



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Speech by

Martin Cullen, T.D.,

Minister for Social and Family Affairs

at the

South East Family Resource Centre - Regional Forum Seminar Dinner

Faithlegg House, Waterford

Friday 18 April 2008, 7:pm

- **Dick Hickey**, Director of St Brigid's Family Resource Centre and member of the Board of the Family Support Agency
- **Claire Cashman**, Member of the Board of the Family Support Agency
- **Stephen Murphy**, Vice Chair of the South East Regional Forum (representing the Forum's Chair, Sr Patricia who cannot attend here tonight)



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- All the representatives from the **Boards of Management** of the Family Resource Centres here in the South East and their **project staff** and **volunteers**

I am delighted to be here this Friday evening to speak at the South East Family Resource Centre Regional Forum Seminar. I would like to thank the organisers, in particular Dick Hickey, for their kind invitation to speak here tonight.

It is now 13 years since the first Family Resource Centres (FRCs), received Government support under a three-year pilot scheme. It was hoped that with the introduction of the programme, family resource centres would be able to build the necessary supports and develop the skills needed to tackle issues affecting families, thereby strengthening families within their local communities.

The pilot scheme was a great success and the 'Family and Community Services' Resource Centre programme was mainstreamed under my Department of Social and Family Affairs. Two more major developments followed; the establishment of the Family Support Agency and the commitment for the establishment of 100 Family Resource Centres under the last National Development Plan.

Government commitment to the programme has seen funding increase from just over €300,000 in 1994 to over €21 million for the current year. However, the importance of Family Resource Centres cannot be evaluated purely in financial terms.



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The Government recognises the important role played by Family Resource Centres around the country in improving people's quality of life. It is through a combination of local community initiatives on the ground, together with support from statutory agencies and other bodies that local communities can realise their potential and have a real say in their development.

Family Resource Centres help bring these strands together in a coherent, structured way to ensure the best outcomes.

With the publication of the Nexus report into the work of Family Resource Centres, we can now quantify the huge amount of work being done by Family Resource Centres throughout Ireland. Headline figures include; 850,000 visits to use centre facilities (in 2005); nearly 16,000 people completing training courses during the year and almost 140,000 people receiving advice and information annually.

As a first report prepared using the Family Resource Centres' new SPEAK system, (a strategic planning and self evaluation system), it made for interesting reading. With the meeting of the National Development Plan target of 100 Family Resource Centres nationwide last year, I am sure that the long term success of the national network of Resource Centres will be greatly enhanced. Through analysis, it will now be possible to accurately evaluate the ongoing effect of programmes and supports. This in turn will help both the FRC National Forum and the Family Support Agency in pursuit of their strategic objectives.

Both the Family Support Agency and the Family Resource Centre National Forum have launched strategic plans to cover the period to 2009. I have noted that they have both identified the further development of the network of Family



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Resource Centres as service providers, as a crucial support to provide guidance to other groups and with a key role in the ongoing promotion of community development principles.

The overriding goal of the National Forum strategic plan, is to support Family Resource Centres in ensuring families enjoy fulfilling lives, free from poverty, neglect, harm, discrimination and abuse. It is a goal which as Minister for Social and Family Affairs, I wholeheartedly endorse.

Families are central to our society and it is evident that family support is core to the work of the Forum. With your help, the Family Support Agency, under the chairmanship of Michael O'Kennedy, will continue with the development of effective and responsive services and supports for families today.

I know that the Family Support Agency values the work of the Family Resource Centre National Forum and will continue to work in partnership and draw on its experience in the consolidation of the Resource Centre Programme in the years ahead.

The Government also recognises the critically important contribution made by Family Resource Centres to combating disadvantage and reaching out to the vulnerable and marginalised. The services provided by FRCs are often emotional and practical lifelines for those who may be going through particularly traumatic situations and experiencing a range of problems that combine to leave them feeling isolated and powerless.



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I am pleased that the Family Resource Centre National Forum has been represented on the Board of the Family Support Agency since its establishment in 2003 by both Dick Hickey and Claire Cashman. I know that both Dick and Claire have brought their considerable expertise to bear at Board level and have played an important role in the development of the Agency over the past five years.

I am very pleased that the target of having 100 Family Resource Centres by the end of 2006 was achieved. I was also pleased to see that the Government's support for the FRC programme into the future was copper-fastened as part of an €861m investment to further support communities under the second National Development Plan 2007 to 2013. This funding will allow not only for the consolidation of the programme but also for up to six additional Family Resource Centres each year over the lifetime of the plan.

Finally, I would like to mention the importance of volunteers to the success of Family Resource Centres. I would like to add my thanks to the many hundreds of people throughout the country who give up their free time to support a huge range of voluntary and community groups. No amount of funding could hope to replace the work that is voluntarily undertaken every day in every corner of Ireland.

Thank you all very much.

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