



**21<sup>st</sup> May 2014**

## **Clarity on reporting underage, consensual, non-abusive sexual activity**

Speaking at the Annual General Meeting of Treoir, Elizabeth Canavan, Assistant Secretary, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, outlined the measures in the Children First Bill 2014 for protecting children.

“Reports will not be required where a young person between 15 and 17 years is engaged in sexual activity with a person who is not more than two years older than the young person where the mandated person knows or believes that there is no material difference in capacity/maturity between the two parties, where the young person has indicated that a report should not be made to the Child and Family Agency and where the mandated person relies upon that view”.

Treoir has been advocating for clarity about reporting underage non-abusive sexual activity for many years.

Justice Catherine McGuinness speaking at the same meeting on the Children and Family Relationships Bill 2014 said

“the proposals in the Children and Family Relationships Bill 2014 are of particular relevance to Treoir, which has over the years provided an essential service to unmarried parents and their extended families. While extending rights to cohabiting unmarried fathers is very welcome, unfortunately there is nothing in the Bill to improve the rights of non-cohabiting fathers.”

Justice McGuinness also called for the initiation of a Central Register for Guardianship Agreements and lamented the fact that the Bill continues to use the old terms “guardianship”, “custody” and “access” in the context of children. “These terms give rise to confusion and uncertainty, and should be replaced by the terms “parental responsibility”, “day-to-day” care and “contact”. The Law Reform Commission recommended both the Register and the change of terminology but they are not reflected in the Bill”.

Margaret Dromey, CEO of Treoir, welcomed the fact that the Bill provides for persons other than biological parents to acquire guardianship rights in respect of children in certain circumstances.

“It is particularly important for step-parents and grandparents who might be full time carers of children but have no legal recognition or rights”.

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**Notes to Editor:**

Treoir is the National Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children. We

1. Operate the free, confidential **National Specialist Information and Referral Service** on all aspects of unmarried parenthood for
  - unmarried expectant parents
  - unmarried parents living apart
  - unmarried parents cohabiting
  - teen parents
  - opposite and same sex parents
  - grandparents and other relatives
  - those working with unmarried parents and their families.
2. Advocate on behalf of unmarried parents and their children.
3. Coordinate nationally the Teen Parent Support Programme

Treoir is a registered charity, a company limited by guarantee and is funded by the HSE, the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme, the Citizens Information Board and other grants.

Founded in 1976, Treoir, is the national federation of services for unmarried parents and their children. Its main aim is to promote the rights and welfare of unmarried families in Ireland. Membership of Treoir is open to professional agencies providing services to unmarried parents. Members include statutory and non-statutory bodies, including specialist agencies, HSE, maternity hospitals, adoption societies, self-help groups.

**Births outside marriage Ireland – the statistics<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> (CSO Vital Statistics 4th quarter 2012 and yearly summary).

- There were 25,190 births registered as outside marriage in 2012
  - This accounts for 34% of all births in 2012
  - Almost 55% of births outside of marriage in 2012 were to parents are registered at the same address
  - The highest percentage of births outside marriage occurred in Limerick City at 49%, while the lowest percentage was 25% which occurred both in Galway County and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown.
  - A total of 1,720 teenagers had babies in 2012, 40 of these were aged under 16 years.
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