



The National Federation of Services for
Unmarried Parents and their Children

ANNUAL REPORT 2011

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Chairwoman's foreword Leonie Lunny

2011 was a very challenging year for those providing social services in Ireland as funding has been reduced across the sector. Treoir had no reduction in services but it was necessary to implement cuts in other areas.

With the enactment of the *Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Responsibilities of Cohabitants Act 2010* in early 2011 Treoir undertook an awareness raising campaign to publicise the new rights and obligations of cohabitants. The funding brief stipulated that both opposite and same sex cohabitants were to be included in the publicity. While Treoir deals with a small number of queries from same-sex parents every year as they are unmarried parents, this was the first time Treoir specifically named them in a publication. This represents an expansion of the client group of Treoir to embrace all unmarried parents and their children.

The Cohabitants Campaign also helped to make Treoir's existing work with heterosexual cohabitants more visible. There can be an assumption that unmarried parents refers to parents living apart, whereas, in 2010 (the latest year for which statistics are available) 54% of births outside marriage were to parents living at the same address.

Budget 2012, announced late in 2011 had significant implications for those in receipt of One-Parent Family Payment (OFP). Research has consistently shown that lone parents, and especially unmarried lone parents, are at a higher risk of poverty than other families. Budget 2012 has in effect made it financially unattractive for those in receipt of OFP to seek part-time employment to supplement their income and may have pushed them further into the poverty trap.

In 2011 Treoir began the development of its strategic plan for 2012 – 2015. There was a very high level of response from members and stakeholders which was extremely positive and constructive. The plan will be finalised in 2012.

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, Chief Executive Officer who steered the organisation efficiently and effectively throughout a challenging year.



Note from CEO Margaret Dromey

Despite financial uncertainties and salary cuts, staff undertook an extremely impressive workload including responding to very complex information queries, providing information training sessions throughout the country, developing a new website, lobbying on numerous issues affecting unmarried parents and their children and hosting an awareness raising campaign on new rights and obligations of unmarried cohabitants who are a significant client group of Treoir. Research was published on parents involved in the Teen Parents Support Programme. Using the Growing Up in Ireland dataset, a study of the characteristics of unmarried parents was initiated.

There was no curtailment of work and we were successful in securing funding to develop our social media and improve the dissemination of our publications. Some of this work will be undertaken in 2012 and will be reported on next year.

I wish to sincerely thank the small, dedicated and highly skilled team of Treoir for their excellent work throughout the year.

We are exceptionally fortunate to have an excellent Board, led by our Chairwoman, Leonie Lunny. The Board undertook a great deal of work on developing and adopting good governance codes, focusing on collaborative working and developing a new strategic plan.

We look forward with enthusiasm to 2012. As well as continuing our core activities of information, outreach, supporting young parenting activities, we have a daunting programme of work ahead, particularly in addressing social welfare cuts and influencing forthcoming legislation on compulsory birth registration, age of consent to sexual activity, guardianship/parental rights and in promoting the findings of the Growing Up in Ireland study.

Treoir Executive Council

Leonie Lunny	Chairwoman
Berit Andersen, Here 2 Help	Vice-Chair
Eilish Craig, HSE	Treasurer
Christina Hughes,	
Miss Carr's Home Housing Association	Secretary

Treoir Council Members

Phyllis Crowe	TPSP Limerick
Louise Graham	Cura National
Marie Finn	Ballinasloe Crisis Pregnancy Support
Mary McGovern	HSE Section 20, Dublin
Dearbhla Ní Riordáin	Cork University Hospital
Thomas Quigley	Bessborough Care Centre, Cork
Loretto Reilly	National Maternity Hospital, Dublin
Siobhan Roddy	Doras Buí, Dublin

Honorary President Honorary Life Member

Dermot Walsh
Gemma Rowley

Treoir Staff

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

National Agencies

Barnardos	www.barnardos.ie
CURA	www.cura.ie
Foroige	www.foroige.ie
Health Service Executive	www.hse.ie
Home-Start	www.homestartireland.ie
Life Pregnancy Care Service	www.life.ie

Carlow

St. Catherine's Community Services Centre	www.catherines.ie
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Clare

Clarecare	www.clarecare.ie
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Cork

