



Access by Lone Parents to the Labour Market in Laois

**Prepared on behalf of
Laois County Development Board
Social Inclusion Measures Working Group (SIM)**

&

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

October 17th 2007

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Parenting Alone Report

Laois County Development Board - Social Inclusion Group (SIM) & The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Laois County Development Board secured funding from the Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to complete a project under Strand A of the Lone Parents Initiative. The Project entailed the following tasks:

1. Collate existing research or data relevant to Lone Parents living in Co. Laois in order to develop an understanding of the statistical profile of lone parents in the county particularly in relation to issues of multiple disadvantage.
2. Conduct a needs assessment of lone parents in the county by engaging directly with persons parenting alone.
3. Address specific contexts for some lone parents such as rural isolation.
4. Promote an understanding and awareness of the labour market needs of persons parenting alone particularly among relevant service agencies both statutory and voluntary.

Laois County Development Board compiled the statistical data with regard to Task 1. An external consultant/facilitator was contracted to complete Tasks 2 and 3. The Social Inclusion Measures Group (SIM), following deliberations on this Report and subsequent Agency discussions, will address Task 4.

1.2 Brief

The brief of the external consultant/facilitator was to:

1. Develop an agreed questionnaire, in association with staff members of Laois County Development Board, to be completed by lone parents.
2. Conduct an interview process based on the questionnaire with a selected number of lone parents to be identified through Laois Network of Groups Representing Persons Parenting Alone.
3. Prepare a report based on the findings of the interviews held.
4. Make a presentation on the findings to members of Laois Social Inclusion Measures Working Group.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Recommendations

1. Increase the provision of community childcare places throughout the county.
2. Examine strategic solutions to the lack of affordable childcare places such as statutory preschool childcare provision in existing schools and support for after-school/holiday activities for school going children.
3. Continue to develop Parenting Alone Support Groups and Networks – the function of these Groups is to provide information, develop skills, reduce isolation and develop a range of supports including positive role models.
4. Research the option of providing a Parenting Alone Centre in Portlaoise.
5. Continued educational awareness on the implications of Parenting Alone for young men and women attending school and/or training programmes.
6. Review access and availability onto VEC PLC Courses.
7. Examine the possibility of providing seamless transition from school to FÁS accredited training programmes.
8. Provide more locally delivered flexible FÁS accredited training with childcare and ongoing employment support.
9. Review the number of places available for people parenting alone on FÁS Social Economy/ Community Employment Programmes. These Programmes provide a critical progression route for women parenting alone.

10. Develop a self-employment/enterprise development programme for women parenting alone.
11. Develop a specific Pilot Progression Programme for people Parenting Alone and pilot it in two locations in the county, a rural and urban-based setting, with integrated supports available in areas such as: Childcare, local Parenting Support Group, local Training Initiative, Jobs Club, links to Statutory and Community Agencies, networking with local Employers, Employment Mentoring and ongoing tracking. Examine the National Workplace Partnership Models.
12. Incorporate parenting alone awareness and communication training in Statutory Agency Staff Training Programmes.
13. Develop Statutory Agency Customer Charters that outline a commitment to transparency, consistency and a respectful culture when dealing with people parenting alone.

3. Methodology

3.1 Methodology

An initial briefing meeting was held between the external consultant and the Community & Enterprise Officer of Laois County Development Board. A follow-up meeting was then held with members of the Laois Social Inclusion Measures Working (SIM) Group see Appendix A. The overall approach to the Project, key issues for the questionnaire and the approach for the consultation meetings/interviews were discussed and agreed.

A meeting with representatives of the Laois Parenting Alone Network was held to pilot the questionnaire, agree the approach to the Project and to begin to plan the consultation meetings. The questionnaire, in consultation with staff from the County Development Board and members of the SIM Working Group, was redrafted several times and piloted by two of the Parenting Alone Groups. It should be noted that the purpose of this Project was to conduct a needs assessment of people parenting alone. It was agreed that whilst the questionnaire was a useful tool for gathering information the direct consultation

meetings/interviews were seen by the SIM Working Group as the principal mechanism of identifying the views and needs of people parenting alone.

The external consultant then met with 36 women living in Co. Laois who are parenting alone. The purpose of the meetings was to identify the needs of people parenting alone in general and more specifically their needs in relation to the labour market. A series of 8 consultation meetings was held in various venues throughout the county. These meetings took place from May to July 2007 see Appendix B. The meetings were organised by personnel in agencies such as Mountmellick Development Association (MDA), National Association for Parent Support (NAPS), Members of Rathdowney Parenting Alone Support Group, Knockmay Family Resource Centre (KFRC), Co. Laois VEC, Portarlinton Family Resource Centre (PFRC), Portlaoise Community Development Project (PCAP), representatives from the Traveller Community, Ethnic Minority Community, Irish Country Women's Association and Laois County Development Board. At the end of these consultation meetings the women participants completed the questionnaire see Appendix C. Two additional questionnaires were received by post.

Finally, although not initially planned, the external consultant/facilitator met with representatives from the HSE – a Senior Community Welfare Officer and a CWO, a Social Worker with Laois County Council, the Co-ordinator of a Gardaí Diversionary Project and the Chairperson of the Portarlinton Family Resource Centre all of whom provide a range of supports to people parenting alone.

4. Feedback

4.1 Background

Feedback in this Report is based on:

- (i) Completed questionnaires from 38 women parenting alone.
- (ii) Feedback from consultation meetings with 36 women parenting alone.
- (iii) Feedback from personnel in key agencies providing services for people parenting alone.

The women who participated were a diverse group. They varied in age, economic, social and educational backgrounds. The reasons why these women are parenting alone were not examined in any great detail. However they included young women in fleeting or unstable relationships, women deserted, separated, divorced and widowed.

As with the vast majority of parents this group of women is striving to provide the best possible opportunities for their children. However the added responsibility of parenting alone, together with responsibility for the financial income of the family and facing a range of obstacles in terms of progression routes out of poverty and/or holding down a full-time job makes life very difficult for most of these women.

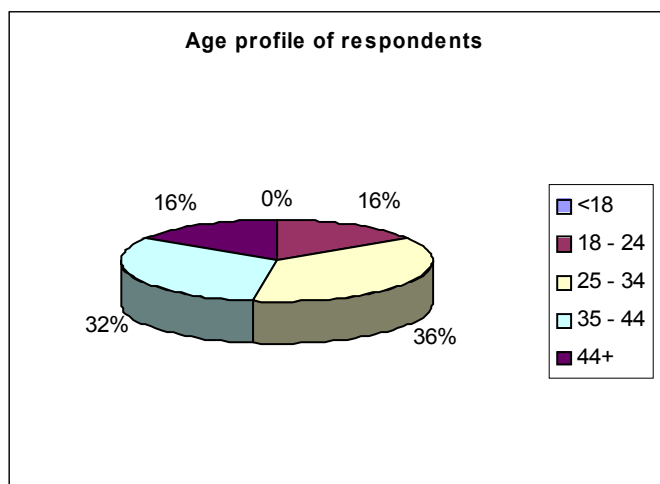
4.2 Feedback from the Questionnaire

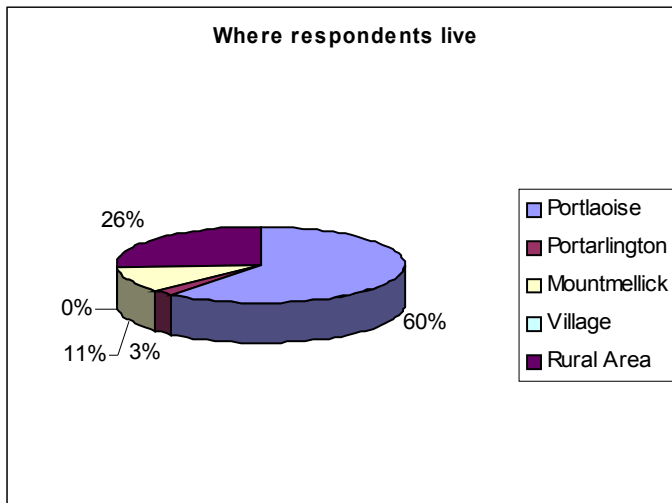
The questionnaires were designed as a qualitative feedback tool to complement the consultative meetings. The purpose of both the questionnaire and the consultative meetings was to identify the needs of people parenting alone in general and more specifically their labour market needs. The questionnaires were completed at the end of the consultative meetings. Due to different interpretations inconsistent responses were sometimes given. The questionnaires were designed to be user friendly whilst still producing worthwhile information.

