

## PRESS RELEASE

### CUTS TO FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES WOULD CRIPPLE LOCAL ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES – FRCNF

Cutbacks to the Family Resource Centre programme would have a devastating impact on local economies and communities. That's according to the Family Resource Centre National Forum (FRCNF), the support network for Ireland's 107 Family Resource Centres.

The Forum outlined its response today (03.08.09) to the 'An Bord Snip Nua' report recommendation to close the Family Support Agency, the state body with responsibility for the Family Resource Centre programme.

Packie Kelly, Chairperson of the FRCNF, said closure of the Family Support Agency would threaten the future of all Family Resource Centres and would have a crippling effect on local economies and communities.

"The An Bord Snip Nua report recommends closing the Family Support Agency in an effort to save the Exchequer €30 million," said Mr. Kelly. "This recommendation is presented in the report in terms of closing an expensive state agency, a luxury we can no longer afford. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

"€18 million of the Family Support Agency's budget is spent directly on the Family Resource Centre programme. This money funds the work of 107 centres, which receive almost one million visits on a yearly basis to access essential services and facilities.

"Family Resource Centres operate in disadvantaged communities. They provide education and training; childcare facilities; counselling services; parenting support, and a range of initiatives to address issues such as addiction, isolation and discrimination.

"The harsh reality of the economic downturn is that social problems are on the increase in Ireland: unemployment is rising and – as a result – the pressures on families are increasing. Now more than ever, the supports provided by Family Resource Centres are needed. Rather than closing or reducing the Family Resource Centre programme, it will need to be supported, developed and possibly even expanded over the coming years."

According to Mr. Kelly, Family Resource Centres represent value for money and long-term savings for the Exchequer.

"The Family Resource Centre model encourages the sharing of resources, thereby reducing the need for the Government to provide individual supports to various organisations. In 2008, for example, other community and voluntary groups used Family Resource Centres over 16,000 times to host meetings, and over 41,000 times to use project facilities.

"In addition, over 10,000 adults availed of education and training courses in our centres, thereby increasing their chances of returning to employment or gaining higher-skilled work. Furthermore, we provide affordable childcare services throughout the country – including pre-school and after-school care – which means parents can join the workforce or engage in training courses with a view to upskilling themselves.

"Our centres employ over 300 staff members, but hundreds more people are involved on a voluntary basis: indeed, every single Family Resource Centre is managed by a team of local volunteers.

“Finally, the supports we offer – and the initiatives we put in place – have future, long-term benefits for our society and our economy. By offering supports such as early childhood care and education; adult literacy courses; addiction support and counselling services, we respond to problems in our communities as they arise or – better still – we prevent certain problems from arising in the first place. Research from the US, for example, shows that investing just \$600 in targeted early childhood education in disadvantaged communities saves society on average \$15,000 per child in lower future crime rates.

“These are just some of the ways in which Family Resource Centres actually contribute to their local economies and to the wellbeing of the country overall. In light of this, the proposal to scrap the Family Support Agency is rash and dangerous: while it has been well documented that certain state agencies are duplicating services or engaging in inefficient practices, it is clear that the Family Support Agency is delivering a much-needed public service in an efficient and cost-effective manner.”

Representatives of the 107 Family Resource Centres throughout Ireland are currently meeting their local Oireachtas members to highlight the importance of maintaining the Family Resource Centre Programme.

“We are raising three key points with the Government and with all Oireachtas members,” said Packie Kelly. “Firstly, that our services are needed now – in times of financial hardship – more than ever, so instead of closing or reducing the Family Resource Centre programme, it should be developed and even expanded.

“Secondly, that the Family Support Agency is the best vehicle through which to deliver the Family Resource Centre Programme and it is our preference that the Agency should be maintained.

“Finally, that we recognise we are in unprecedented times, and that the Government is under pressure to correct the public finances. And, with this in mind, we are anxious that if any changes are to be made to the FRC programme or Family Support Agency, we are consulted on the way forward.

“We expect to receive widespread support for these three points – not only from the many thousands who use our services – but also from politicians throughout the country who are only too well aware of the positive impact of Family Resource Centres on their local communities and economies.”

**ENDS**

**Contact: Dermot Ryan / Martina Quinn, DHR Communications, Tel: 086-6002306 / 087-6522033**