



The National Federation of Services for  
Unmarried Parents and their Children

# Annual Report

## 2010



[www.treoir.ie](http://www.treoir.ie)



## Chairwoman's foreword

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In 2010, the Irish legal landscape was dramatically changed, firstly, by the introduction of legislation which, for the first time in Ireland, recognised families not based on marriage and secondly, by radical recommendations by the Law Reform Commission in relation to unmarried fathers and guardianship of their children.

The *Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010* was signed into law in July 2010. The significance of this Act for Treoir lies in the last part of the Act which establishes the concept of cohabitation in Irish Law and provides financially dependent cohabitants (both opposite and same sex) with the possibility of financial redress at the end of a relationship through death or separation.

In *Legal Aspects of Family Relationships* published in December 2010 the Law Reform Commission recommended that “legislation be enacted to provide for automatic joint parental responsibility (guardianship) of both the mother and the father of any child”. In addition these automatic joint parental responsibilities are to be linked to compulsory joint birth registration. These recommendations provoked lengthy discussions at Council. They are complex and sensitive issues which need much discussion over the coming months not only among Treoir member agencies, but with others who are involved and interested, including government departments. Treoir's vision is for a society where children are not disadvantaged because of the marital status of their parents and the enactment of some of the proposals of the Law Reform Commission would go a considerable way towards improving the position of children of unmarried parents.

I would like to thank council members for their commitment to Treoir and their support to me during the year. Compliments and a big thank you to all the staff for a job well done. In particular I want to thank Margaret Dromey who led the team efficiently and effectively throughout a challenging year.

**Leonie Lunny, Chair**

**June 2011**

## Note from Chief Executive Officer

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In 2010, despite severe financial cut-backs, our small team

- responded to 7,590 information calls
- undertook 33 outreach workshops for professionals and parents and received a very positive evaluation of the workshops
- published a new *Information Pack* and 2nd edition of the *Young Parent Survival Guide*
- provided networking opportunities for members and others
- supported the co-ordination of the Teen Parent Support Programme
- made several submissions and presentations to ministers and government officials on welfare, guardianship, adoption etc.

Staff continue to have concerns about the mis-information and the dearth of good reliable information among unmarried parents, their extended families and professionals involved with them. In the interest of their children it is vital that unmarried parents and those involved with them are aware of their legal rights and are especially aware of Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010 which may have implications for unmarried parents whose relationship breaks down. With its limited resources Treoir disseminates accurate information widely and the new website, facebook and twitter will help ensure greater access to good quality information.

Treoir engaged with many agencies during 2010 especially in relation to the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010 and secured funding from the Family Support Agency for an information campaign on the cohabitants section of the Act.

A big thank you to all the staff for the excellent job they do and for regularly going the extra mile in the interest of the people we serve.

**Margaret Dromey, CEO**

**June 2011**

## Council Members of Treoir 2010

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### 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 Office
Thomas Quigley	Bessborough Care Centre
Dearbhla Ní Riordáin	Cork University Hospital
Loretto Reilly	National Maternity Hospital
Siobhan Roddy	Doras Buí

### Honorary members

Dr. Dermot Walsh	Honorary President
Gemma Rowley	Honorary Life Member

### Staff

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

## Member Agencies

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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
Homestart (Family Support)	National
Life (Pregnancy counselling service)	National
Limerick Social Service Centre	Limerick
Mary Immaculate College (UL Students Union)	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 (TPSP)	Cork
St. Catherine's Community Services Centre	Carlow
St. Patrick's Guild (Adoption, tracing)	Dublin
The Base Youth Service (TPSP)	Dublin

## Principles of Treoir

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- 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.

*Treoir staff (L - R): Veronica Black, Bella Maher, Brenda Forde, Margaret Morris,  
Margot Doherty, Margaret Dromey.  
Centre: Joanne Hickey*

## National Information Service 2010

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### National Information Centre

The Treoir Information Service dealt with 7,590 queries during 2010. The majority of queries were dealt with by telephone. Queries were also dealt with by e-mail and in person where clients accessed our drop-in centre.