38 women parenting alone and living in County Laois completed the questionnaire see Appendix D for a Summary of Responses. 36 of these women were met by the external consultant/facilitator at the consultation meetings and two women submitted completed questionnaires by post. For the purposes of this Report no differentiation is being made between the 36 women met and the 2 who submitted questionnaires by post.

(i) Personal

None of the women were under 18 years as parental consent is required and this was not within the scope of the Project. 6 women were under 24 years, 14 were under 34 years 12 were under 44 years and a further 6 were over 44 years.





The majority of the women met live in urban settings. 10 live in rural areas such as Rathdowney. Key issues for these women were the lack of access to affordable childcare services, the difficulty accessing training/educational opportunities and the lack of

employment in the area. These issues add to the sense of isolation felt by the women parenting alone.

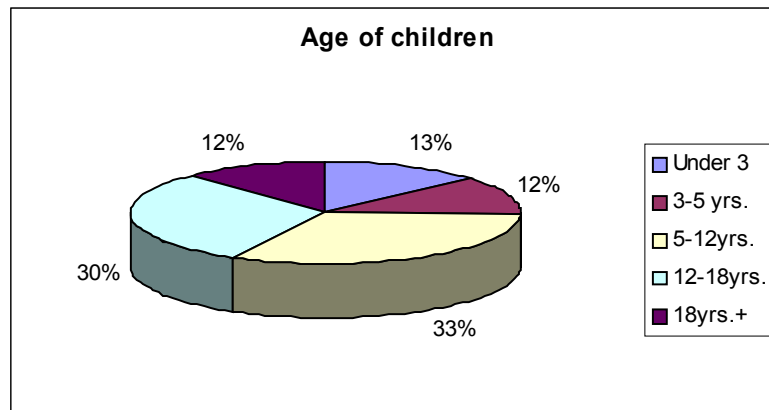
22 of the women were parenting alone for more than five years. 35 of the women were Irish, one woman an Irish Traveller, another a non Irish EU citizen and one other woman a foreign national.

32 of the women were financially supporting three children or less.

The ages of the children were as follows:

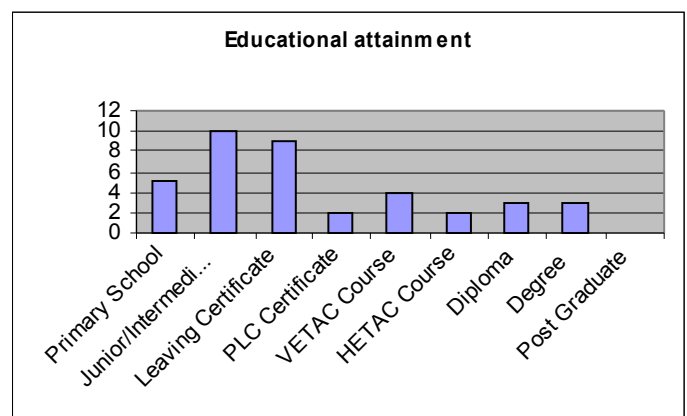
Figure 1 **Ages of the Children**

| Area | No. of responses | Under 3 | 3-5 yrs. | 5-12yrs. | 12-18yrs. | 18yrs.+ |
|--------------|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Portlaoise | 24 | 8 | 2 | 21 | 17 | 6 |
| Mounmellick | 4 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Rathdowney | 7 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| Others | 3 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 38 | 11 | 10 | 27 | 25 | 10 |



(ii) Education

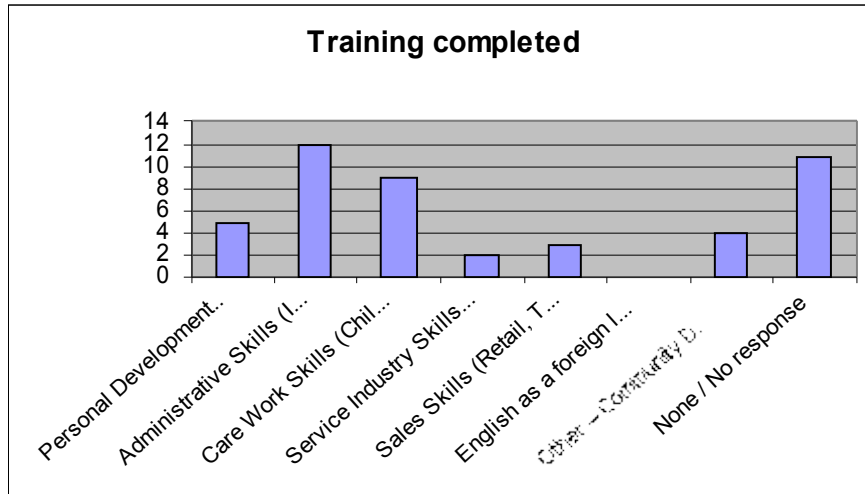
In terms of educational background, 23 of the women had completed their Leaving Certificate. A further 10 women had just completed their Junior Certificates and 5 women had left after primary school. In terms of participating in further education, in general, the women appeared to be



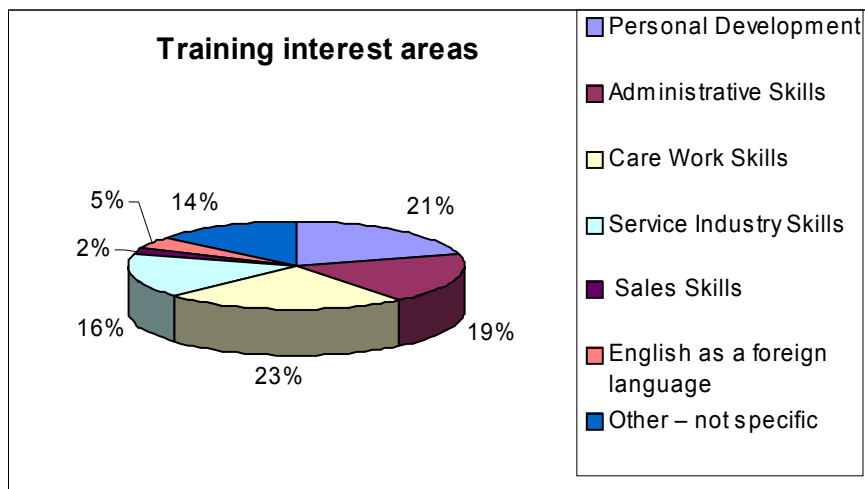
more interested in quality workplace training rather than further educational studies with some exceptions such as Junior Certificate subjects. Those with post Leaving Certificate qualifications were more likely to be interested in further education but feel unable to pursue it due to financial and childcare issues. A number of the younger women wished to do PLC courses but were finding access to grants and the qualification process prohibitive – this may be an information issue.

(iii) Training

In terms of training the majority of the women had completed some form of training. Some had done a number of courses. Much of the training was in areas such as care work (child, youth and elderly), personal development and administrative work.



