

TREOIR (National Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and Children)

PRESS STATEMENT 9/9/09

Rights for Unmarried Families

Treoir extends its congratulations to the Law Reform Commission on addressing the rights of unmarried fathers, grandparents, step parents and indeed recognising that all children, irrespective of the marital status of their parents have a right to a relationship with their fathers and extended families without any obstacles.

Forty four percent of first births in Ireland are now outside of marriage and it is unacceptable that the fathers of these children do not enjoy any legal rights in respect of their children.

Many unmarried parents believe that rights flow from having the father's name on the birth certificate, Margaret Dromey CEO of Treoir says "nothing could be further from the truth and that staff of *Treoir's National Information Centre for Unmarried Parents* deal with calls every day from fathers who are devastated to discover that they have no rights. This usually only becomes an issue when the relationship between the parents breaks down".

A significant number of parents are cohabitating and ideally they should become joint guardians by agreement but many of them are unaware that there is a facility to do this outside of the court system ie by signing a statutory instrument (SI5 of 1998). Despite a great deal of lobbying by Treoir there is no Central Register for these agreements. We are gratified that the Commission has provisionally recommended that a Central Register be established.

Dromey says "Treoir also receives many very emotional calls from grandparents who after years of regular contact are being denied all access and communication with their

much loved grandchildren”. The Law Reform Commission in its report recognizes the difficulties for grandparents and makes provisional recommendations to improve their legal rights .

The invitation from the Commission for submissions on extending guardianship or parental responsibility to step-parents is hugely significant. The current system whereby step-parents can only get rights through adoption is inappropriate and has the result of changing a child’s identity completely and severing all links with the paternal family.

In response to the vast number of queries to the National Information Centre, Treoir has produced an Information Pack for Unmarried Parents which clearly outlines the current legal position of Unmarried and Parents and their families. Free from Treoir, download on www.treoir.ie

For further information:

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About Treoir:

Treoir, national federation of services for unmarried parents and children, was founded in 1976 to promote the welfare of unmarried families.

It operates the **National Information Centre** for parents and professionals loCall 1890 252 084. It is involved in research and lobbying as well as producing numerous information publications on rights and entitlements of unmarried parents. In excess of 50% of calls to the Treoir National Information Centre concerne parenting issues - custody, access, guardianship, maintenance and establishing paternity.