with Barry Andrews T. D., Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children as ex-officio member of the Joint Committee on Constitutional Amendment on Children, asking that the equality of rights proposed between children of married and unmarried families in the area of adoption be extended to other areas.

In 2006 the 10th Progress Report of the A-I Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution (APOCC) suggested that the Constitution needed to express in unambiguous terms that all children, irrespective of their parents’ marital status, should have exactly the same constitutional rights and entitlements.

One of Treoir’s key recommendations to the APOCC was:

“The enumeration of children’s rights within the Irish Constitution using both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights as a framework. Further, children’s rights should be paramount notwithstanding any other article in the Constitution”.

One of the main areas where there is inequality between children born within and outside marriage is the area of guardianship rights and responsibilities of fathers. Currently unmarried fathers only have the right to apply for guardianship rights and not the right to have them.

Access to birth records for adopted people

Treoir has campaigned for many years for access to birth certificates for adopted people.

Promises were made by successive Ministers for Health that legislation would be introduced to facilitate this. Therefore Treoir was hugely disappointed when the Adoption Bill published in 2009 made no reference whatsoever to access to birth information. We made our views known to the relevant Ministers, members of the All-Party Oireachtas Committee and government officials. We believe the denial of access to information regarding one's origins is now universally accepted as the denial of a basic human right. We have asked that new legislation giving access to birth records be introduced within a reasonable time frame.

Civil Partnership Bill 2009

This Bill was initiated in order to provide the possibility of civil partnership for same sex couples. It contains a small section for cohabitants which would give financially dependent cohabitants a right of redress in the event of the cohabitation ending through death or separation.

Treoir was very concerned that that there would be significant confusion among the general public around the Bill and this was proven to be correct. There were many calls to the National Information Centre asking when would it be possible for cohabitants to become civil partners, which of course is not what the Bill was offering. Treoir wrote several letters to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform requesting that the Bill be divided into two Bills – one for Civil Partnership and one for Cohabitants. As a minimum we requested that the name of the Bill be changed to reflect that provisions were different for those entering civil partnership and cohabitants.

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 and publications including *Information for Young Parents in Education*, *Information Pack for parents who are not married to each other*, *Adoption Resources*, the Citizens Information Board for supporting ongoing work with the Citizens Information Centres and Pobal for funding the *Shared Parenting* workshops.

Our sincere thanks to those who supported Treoir through giving talks and training to members including Geoffrey Shannon, Natalie McDonnell, Dolores Moran, the Hon Judge Catherine McGuinness.

| | 2008 | 2007 |
|--|--------|--------|
| Number of births outside marriage | 24,844 | 23,170 |
| Births outside marriage as a percentage of all births | 33% | 33% |
| Percentage of births outside marriage where parents were registered at the same address | 51% | 51% |
| Births outside marriage to women under 20 | 2,233 | 2,251 |
| Terminations | 4,686 | 4,600 |
| Adoptions | 200 | 187 |
| Family Adoptions | 133 | 144 |