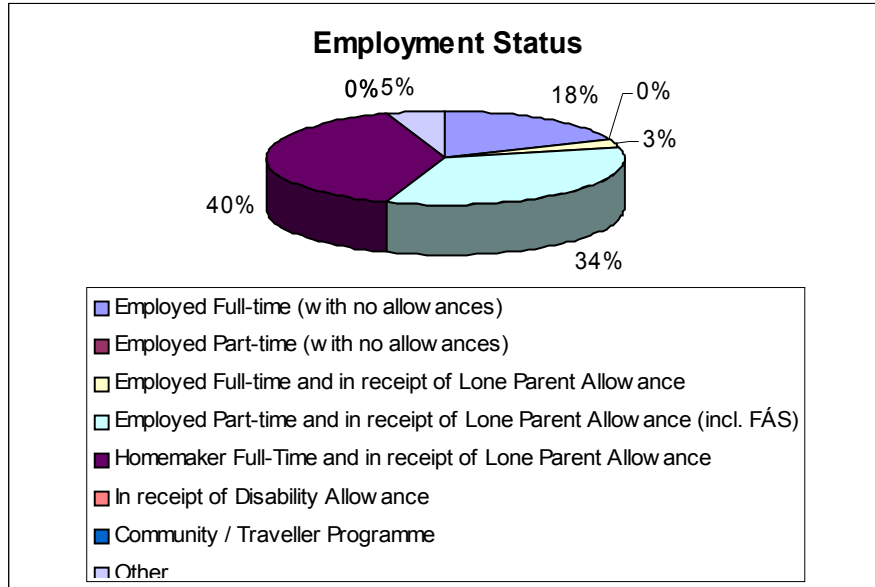
The vast majority of the women, 33 of the 38, indicated that they are interested in further training. Areas of training that the women expressed an interest in included care work and administrative skills. Other training areas included hairdressing, beauty therapy and fitness instruction. There seemed to be a general awareness that recognised qualifications are now essential for quality employment. Approximately five women indicated that they would like to participate in a Jobs Club.



(iv) Employment

With regard to employment 8 of the women that completed the questionnaires were in full-time employment. Employment was in areas such as community development, administration, sales and transport. Four women were employed in community development, another two in administration/clerical jobs and one each in sales and one in transport. With regard to three of the women employed in community development they had returned to the labour force through FÁS Programmes, had gained experience, training and confidence and had progressed into more stable employment within the community development

organisations. Those in employment tended to have third level education and/or good work experience.

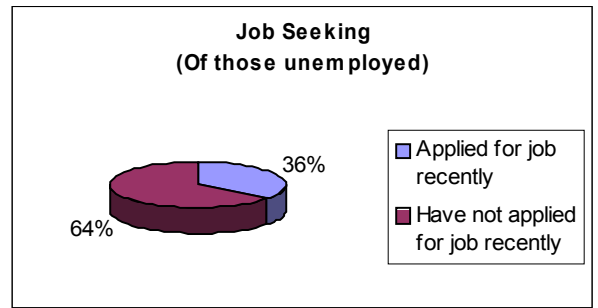
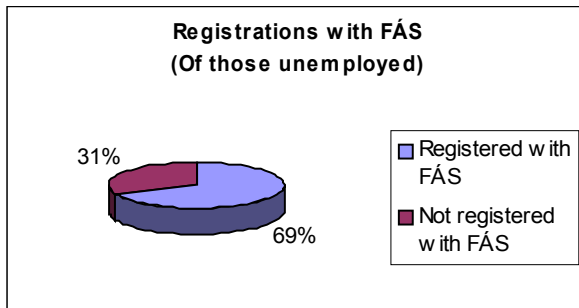
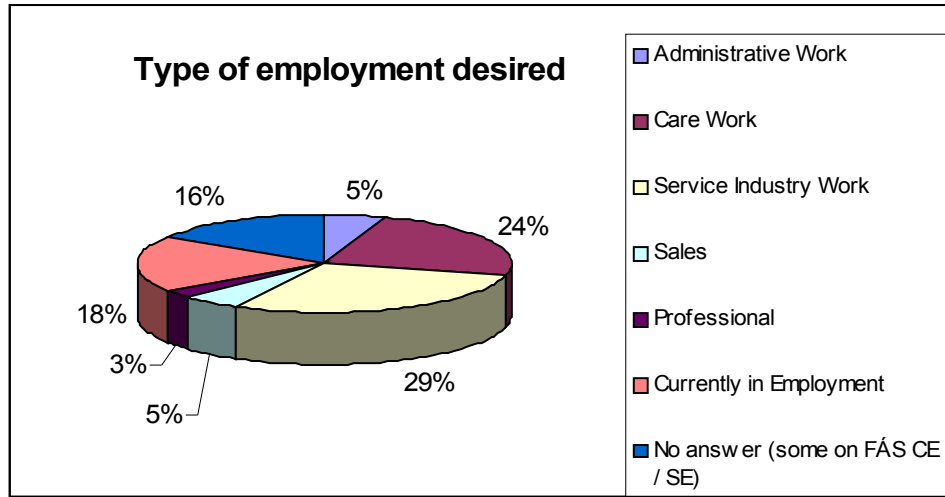


An additional 13 women were employed part-time. Employment included FÁS Programmes and a number of part-time care workers. 15 women were full-time homemakers with no source of paid employment. And two additional women were awaiting decisions on Lone Parent Allowance applications.

In relation to the type of employment preferred 19 women replied that they would prefer part-time employment. Many of the women are interested in part-time care work or work in service industries such as hairdressing and beautician. 20 women

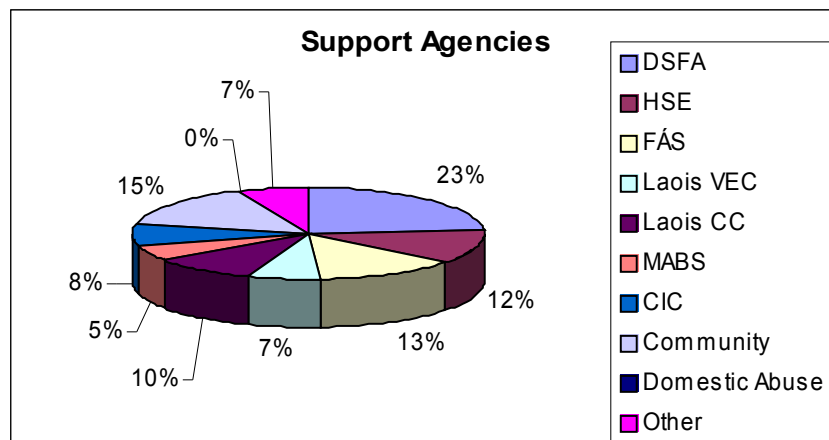


indicated that they were registered with FÁS and 9 indicated that they are not registered. Of these 10 tried to get a job recently, 18 had not tried to get a job. The experiences of trying to get a job were largely negative. This negative experience together with huge anxiety regarding loss of social welfare, rent and medical card allowances combine to make progression into employment very difficult.



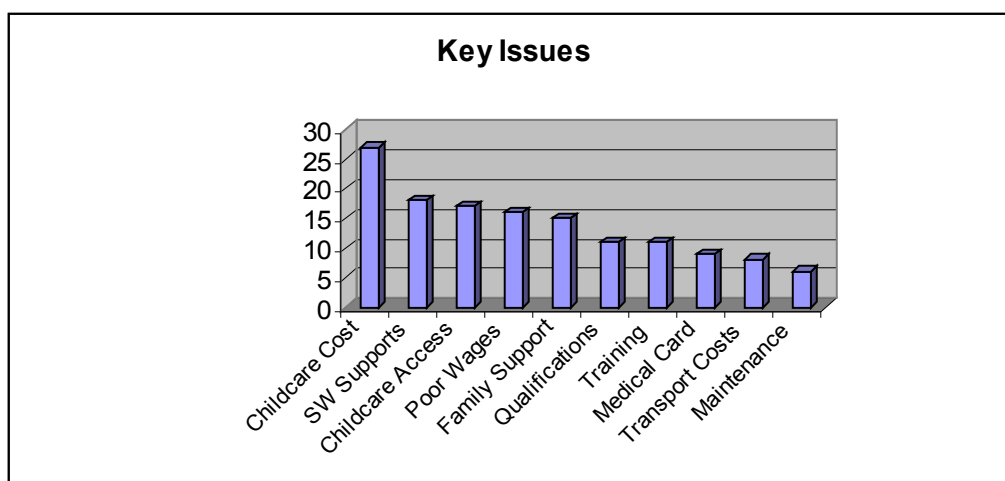
(v) Support

With regard to support provided by the Agencies, feedback in the questionnaire indicates an engagement with a range of Agencies. Comments regarding the Statutory Agencies were quiet negative whilst comments regarding the Community Agencies were much more positive.



