



## PRESS RELEASE

Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> July 2010

### FRCs Act as Lifeline for 'New Unemployed'

#### *– Launch of report on work of Family Resource Centres –*

Family Resource Centres are increasingly acting as a lifeline for people who have lost their jobs because of the recession. That's according to the Family Resource Centre National Forum and the Family Support Agency, which today (07.07.10) launched a report detailing the work of Family Resource Centres (FRCs) throughout Ireland over the course of 2009.

According to Packie Kelly, Chairperson of the Family Resource Centre National Forum – the support network for Ireland's 107 FRCs – a range of additional services and supports were introduced by FRCs last year to meet the demands of the 'new unemployed'.

"In 2009, FRCs had an influx of service-users experiencing stress, financial management difficulties and mental health problems, mostly as a direct consequence of the recession and the rise in unemployment," he said. "While FRCs have always provided developmental supports, counselling and information services, many had to expand and tailor their offerings last year to respond directly to the needs of the unemployed."

"Some Centres, for example, noted a particularly high number of young male users, accessing Back to Education support, personal development courses, health and safety courses, and information and resources to assist them in seeking work. Many FRCs offered very practical support to the unemployed: free internet and administration services to access job information; assistance with CV writing, and packs with all the relevant information needed by job-seekers."

#### **Information, Training and Support**

Over 150,000 people accessed information from FRCs in 2009. The topics on which visitors most frequently requested information were social welfare rights and entitlements, housing and personal debt. Almost 14,000 people, meanwhile, availed of training courses in FRCs that were directly related to gaining employment.

"FRCs really serve as a lifeline for those who find themselves suddenly out of work," said Packie Kelly. "In addition to providing practical supports – like education and training opportunities, information and advice – we also provide emotional and personal support."

"Over 13,000 people were provided with direct, one-to-one support – what we call 'cup-of-tea' support – in FRCs last year. This is literally where people who are feeling worried or stressed come to their local FRC for a cup of tea and a chat with one of our staff members or volunteers. Just sharing their worries with somebody else and having somebody listen to them in a respectful and confidential space can go a long way towards lightening their load."

In addition to those who availed of informal, one-to-one support last year, over 5,000 people availed of in-house counselling sessions in FRCs. The most common counselling service provided was relationship counselling, followed by bereavement counselling and separation counselling. A further 9,000 people were supported through self-help groups, including Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and Lone Parent Support groups.

#### **Positive Trends**

According to Packie Kelly, while the recession presented new challenges for FRCs, there were also a number of more positive developments over the course of 2009.

"One thing we have noticed is that providing practical resources like photocopying and computer services has a knock-on effect of attracting people to FRCs that we have traditionally found difficult to reach. What we have seen now is that – if people come to an FRC to get information on job opportunities or unemployment supports – they are more likely to engage then with other activities and return to the Centre for future events.

"Another positive trend we have noticed in the past year is a growing level of voluntary activity. FRCs have always depended to a very large extent on the contribution of volunteers and we were delighted to see even more people getting involved in this manner during 2009."

2,744 people volunteered in FRCs last year, making a contribution equivalent to that of 343 full-time staff members or €10.98 million (calculated in accordance with the average industrial wage). A further 985 volunteers served as members of the Boards of Management of FRCs.

### **Support for Grandparents**

Commenting at today's launch, Pat Bennett, Chief Executive Officer of the Family Support Agency – the government agency that administers the FRC programme – said it was clear that FRCs were playing an increasingly important role in local communities, and that the Family Support Agency would continue to support and facilitate their work. According to Mr. Bennett, a future priority for FRCs will be to support grandparents who find themselves playing a key role in the upbringing of their grandchildren.

"A trend that we have witnessed in FRCs is that more and more grandparents are taking a hands-on role in raising their grandchildren," he said. "Indeed, we recently published research on the role that grandparents play in divorced and separated families. In disadvantaged communities, it is relatively common for grandparents to find themselves as the primary carer for a young child.

"For the grandparents concerned, this can be overwhelming: at a stage when they think they can enjoy their retirement, they are suddenly faced with the responsibility of rearing a child. Our aim is to provide them with the supports within FRCs to cope with such situations. For example, FRCs can serve as a social outlet for people who might otherwise feel isolated, providing them with a place where they can come to relax and meet others going through similar experiences to themselves. They also provide other services, such as childcare and counselling support.

"Today's report shows that FRCs impact positively on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, and respond in a flexible manner to the needs of their local communities. The way in which they have adapted their programmes and services in response to the growing numbers of unemployed is evidence of the success of their approach. We look forward to working with the Family Resource Centre National Forum, the 107 FRCs throughout the country and the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs to ensure the ongoing success of the FRC programme."

The report on the 2009 activities of FRCs was launched this morning at St. Andrew's Family Resource Centre on Pearse Street in Dublin by the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, Mr. Pat Carey TD.

**ENDS**

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

**Notes:**

### **About the Family Resource Centre Programme**

The aim of the Family Resource Centre (FRC) programme is to combat disadvantage and improve the functioning of the family unit. The programme emphasises involving local communities in tackling the problems they face, and creating successful partnerships between voluntary and statutory agencies at community level. FRCs involve people from marginalised groups and areas of disadvantage at all levels, including on their Voluntary Management Committees. Since the FRC programme began in 1994, the number of core-funded FRCs has increased from 10 to 107.

The **Family Resource Centre National Forum** is the support network for FRCs throughout Ireland. The **Family Support Agency** is the government agency with responsibility for providing core funding and support to FRCs.