



## **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

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### **Minister Says Welfare Queries Accounted For One Third Of The 700,000 Queries Dealt With By Citizen Information Centres Last Year**

#### ***Latest Figures Show Almost 44,000 People In Co. Mayo Directly Benefiting From Welfare Entitlements & Supports***

The Minister for Social Affairs, Seamus Brennan TD, said today latest statistics show that the nationwide network of Citizen Information Centre (CIC) offices dealt with more than 700,000 queries from members of the public last year.

Minister Brennan said that according to the latest research and analysis social welfare queries accounted for over one third of all the queries, followed by employment, health services, family matters, housing and law issues.

Minister Brennan announced the latest statistics during a visit to Co. Mayo during which he visited the Citizen Information Centre (CIC) offices in Ballina and also the town's local Social Welfare Offices. The new accessible CIC offices at Teeling Street are part of the Mayo Citizen's Information Service. In 2005 the Ballina office dealt with 4,340 queries and so far in 2006 it has dealt with 2,300 queries. One in three of all queries were social welfare related, with one in five on employment rights.

The Mayo Citizen's Information Service is currently receiving funds to provide an outreach information service for foreign nationals in Ballinrobe, using interpreters and translation services for Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian immigrants.

Minister Brennan also released the latest figures for the numbers of people in Co. Mayo who benefit from social welfare supports and entitlements, and also details of the new allocation of grants for Marriage, Child and Bereavement Counselling services in the county.

The welfare figures show that almost 44,000 people in the county are benefiting from entitlements and supports, including 15,295 families who received Child Benefit for



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31,846 children; State Age Pensions (7,469), Unemployment Payments (5,420), Retirement Pension (2,486), Pre-Retirement Pension (424), Disability Benefit/Allowance (4,446), Widow's & Widower's Pensions (4,143), One-Parent Family Payment (1,705), Carer's Benefit/Allowance (1,470) and Supplementary Welfare Allowance (724).

Marriage, Child and Bereavement Counselling Grants have been awarded by Minister Brennan to:

Knock Counselling Services, Knock (€94,900);

Hope House, Foxford (€50,000);

Family Life Services, Castlebar (€60,100);

ACCORD, Ballina (€35,300);

ACCORD, Castlebar (€23,000);

Curam Family Centre, Claremorris (€16,400);

ACCORD, Charlestown (€16,100);

West of Ireland Alzheimer Foundation, Ballindine (€5,000);

Ballyhaunis Family Resource Centre (€2,500);

Lacken Bereavement Support Group, Lacken (€1,950);

St. Colman's Care Centre, Achill (€1,000);

Rainbows Scoil Naomh Aingeal, Castlebar (€900) and

Rainbows Ballyhaunis (€900).

Minister Brennan said the latest statistics for Citizen Information centres show that in 2005 a total of 733,879 queries were processed by centres nationwide -compared with 676,846 in 2004. A breakdown under the various categories showed 34% were about social welfare issues, 15% concerned employment queries, health services and payments (13%), family matters (7%) law (6%) housing (6%), tax (4%), consumer (3%), education (2%) and debt (1%). A range of general queries accounted for the remainder.

Minister Brennan said: "These latest statistics clearly demonstrate the extent of the public's need for information on entitlements and rights. The Citizens Information Centres and outreach services provide a valuable and easily accessible network of information points that reach into every corner of the country. The provision of information on the scale provided helps break down barriers, eases anxieties, opens



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up opportunities and often clears the way for citizens, particularly those who are most vulnerable in society, to improve their situations and build better lives. When you consider that over 970,000 payments are made by my Department each week that in total benefit more than 1.5 million men, women and children, it is understandable why queries on welfare rights and entitlements should make up more than one third of overall information and advice queries."

The national network of citizens' information services is supported by Comhairle, the statutory body operating under the aegis of the Department of Social Affairs, with responsibility for the provision of information, advice and advocacy services. This year the Department is providing funding to Comhairle of over €24 million - €3 million more than in 2005 - of which almost €10 million is earmarked as support Citizens Information Services.

**Ends**