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## MINISTER COUGHLAN ANNOUNCES NATIONAL FAMILY CONSULTATIONS AND PRESENTS €1.9M TO MARRIAGE COUNSELLING GROUPS

Mary Coughlan T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs, today presented cheques totalling €1.9m to national organisations providing marriage and relationship counselling – and announced a series of national consultations on the challenges facing families in Ireland.

“These national consultations will be an opportunity for family members, and those who work them, to express the concerns and themes which influence family life today. The fora discussions will help to inform the development of future policy and will be documented in a detailed report to be prepared at the end of the series,” said Minister Coughlan.

“Earlier this year I announced a series of five nationwide consultative family fora to take the pulse of the nation on how best the state can support families. The first forum was held in Donegal, with great success, on the first of May last. I can now announce the remaining four fora – to be held in the Kilkenny Ormonde Hotel on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September, Cork



Metropole Hotel on October 9<sup>th</sup>, Galway Best Quality Hotel, Clarenbridge on November 6<sup>th</sup> and finally at Croke Park on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December.

“Families are the building blocks of our society. They are the very glue which bind our communities together. These bonds are under increasing pressure from many areas – economic, social and demographic. As Minister responsible for Family Affairs I am determined to keep family issues central to Government policy, as illustrated by our ‘Families First Policy’. This policy is evident in such initiatives as the establishment of the Family Support Agency, which administers the funding distributed today, and the nationwide consultative Family Fora being held during the remainder of this year.

“The importance of the Family Support Agency can be gauged by the effectiveness of the funding it provides to organisations such as ACCORD and MRCS. Time and again counselling they provide has been proven to work, especially when provided by skilled and experienced organisations operating on a local basis,” said Minister Coughlan.



The Minister today gave grants to ACCORD which aims to help people in their marriages and relationships, primarily through the provision of marriage preparation courses and marriage counselling. Accord HQ, based in Maynooth, Co. Kildare, supports 48 centres nationwide providing these services. In 2002 ACCORD provided marriage counselling for nearly 3,400 couples and marriage preparation for more than 12,500 people. ACCORD Dublin is responsible for 11 centres serving the Dublin/Wicklow region.

ACCORD, the marriage care service, received €1.5m in total - €940,000 for its Headquarters in Maynooth, Co. Kildare and €533,000 for ACCORD DUBLIN.

The Marriage and Relationship Counselling Service (MRCS) received €423,000. MRCS aims to provide counselling to all who need it regardless of their ability to pay or location. Its services include marriage and relationship counselling, pre-marriage counselling and separation/divorce counselling. Through its 'Teen Between' programme MRCS provides counselling for young people, aged between 12 and 18, whose parent's have separated. Last year nearly 2,200 people attended marriage counselling with MRCS at its



centres in Dublin, Longford, Athlone, Carlow, Waterford and Wexford.

The funding presented today comes under the 2003 Scheme of Grants for Marriage, Child and Bereavement Counselling Services. So far this year some €6.8m has been allocated to more than 450 voluntary and community groups nationwide providing marriage counselling, marriage preparation, child counselling in relation to parental separation and bereavement counselling support. The scheme is administered by the Family Support Agency.

ENDS 20th August, 2003

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SEE FACT SHEET ATTACHED

### Notes for News Editor

#### **The Family Support Agency**

The Family Support Agency was formally launched by Minister Coughlan on May 15<sup>th</sup> 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 FSA 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 has been allocated a budget of €17.2m for 2003.

The Family Support Agency:

- Provides a family mediation service to help couples, who have decided to separate, negotiate their separation without acrimony. Over the last six years this service has expanded from two centres in Dublin and Limerick to 12 centres throughout the country. This figure will increase to 14 by the end of this year.
- Supports, promotes and develops the provision of marriage and relationship counselling and other family support services.
- Supports, promotes and develops the Family and Community Services Resource Centres programme. The number of centres has increased from 10 to over 85 since 1997.
- Provides and disseminates information about these services and other family issues, and
- Provides financial assistance to voluntary organizations for these purposes.
- Undertakes or commissions research into matters related to its functions.

**ENDS**