**"The support I got from you is the reason I am back with my son again"**

caller (father) July 2010

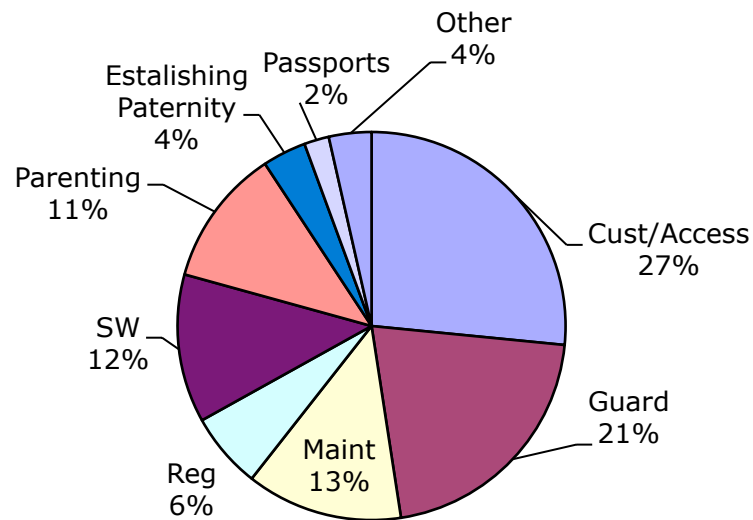
**Chart 1** shows a breakdown on the subject matter of all queries. 72% of the queries dealt with by information officers were legal in nature. The most common queries were around custody and access in relation to children. These types of queries were very often lengthy and involved parenting issues. There continues to be a great deal of misinformation about the legal guardianship of children and a large percent of our queries are in this area. Other issues arising are birth registration, applications for passports, establishing paternity and increasingly the right to travel outside the jurisdiction/abduction.

The remaining 4% of queries were in relation to other issues such as mediation, counselling, media queries etc. and requests for Treoir publications.

These statistics vary very little from statistics collected in 2009.

**Chart 1**

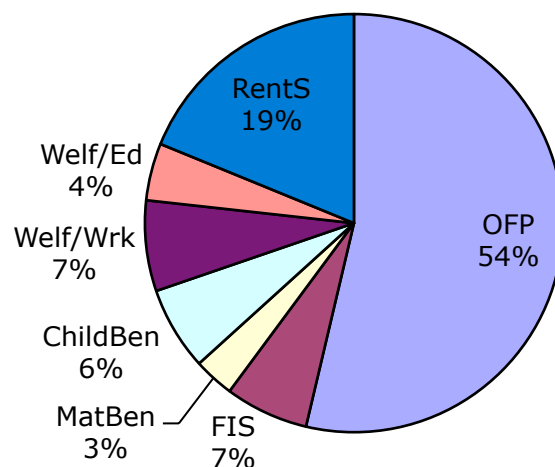
### **Type of Query**



**Chart 2** shows a breakdown of the type of social welfare queries received. 12% of calls received were in relation to social welfare issues. The main topics dealt with were One Parent Family Payment, Family Income Supplement and Rent Supplement

**CHART 2**

### **Social Welfare Query**

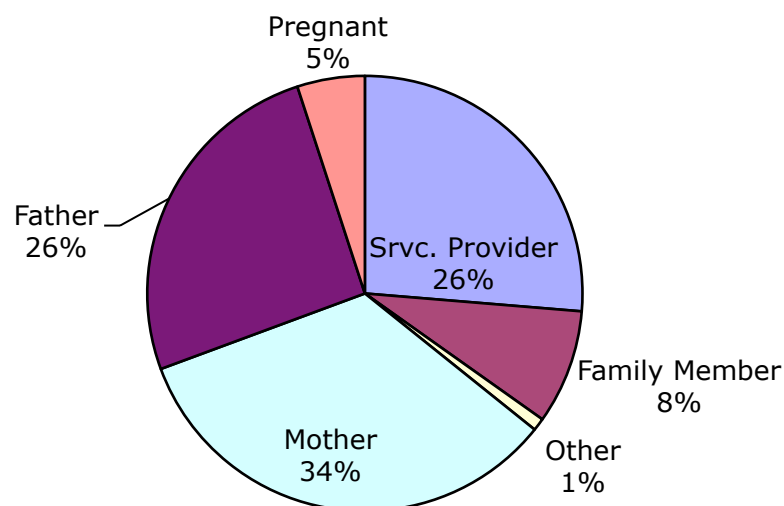




It can be seen from **Chart 3** that of the majority of calls received, 34%, were from mothers. It is noticeable over the last number of years that there has been a sustained increase in calls from fathers, who represented 18% of callers in 2005 and in 2010 represented 26% of callers. Though we increasingly receive calls from cohabiting parents, in 2010 the majority of parents dealt with were not cohabiting despite the fact that the Central Statistics Office figures show that 55% of births registered as outside of marriage in 2009 were registered to parents giving the same address.

