



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

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### **Mary Coughlan Minister For Social And Family Affairs Launches RAINBOWS Ireland Strategic Plan**

Mary Coughlan Minister for Social and Family Affairs today emphasised the Government's support for "RAINBOWS IRELAND" which provides support for children who are experiencing loss of a parent through death, separation or divorce.

Minister Coughlan today launched the first ever strategic plan for RAINBOWS 2003 – 2006 which is supported by the Government.

RAINBOWS IRELAND is the largest RAINBOWS organisation outside the USA and provides support for children to help bring them through their experiences of bereavement and insecurity to a level of acceptance of the situation and a willingness to be positive about the possibilities in their own lives going into the future.

One of the key areas highlighted in the plan is the challenge of making RAINBOWS programmes available to more children throughout the country.

"I note that the changing nature of families in Ireland is reflected in the results of your recent survey which suggest that participants on Rainbows courses experiencing a separation are in a 2 to 1 majority over those experiencing bereavement", Minister Coughlan added.

"The latest census shows us that almost 154,000 children are living in families which are headed by a parent who is widowed, separated, divorced or unmarried".

"It is critical that we as a society assist these children in the painful periods associated with the bereavement they have experienced, to assist them in building a stronger sense of self esteem and to direct the children towards a healthy acceptance of the changes that have taken place in their lives and the RAINBOWS Programmes aims to do just this", Minister Coughlan said.

"The Government is committed to protecting the family through political, economic, social and other measures to support the stability of the family. We are particularly concerned with protecting children as vulnerable members of families. I have long been aware of the valuable work RAINBOWS does with children, adolescents and adults experiencing grief through bereavement, separation or divorce."

Rainbows is a not-for-profit voluntary organisation whose services are aimed at children who have experienced bereavement or parental separation.

RAINBOWS helps by providing a safe setting in which children can talk through their feelings with other children who are experiencing similar situations. They are helped to articulate their feelings by an adult facilitator or listener. RAINBOWS provides materials; journals, story books, games and activities - which form a structured programme to lead the children gently through the grieving process.

RAINBOWS Ireland HQ received a grant of €100,000 from the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Part of this funding went to the development of the strategic plan launched today. Grants totaling a further €80,000 were made to over 100 RAINBOWS groups nationwide under the scheme of grants for marriage, child and bereavement counseling administered by the Family Support Agency. The 2004 scheme for applicants for grants is currently being advertised.

ENDS February 4th 2004