(vi) Key Issues

With regard to the key issues for women parenting alone – the cost of and access to childcare was the most significant issue. With diminished employment capacity because of sole parenting responsibility, the lack of access to well paid employment very often because of a lack of qualifications and perhaps rural isolation- these women cannot afford private child care facilities even if they existed in their areas. Affordable and accessible childcare is therefore critical if these women are to progress into further education, training and/or employment.



Social welfare support was the second key issue identified by the women in the questionnaire. There was considerable fear, anxiety and mixed information around social welfare payments and entitlements particularly in relation to returning to work.

Family support emerged as critical in facilitating particularly the younger women to return to education and for other women to be able to continue to work. Not all families have the capacity to give this support. The community organisations and the emerging Parenting Alone Networks both play a critical role in the provision of support, information sharing and advice.

Poor wages and the lack of qualifications and training were key issues. Accessing and participating training with qualifications is very difficult for young women once they have had a child. Locally delivered accredited training with childcare provided is critical for these women to be able to progress.

(vi) Childcare & Challenges

Preferred childcare options were: a community crèche, with a family member/ neighbour or in the home. The women did not appear to think that a private crèche was a feasible option. With regard to the older children homework clubs and affordable activities during the school holidays are critical if the women are to return to employment.

The biggest challenges facing the women are: childcare, isolation and financial pressure. The top three improvements in services that the women would like to see happening are:

- (xiv) Affordable and accessible childcare
- (xv) Supports for people parenting alone
- (xvi) Better access to progression routes.

4.2 Feedback from the Consultation Meetings/ Interviews

The external consultant facilitated eight consultation meetings with 36 women attending in different locations throughout the county. A further four meetings were held meeting representatives from three Agencies that deliver services to people parenting alone namely the HSE, Laois County Council and the Portlaoise Gardaí Diversionary Project.

(i) Personal

Most of the women were very keen to participate in the consultation process. Many of them feel trapped in poverty unable to work because of childcare issues and not having sufficient qualifications to get a reasonably paid job. Equally those in full-time employment are struggling to do everything on their own. Nonetheless all of the women who attended the meetings were keen to improve their situations and those of their children.

(ii) Education

23 of the 38 women met had completed their Leaving Certificates or the equivalent of and yet only 8 of these women were in full-time employment. There appears to be a gap between completing the Leaving Certificate and accessing employment training. Some of the younger women, particularly in Portlaoise, completed the Leaving Certificate and then seemed to move in and out of courses and jobs until they had a baby a few years later. At this point when they really need an income and secure employment it is very difficult to organise childcare, a home, training and hold down a full-time job.

Another issue to emerge with regard to education is access to PLC courses. Some of the younger women, in particular those living with their parents, have difficulty accessing the Higher Education Grants for the PLC courses.

(iii) Training

There certainly appeared to be a general recognition amongst the women that in order to get a well-paid job recognised qualifications are essential. In order for the women to access training it must be local, relevant, certifiable and have childcare facilities. For the younger women, in particular before they have children, entry into employment training should follow the September after they finish the Leaving Certificate. For some of these young women doing the Leaving Certificate is a considerable achievement for them and their families. College is perhaps not an option so locally based certifiable employment training should come on stream seamlessly without having to be unemployed for a number of months. For this group it appears, as stated in the discussions, that foreign nationals are taking up the jobs that they traditionally did for example in the restaurants, hotels, pubs and hospitals. So it is critical that this group receive certified training post Leaving Certificate giving so that they have the skills necessary for more complex employment.

(iv) Employment

Of the 8 women in employment 4 had third level qualification and 4 had a good track record of employment. For these women organising childcare, the home and holding down a full-time job with very often no assistance was difficult. However they did comment that they felt that they were providing a positive role model for their families and that they benefited themselves from being part of the workforce.

For some of the women FÁS Programmes were the entry route back into employment. FÁS Programmes with part-time work in a community organisation suit many of the women. The programmes provide part-time work experience, training, scope for personal development and progression routes in a secure working environment. The Lone Parent and other allowances remain largely intact. Many of the women suggested a return to this type of programme as an entry back into employment with more emphasis on progression routes.

Overall there appeared to be a lot of confusion and fear about taking up employment and losing benefits. Department of Social and Family Affairs Programmes such as the Family Income Supplement appeared to be misunderstood by many of the women and they thought also misunderstood by employers.

Care work, administration, community development and beautician/hairdressing were all areas sought of as employment. Approximately five women expressed an interest in participating in a Jobs Club. This could support those seeking employment as the experiences of job seeking seem to have been very negative and initiatives such as a Job Club would encourage more to try and seek employment in a more positive context.

(v) Support

Feedback on the support received from Statutory Agencies was quiet negative. In general the women felt that the means testing process for allowances and benefits was intrusive, inconsistent in its application and that some of the personnel did not have any respect for them. Some of the women said that they did not put the fathers name on the birth certificates because they would have to try and get maintenance and this would alienate the fathers even more. It would seem that the process of applying and receiving financial assistance be it lone parent or rent allowance is a disincentive to forming or declaring long-term relationships. A system that keeps family formations apart cannot be good social policy.

Feedback on the Community Agencies was much more positive. Agencies such as Money Advice Bureau, Citizen's Information Centres and Community Development Agencies were all perceived as more approachable and more helpful.

Many of the women said that they would like to share experiences and information with other people parenting alone in their areas. Information in areas such as parenting alone, finance, employment, relationships and legal issues. Some of the women were keen to have a parenting alone centre however others felt that local groups were more effective and that a centre on its own would further alienate them from mainstream society. Therefore it is important that support is not provided in an isolated context rather it is linked with existing community development initiatives.

(vi) Key Issues

Childcare, social welfare support, training leading to well-paid employment and family support were all seen as key issues for progression by the women. Family support particularly in terms of childcare was critical for the younger women to continue in education and for the older women to work. Fear of losing social welfare allowances was a very real deterrent to developing any personal relationships or participating in progression routes.

The women in rural areas, particularly Rathdowney, felt that there were little or no services in their area. Services such as childcare, further education and training are difficult to access. They felt isolated and travel to Carlow, Roscrea and Portlaoise to access services. FÁS ran a sales training programme a number of years ago with childcare facilities provided prior to the opening of the designer retail unit. But the retail outlet does not seem to have taken off and the jobs did not last. A Jobs Club Programme was run some time ago. Further progression opportunities need to be considered for this area.

(vi) Childcare & Challenges

Not only is childcare an issue for the younger children but also for older children in secondary school. The lack of after school support and activities during the school holidays for children presents more childcare challenges and blockages to progression. A very limited number of places are available in community crèches. The women feel a sense of being stigmatised in the application process for these places.

The biggest challenges facing the women in discussion and as answered in the questionnaire are: childcare issues, loneliness and pressure and financial responsibility.

4.3 Feedback from meetings with Key Agency Staff

The external consultant/facilitator met with personnel from the HSE, Laois County Council and a Gardaí Diversionary Project. There was certainly a keen awareness amongst the personnel regarding the difficulties experienced by those parenting alone.

There was an awareness that:

- Financial rates of support are very low
- Whilst pregnant it is very difficult to access support
- That mothers need to be financially independent
- There is a huge amount of fear in relation to losing benefits
- Ongoing relationships with personnel in Agencies have to be fostered if trust is to be built on both sides
- Women parenting alone are under enormous pressure
- Systematic support is critical for progression

5. Conclusion

The growth in the number of families headed by one parent is an increasing national trend. The majority of women met through this Project have been parenting alone for more than five years and have three children or less. The majority have completed their Leaving Certificate and are not in long-term paid employment.

As stated earlier, this group of women parenting alone is striving to provide the best possible opportunities for their children. However the added responsibility of parenting alone, together with the sole responsibility for the financial income of the family and a range of obstacles in terms of progression out of poverty or the added responsibility of holding down a full-time job makes life very difficult for most of these women.

