



**NEWS RELEASE**

**May 15 2009**

**Government supporting families through services and funding – Hanafin**

**UN International Day of Families – Friday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2009**

Almost €3.5billion is being spent this year by the Government to support families through income supports such as Child Benefit and Family Income Supplement and a variety of other projects. **Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin T.D., today said that highlighting the positive supports that are available for families was important as the 15<sup>th</sup> of May is United Nations International Day of Families.**

Minister Hanafin said that the current economic downturn is placing additional strain on many families. **“Now more than ever there is a need to ensure that quality services are available to help families experiencing new pressures in their lives. Financial strain can lead to problems in relationships but families need to know that they are not on their own and that help is there for them. The Government is committed to supporting families and helping them to deal with difficult periods they may experience.”**

The Minister highlighted the important role played by the Family Support Agency in providing supports to families throughout the country. The Agency brings together programmes and services introduced by the Government which are designed to:-

- Promote local family support
- Support ongoing parenting relationships for children and,
- Help prevent marital breakdown

Specifically, the Family Support Agency is responsible for:

- Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme



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- Scheme of Grants to Voluntary Organisations providing Marriage, Child and Bereavement Counselling Services
- Family Mediation Service
- Research & Information provision on family related issues

Minister Hanafin said that Family Resource Centres in 107 local communities are **“supported in developing approaches to tackle the problems they face. Services provided are tailored to the needs of the local community and typically include provision of education or training opportunities, childcare facilities for those attending courses run by the project and practical assistance to community groups such as training, information and support.”**

The Agency’s Counselling Grants Scheme provides financial support to voluntary and community organisations providing marriage and relationship counselling, marriage preparation courses, child counselling in relation to parental separation and bereavement counselling and support on the death of a family member.

The Family Mediation Service is a free, professional, confidential service which enables couples, married and non-married, who have decided to separate, or divorce and who together want to negotiate the terms of their separation or divorce with the help of a trained mediator. It assists couples to address the issues on which they need to make decisions including; post-separation living arrangements, finances and parenting arrangements to enable children to have an ongoing relationship with each parent.

Minister Hanafin recently announced funding of over €11.3million to 588 voluntary and community groups nationwide that provide marriage, child and bereavement counselling. **“Having a network of support services available throughout the country is a core part of helping families to cope with problems they are confronted with. Early intervention**



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**and support can help families to avert a much deeper crisis causing a family break-up.”**

The Minister concluded by saying that children and families are supported in a number of other ways by the Department through schemes such as the **“Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, which this year is expected to provide support to over 100,000 families with children of school going age. The Department also funds schools and school-based community organisations through the School Meals Programme which delivers some 218, 000 nutritious meals each day to children in almost 2,000 schools around the country. Children benefit hugely through breakfast clubs, healthy snacks, lunch, dinner and homework clubs.”**

**ENDS**