Bessborough Care Centre	www.bessboroughcarecentre.ie
St. Anne's Day Nursery	

Dublin

Aislinn	
The Base Youth Service	www.thebase.ie
Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital	www.coombe.ie
Cunamh	www.cunamh.com
Doras Bui	www.dorasbui.org
Miss Carr's Home Housing Association	www.misscarrs.ie
National Maternity Hospital	www.nmh.ie
PACT	www.pact.ie
Rotunda Hospital	www.rotunda.ie
St. Patrick's Guild	

Limerick

Limerick Social Services Council	www.lssc.ie
Mary Immaculate College	www.mic.ul.ie

Roscommon

Boyle Family Life Centre	www.familylifecentre.ie
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Sligo

Sligo Social Service Council	www.sligosocialservices.com
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Joanne Hickey
Office Assistant



Bella Maher
Office Manager

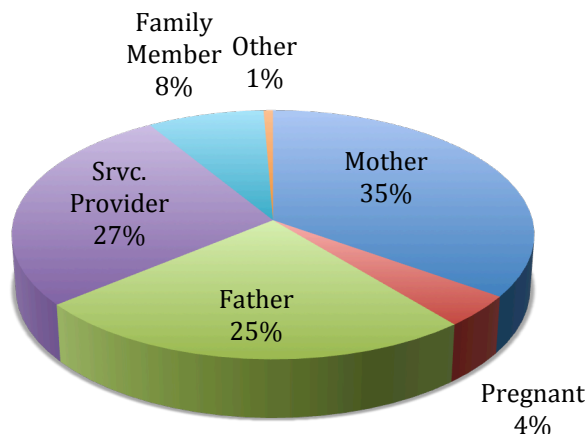
- Treoir recognises the diversity of family life in Ireland.
- Treoir recognises that all families, including unmarried families, have a right to respect, care, support, protection and recognition.
- Treoir supports and promotes the rights of all children as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Treoir believes that all children have a right to know, be loved and cared for by both parents.

National Specialist Information Service

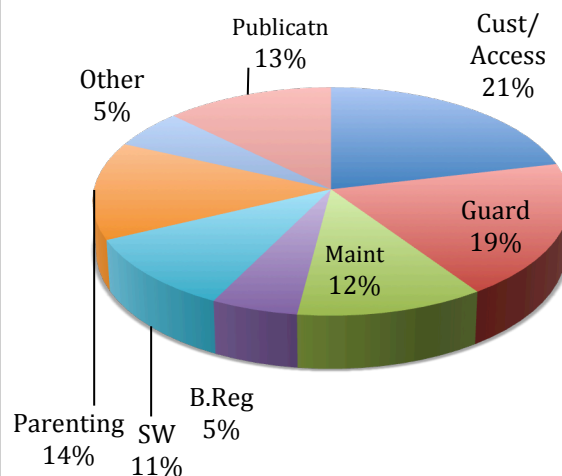
There were 8,132 queries dealt with by the Treoir National Specialist Information Service in 2011. The majority of these calls were legal in nature and dealt with by telephone. Queries were also dealt with by e-mail and by clients availing of our drop-in facility.

By far the largest number of calls received were from the Dublin area. Dublin was followed by Cork, Galway, Limerick, Kildare and Monaghan in that order. The fewest number of calls were received from Co. Leitrim.

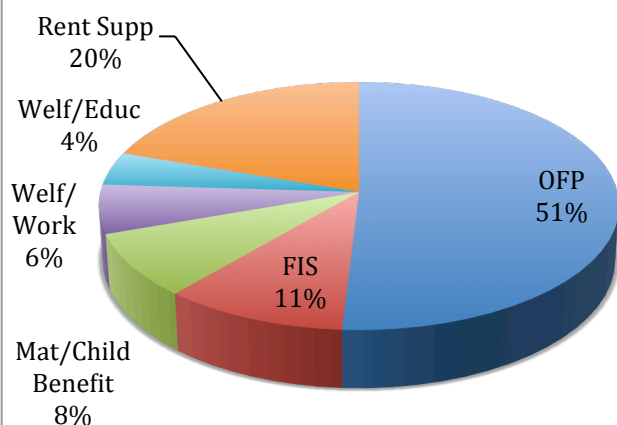
Clients



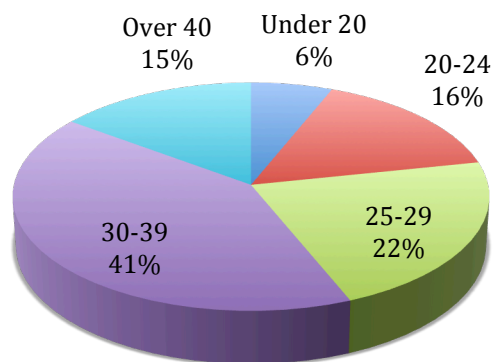
Type of Query



Social Welfare Queries



Age of Parent



I wish to express my gratitude for your information and services thus far. I, quite literally, could not have done without them. They were invaluable - email from a father 14.06.11