**CHART 3**

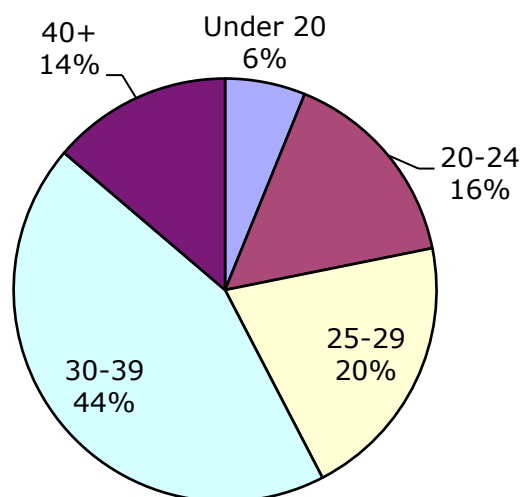
### **Origin of Contact**



**Chart 4** shows a breakdown of the age of clients contacting the National Information Service. This question is only asked of mothers and fathers and may not always be recorded. As in the previous 2 years the largest percentage (44%) of all calls received from parents were from parents between the ages of 30 and 39.

In 2010 while the percentage of those under 24 and those over 40 who contacted Treoir remained similar to those in 2009, there was a decrease in the 25 – 29 year olds (from 29% to 20%) and an increase in the calls from 30 – 39 year olds (from 34% to 44%). This older age group (30 – 39) now represents the largest percentage of callers to Treoir.

### Age of Parent



The majority of calls received were from the Dublin area followed by Cork, Galway, Kildare, Meath and Wexford in that order. The fewest number of calls was received from Co. Roscommon.

## Treoir Outreach Services 2010

Treoir provides workshops and training 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, living together or apart
- information on social welfare allowances, employment and training/education opportunities
- information on shared parenting and explaining family relationships to children who are not living with both parents.

In 2010 Treoir delivered 33 workshops which were attended by 649 people. Twelve workshops were provided to parents, 18 workshops to workers, 2 workshops to students and 1 workshop to grandparents.

Workshops took place in Clare, Carlow, Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kildare, Mayo, Waterford, Westmeath and Wicklow.

## Treoir Shared Parenting Training Course

### *Shared Parenting- supporting parents in making it work*

In 2010, Treoir delivered 9 workshops on Shared Parenting for workers working with unmarried parents. The workshops were part of a new training programme which was established in 2009 and were attended by those working in the community, voluntary and statutory sectors. The workshops were funded by Pobal.

**“I attended the shared parenting workshop in Waterford in January and Veronica was fantastic, she was so interesting it made me want to study law”**

(email from worker in Waterford May 2010).

The aims of the Shared Parenting Workshop were:

- to raise the awareness of workers of the importance of both parents in the lives of their children

- to build the capacity of workers to work with families where the parents are living apart.

This newly developed workshop focused on the needs of children in relation to both parents and looked at the legal and emotional complexities involved in co-parenting. The workshop offered practical hints on how to make shared parenting work and provided an understanding of the legal complexities of co-parenting for parents who are not married to each other.

The new training programme was externally evaluated and the feedback was very positive. Participants found the workshops very informative, the day enjoyable and the trainer, Treoir Information Officer Veronica Black, excellent in both knowledge and delivery.

## Publications

In 2010 Treoir updated its *Information Pack for parents who are not married to each other* and published the second edition of the *Young Parents Survival Guide*. We are very grateful to the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme for funding both of these publications.

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

The 2010 edition of our signature publication, the *Information Pack*, was not published until June of 2010 due to the supplementary budget of 2010. Late but up-to-date!

*"I wonder if you could send me 25 copies of your invaluable Information Pack booklet ....it's such a useful resource against the mound of misinformation out there"*

Counsellor, lone parent organisation March 2010

The second edition of *The Young Parent Survival Guide*

The first edition of the YPSG was a huge success and quickly went out of print. While keeping some of the original articles, new ones were added to the second edition. These include: *Two families, one home* (for young parents living with their own families), *Looking after your pregnant self*, *Breastfeeding*, short articles on parenting – *Ways to cope with a crying baby*, *When to call the doctor*, *Happy meals*, *Sweet dreams*. We are very grateful to David Coleman for contributing *Tips for tantrums*.