Statutory Agencies need to develop a model of progression if these families are to move into employment. Systematic support has been provided in some instances, the women are in employment and relationships have been developed, in particular, with community-based organisations. To move from the security of social welfare support to a world of independence where a woman has sole financial, household and childcare responsibility is a very difficult step and perhaps one that can only be done in stages.

For this reason this Report recommends a systematic model of progression support for women parenting. An interagency Pilot Progression Programme for people Parenting Alone is recommended. It should be piloted in two locations rural and urban and provide a range of integrated supports such as: Childcare, local Parenting Support Group, local Training Initiative, Jobs Club, links to Statutory and Community Agencies, networking with local Employers, Employment Mentoring and ongoing tracking.

Research from an EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (2005) highlights the fact that parental employment rather than family type is the single most important factor associated with a high risk of child poverty.

The women working who participated in this Project whilst finding it difficult managing everything on their own felt that they personally benefited from the interaction of employment and that more importantly their children had a positive role models.

In order to facilitate parental employment Agencies need to:

- Provide access to more community childcare services.
- Provide more community employment places as an access route to long-term employment.
- Develop the capacity of local groups to support people parenting alone.
- Foster greater links between people parenting alone and employers in the area.

STATISTICAL PROFILE OF LONE PARENTS

Population

Total Population of the County

| 1996 | 2002 | 2006 | % change 2002 to 2006 | Summaries and trends |
|--------|--------|--------|-----------------------|---|
| 52,945 | 58,744 | 67,059 | 14.1% | Strong population growth of over 25% in past decade |

Number of Lone Parents

Number of Lone Parents in the County

| Category | 2002 | 2006 | % change 2002 to 2006 | Summaries and Trends |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|--|
| Males | 399 | 416 | 4.3 | While there is an overall increase of 12.6% in the number of households headed by a lone parent, there is an increase of 14.5.% in the number of households headed by a lone mother, as against an increase of only 4.3% in the number of households headed by a lone father |
| Females | 1770 | 2026 | 14.5 | |
| TOTAL | 2169 | 2442 | 12.6 | |

Breakdown of lone parent households by type of housing unit and whether household contains other adults:

| Type of Unit | Head of Household | 2002 | 2006 | % change | Summaries and Trends |
|-------------------------|---|-------------|-------------|----------|--|
| Permanent Housing Units | Private Households headed by Lone Mother with children of any age | 1516 | 1824 | + 20.3% | Increase by 18% in the number of private households in permanent housing units headed by lone parents (both fathers and mothers) with children of any age |
| | Private Households headed by Lone Father with children of any age | 338 | 371 | + 9.8% | |
| | Private Households headed by Lone Mother with children of any age and other persons | 193 | 189 | —2.1% | Decrease by 4% in the number of private households in permanent housing units headed by lone parents (both fathers and mothers) with children of any age and other persons |
| | Private Households headed by Lone Father with children of any age and other persons | 49 | 44 | —10.2% | |
| Temporary Housing Units | Private Households headed by Lone Mother with children of any age | 49 | 13 | —73.5% | Decrease by 75% in the number of private households in temporary housing units headed by lone parents (both fathers and mothers) with children of any age |
| | Private Households headed by Lone Father with children of any age | 8 | 1 | —87.5% | |
| | Private Households headed by Lone Mother with children of any age and other persons | 12 | 0 | —100% | 100% reduction in the number of private households in temporary housing units headed by lone parents (both fathers and mothers) with children of any age and other persons |
| | Private Households headed by Lone Father with children of any age and other persons | 4 | 0 | —100% | |
| TOTAL | Private Households headed by Lone Parent | 2169 | 2442 | + 12.6% | Overall increase of one eighth in the number of households headed by a lone parent |

Parenting Alone – Laois County Development Board – October 5th 2007

Breakdown of number of private households headed by a lone parent, in permanent housing units, by number of persons in household:

| Year | Head of Household | Number of persons in household | | | | | | | | |
|------|--|--------------------------------|-----|-----|----|----|----|---|---|----|
| | | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 2002 | Household headed by Lone Mother with children of any age | 771 | 456 | 182 | 65 | 23 | 11 | 5 | 2 | 1 |
| 2006 | | 1042 | 479 | 198 | 71 | 24 | 5 | 3 | 2 | |
| 2002 | Household headed by Lone Mother with children of any age and other persons | | 79 | 56 | 28 | 17 | 9 | 3 | 1 | |
| 2006 | | | 117 | 41 | 14 | 11 | 2 | 3 | - | 1 |
| 2002 | Household headed by Lone Father with children of any age | 183 | 98 | 41 | 10 | 5 | - | - | 1 | - |
| 2006 | | 233 | 90 | 33 | 8 | 5 | 2 | - | - | - |
| 2002 | Household headed by Lone Father with children of any age and other persons | | 17 | 14 | 15 | 1 | - | 2 | - | - |
| 2006 | | | 17 | 15 | 6 | 5 | 1 | - | - | - |

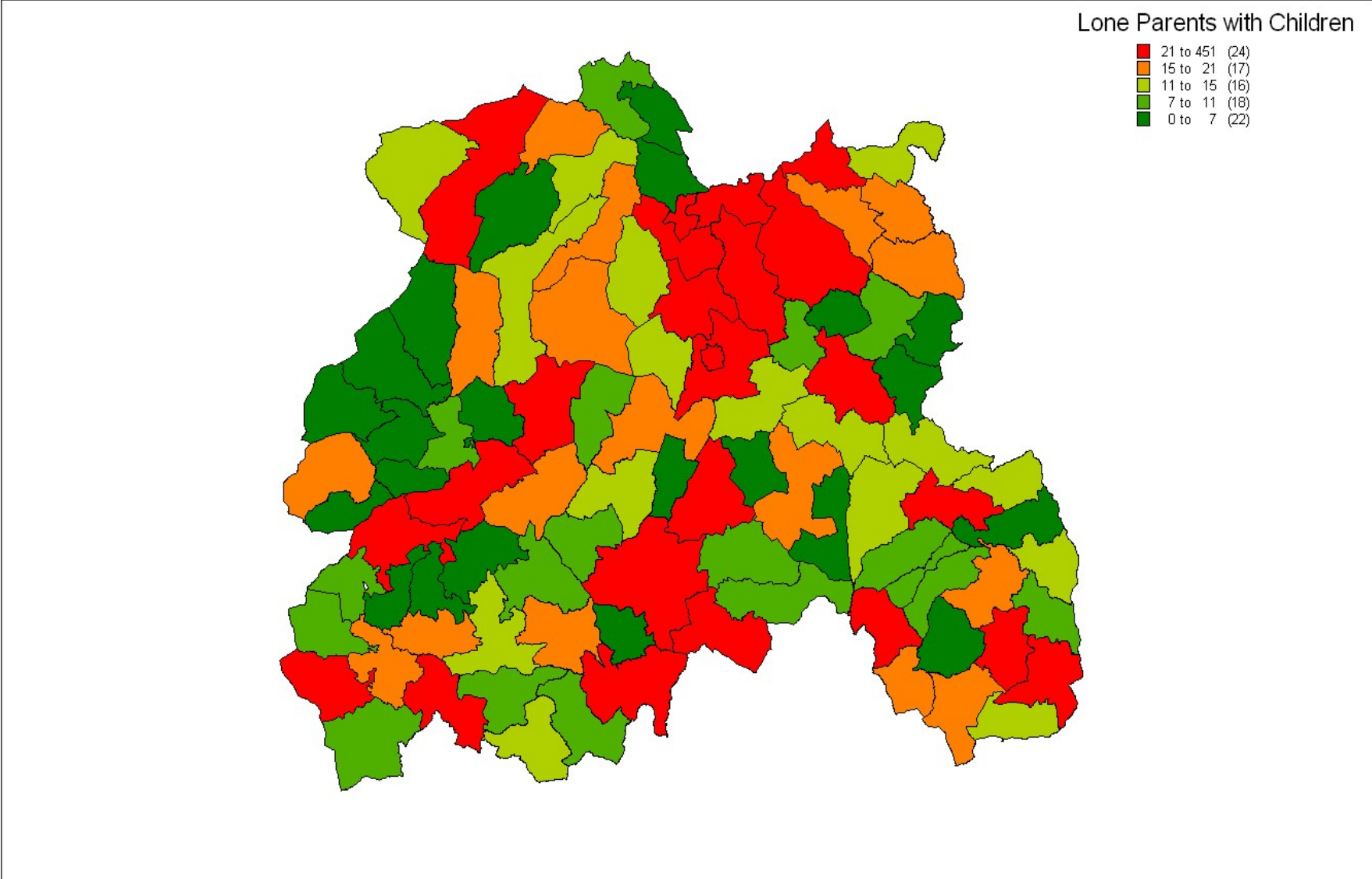
Number of private households headed by a Lone parent in the three major towns:

