



## **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

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### **Minister Says Expanding Family Mediation Service Has Vital Role In Helping Children Of Separating Couples To Retain Bonds With Both Parents**

### **Seamus Brennan - Increase In Number Of Mediation Services Reflects Growing Demand From Couples Coping With Modern Day Stresses & Pressures**

### **Minister Opens New Mediation Service Offices In County Donegal & Announces Marriage Counselling Grants For County**

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., said today that the rapid expansion in recent years of the Government funded Family Mediation Service - which helps couples who have decided to separate or divorce to negotiate their own terms of settlement - reflected the increasing demand for the service from those coping at particular times in their lives with enormous stress and pressure.

Minister Brennan announced that the number of Family Mediation Services run and funded through the Family Support Agency will increase to 16 by the end of this month - compared with only two services, in Dublin and Limerick, less than a decade ago in 1998.

Minister Brennan said: "The Family Mediation Service is becoming increasingly important as a free, professional and confidential service that is a sensitive, yet vital, conduit in helping couples who have decided to divorce or separate to reach agreement on central issues such as post separation living arrangements and finances. But, most important of all, is the critical role it can play in the working out of agreed parenting arrangements that facilitate the children involved and allows them to retain close bonds with both parents."

The Minister made his comments when opening the country's 15<sup>th</sup> Mediation Service offices in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. The 16<sup>th</sup> centre will open later this month in Portlaoise to expand the service in the Midlands. The opening of the new offices in Letterkenny is in response to the growing awareness of, and demand for, mediation



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services in the North West since the opening of the Mediation Service in Sligo in 2004.

Minister Brennan also announced that he has approved funding of over €172,000 in Marriage, Child and Bereavement Counselling grants to groups in Co. Donegal. (Full list is attached)

Minister Brennan also released the most recent statistics for the numbers of people in Co. Donegal who are benefiting from welfare entitlements and supports. In total, almost 56,000 benefit, including some 36,695 people on a variety of welfare support schemes and 19,256 families who receive Child Benefit on behalf of 39,506 children. A breakdown of the welfare support schemes shows 9,440 on unemployment or jobseekers payments; 7,533 (State Pensions), Retirement Pension: (2,865), Pre-Retirement Pension (1,003), Disability Benefit/Allowance (6,008), Widow's & Widower's Pensions (4,002), One-Parent Family Payment:(3,209), Supplementary Welfare Allowance (964) Carer's Benefit/Allowance (1,671).

The Minister said that in 2005, through the Family Mediation Service, almost 1,500 couples were assisted when they sought advice on separation and the desire to reach agreement on many issues, especially the most important and sensitive area of all, the consequences for the children of their relationship.

Of those couples who finished the mediation process, 54% reached agreement. The figure of 1,500 couples assisted last year compares with an average of 250 couples a year who used the Service from 1986 to 1997 before its nationwide expansion.

A total of 42 staff are currently employed in FMS offices. There are four full-time offices in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway with part-time offices situated in Athlone, Blanchardstown, Castlebar, Dundalk, Marino, Sligo, Tallaght, Tralee, Waterford, Wexford and, now, Letterkenny.

Minister Brennan said: "In an increasingly pressurised society the role of family mediation services is of enormous importance in assisting couples who have decided to separate. 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.



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Increasingly, research evidence is highlighting the considerable importance of mediation services for those who want to reach an agreed separation, and 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 said that since it was established three years ago the Family Support Agency has gone from strength to strength and this was reflected in the commitment each year to further increases in funding. This year, funding from the Department of Social and Family Affairs has increased to over €28 million, more than 60% up on the funding level for 2004.

### **Marriage, Child and Bereavement Counselling grants approved by Minister Brennan through the Family Support Agency for County Donegal as follows:**

ACCORD DONEGAL: € 33,900  
ACCORD INISHOWEN, Carndonagh: € 15,000  
ACCORD LETTERKENNY, Letterkenny: € 43,900  
AIDS HELP NORTH WEST, Letterkenny: € 3,000  
DONEGAL TRAVELLER'S PROJECT, Letterkenny: € 4,400  
DONEGAL YOUTH SERVICE, Letterkenny: € 6,500  
FAMILY ENRICHMENT CENTRE, Lifford: € 27,500  
FAMILY MINISTRY SUPPORT AND DEV GROUP, Letterkenny: € 12,000  
HELP CARE NORTH WEST LTD, Donegal Town: € 10,400  
INISHOWEN WOMEN'S OUTREACH, Inishowen: € 5,000  
LETTERKENNY WOMEN'S CENTRE, Letterkenny: € 2,000  
MOVILLE & DISTRICT FAMILY RES. CENTRE, Moville: € 3,000  
RAINBOWS BUNCRANA, Bunrana: € 1,000  
RAINBOWS TWIN TOWNS, Ballybofey: € 600  
ST JOHNSTON & CARRIGANS FRC, Lifford: € 4,000

TOTAL: € 172,200