

NEWSLETTER

National Resource Centre for those working with young
parents

October 2009

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Information for Young Parents in Education

Funded by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency, the third edition of this publication became available in September 2009. Written in clear, accessible language it will be useful to young parents still in education or who want to return to education.

Updated information includes:

Home Tuition Scheme
Back to Education Allowance
Back to Education Initiative
VTOS
Youthreach
PLCs

FIT

Adult literacy

Financial supports for higher education

Childcare

Useful contacts

The Real Deal peer education programme

The Real Deal is a unique Peer Education programme utilising the experiences of teenage mothers to educate teenage peers in the realities of parenting at such a young age. The concept was developed initially with a group of one-time teenage parents from Kildare and a group from Dun Laoghaire.

The aim of the project is to help young women to develop their self-esteem and to realise that they can have full control over their decisions, to educate themselves about their fertility and contraception, and to learn that there is nothing wrong with saying 'no'.

Following numerous and in-depth group work sessions, a training programme was designed. A manual targeting this group was developed alongside and used in the delivery of the training. When writing the manual they made sure "it was written in our style" – it's easy to read, it's not in technical language and it doesn't speak down to teenagers.

What was most important to the young mothers was to talk to other young women in a way that they hadn't been talked to themselves – to be honest and forthcoming about their lives, to speak to them in their own language and to listen to what the young women had to say.

The programme was piloted during 2007 and 2008 and was evaluated by the Department of Public Health, Trinity College.

Now in the second phase of delivery this programme will be further rolling out to schools and training centres in the Leinster area.

The success of the programme is based on the Peer Educators who are willing to share their own unique personal experiences of parenting in teenage years. Now further recruits are being sought from young parents who would like to work on this programme.

Typically they would be young women who have experienced parenting in their teenage years and who feel they would be able to educate groups of teenage girls about their experiences, alongside delivering a sex education programme covering contraception and STIs.

If you, or someone you know would be interested in this programme, please forward contact details to catherine@dlctc.ie or phone 086-8148359. A group session of all those interested will be held in the coming weeks. Those chosen to work on this programme will be asked to attend a training course which will equip them to run the Real Deal Training programme.

This programme is funded by The Crisis Pregnancy Agency.

Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children: Second Report, May 2009.

In 2006 the Oireachtas enacted the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act which, among other provisions, allowed for the defendant to prove that s/he honestly believed that the child had attained the relevant age. This is currently the form of statutory rape provision which applies in the State. In 2007 the Oireachtas proposed the 28th amendment to the Constitution, which included the proposal that *No provision in this Constitution invalidates any law providing for offences of absolute or strict liability committed against or in connection with a child under 18 years of age.*

This Second Report of the above committee addresses this particular issue.

Defence of honest mistake

The Report discusses the need to balance competing rights such as the right of children to protection and the right of an accused to a fair trial. The report states that

the competition between rights may necessitate the establishment of a 'hierarchy' of rights. In particular circumstances one of them must yield right of way to another.

The desirability of a constitutional amendment

The Committee were unable to make an agreed recommendation on whether or not there should be a constitutional amendment. Fianna Fáil and Labour members of the Committee suggested that the proposed referendum should not proceed. Other members favoured a constitutional amendment which removed the defence of honest mistake as to age where the child was under 15 years of age (Fine Gael) or 14 years of age (Sinn Féin).

Legislative change

The Committee could not reach agreement as to which approach in legislation would be best.

Age of consent

The Committee did not reach a consensus on this. Most of the Committee members recommended that the age of consent should be 16 years while Fine Gael recommended 17 years. All recommended however that it should be an offence for a person in authority to engage in sexual acts with children under 18 years of age.

Sexual activity between young people

The Committee could not agree on how non-exploitative sexual activity between young people could be decriminalised.

Equality

The Committee did agree a recommendation that the law relating to sexual offences against children should not discriminate on grounds of gender or sexual orientation.

The Committee has asked for an extension to their time in order to come up with an agreed wording for the amendment to the Constitution. The commitment to holding a constitutional referendum on children's rights is included in the recent revised programme for government.

Cork TPSP launches website for teen parents

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 on 28th May. 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.

The website launch took place at St. Ann's Day Nursery, managing organisation of the Cork TPSP. This provided a colourful and informal backdrop for the event, attended by teenage parents, their families and local service providers. A teenage mum and dad spoke of the challenges and joys of young parenthood, while the grandmother of twin boys described her experiences since their birth. David Coleman provided a wealth of insightful information on early bonding and attachment between the baby and parent.

www.teenparents.ie, which was funded by the HSE, is geared towards all teenage parents throughout the country, while also providing additional local information for Cork teenagers. This is the first Irish website for teenage parents. It provides information and guidance on a wide range of issues from pregnancy right through to coping with toddler tantrums. Staff at the Cork TPSP consulted with young parents who already had children, to determine what information should be included in the website. The aim is to provide good sound basic information with links to more details on other relevant sites or different sources. The website also clarifies the role of different services in the community and how and when to access them. Both young mums and young dads should find www.teenparents.ie useful, before and after their baby is born.