



## South West Regional Forum of Family Resource Centres

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By South West Regional Forum of Family Resource Centres

### Parenting – the toughest job of all

#### - Killarney Conference attracts over 250 to discuss Parenting Models -

At some stage in our lives, we've all been children. Many of us have known what it's like to be a parent, and would have realised fairly quickly that, as clinical psychologist Tony Humphreys puts it: "Parenting is a profession, not an instinctual behaviour." To parent effectively, parents – and professionals involved in supporting parents – need to understand what it takes to do the job well. The greater the understanding about a child's development and needs, the greater the awareness of what it takes to create healthy environments in which children can thrive.

Tony Humphreys was one of five of the country's principal speakers on parenting methods who made presentations at the one-day Conference: "*Models of Parent Support*", hosted by The South West Regional Forum of Family Resource Centres – the regional forum for Family Resource Centres in Cork and Kerry. A capacity audience of over 250 delegates was inspired and enthused by each of the presentations made during a busy day at The Malton Hotel and Conference Centre in Killarney on 22<sup>nd</sup> October.

The Conference was officially opened by Michael O'Kennedy, Chairperson of the Family Support Agency, who commented on ways in which the family unit in Ireland, and even the term 'family', had changed in recent times. He praised the work of the National Forum of Family Resource Centres, and especially thanked the South West Region of Family Resource Centres for organising this important conference. The business of the conference throughout the day was overseen by Packie Kelly, Chairperson of the National Forum of Family Resource Centres.

The first parenting model described was the Marte Meo Method, presented by Colette O'Donovan - the licensed Marte Meo supervisor in Ireland, who has been since 1995 the co-ordinator of the Marte Meo Training Centre with the HSE, based in Dublin. The Marte Meo method is a video based interaction programme that provides concrete and practical information to parents/carers on supporting the social, emotional and communication development of children/adolescents/adults in daily interaction moments. Colette used film to identify the elements of supportive interaction connected to child development, and showed how this solution is tailor made to each family situation, striving to enhance the competence of parents, activate development rather than compensate problems, build behaviour models and support developmental processes.

Consultant Clinical Psychologist and well-known and respected author and international speaker Tony Humphreys then presented "Effective Parenting of Self and Children", which emphasised the need for parents to know and understand themselves before they endeavour to address the issues presented by their children. He spoke passionately about the responsibility of parents to create 'holdings' that allow children to express the fullness of their own nature – the crucial holding being that of unconditional love – the life blood of a child's expression of itself.

The third model, outlining the way that the Parents Plus Programme builds on parents' strengths, was presented by family and child psychotherapist Dr John Sharry, co-developer of the award-winning, video-based Parents Plus Programme - the focus of which is positive, aiming to build on parents' strengths and

help them not only to solve childhood problems but also to have more enjoyable and satisfying relationships with their children.

Staring the afternoon session of the Conference, Robert O'Driscoll, an addiction counsellor with HSE South working in Arbour House Youth Drug and Alcohol Services, outlined The Strengthening Families Programme – a family skills training programme designed to increase resilience and reduce the risk factors for substance misuse, depression, violence and aggression, involvement in crime and school failure in high risk, 12-16 year old children and their parents.

The fifth and final model presented at the Conference was entitled: "Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities" - a unique integration of various prevention/intervention strategies geared toward reducing violence against self, the family and the community. This was presented by Frances Byrne, the Chief Executive of OPEN - the national network of one-parent families, and a former Deputy Chairwoman of the National Women's Council of Ireland. The information was presented within a cultural framework and focused on helping both parents and children enhance life skills necessary for functioning in today's society. The programme integrates positive discipline approaches as a vehicle for fostering high self-esteem, self-discipline and social competence in children.

Delegates attending the conference comprised a mix of Family Support Workers, Social Care Workers, Community Development Workers, Child Care Workers, Social Workers, Psychologists, Carers, People working with children with a disability, People supporting children in group settings, Teachers, Public Health Nurses, Playschool Leaders, and of course, Parents.

Commenting on the success of the conference, Helen Quinn, Chairperson of the South West Regional Forum of Family Resource Centres said: "The initiative for this important conference arose from individual family resource centres in the region who had identified that parents were presenting a wide variety of issues and concerns relating to their children & teenagers. These included behaviour issues, sibling rivalry, having a child in the family with a disability and the effects on other children. Parents are also finding it difficult to cope with young people, those with drug and alcohol problems, dealing with bereavement issues, illness in the family and suicide."

"Seeing and hearing these needs prompted the Regional Forum to look at models of parent support programmes in Ireland. The conference we held today presented five separate models to provide information to those living in the Cork and Kerry region."

Helen Quinn said the South West Regional Forum was overwhelmed by the interest and response to the conference by organisations and individuals: "We see this as a first step to providing practical supports to parents in this region. We have provided information on some of the models of supporting parents, and now we need to consider how we can develop a range of parent support programmes in this region to support parents in their role – doing the toughest job of all."

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