*"The new Young parent survival guide is really brilliant and full of very relevant information. Congratulations"*

Counsellor, Adoption Agency November 2010

### Examining Treoir's dissemination process

Treoir disseminates its publications widely. However, there are still many unmarried parents who do not receive our publications. With funding from the HSE CPP Treoir engaged in an examination of its dissemination process to see if the dissemination of publications could be improved. It involved ascertaining where Treoir materials are available, identifying new outlets and disseminating the materials more widely.

It was found that:

1. All agencies consulted who are using Treoir publications agree the materials are valuable and would like a regular supply. Yet many were using out-dated publications and many of them do not re-order publications when they run out.

It would appear from liaising with the services that

- they are extremely busy and ordering publications is not a priority
- sending an email to the general email account of the service is not sufficient to highlight new and updated publications that are available.
- it is necessary to identify a contact person in each service with whom Treoir can liaise on a regular basis regarding their publication needs.

2. *Information Packs* need to be placed in maternity hospitals in departments other than the social work departments.
3. Treoir customers consulted as part of the process overwhelmingly established the Internet as the most important source of information for service users regarding pregnancy and parenting.

Treoir is now actively seeking to overcome these challenges to enhance current distribution channels for Treoir publications and information.

## Media

Staff of Treoir did numerous interviews with national and local media during 2010. Issues highlighted include rights of grandparents, unmarried fathers, cohabitants, issues for young parents, maintenance, social welfare and birth registration. We also used the media to publicise the new edition of the Young Parent Survival Guide.

In 2010 Treoir entered The Wheel's video competition under the Better Together national campaign to encourage community and voluntary activity and were delighted to be shortlisted. The video – on shared parenting and entitled *Lollipops Actually* - is available on our website and on Youtube.

Sheila Lawlor, UCHG, Rosemary Grant, Coombe Hospital,  
Pat Dolan, NUIG, Aisling Gillen, HSE, Margaret Morris, TPSP,  
at the TPSP 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference, Galway, 2010

## Resource Centre for Young Parents

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A project has been initiated with a number of groups to discuss the development of Guidelines for Schools on the legal situation of parents who are not married to each other, both opposite and same sex parents. There is much confusion among staff in schools regarding the guardianship of children and who may or may not sign forms for school tours, passports etc.

## Teen Parent Support Programme

In 2010 the eleven Teen Parent Support Projects (TPSPs) offered support to 1340 young parents and their families. In addition to delivering support 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 Certificate students, outreach clinics and courses in personal development including sexual health.

One highlight for the TPSP in 2010 was its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference, which took place in Galway in December with a keynote address by Professor Pat Dolan, UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement and Director of the Child and Family Research Centre of NUI, Galway. The Conference provided an opportunity to celebrate the work of the TPSP since 2000 and, through workshops delivered by TPSP staff, to share their expertise with other professionals who have contact with young parents. The Proceedings of the TPSP 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference are available on the Young Parents Section of the Treoir website.

(L to R) Aileen Davies, Imelda Ryan and Monica Meaney,  
staff of the Galway TPSP at the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Conference, December 2010

In October 2010 the TPSP hos  
*Niczyje*, Warsaw. This is an organisation that delivers parenting support to parents  
of all ages and is interested in establishing a targeted project to support teen parents  
in Warsaw based on the TPSP model.



## Policy Development

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### (1) Legal Aspects of Family Relationships

The Law Reform Commission engaged in an examination of the rights and duties of fathers in relation to guardianship, custody and access to their children and the rights and duties (if any) of grandparents and step parents and published a consultation paper in 2009.

Following consultation with its member agencies, Treoir in its submission welcomed the focus in the guiding principles of the study on the best interests of children and considered the report to be as significant as the Commission's report in 1982 on Abolishing Illegitimacy, which led to the Status of Children Act 1987. Treoir seeks an improvement in the law relating to guardianship of children and the right of children born outside of marriage to have both parents as guardians where possible and as early as possible.

There was a large attendance at the launch of the final report of the Commission "Legal Aspects of Family Relationships" in December 2010, despite the heavy snow. A number of the recommendations differ from those in the consultation paper, for example it recommends automatic guardianship rights for fathers on birth registration. The views of Treoir members will be sought and a final position paper on the recommendations will be produced in 2011.

### (2) Civil Partnership

The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Bill passed through the houses of the Oireachtas during 2010 and came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2011. Treoir welcomed the enactment of the legislation. The Act contained a small but very significant section on rights and obligations of cohabitants. Treoir received funding from the Family Support Agency to undertake an awareness raising campaign on the cohabitants section of the Act. This is to take place in 2011.