| Town | Lone Parent with children (of any age) | | | Lone Parent with children (of any age) and other persons | | | Town Total 2006 | Summaries and Trends |
|---------------------|--|------|------|--|------|------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| | Gender of Lone Parent | 2002 | 2006 | Gender of Lone Parent | 2002 | 2006 | | |
| Portlaoise | Male | 60 | 68 | Male | 6 | 15 | 83 | |
| | Female | 392 | 444 | Female | 42 | 53 | 497 | |
| | TOTAL | 452 | 512 | TOTAL | 48 | 68 | 580 | |
| Portarlinton | Male | 19 | 30 | Male | 4 | 1 | 31 | |
| | Female | 112 | 191 | Female | 19 | 18 | 209 | |
| | TOTAL | 131 | 221 | TOTAL | 23 | 19 | 240 | |
| Mountmellick | Male | 21 | 24 | Male | 2 | 2 | 26 | |
| | Female | 104 | 134 | Female | 15 | 9 | 143 | |
| | TOTAL | 125 | 158 | TOTAL | 17 | 11 | 169 | |

Family Units in private households classified by type of family unit

| Town | Type of family unit | | | Type of family Unit | | | Type of family unit | | |
|--------------|---------------------------|------|----------|---------------------------|------|----------|---------------------------|------|---------|
| | Lone mother with children | | | Lone father with children | | | Lone parent with children | | |
| | 2002 | 2006 | % change | 2002 | 2006 | % change | 2002 | 2006 | %change |
| Portlaoise | 440 | 545 | 23.9 | 66 | 87 | 31.8 | 506 | 632 | 24.9 |
| Portarlinton | 133 | 228 | 71.4 | 23 | 31 | 34.8 | 156 | 259 | 66.0 |
| Mounmellick | 120 | 153 | 27.5 | 23 | 27 | 17.4 | 143 | 180 | 25.9 |

The following pages shows the number of lone parents with children in Laois by DED. The map clearly demonstrates where there are greater numbers of lone parents throughout the county.



6. Appendix A
Parenting Alone Report

Members of the Social Inclusion Measures Working Group (SIM)

| Name | Representation |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (Chair) | |
| Catherine Cowap | PCAP |
| Lina Ging | Irish Countrywomen's Association |
| Teresa Mc Evoy | Co. Laois VEC |
| Yvonne Murphy | Laois County Development Board |
| Sarah Shakespeare | Portarlinton Family Resource Centre |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

7. Appendix B
Parenting Alone Report
Consultation Meetings

| No. | Date | Location | Consultation | Nature of Meeting |
|------------|-----------------------|--|---|---|
| 1. | May 24 th | Parish Centre, Portlaoise | Laois Parenting Alone Network | Consultation on Study & feedback on draft questionnaire |
| 2. | May 24 th | Laois County Hall | SIM Group | Briefing meeting on the nature of the Study. |
| 3. | June 14 th | Mountmellick Development Association | Group of women Parenting Alone | Consultation & 4 completed questionnaires |
| 4. | June 14 th | National Association for Parent Support (NAPS), Portlaoise | Group of women Parenting Alone | Consultation & 6 completed questionnaires |
| 5. | June 14 th | Rathdowney | Group of women Parenting Alone | Consultation & 7 completed questionnaires |
| 6. | June 15 th | Knockmay Family Resource Centre, Portlaoise | Group of women Parenting Alone with a representative from the Stradbally Group | Consultation & 6 completed questionnaires |
| 7. | June 21 st | Portarlinton Family Resource Centre | One woman Parenting Alone together with the PFRC Administrator and PFRC Chairperson | Consultation & 1 completed questionnaires |
| 8. | June 21 st | HSE Portlaoise | Senior Community Welfare Officer | Consultation meeting |
| 9. | June 21 st | PCAP Resource Centre | Group of women Parenting Alone | Consultation & 11 completed questionnaires |
| 10. | July 4 th | Gardaí Diversionary Project, Portlaoise | Project Co-ordinator | Consultation meeting |
| 11. | July 4 th | HSE, Portlaoise | Community Welfare Officer | Consultation meeting |
| 12. | July 4 th | Portlaoise | Traveller Representative | Consultation & 1 completed questionnaires |
| 13. | July 4 th | Portlaoise | Laois County Council, Social Worker | Consultation meeting |
| 14. | July 4 th | Portlaoise | Non National Representative | Consultation meeting |
| 15. | July 20 th | By Post | Women Parenting Alone | 2 completed questionnaires |

8. Appendix C
Parenting Alone Report

Parenting Alone Questionnaire – June 14th 2007

The purpose of this questionnaire is to assess the employment needs of individuals Parenting Alone. Laois County Development Board has contracted Ms. Patricia Hunt to conduct the questionnaire. By getting the views of individuals Parenting Alone it is hoped that support services for this Group can be improved in County Laois. Please note that this questionnaire is confidential and those compiling the results of the survey will not use the names of those completing the survey in any circumstances.

Questionnaire Number

Section 1 Personal

Person completing the questionnaire: Gender Female Male Please tick one box only

Q1. How old are you? Please tick one box only

- 1. Under 18 years
- 2. 18 – 24 years
- 3. 25 – 34 years
- 4. 35 – 44 years
- 5. 45+ years

Q2. Where do you live? Please tick one box only

- 1. Portlaoise
- 2. Portlincross
- 3. Mountmellick
- 4. Villages
- 5. Rural Areas

Q3. If you live in a village/rural area how far is it to the nearest town? to the nearest mile

Q4. How long have you been Parenting Alone? Please tick one box only

- 1. Less than 1 year
- 2. 3 – 5 years
- 3. 5 – 10 years
- 4. 10 years or more

Q5. What nationality are you? Please tick one box only

| | |
|--|--|
| 1. Irish | |
| 2. Irish Traveller | |
| 3. EU Citizen (please name your country of origin) | |
| 4. Foreign National (please name your country of origin) | |
| 5. Other | |

Q6. How many children are you financially supporting? Insert the no. of children

Q7. How old are your children? Please tick one box for each child

| Child | Under 3 | 3-5 yrs. | 5-12yrs. | 12-18yrs. | 18yrs.+ |
|-------------|---------|----------|----------|-----------|---------|
| Child no. 1 | | | | | |
| Child no.2 | | | | | |
| Child no.3 | | | | | |
| Child no.4 | | | | | |
| Child no.5 | | | | | |
| Child no.6 | | | | | |
| Child no.7 | | | | | |
| Child no. 8 | | | | | |

Section II Education

Q8. What is the highest level of education you have successfully completed to date? Please tick one box only

| Educational Level | ✓ | Comment / How long you attended |
|------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. Primary School | | |
| 2. Junior/Intermediate Certificate | | |
| 3. Leaving Certificate | | |
| 4. PLC Certificate | | |
| 5. VETAC Course | | |
| 6. HETAC Course | | |
| 7. Diploma | | |
| 8. Degree | | |
| 9. Post Graduate | | |

Q9. Are you interested in further education? Please tick one box Yes No

Q10. If yes, what type of further education are you interested in? Please tick and comment

| Educational Level | ✓ | Comment |
|------------------------------------|---|---------|
| 1. Primary School | | |
| 2. Junior/Intermediate Certificate | | |
| 3. Leaving Certificate | | |
| 4. PLC Certificate | | |
| 5. VETAC Course | | |
| 6. HETAC Course | | |
| 7. Diploma | | |
| 8. Degree | | |
| 9. Post Graduate | | |