Brenda Forde,
Senior Information
Officer

The most interesting change over recent years has occurred in the age of parents contacting Treoir. This reflects the change which has been occurring over the last 10 years in the age of mothers giving birth outside marriage, as recorded by the Central Statistics Office in the annual Vital Statistics Reports. Births to unmarried women aged 24 and under have been declining and births to unmarried women aged 25 and over have been rising, most notably in the 30 – 34 and 40 – 44 age groups.

Thank you again for your support and I hope your service continues, lone parents need a service like yours. – email 29.04.11

Website

The Treoir website continues to receive a large number of hits with our busiest month in 2011 being April at 5,434 requests for pages. There were 47,196 visits to the Treoir website in 2011: 85% came from Ireland followed by the United States, Spain, Great Britain and Romania. Information sections most visited were the section on fathers, followed by cohabitation, mothers, access and custody, guardianship and the publication section. The most downloaded publications were information leaflets on birth registration followed by passport applications, unmarried fathers, access and custody, guardianship and the Treoir Information Pack. There was a peak of activity on our website in the first half of the year which coincided with Treoir's campaign, funded by the Family Support Agency, publicising the changes for cohabitants introduced in the *Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010*.



Veronica Black,
Information Officer

In 2011 the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme funded a re-design of Treoir's website. An accessible, informative website is now available for unmarried parents, their relatives and those working with them. It is updated regularly and all Treoir publications are downloadable from the site.

Hi, I have been searching for some information on the web and I could not really find what I was looking for and then I found your website. It's great, thanks! - message on website

Outreach Service

TREOIR offers a variety of workshops and training around the country to groups of unmarried parents and to groups of workers who provide services to unmarried parents. Workshops can be tailored to respond to the needs of individual groups. Workshops are provided on *Legal rights of unmarried parents, (including cohabiting parents), Shared parenting and explaining family relationships, Work it out – Social Welfare Payments and Going back to Work/Education/Training*.

In 2011 Treoir delivered 22 workshops to groups throughout the country.

Over 600 people participated in the workshops. Ten workshops were attended by groups of parents. Three workshops were attended by groups of grandparents. Eight workshops were provided to workers in the youth/community, voluntary and statutory sectors. One workshop was provided to students.

Workshops took place in: Ballina, Carlow, Castlebar, Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kildare, Limerick, Maynooth, Navan, Portlaoise, Waterford and Wexford.



Publications

The **Information Pack for unmarried parents** for 2011 was updated, published, widely distributed and also available to download from the website.

In progressing Treoir's dissemination plan we promoted the Information Pack through specific channels including maternity hospitals, pregnancy counselling services, family resource centres, teen parent support programmes. This has proved very successful and the demand for it is constant. We are very grateful to the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme for continuing to fund our signature publication.

Treoir produced two new leaflets in 2011 – one explaining the Civil Partnership Act which impacts on cohabitants - **Information for Cohabitants on the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010** and another on **Child Abduction**.

A great deal of work was undertaken in preparing the Cohabitants leaflet which explained in detail the redress scheme available to financially dependent, qualified cohabitants. The cohabitation booklet was published in April to support the information campaign for cohabitants, both opposite and same sex, funded by the Family Support Agency.

A new edition of **Being there for them** – Treoir's booklet for grandparents - was launched in September, funded by the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme

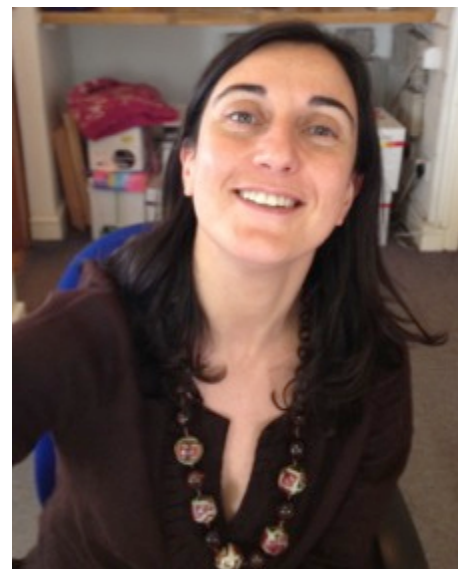
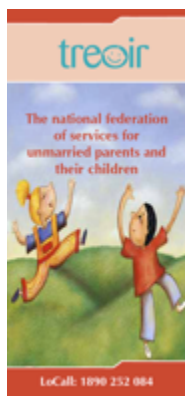
In 2011, four **E- Bulletins** were circulated as well as **one E-Newsletter** for those working with young parents.

