

MINISTER COUGHLAN STRESSES SUPPORT **FOR FAMILIES**

Mary Coughlan, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, today stressed the importance of support for families in her address to the AGM of Dublin based organisation, AIM Family Services.

“The promotion of continuity and stability in family life is a primary goal for this Government. Our approach involves an increasing emphasis on preventing family breakdown in the first place through the development of marriage and relationship counselling services,” said Minister Coughlan.

“Counselling can greatly help families, parents and children with the difficulties they experience in their relationships. My Department funds organisations countrywide, who provide this service, through the Scheme of Grants for Marriage, Child and Bereavement Counselling Services administered by the Family Support Agency,” said Minister Coughlan.

Referring to the findings of the recent report by Accord, “Unhappy Marriages: Does Counselling Help”, Minister Coughlan said, “...the conclusion was that Counselling does work...in 7 out of 10 cases; that it works equally well for men and women and that it can help people in widely different relationships and circumstances.”

Minister Coughlan commented on the importance of family mediation, “It is important that when a couple have decided to separate, they have a service which facilitates them in negotiating their separation without acrimony... this type of approach encourages co-operation and has recognised advantages for children.

“It was for this reason that the Government singled out the Family Mediation Service for development over the last 6 years. The number of Family Mediation Service centres has been increased from just two, in Dublin and Limerick, to 12 centres throughout the country. The number of couples being helped by the Family Mediation Service has increased from 484 couples in 1997 to over 1,300 last year.”

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Minister Coughlan also referred to the Family Support Agency, which she established last May, “I have recently established The Family Support Agency. Its main task is to support families, promote the continuity of stability in family life, prevent marital breakdown and foster a supportive community environment for families at a local level.”

The Minister welcomed AIM’s work in researching issue affecting the family and spoke about the series of public consultation fora she is hosting around the country.

“The aim of these fora is to provide me with the opportunity to hear the views of a cross section of family members from different regions of the country and all those who work with them.

“These fora will act as significant listening posts that will help to inform policy and will ensure that family friendly policies are kept at the top of the social partnership agenda,” said Minister Coughlan.

The Minister acknowledged the importance of working with voluntary and community groups, such as AIM, to “strengthen and support families and local communities and help develop the kind of family-friendly society we all aspire to have.”

ENDS 18th June, 2003

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Note for News Editors

AIM Family Services

AIM Family Services, founded in 1972, is a voluntary organisation, which offers non-directive counselling, legal information, and a family mediation service to people experiencing marital, relationship and family problems. Its drop-in centre at 6, D'Olier Street, Dublin 2 has been operating since 1975.

AIM offers the following services,

1. Family Mediation Service.
2. Individual and Couple Counselling.
3. Information on Family Law.
4. A 24-hour telephone answering service.
5. A countrywide letter answering service.

Contact Details at their main office are,

AIM Family Services. Family Law Information, Mediation and Counselling

Tel.: (01) 670 8363

Fax: (01) 670 8365

10am - 1pm Monday to Friday

6, D'Olier Street, Dublin 2

E-Mail: aimfamilyservices@eircom.net

Family Support Agency

The main task of the Family Support Agency is to support families, promote the continuity of stability in family life, prevent marital breakdown and foster a supportive community environment for families at a local level. It does so by providing a family mediation service, by developing marriage and relationship counselling, undertaking research and by advising the Minister on its functions and family issues.

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