



**Séamus Brennan, T.D.,
Minister for Social and Family Affairs**

at the launch of the

**Family Resource Centre
National Forum Strategic Plan**

“Supporting Families, Building Communities 2006-2009”

21ST June 2006



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I am delighted to be here today to launch the 2006-2009 Strategy on behalf of the Family Resource Centre National Forum. The title - "Supporting Families, Building Communities" - sends out a positive message. It is about enabling and empowering people. It is about a society in which people, men, women and children, can flourish and can face the future with confidence.

Special thanks to -

- Packie Kelly, who has given us a very interesting presentation on the Plan.
- Alice Griffin who put the Strategic Plan together.
- Committee who put the finishing touches to it: Dick Hickey, Tina McLaughlin, Rory Gallagher, Anne Shortall and Leo Scales.

I am very impressed with the way in which it has been clearly well thought out in consultation with Family Resource Centres around the country. The strategic plan will help guide the development of the Forum and in doing so, will assist Family Resource Centres in ensuring family support programmes are an integral part of local community activity. The overriding goal of the strategy is to support Family Resource Centres in ensuring families enjoy fulfilling lives, free from poverty, neglect, discrimination and abuse.

The views of those people active on the ground at community level are clearly reflected in the Forum's key goals and strategies, including:

- the influencing of national policy on family support,
- the promotion of inclusive family support practices,
- development of the Family Resource Centre Programme,
- delivering quality training and development programmes,
- and
- supports to staff and volunteers and promoting the organisational capacity of the Forum.

The Government recognises the critically important contribution that Resource Centres make to combating disadvantage and reaching out to the vulnerable and marginalised. In this regard I am pleased to confirm that the target set by the



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Government under the National Development Plan of funding 100 Family Resource Centres by the end of 2006 will be delivered.

There are currently 91 centres in receipt of core-funding by the Family Support Agency. Funding for the Programme has increased substantially from €317,500 in 1994 to almost €13 million in 2006.

The services provided by community resource groups 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 often leave them feeling isolated and powerless. This new strategy examines the rapidly changing environment for families in Ireland today and how best to respond to wide-ranging and diverse needs. Issues such as childcare, balancing work and family life, caring for family members, lone parenting and low income supports have all contributed to the increasing pressures and challenges of modern family life. It is through a combination of local community initiatives on the ground and support from statutory agencies and other bodies that local communities can realise their potential to make a real difference in the lives of others.

The family is central to our society and it is evident that family support is at the core to the work of the Forum. The Family Support Agency, under the Chairmanship of Michael O'Kennedy, continues to develop effective and responsive services and supports for families today. The Agency has an important role in ensuring that future family policy will be underpinned by sound practical information.

I know that the Family Support Agency values the work of the Family Resource Centre National Forum and will continue to work in partnership with it. I am pleased Resource Centre Forum has been represented on the Board of the FSA since its establishment in 2003 by both Dick Hickey and our MC here today, Claire Cashman.

A key element of the overall National Development Plan has been the continuation of sustainable economic growth to promote jobs. There has also been substantial investment in welfare supports, education and training, childcare and recreational infrastructure and investment in people through lifelong learning and skills



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development, community development and family services. The goal is that employment is opened up to all sectors of society and that the potential or talents of no individual is overlooked or neglected. Preparations are well under way for the next National Development Plan- and again social inclusion measures will form a key part.

I particularly welcome the attention in the strategy to the importance of volunteers to the success of Family Resource Centres. Often volunteers are the unsung heroes. This strategy helps point the way towards enhancing volunteer participation through the delivery of key supports.

As many of you may be aware, the Taoiseach has recently set up a Task Force on Active Citizenship to, among other things, recommend measures which could be taken as part of public policy to facilitate and encourage a greater degree of engagement by citizens in all aspects of life and the growth and development of voluntary organizations as part of a strong civic culture.

Finally, let me say that today marks something of a milestone in the development of the Family Resource Centre network.

The Family Resource Centre National Forum has a clear purpose and direction for the road ahead. I know some may see today as an end in itself.

However, I know most of you will be aware that the hard work really begins here in terms of putting together an Implementation Plan which will detail tasks, assigned responsibilities and time frames.

I wish you well in this work.



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I know you will be able to rise to the occasion and will have the support of the Family Support Agency in this challenging task over the months and years ahead.

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