



**Minister Says Findings Of Nationwide Survey Of Issues Affecting
Most Vulnerable Will Help Government In Targetting Further
Resources And Services**

**Brennan Opens Cobh Family Resource Centre & Confirms Target Of
100 Centres By End 2006 Will Be Delivered**

The Minister for Social Affairs, Seamus Brennan T.D., said today in Co. Cork that the findings of a recent evaluation survey of almost 90 Family Resource Centres countrywide had clearly identified the central issues that in 21st century Ireland are of most concern to families in areas where people feel disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalised.

Minister Brennan described the findings of the evaluation - conducted through the Centres by the Family Support Agency - as a valuable indicator of the challenges facing families in modern Ireland. He said the findings would further inform the Government in identifying the areas that required additional targeted resources, supports, services and entitlements as part of an ongoing multi-billion package of measures spread across a number of Departments and Agencies.

Minister Brennan was speaking when performing the official opening of Cobh Family Resource Centre, which provides a range of community support services and links to advice agencies and groups.



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Minister Brennan also announced that the target set by the Government under the National Development Plan of funding 100 Family Resource Centres by the end of 2006 will be delivered. There are currently 92 core-funded groups in the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme, with an additional three Resource Centres having recently signed contracts with the Agency.

A further eight groups have applied for inclusion in the Programme. Funding for the Family Resource Centre Programme has increased substantially from €317,500 in 1994 to over €12.9 million in 2006. The evaluation of Family Resource Centres nationwide lists, in order from one to 10, the major issues that have been identified by the Centres as most affecting the communities that they serve:

Childcare

In many areas, accessible and affordable childcare facilities are at present not adequate to meet the increasing demands. Family Resource Centres have expressed the view that by providing quality childcare it has a positive effect on children's lives and reduces the risk of early school leaving and getting involved in drugs and crime.

Education

Education is seen as the first step for marginalised groups in taking responsibility for their futures. Adult education is also seen as important (e.g. literacy skills).

• Drug Use

The increase in drug use among younger people appears to be an issue in all areas of the country. This can also be associated with drug-related crime and anti-social behaviour.

• Amenities

The lack of amenities for young people in particular is seen as an issue as it is strongly felt that the provision of amenities may help to combat problems of drugs and crime among this age group.

• Equality

The issue of equality has been identified with that of social inclusion and how it affects certain sections of society – lone parent families, travellers, people with disabilities and immigrants.

• Employment

Access to employment is regarded as the best route out of poverty and is still seen as a key challenge. Upskilling and training to provide quality sustainable employment with career prospects is vital to facilitate people in moving to greater levels of financial independence.

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- **Disability**

Issues of access to education, training and employment for those with disabilities have been identified.

- **Mental Health**

The issue of mental health is reflected in the increased incidence of suicide, particularly amongst young men and particularly amongst those living in isolated rural areas. Mental health issues have also been identified with drugs, crime and domestic violence.

- **Physical Health**

For many particularly older members of the community, physical as well as mental health is an important issue. Accessibility to health services remains a concern.

- **Transport**

The poor quality of transport infrastructure particularly in rural areas has been highlighted as an impediment to the development of the areas in question. Its effect on social isolation has also been highlighted.

Minister Brennan said: "Modern 21st century Ireland is witnessing the emergence of a whole range of new stresses and pressures. Our success as a nation in recent years has brought with it, or perhaps brought to the surface, social issues that are of particular concern.

"This survey identifies the issues that most concern those working on a day to day basis on building, or rebuilding, better lives for those who feel most vulnerable and marginalised. The rising tide of economic buoyancy and greatly increased and targeted resources has lifted over 250,000 men, women and children out of poverty in less than a decade. But some, as this survey shows, have been left behind and it is on those people we must now concentrate all our efforts through further increased resources, improved services, targeted entitlements and more individually directed social supports that all converge to provide the foundations on which people can build better lives for themselves and their families."

"My Department is this year spending almost €14 billion in supports, entitlements and payments that each week directly benefits more than one and a half million men, women and children. But payments alone will not solve our problems. That is why social policy is now increasingly directed at getting behind the payments, and confronting and tackling the issues that can blight young lives and leave too many of our people vulnerable and marginalised. Reforms and improvements are now advancing that will lift more children out of poverty; that will deliver decent pensions and security for all of our older people;



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that will provide better opportunities for lone parents and their children; and that will open up new career and employment prospects for those with disabilities so that we can be sure that no individuals talent or contribution is overlooked or neglected."

Minister Brennan paid tribute to the contribution Resource Centres are making to modern society. "The Government recognises the critically important contribution that Resource Centres make to combating disadvantage and reaching out, in particular, to those who feel vulnerable and marginalised. The services provided by community resource groups are often emotional and practical lifelines for those who may be going through particularly traumatic situations and experiencing a range of problems that combine to leave them feeling isolated and powerless".

Minister Brennan also released the most recent statistics for the numbers of people in Co. Cork who are benefiting from welfare entitlements and supports. In total, about 155,000 benefit, including some 93,299 people on a variety of welfare support schemes and 61,667 families who receive Child Benefit on behalf of 119,946 children. A breakdown of the welfare schemes shows 15,533 on unemployment or jobseekers payments; 20551 (State Pensions), 9,988 (Retirement Pension), 1,217 (Pre-Retirement Pension), 17609 (Disability Benefit/Allowance), 13650 (Widow's & Widower's Pensions), 9037 (One-Parent Family Payment), 2,946 (Supplementary Welfare Allowance), 2768 (Carer's Benefit/Allowance).

Minister Brennan said: "The services provided by Cobh Family Resource Centre are a practical response to the real local needs of the communities serviced by the centres. All of the dedication and commitment shown at local level is, of course, inspired by a vision of change for the good of the community and society in general".

The Minister said his Department recognized the important part played by local community groups around the country in improving the quality of the lives of the people by helping them to develop their capacity to change their situation for the better. It is through a combination of local community initiatives on the ground and support from statutory agencies and other bodies that local communities can realise their potential to play a real part and have a real say in their own development.

ENDS



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