



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Announces That Family Mediation Service Helping 1,500 Couples A Year Cope With Marriage Difficulties & Separations

SEAMUS BRENNAN-“Marriage And Relationship Counselling Of Enormous Support For Couples With Problems In Our Rapidly Changing Society”

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., said today that in an increasingly pressurised society the role of family support and counselling services in marriage and relationship counselling is of enormous importance in assisting couples who are coping with difficulties.

Minister Brennan said that in situations where couples have decided that relationships are in serious difficulty and a decision has been made to separate, the 14 Family Mediation Services run by the Family Support Agency-it will increase to 16 within months- is a vital conduit in resolving conflict and in helping both parties to reach agreement on central issues such as the family home, financial arrangements and avoiding costly litigation, as well as bringing about arrangements that facilitate children retaining close bonds with both parents where possible.

The Minister announced that in 2005, through the Family Mediation Service, almost 1,500 couples were assisted when they sought advice on separation and the consequences for the children of their relationship. Of those couples who finished the mediation process, 54% reached agreement and a further 5% decided to return to their marriage.

Minister Brennan said: “We are living in a society that is full of pressures and increasing demands on individuals and families. Coping with these demands, pressures and expectations can place enormous stress on couples and families. Increasingly, research evidence is highlighting the considerable importance of marriage and relationship counselling services and supports in assisting couples with difficulties and in assisting them in building new relationships. That is why having supports in place, and increasing awareness of the help that can be availed of, is so imperative. In the rapidly changing society we have in Ireland today such supports are of increasingly critical importance and the services they provide are invaluable.”

Minister Brennan was speaking in Dublin when launching three new initiatives for the Family Support Agency (FSA), established in 2003 to bring together programmes and services to support families. Funding for the FSA from the Department of Social and Family Affairs has increased this year to over €28 million, more than 60% up on the funding level for 2004.

The initiatives launched today are:

- Announcement of the second phase of the Agency’s Families Research Programme and the availability of grant aid to undertake original research in the field of family policy. Some €60,000 will be available in 2006 for research studies, which will seek to inform the future development of aspects of public policy. The Programme was originally initiated by the Department in 1999, when it commissioned 14 studies designed to inform the development of family policy in Ireland.
- The 2006 edition of the “*Support for Families*” Directory which is a comprehensive guide to local voluntary and community groups providing marriage counselling, marriage preparation programmes, child counselling and bereavement counselling



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and support services. In 2005, the Family Support Agency awarded grants totalling over €8 million to 547 organisations involved in providing these services. The Guide also includes details of the Family Mediation service as well as local Family Resource Centres and law centres.

- And the launch of the Family Support Agency's new website, www.fsa.ie which outlines the core functions of the Agency and provides comprehensive information on the counselling, advice and support services it provides.

Minister Brennan said that the funding to voluntary groups providing marriage, child and bereavement counselling had extended from just over €1 million in 1997 to €9 million this year and the number of groups funded under the Scheme expanding from less than 100 to some 550 over the same period.

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 88 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 9 groups have already been approved for inclusion. Funding for the Programme has increased substantially from €317,500 in 1994 to almost €13 million in 2006.

Minister Brennan said: "The Government recognises the critically important contribution that Resource Centres make to combating disadvantage and reaching out to the 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".

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