Section III Training

Q11. What type of training, if any, have you completed, Please tick, identify where you did the training and comment

| Training | ✓ | Where did you do the Training e.g. FÁS, Youthreach, Training Centre, College | Qualifications / Comment |
|--|---|--|--------------------------|
| 1. Personal Development (Jobs Club) | | | |
| 2. Administrative Skills (ICT, Clerical) | | | |
| 3. Care Work Skills (Childcare, Education) | | | |
| 4. Service Industry Skills (Hairdressing, Horticulture, Recycling, Catering, Arts) | | | |
| 5. Sales Skills (Retail, Tourism) | | | |
| 6. English as a foreign language | | | |
| 7. None | | | |
| 8. Other | | | |

Q12. Are you interested in further training? Please tick one box only Yes No

Q13. If yes, what type of training would you like to do? Please rank 1–3 in order of priority, 1 being the most important

| Training | ✓ | Qualifications / Comment |
|--|---|--------------------------|
| 1. Personal Development (Jobs Club) | | |
| 2. Administrative Skills (ICT, Clerical) | | |
| 3. Care Work Skills (Childcare, Education) | | |
| 4. Service Industry Skills (Hairdressing, Horticulture, Recycling, Catering, Arts) | | |
| 5. Sales Skills (Retail, Tourism) | | |
| 6. English as a foreign language | | |
| 7. Other | | |

Section IV Employment

Q14. Please tick what status of employment/homemaker you are, for what length and what type work you do. Indicate for how long, if at all, you participated in any of the other work areas.

| Employment Status | ✓ | From - To | Type of Work/Experience |
|--|---|-----------|-------------------------|
| 1. Employed Full-time (with no allowances) | | | |
| 2. Employed Part-time (with no allowances) | | | |
| 3. Employed Full-time and in receipt of Lone Parent Allowance | | | |
| 4. Employed Part-time and in receipt of Lone Parent Allowance | | | |
| 5. Homemaker Full-Time and in receipt of Lone Parent Allowance | | | |
| 6. In receipt of Disability Allowance | | | |
| 7. FÁS Programme | | | |
| 8. Community / Traveller Programme | | | |
| 9. Other | | | |

Q15. If you are not in paid employment would you like to be? Yes No

Q16. If yes, would you like Full-Time Employment Part-Time Employment

Q17. What type of employment are you interested in?

| Employment | Experience | Comment/Training Needs |
|--|------------|------------------------|
| 1. Administrative Work (ICT, Clerical) | | |
| 2. Care Work (Childcare, Education) | | |
| 3. Service Industry Work (Hairdressing, Horticulture, Recycling, Catering, Arts) | | |
| 4. Sales (Retail, Tourism) | | |
| 5. Professional (Teaching, Nursing, Community) | | |
| 6. Other | | |

Q18. Are you currently registered with FÁS? Please one box Yes No

Q19. Have you tried to get a job recently? Please tick one box Yes No

Q20. If yes, what was your experience like of trying to get a job? 85

Section V Supports

Q21. The following Agencies provide support to people Parenting Alone, tick if you avail of supports and comment.

| Agency | ✓ | Type of Support/Comment |
|--|---|-------------------------|
| 1. Dept. Social & Family Affairs | | |
| 2. HSE | | |
| 3. FÁS | | |
| 4. Laois VEC | | |
| 5. Laois County Council | | |
| 6. Money Advice Bureau | | |
| 7. Citizen's Information Centre | | |
| 8. Community e.g. PCAP, Knockmay FRC, MDASI, Portarlinton CDP, LTAG | | |
| 9. Support Services against Domestic Abuse | | |
| 10. Other | | |
| 11. | | |

Section VI Key Issues

Q22. Identify and rank the factors from 1 to 5 (1 being the most important and 5 being the least important) that affects your entry into further education, training and/or employment

| Progression Related Issues | 1-5 | Comment |
|--------------------------------|-----|---------|
| 1. Accommodation Issues | | |
| 2. Childcare Access | | |
| 3. Childcare Cost | | |
| 4. Contacts with Employers | | |
| 5. English Language | | |
| 6. Family Support | | |
| 7. Health Issues | | |
| 8. Lack of Qualifications | | |
| 9. Lack of Training | | |
| 10. Literacy | | |
| 11. Loss of Medical Card | | |
| 12. Loss of Rent Allowance | | |
| 13. Maintenance Payments | | |
| 14. Neighbour /Friends Support | | |
| 15. Personal Development | | |
| 16. Poor Wages | | |
| 17. Social Welfare Supports | | |
| 18. Time Factors | | |
| 19. Transport Access | | |
| 20. Transport Costs | | |
| 21. Type of Employment | | |
| 22. Other Please specify | | |
| 23. Other Please specify | | |
| 24. Other Please specify | | |

Section VII Childcare & Challenges

Q23. Comment on your preferred childcare option and associated costs should you return to employment or if you are in employment.

| Childcare Options | ✓Comment | Cost (approx.) |
|-----------------------------------|----------|----------------|
| 1. In the home | | |
| 2. With a family member/neighbour | | |
| 3. In a community crèche | | |
| 4. In a private crèche | | |
| 5. Other | | |

Q24. If you have children under five years are they being minded on a full-time / part-time basis by anyone other than yourself? If so can you comment on the childcare cost, access etc?

Q25. If you have children between 5 – 12 years, are you the sole minder or have they have an after school minder and/or are attending a homework club?

Q26. Please comment if childcare support is needed or availed of for the 12 – 18 year age group.

Q27. What, in your opinion, are the biggest challenges facing you as an individual Parenting Alone?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Q28. What are the top three improvements in services you would like to see happening in Co. Laois to support individuals Parenting Alone?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Please return by: June 30th 2007 Return by email to patriciahunt@eircom.net or post to Ms. Patricia Hunt c/o Laois County Development Board, Co. Hall, Portlaoise, Co. Laois. Many Thanks

**9. Appendix D
Parenting Alone Questionnaire**

Summary of Responses

Section 1 Personal

38 women parenting alone living in Co. Laois completed this questionnaire.

Q1. How old are you?

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| Under 18 years | 0 |
| 18 – 24 years | 6 |
| 25 – 34 years | 14 |
| 35 – 44years | 12 |
| 44 + years | 6 |
| Total | 38 Respondents |

Q2. Where do you live?

| | |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| Portlaoise | 23 |
| Portarlinton | 1 |
| Mountmellick | 4 |
| Village | 0 |
| Rural Area | 10 |
| Total | 38 Respondents |

Q3. If you live in a village/rural area how far is it to the nearest town? 10 respondents indicated 25 miles from Rathdowney to Portlaoise

Q4. How long have you been Parenting Alone?

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Less than 3 years | 8 |
| 3 – 5 years | 8 |
| 5 – 10 years | 11 |
| 10 years + | 11 |
| Total | 38 Respondents |

Q5. What nationality are you?

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Irish | 35 |
| 2. Irish Traveller | 1 |
| 3. EU Citizen (please name your country of origin) | 1 |
| 4. Foreign National (please name your country of origin) | 1 Nigeria |
| 5. Other | 0 |

Q6. How many children are you financially supporting? 19 women had 1 child; a total of 32 women had 3 or less children, 6 women had 4 or more children to support.

Q7. How old are your children?_

| Area | No. of responses | Under 3 | 3-5 yrs. | 5-12yrs. | 12-18yrs. | 18yrs.+ |
|--------------|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Portlaoise | 24 | 8 | 2 | 21 | 17 | 6 |
| Mountmellick | 4 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Rathdowney | 7 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| Others | 3 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 38 | 11 | 10 | 27 | 25 | 10 |

Section II Education

Q8. What is the highest level of education you have successfully completed to date?

| Educational Level | ✓ | Comment / How long you attended |
|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Primary School | 5 | |
| 2. Junior/Intermediate Certificate | 10 | |
| 3. Leaving Certificate | 9 | |
| 4. PLC Certificate | 2 | |
| 5. VETAC Course | 4 | |
| 6. HETAC Course | 2 | |
| 7. Diploma | 3 | |
| 8. Degree | 3 | |
| 9. Post Graduate | 0 | |
| Total | 38 | |

Q9. Are you interested in further education? In general, Respondents were generally interested in further education but vague and unsure in terms of specific courses. They appeared to be more interested in workplace training with qualifications rather than in further formal education. Some want to do Junior Certificate subjects. Three with diploma/degree qualifications expressed interest in pursuing their studies but financially could not take the time off work.