Treoir produced a new leaflet on its services in keeping with the "new look" for Treoir emanating from the new website.

Thanks for all your help - we find your publications invaluable – pregnancy counselling agency.

Just to say many thanks for sending me the wonderful books full of important information for the nurses I have been teaching - training & development officer.

Thanks for the PDF. I have to say, an absolutely excellent and useful guidebook. Extremely clear and useful. Thanks - email from client re Information Pack on web



Beatrice Cantalejo,
Dissemination Project Officer

Raising Awareness

The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010 which introduced new rights and obligations for cohabiting couples, whether opposite or same sex, came into force in January 2011.

The implications of the legislation for cohabitants are hugely significant and we sought and received funding from the Family Support Agency to run an awareness raising campaign on the legislation. It involved national and local radio advertisements that ran for a few weeks, newspaper advertising and a booklet on the Act, which was very widely disseminated.

In an effort to raise awareness of the legal rights of unmarried parents and to combat the misinformation that abounds, we commissioned Neon Fringe to produce a podcast/video on Guardianship. Feedback has been very positive. The podcast can be viewed on the Treoir website.

Media/publicity/campaign

In 2011 Treoir participated in 28 radio interviews, issued 7 press releases and had 3 magazine articles published.

The main media event for Treoir in 2011 was the campaign, funded by the Family Support Agency, to explain the changes for cohabitants introduced in the *Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010* which came into effect in January 2011. Treoir produced a new

I heard the advert on the radio.....very clear and concise, well done to all the team. - member agency

Dissemination Project

The dissemination project aimed to increase awareness of Treoir's services by optimising online visibility and social networking engagement and by improving the dissemination of publications through various effective channels. The ultimate goal was to better inform unmarried parents and their families on issues affecting them. The dissemination project involved the continuous assessment and improvement of website content, as well as integration with social media platforms, and the research of efficient and cost effective ways of reaching key professionals and agencies.

The achieved outcomes include

- the improvement of online search engine optimisation rankings and the increase of website visitors and followers to Treoir's social media platforms

- the development of professional relationships and individual contacts with key agencies
- the publication of articles featuring Treoir services in key professional publications including General Practitioners and Nurses magazines
- the development of facebook and twitter accounts.

The dissemination project is ongoing and it is expected that it will be enhanced by the new database project. This project is funded by the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme.

May I also compliment you all on your great website - very informative and eye-catching - website editor

booklet on the rights and duties created in the Act for cohabitants, both opposite and same sex. A publicity campaign, which included a radio ad, advertising in the printed media, and many radio interviews resulted in an extensive response from the public reflected in calls to the National Information Service and hits on Treoir's website.



L - R: Leonie Lunny, Chairwoman, Treoir, Margaret Dromey, CEO, Treoir and Pat Bennett CEO, Family Support Agency at the launch of the cohabitants' campaign

Teen Parents Support Programme



Treoir continues its involvement with the Teen Parents Support Programme by managing its national co-ordinator.

Activities of the national co-ordination of the Teen Parents Support Programme can be seen on its website: www.tpsp.ie

In 2011 **Young Parenthood - facts and challenges**, an analysis of 1,449 young mothers and 73 young fathers who used the Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP) between 2005 and 2008 was published.

While this analysis is not nationally representative of all teen parents in Ireland, nevertheless it presents, for the first time, a wealth of information on a large number of young parents in Ireland.

The analysis reveals that:

- 98% of teen mothers had their own support network consisting mainly of family and friends and/or the fathers of their children
- 80% of young fathers had some contact with their children



Margaret Morris, national co-ordinator
Teen Parents Support Programme

29% of teen mothers were early school leavers (though this in itself was more than twice the national rate of 11.7% in 2008)

- 71% of teen mothers were in receipt of One-Parent Family Payment
- Nearly 40% of young mothers had no access to childcare when they needed it
- Two thirds of teen parents were living at home with their own families.

