



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Coughlan Opens Family Mediation Service In Sligo

Mary Coughlan T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs, today formally opened the North West's first Family Mediation Service office, in Sligo Town. Minister Coughlan also announced that she has secured funding to open two additional offices next year, one in County Donegal, further enhancing the service in the North West, and one in the Midlands.

"I am delighted to open this long awaited Family Mediation Service for the North West. The benefits of family mediation as a non-adversarial approach to resolving the issues that arise on separation are increasingly being recognised, it helps people during what can be a very distressing time," said Minister Coughlan.

"I am also delighted to be able to announce that I have made additional funds available to the Family Support Agency in the recent budget to allow for two new Family Mediation Service offices to be opened next year. One of these will be in County Donegal, copper-fastening the availability of the service in the north-west, and one in the Midlands," said Minister Coughlan.

The Family Mediation Service is provided by the Family Support Agency, which operates under the aegis of Minister Coughlan's Department. Last year the Service helped over 1,300 couples - five times more than those who used it in 1997. Minister Coughlan has increased next year's funding for the Family Support Agency by 3m, bringing it to more than E20m.

ENDS

Note for news editors

Family Mediation Service

The Family Mediation Service is a free, professional, confidential service that enables couples who have decided to separate to reach agreement on all issues related to their separation. 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 on-going relationship with each parent.

Over the past number of years the Family Mediation Service has radically expanded to meet a growing need for its empathic service. It is now available in 14 centres throughout the country including the new centre in Sligo and an additional new centre, which has just opened in Waterford city.

Awareness of its benefits has lead to a dramatic increase in the number of couples seeking mediation. Last year the Service helped over 1,300 couples - which compares with the average of 250 a year who used the Service from 1986 up to the end of 1997, before its nation-wide expansion.

Family Support Agency

Minister Coughlan formally launched the Family Support Agency on May 15th last. Its main task is to protect the family, by supporting the stability of family life and addressing the effects of changing family formation.

The Family Support Agency provides a family mediation service, develops marriage and relationship counselling, undertakes research and advises the Minister on family issues and works in partnership with the community and voluntary sector. The Family Support Agency will have a budget of over 20m next year.



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The Agency is managed by a board with experience and expertise in matters relating to its functions chaired by Michael O'Kennedy and by its Chief Executive Officer, Pat Bennett.