### (3) Pre-budget Forum

Treoir made a presentation at the Department of Social Protection Pre-budget Forum hosted by Minister Ó Cuiv. We appealed to the Minister not to cut the One Parent Family Payment or Child Benefit, to introduce the activation measures in a sensitive manner and to remove the anomalies that apply to cohabiting couples in the social

welfare and tax codes. Unfortunately our request not to reduce payments was not acceded to nor has there been any improvement in the income tax system for cohabiting couples.

#### **(4) Financial Disincentives to Cohabitation and Marriage**

A delegation from Treoir made an oral presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs on Financial Disincentives to Cohabitation and Marriage. A report commissioned by the Committee suggested that families are financially better off living apart than living together, whether in marriage or cohabitation whereas statistics from EU SILC 2006 show that 27% of lone parent households were in consistent poverty compared with 5.3% for two-adult households with children. It was suggested to the Committee that an investigation should be carried out into all relevant statistics concerning unmarried parents, cohabitation and poverty to ascertain the facts over time; that cohabitants with children should be treated in the same way as married parents with children within both the Income Tax and Social Welfare systems; that a Parental Allowance be introduced for low income families and in the long term there should be full individualisation of the Income Tax and Social Welfare systems.

#### **(5) Meetings with relevant Ministers and T.Ds**

Treoir members met with a number of ministers during the year to raise issues of concern. Meetings were held with Ministers Hanafin and Ó Cuiv to discuss social welfare matters, with Minister Mary White to promote the equality agenda and with Kathleen Lynch T.D. to discuss her Guardianship of Children Bill 2010.

We corresponded with Minister Andrews and members of the Dail and Senate to raise awareness of the omission in the Adoption Bill of a provision to allow access to birth records for adoptees. Regrettably, the legislation did not make provision for this but Minister Andrews did make a commitment to introduce legislation to facilitate access to birth records in the near future.

## Research

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Treoir maintains its interest in the GUI (Growing Up in Ireland - longitudinal study of children). We attended a workshop on accessing the data for further analysis and we met with various researchers regarding the possibility of carrying out further analysis of the data. We also attended the Growing Up in Ireland Conference at which the report of the findings of the first round of interviews in relation to the nine month olds was published. Of interest to Treoir was the finding that 10% of the births were unplanned and 15% of the children were from lone parent families.

## Students

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Every year we are fortunate enough to have a student from the University of Tulsa for a few weeks' placement. In 2010 Daina Babin analysed the Treoir Query Database and also undertook some research on the parental rights and the education system in other countries.

Daina Babin, University of Tulsa

## Joint working

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In Treoir we are very aware of the benefits of joint working and are committed to doing so in the interest of those to whom we provide a service. We have made a number of joint submissions with other organisations and have worked collaboratively with various groups: we brought together groups such as Home School Liaison Officers, Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), ICGP, hospitals and others to develop guidelines for schools and hospitals in working with unmarried parents.

Treoir is represented on the advisory group of the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme and on a group working on supported accommodation.

We were involved in a joint submission to the Department of Social and Family Affairs on Value for Money Review of Child Income Supports with INOU, OPEN, National Women's Council and One Family.

We were also represented on an advisory group with FÁS on "Paving Your Way to Work", a course supporting lone parents to return to work/education. It is hoped to mainstream the course and to extend to other socially excluded groups.

The co-ordinator of the TPSP is a member of a special interest group on parenting, facilitated by the Centre for Effective Services.

Treoir is represented on the user group of the Courts Service for Dublin district and circuit family courts.

## Membership of Treoir

The strength of Treoir is in its membership. Members help to identify issues adversely affecting unmarried parents and their children and in formulating policy responses.

We were delighted to welcome two new member agencies in 2010: Home Start, a family support service [www.homestartireland.ie](http://www.homestartireland.ie) and UL/Mary Immaculate College Student Union, who offer a crisis pregnancy counselling service.

## Acknowledgements

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The services of Treoir could not be provided without the help of numerous agencies and we would like to express our gratitude to all of them. In particular we thank our funders: the Health Service Executive for core funding, the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme for funding an Information Officer post and various publications and the Citizens Information Board for funding the service we provide to the Citizens Information Centres. We thank the Family Support Agency for a grant in 2010 for an awareness raising campaign to be run in early 2011.

Professor James Williams, ESRI has been very generous with his time and expertise in relation to the Growing Up in Ireland Study, Tony McCashin, TCD has continued to support Treoir in relation to research matters, the Department of Social Protection staff are always available and willing to answer our numerous questions. A big thank you to them all.