However, 31% of teen mothers and 32% of teen fathers were described as having a high level of need at the time they were referred to the TPSP. TPSP workers identified four categories of young mothers who were especially vulnerable with higher levels of need:

- Young mothers who were in care or in contact with the HSE family services (who represented 28% of all mothers in the study)
- Young non-Irish mothers (15%)
- Young traveller mothers (3%)
- Young mothers with a repeat pregnancy (5%).

The capacity of the TPSP to offer flexible, personalised support is clearly vital in the light of the variety of circumstances captured by the analysis. Supports offered by the TPSP to young parents included support in relation to parenting skills, relationships, education, training, childcare, emotional issues, health and accommodation.

The analysis offers some recommendations in the light of the findings:

Increase availability of relationship and sex education at the informal community level, for example youth clubs and other community based services

Young people living in care could also be targeted with relationship and sex education

Extend the School Completion Programme (SCP) so that all young parents would have access to supports to remain in education

Introduce a childcare grant for all young parents who are in second level education

TPSPs to be resourced to develop strategies to engage with young fathers and support them

The full analysis is available at <http://treoir.ie/target-young-parents.php>. A summary is also available on request.





Minister for Children Frances Fitzgerald (pictured with L - R; Margaret Dromey, CEO, Treoir, Berit Andersen, Vice-chair of Treoir, and Margot Doherty, Assistant CEO)

The main recommendations put forward in our written and oral [pre-budget submissions](#) to the Department of Social Protection were that the basic One-Parent Family Payment rate should not be cut and that affordable, flexible, quality childcare should be provided as this is the most crucial issue in facilitating lone parents in accessing education or work.

There was a major concern that Child Benefit would be cut in Budget 2012 and Treoir joined with the INOU, the National Women's Council, One Family and OPEN in making a joint submission to the Department of Social and Family Affairs .

In the submission to the [Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare](#), Treoir indicated its support for an approach which places Child Income Support within a broader strategy which aims to reduce poverty for all and which focuses on co-ordinated policy development and implementation, designed to achieve positive outcomes for children and their families.

[Child Benefit](#) was discussed widely

during 2011 and Treoir met with a number of groups in November 2011 to discuss the issue. A discussion at Council resulted in the following: *It was agreed by Council that economically universal payments were no longer appropriate and not the way forward. However, child income support for children in poverty needs to be protected.*

Two papers were presented to the consultation seminars organised by the Department of Social Protection in 2011. The first was on the [Review of Child Income Support Policies and Programmes](#). Treoir recommended that a rebalanced and integrated child income support payment should be the way forward in structural reform of child income support.

The second was on [Progressing to a single working age payment in July 2011](#). Treoir suggested that there are two major tasks which should be undertaken consecutively:

1. Simplify and rationalise the current system – a basic payment with supplements for those who require them – lone parents, people

- with disabilities etc.
2. Then address activation.

By then we may have moved on from our current economic crisis - resources may become available, jobs may be created and work will pay.

Treoir met with the Minister for Children where members' concerns were expressed regarding the [age of consent](#) to sexual activity and the difficulties this raises for consensual sexual activity among under 17 year olds in Ireland and for those working with them.

Changes in [Income Tax](#) legislation which applies to civil partners and not to qualified cohabitants has introduced an anomaly between them. Treoir contacted all T.D.s recommending that the tax law should be amended to place a qualified cohabitant on the same threshold as a spouse or alternatively introduce a new, favourable, threshold for qualified cohabitants.

Thanks so much for your time and support - social worker



Dr. Stephanie O'Keeffe, Director HSE CPP, Andrew Montague, Lord Mayor of Dublin and Margaret Dromey, CEO, Treoir at the launch of *Being there for them*

Membership

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.

In 2011 we had a members' meeting to discuss the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission's report on *Family Relationships*. Dr. Anne Egan, from NUI Galway gave an excellent presentation at this meeting which was followed by a lively discussion.



Ann Kennedy, Secretary, and Leonie Lunny, Chairwoman of Treoir at AGM 2011

Collaborative Working Project

Treoir participated in a collaborative working project organised by The Wheel and funded by Vodafone. The aim of the project was to encourage and support community and voluntary agencies who wished to work collaboratively or to consider merges. Prospectus facilitated a number of workshops with staff and the council of Treoir. In the course of the workshops issues were identified on which it would be appropriate to collaborate with other agencies, including promoting legislative change in family relationships, specific publications and research on growing up in Ireland. The project was very beneficial and many pertinent issues were identified which will be useful in developing the Treoir Strategic Plan.

