



More Than 70,000 People Each Year Receiving Marriage, Child & Bereavement Counselling From State Supported Groups

Minister Brennan Says Family Support Agency Must Have Central Role In Addressing Modern Pressures On Families

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., said today that more than 70,000 men, women and children are now being supported each year countrywide with counselling services at particularly stressful times in their lives which is provided by groups who receive State funding through the Family Support Agency.

Minister Brennan said the nationwide marriage, child and bereavement counselling service, which is receiving EUR10 million in funding supports this year, provided crucial emotional and practical help for thousands of people, often at times when they were particularly vulnerable.

The Minister was speaking in Dublin when launching a review by Petrus Consulting, on the Family Support Agency's Scheme of Grants to Voluntary Organisations providing marriage, child and bereavement counselling services. He also launched the Agency's Strategic Plan 2007-2009 which examines the further expansion and developing of services for families and communities.

Minister Brennan welcomed the Petrus review findings that the grants provided in 2005 and 2006 ensured that over half of the 544 organisations, which received grants, did not charge for their services. In value for money terms, the review extrapolates that the average cost per intervention was a modest EUR117. This refers to the cost of supporting a client through a whole process of counselling which is often a number of sessions. Over 70,000 people benefited from counselling services last year. The review also noted that none of this would be possible without the volunteers, as through their involvement the grant "buys" a greater number of counselling hours than could be provided on a commercial basis.



Department of Social and Family Affairs

The Minister said the review was timely and the results a clear vindication of the increased investment in the counselling grants scheme which each year is making counselling more accessible to people who otherwise may not be in a position to avail of this important emotional and practical support.

He said that a number of recommendations in the review relating to the ongoing development, streamlining, funding and monitoring of the grants scheme would be given careful consideration and acted on.

Minister Brennan said the focus of the Agency's Strategic Plan 2007-2009 is to build on the success it has achieved since its establishment in 2003 by refining the existing programmes; strengthening the co-operation between the various parts of the Agency, and between the Agency and other organisations working in related areas; and, building up the capacity of the organisation.

Minister Brennan added; "Families and family life have undergone profound changes in Ireland in recent years. Economic success has been hugely beneficial throughout society but it has also brought with it additional pressures and stresses and many new challenges. The Family Support Agency has a crucial role to play in helping families to meet these pressures. Migration into Ireland is bringing many economic and social benefits. However, the resulting increase in the number of families will increase the need for the services supported by, and provided by, the Agency. The Agency will also have to support and provide services in a multicultural and multilingual context and be a key player in encouraging and supporting the integration of our growing number of immigrants into all levels of Irish society. Ongoing changes in social values and personal expectations can sometimes put increasing pressure on relationships. Changes in the form of the family unit may also increase the demand for services".

The Minister said research into issues affecting families in Ireland is at an early stage of development and he was looking to the Agency to develop as a matter of urgency a dynamic research programme to stimulate the development of family research in Ireland.



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The key challenges facing the Family Support Agency over the course of its second Strategic Plan are to:

- Further develop the role of the Family Resource Centres. Promoting their long term Community Development role.
- Provide support to parents through the dissemination of information on parenting.
- Meeting the growing need for family mediation and providing these services in a more complex environment.
- Further developing the services provided by the large number of grant supported counselling organisations, and consolidating the provision of counselling services at strategic locations throughout the country.
- Addressing resource and organisational capacity issues

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