



**Minister Unveils Details Of Nationwide Survey Of Issues  
Affecting Those In Areas Who Feel Most Vulnerable &  
Marginalised**

***Brennan Says Findings Will Further Inform Government Of  
Where Resources, Services & Entitlements Must Be Targeted***

The Minister for Social Affairs, Seamus Brennan T.D., today unveiled the findings of a recent evaluation survey of almost 90 Family Resource Centres countrywide which identified in 21<sup>st</sup> century Ireland the main central issues that are of most concern to families in areas where people feel disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalised.

Minister Brennan described the findings of the evaluation - conducted through the Centres by the Family Support Agency - as a valuable indicator of the challenges facing families in modern Ireland. He said the findings would further inform the Government in identifying the areas that required additional targeted resources, supports, services and entitlements as part of an ongoing multi-billion package of measures spread across a number of Departments and Agencies.

Minister Brennan announced details of the evaluation results in Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim when officially opening the new Family Life Centre in the town. The Centre, which is being set up on a voluntary basis, is dedicated to supporting and enriching family life in its diverse forms; to providing an atmosphere of respect and welcome for each individual, couple or family, and to the training, guiding and empowering leaders and personnel, professional and voluntary, to work with clients for their enhancement.

The Minister also revealed the latest statistics on the numbers in Co. Leitrim receiving welfare supports and entitlements and also details of the new allocation of grants for Marriage, Child and Bereavement Counselling services in the county. The welfare figures show that more than 10,000 people in the county benefit from entitlements and supports, including 3,438 families with 7,131 children who receive Child Benefit; 1,895 (State age pension), 1,133 (Widow's & Widower's pensions), 1,103 (Disability Benefit/Allowance), 1,028 Unemployment payments, 662



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(retirement Pension), 300 One-Parent Family payments), 270 (Carers Allowance/Benefit) and 125 (Supplementary Welfare Allowance). **See Attached List**

Grants for Marriage, Child and Bereavement Counselling were awarded to: Family Life Centre (€7,000) and Community School Separation & Bereavement Counselling Support Group (€4,300), Carrick-on-Shannon; Mohill Family Support Centre (€8,400), Support After Homicide Organisation, Dromahair (€5,500), Lough Allen Community Development Project, Drumkeeran (€3,300), and Rainbown Drumshambo (€1,350).

The evaluation of Family Resource Centres nationwide lists, in order from 1 to 10, the major issues which have been identified by the Centres as most affecting the communities which they serve:

### **Childcare**

In many areas, accessible and affordable childcare facilities are at present not adequate to meet the increasing demands. Family Resource Centres have expressed the view that by providing quality childcare it has a positive effect on children's lives and reduces the risk of early school leaving and getting involved in drugs and crime.

### **Education**

Education is seen as the first step for marginalised groups in taking responsibility for their futures. Adult education is also seen as important (e.g. literacy skills).

#### **• Drug Use**

The increase in drug use among younger people appears to be an issue in all areas of the country. This can also be associated with drug-related crime and anti-social behaviour.

#### **• Amenities**

The lack of amenities for young people in particular is seen as an issue as it is strongly felt that the provision of amenities may help to combat problems of drugs and crime among this age group.

#### **• Equality**

The issue of equality has been identified with that of social inclusion and how it affects certain sections of society – lone parent families, travellers, people with disabilities and immigrants.



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- **Employment**

Access to employment is regarded as the best route out of poverty and is still seen as a key challenge. Upskilling and training to provide quality sustainable employment with career prospects is vital to facilitate people in moving to greater levels of financial independence.

- **Disability**

Issues of access to education, training and employment for those with disabilities have been identified.

- **Mental Health**

The issue of mental health is reflected in the increased incidence of suicide, particularly amongst young men and particularly amongst those living in isolated rural areas. Mental health issues have also been identified with drugs, crime and domestic violence.

- **Physical Health**

For many particularly older members of the community, physical as well as mental health is an important issue. Accessibility to health services remains a concern.

- **Transport**

The poor quality of transport infrastructure particularly in rural areas has been highlighted as an impediment to the development of the areas in question. Its effect on social isolation has also been highlighted.

Minister Brennan said: "Modern 21<sup>st</sup> century Ireland is witnessing the emergence of a whole range of new stresses and pressures. Our success as a nation in recent years has brought with it, or perhaps brought to the surface, social issues that are of particular concern. This survey identifies the issues that most concern those working on a day to day basis on building, or rebuilding, better lives for those who feel most vulnerable and marginalised. The rising tide of economic buoyancy and greatly increased and targeted resources has lifted over 250,000 men, women and children out of poverty in less than a decade. But some, as this survey shows, have been left behind and it is on those people we must now concentrate all our efforts through further increased resources, improved services, targeted entitlements and more individually directed social supports that all converge to provide the foundations on which people can build better lives for themselves and their families.



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“My Department is this year spending almost €14 billion in supports, entitlements and payments that each week directly benefits more than one and a half million men, women and children. But payments alone will not solve our problems. That is why social policy is now increasingly directed at getting behind the payments and confronting and tackling the issues that can blight young lives and leave too many of our people vulnerable and marginalised. Reforms and improvements are now advancing that will lift more children out of poverty; that will deliver decent pensions and security for all of our older people; that will provide better opportunities for lone parents and their children; and that will open up new career and employment prospects for those with disabilities so that we can be sure that no individuals talent or contribution is overlooked or neglected.”

The Minister said the biggest issue of concern identified in the survey, childcare, was now being aggressively addressed on several fronts. In less than a decade Child Benefits rates have increased by almost 300%.

Since 2000, €500 million has been invested and almost 41,000 new childcare places have been created. The last Budget introduced a new scheme to allow individuals mind up to three children in the minders home and payments of the new Early Childcare Supplement of €1,000 per year for all children under 6 years will begin within weeks.

In his address at the opening, Minister Brennan said that it is evident that Carrick-on-Shannon as a town has grown rapidly over the past number of years. The population has doubled in recent years; the town has acquired a considerable educated and professional workforce and as an example of the progress made there are now some 30 nationalities attending the local national school.

The Minister added: “Such progress, however, does not always come without a price. I know that Carrick, no more than any large urban area, has not been spared the kind of problems which arise with the pressures of modern living, marriage break-up, alcohol abuse, suicide and the need for interventions in particular with troubled children and adolescents. I believe that this Centre, which is supported by doctors, teachers, the Garda Síochána, local counsellors and local business, will prove to be a valuable resource to the people of the town and Co. Leitrim generally. It is designed



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to be a centre for individuals, families, couples and groups to whom hurt or pressure has been caused in our contemporary society and it will present an atmosphere of care and peace. A skilled and committed staff will provide each person with a safe space to deal with the issues which affect them in the modern society”.

\* APPROXIMATE NUMBERS BENEFITING IN THE LEITRIM AREA ARE DETAILED BELOW:

Unemployment Payments:	1,028
Old Age Pensions:	1,895
Retirement Pension:	662
Pre-Retirement Pension:	71
Disability Benefit/Allowance:	1,103
Widow's & Widower's Pensions:	1,133
One-Parent Family Payment:	300
Supplementary Welfare Allowance:	125
Carer's Benefit/Allowance:	270
Child Benefit recipients:	3,438 families with 7,131 children

Total benefiting in Co Leitrim: 10,025

**Ends**