Can I say how informative I find the emails from your office, detailing relevant articles in the newspapers for that day. For someone like me, who doesn't get to read a newspaper every day, or listen to the news on radio and/or TV, it's a great way of keeping up to date. So well done! - Caller

Networking

Treoir values the opportunities to work with other agencies in areas of common interest.

A number of meetings facilitated by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, to share information on issues affecting lone parents were attended. Also attending were Barnardos, INOU, National Women's Council, One Family and OPEN.

Treoir is represented on the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme Advisory Committee and the National Advisory Committee of the Teen Parents Support Programme.

Staff attended various training events and meetings organised by the Children's Rights Alliance, Roundtable on the Referendum on Children, Law Society on Good Governance, MSGI conference on guardianship, CIB, The Wheel, Boardmatch, Centre for Effective Services, FLAC, Growing Up in Ireland study etc.

Governance

There were 5 Council Meetings and 3 Executive Meetings held during 2011 in addition to the Annual General Meeting.

In 2011 a Strategic Plan for 2012 – 2016 was initiated. Meetings were held with funders, member agencies and many other stakeholders to elicit their views on Treoir's current and desired position and services over the coming years. Service users were also consulted as part of the process. Sessions were also held with staff and members of Council. The Plan will be finalised by autumn and an implementation plan developed in 2012.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Deirdre McTeigue who planned the questionnaire, undertook the interviews and documented responses for Treoir and to those who participated in the survey. Very valuable comments and suggestions emerged.



Council members of Treoir L - R: Mary McGovern, (HSE) Berit Andersen, Pact, Phyllis Crowe, (Limerick Social Service Centre) and Eilish Craig, (HSE).

Research

Funding was received in 2011 from the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Agency to analyse data from the *Growing Up in Ireland (GUI)* study that concerns unmarried parents, both those cohabiting and those parents living apart. Data was collected on over 11,000 9 month-olds in 2007/8. Details of those who considered their pregnancies unintended, whether the pregnancy was stressful and the sources of pregnancy-related stress will be analysed in detail.

In addition childcare, father's contact with baby, health, work etc. will be analysed.

Acknowledgements

Without continued funding from our three main funders Treoir would be unable to continue its work. Given the number of births outside marriage in Ireland (24,860 in 2010) the need for a specialist information service for unmarried parents remains essential. The HSE, the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme and the Citizens Information Board all fund Treoir annually and for this we are very grateful.

The HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme fund many of our publications and projects and we are extremely grateful for this.

Dara Breathnach, Department of Justice and Law Reform, gave unstintingly of her expertise in helping us to prepare the publication on the new rights and responsibilities of cohabitants.

We are very grateful to Pat Bennett, Family Support Agency, for funding the cohabitation raising awareness project.

Tony McCashin, TCD, greatly helped us initiate the research into the GUI data and is continuing to facilitate and support the project.

Deirdre McTeigue gave very generously of her time and expertise in working on our strategic plan.

To Brian Killoran of the Migrant Rights Centre and Ann-Marie O'Connor we give thanks for speaking at our AGM in 2011 and Dr. Anne Egan who spoke at our members' meeting.

We offer our thanks to those who helped us throughout 2011, including Geoffrey Shannon, Fergus Ryan, Andrew Montague, Lord Mayor of Dublin, staff from the Department of Social Protection.

I love your organisation - at least you can talk to somebody - caller

I just wanted to drop you a line to thank you for the package of Treoir publications received today. There is some fantastic information in there which I know will be of great benefit to our clients and staff. With many thanks and kind regards. - project worker

I am so impressed with your service,- caller

On behalf of the student parent group work & networking project, we would like to thank you for your input on February 23rd. It was very informative, practical and useful. The feedback from the students has been excellent and I am still getting requests for the information pack - several weeks later! It is great to have these resources going forward - student parent co-ordinator.

Testimonials

I just rang to thank you for the valuable information you gave me - caller

Thank you for the updated YPSG received recently. We find them invaluable in our work and appreciate your prompt delivery - member agency

I'm doing a little research and I have to commend you, your website is very helpful and friendly and has been a very good source. - researcher

On Friday 18th Nov Veronica Black gave an information workshop. I found this exceptionally good and wanted to pass on some of that info to my colleagues and clients. - social worker