Section III Training

Q11. What type of training, if any, have you completed?

| Training | ✓ | Where | Qualifications |
|--|-----------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Personal Development & Jobs Club | 5 | FÁS, VEC | - |
| 2. Administrative Skills (ICT, Clerical) | 12 | FÁS, Third Level | FETAC, City & Guilds, Diploma, Degree |
| 3. Care Work Skills (Childcare, Education) | 9 | WIT, NUIG, FÁS, VEC Youthreach | VETAC |
| 4. Service Industry Skills (Hairdressing, Horticulture, Recycling, Catering, Arts) | 2 | FÁS, Nat. College of Catering, CERT, VEC, Youthreach | Certificates, Diplomas |
| 5. Sales Skills (Retail, Tourism) | 3 | FÁS, | FÁS Rathdowney Retail Course |
| 6. English as a foreign language | 0 | - | - |
| 7. Other – Community Development | 4 | Merchants Quay, FÁS | |
| 8. None / No response | 11 | | |
| Total number of responses | 46 | | |

Q12. Are you interested in further training? 33 Yes 2 No 3 did not indicate either preference

Q13. If yes, what type of training would you like to do? _

| Training Interest Areas | ✓ | Qualifications / Comment |
|--|-----------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Personal Development (Jobs Club) | 9 | |
| 2. Administrative Skills (ICT, Clerical) | 8 | |
| 3. Care Work Skills (Childcare, Education) | 10 | |
| 4. Service Industry Skills (Hairdressing, Horticulture, Recycling, Catering, Arts) | 7 | |
| 5. Sales Skills (Retail, Tourism) | 1 | |
| 6. English as a foreign language | 2 | |
| 7. Other – not specific | 6 | |
| Total number of responses | 43 | |

Section IV Employment

Q14. Please tick what status of employment/homemaker you are, for what length and what type work you do. Indicate for how long, if at all, you participated in any of the other work areas.

| Employment Status | ✓ | Type of Work/Experience |
|---|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Employed Full-time (with no allowances) | 7 | |
| 2. Employed Part-time (with no allowances) | 0 | |
| 3. Employed Full-time and in receipt of Lone Parent Allowance | 1 | |
| 4. Employed Part-time and in receipt of Lone Parent Allowance (incl. FÁS) | 13 | |
| 5. Homemaker Full-Time and in receipt of Lone Parent Allowance | 15 | |
| 6. In receipt of Disability Allowance | 0 | |
| 7. Community / Traveller Programme | 0 | |
| 8. Other | 2 | Voluntary Work & U/B awaiting claim |
| Total | 38 | |

Q15. If you are not in paid employment would you like to be? Yes 21 No 1

Q16. If yes, would you like Full-Time Employment 7 Part-Time Employment 19

Q17. What type of employment are you interested in?

| Employment | Response | Comment/ |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Administrative Work (ICT, Clerical) | 2 | |
| 2. Care Work (Childcare, Education) | 9 | |
| 3. Service Industry Work (Hairdressing, Beauty) | 11 | |
| 4. Sales (Retail, Tourism) | 2 | |
| 5. Professional (Teaching, Nursing, Community) | 1 | |
| 6. Currently in Employment | 7 | |
| 7. No answer (some on FÁS CE / SE) | 6 | |
| Total | 38 | |

Q18. Are you currently registered with FÁS? Yes 20 No 9

Q19. Have you tried to get a job recently? Yes 10 No 18

Q20. If yes, what was your experience like of trying to get a job?

Responses included: fear of loss of benefits, childcare issues, cannot drive (for someone in Portlaoise to get to the other side of town and leave children off), too old, wages not enough, find the rejection terrible, never hear back from employers.

Section V Supports

Q21. The following Agencies provide support to people Parenting Alone, tick if you avail of supports and comment.

| Agency | ✓ | Type of Support/General Comment |
|--|----|--|
| 1. Dept. Social & Family Affairs | 22 | Poor attitude and lack of respect for lone parents |
| 2. HSE | 11 | Difficulties with bureaucracy and attitudes |
| 3. FÁS | 12 | Mixed response overall poor |
| 4. Laois VEC | 6 | No response |
| 5. Laois County Council | 9 | Very difficult to meet with or speak to a person |
| 6. Money Advice Bureau | 5 | Very positive |
| 7. Citizen's Information Centre | 7 | Very positive |
| 8. Community e.g. PCAP, Knockmayl FRC, | 4 | Very positive |
| 9. MDASI, Portarlinton CDP, LTAG | | |
| 10. Support Services against Domestic Abuse | 0 | No response |
| 11. Other | 6 | 6 people did not respond to this question |
| 12. Other | 6 | 6 people did not respond to this question |

Section VI Key Issues

Q22. Identify and rank the factors from 1 to 5 (1 being the most important and 5 being the least important) that effect your entry into further education, training and/or employment

| Progression Related Issues | Number of respondents that indicated the issue |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Childcare Cost | 27 |
| 2. Social Welfare Supports | 18 |
| 3. Childcare Access | 17 |
| 4. Poor Wages | 16 |
| 5. Family Support | 15 |
| 6. Lack of Qualifications | 11 |
| 7. Lack of Training | 11 |
| 8. Loss of Medical Card | 9 |
| 9. Transport Costs | 8 |
| 10. Maintenance Payments | 6 |
| 11. Transport Access | 5 |
| 12. Type of Employment | 5 |
| 13. Loss of Rent Allowance | 4 |
| 14. Health Issues | 3 |
| 15. Accommodation Issues | 3 |
| 16. Personal Development | 3 |
| 17. Neighbour /Friends Support | 2 |
| 18. Contacts with Employers | 2 |
| 19. Time Factors | 2 |
| 20. Other Children need us at home | 1 |
| 21. Other Age barriers | 1 |
| 22. Literacy | 0 |
| 23. English Language | 0 |
| 24. Other Please specify | 0 |

Section VII Childcare & Challenges

Q23. Comment on your preferred childcare option and associated costs should you return to employment or if you are in employment.

| Childcare Options | ✓ | Comment | Cost (approx.) |
|-----------------------------------|----|---------|----------------|
| 6. In the home | 10 | | |
| 7. With a family member/neighbour | 12 | | €130. pw |
| 8. In a community crèche | 13 | | €30 – €40 pw |
| 9. In a private crèche | 3 | | €150.00 pw |
| 10. Other | 1 | | |

Q24. If you have children under five years are they being minded on a full-time / part-time basis by anyone other than yourself? If so can you comment on the childcare cost, access etc.

Grannys / Neighbours

Q25. If you have children between 5 – 12 years, are you the sole minder or have they have an after school minder and/or are attending a homework club?

“I am the sole minder” “Older children help out” “Granny helps”

Q26. Please comment if childcare support is needed or availed of for the 12 – 18 year age group.

Neighbours, Study Groups, Homework Clubs, More supervised after school activities critical if the mother is to work.

Q27. What, in your opinion, are the biggest challenges facing you as an individual Parenting Alone?

1. Child care support so that a parent can progress
2. Sense of responsibility – loneliness and pressure
3. Financial responsibility

Q28. What are the top three improvements in services you would like to see happening in

Co. Laois to support individuals Parenting Alone?

1. Accessible and affordable childcare
2. Supports for people parenting alone
3. Easier progression routes

Please return by: June 30th 2007 Return by email to patriciahunt@eircom.net or post to Ms. Patricia Hunt c/o Laois County Development Board, Co. Hall, Portlaoise, Co. Laois. Many Thanks.