



family resource centre
national forum

Supporting Families, Protecting FRCs

The Family Resource Centre National Forum is inviting all general election candidates to sign our #SupportingFRCs pledge...

Will you support and protect the families in your constituency?

 #SupportingFRCs

www.familyresource.ie

The national Family Resource Centre programme is the largest community-based family support programme in Ireland. Through a network of 121 Family Resource Centres (FRCs), it supports families in communities experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

The main focus of FRCs is on early intervention and prevention, with the aim of promoting and protecting the health, wellbeing and rights of young people and their families.

In addition to family supports, FRCs have important wider functions for communities experiencing marginalisation: they promote the integration of minority groups, provide meeting spaces for activities such as Men's Sheds and Active Retirement Associations, offer education and training opportunities, provide childcare, and serve as an information hub through which local people can access the supports they need.

The Family Resource Centre programme has been in operation for over 25 years, and is currently housed within Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

The national representative body for FRCs is the Family Resource Centre National Forum (FRCNF).

 @frcnf #SupportingFRCs

Challenges Facing FRCs

The period since 2008 has been a difficult one for FRCs, with core funding down by over 20%, resulting in reduced services, salaries, and conditions. The communities in which FRCs operate suffered considerable hardship during the recession, and other community supports were sharply reduced or eliminated. While this happened, demographic and social pressures grew.

FRCs are now at a critical juncture. While the Family Resource Centre programme has received increased funding in recent years, and 11 new FRCs were established in 2018, the FRCNF has identified **three main threats to the future of FRCs**:

1. The Family Resource Centre programme is a national programme. To be truly effective, **a dedicated government unit must be responsible for overseeing the programme**. Its current placement within Tusla is not ideal.
2. The success of the programme to date is down to the **unique community development model of family support** developed by FRCs over the past 25 years. This model is now being diluted and dismantled.
3. The majority of FRCs are not receiving the **core funding** they need to conduct their work.

Establishing a Dedicated Government Unit for the Family Resource Centre Programme

When the Family Resource Centre programme was established, it was initially housed in what was then the Department of Social Welfare. Subsequently, in 2003, the Family Support Agency was formed. The Agency had a very focused remit: to support families in Ireland. The Family Resource Centre programme was at the core of its work.

Following the recession and the resulting cutbacks in public services, the Family Support Agency was amalgamated with the HSE's Children and Family Services, the National Educational Welfare Board and a range

of psychological services and services that respond to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. A new entity was formed in 2014: Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

In the view of the FRCNF, Tusla is predominantly focused on families in crisis. The Agency plays a crucial role in child protection and welfare. However, as such, it is not the most appropriate home for the Family Resource Centre programme. Tellingly, administration of the Family Resource Centre programme is not mentioned as one of Tusla's core functions in the legislation that established the Agency, the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 – nor is the programme mentioned anywhere in the Act.

The fact that the Family Resource Centre programme has had a number of different 'homes' since it was established in the 1990s has led to challenges, uncertainties, inefficiencies and misunderstandings about the ethos and delivery model of FRCs.

The FRCNF is calling on the next government to establish a dedicated government unit – permanently housed within an appropriate government department (e.g. Children and Youth Affairs) – to administer the Family Resource Centre programme into the future.

Preserving the Unique Model of Family Support Offered by FRCs

FRCs are a success story, bringing Ireland into line with best European practice in the delivery of accessible, trusted, low or no-cost services that act as gateways to other social supports. They have a high work-rate, interacting with over 409,000 adults and 70,000 children each year. The success of FRCs is due to a number of defining characteristics that underpin our work:

1. All FRCs operate autonomously, working inclusively with individuals, families, communities, and statutory and non-statutory agencies. FRCs are managed by local voluntary management committees, which are critical in facilitating meaningful participation within communities and ensuring local knowledge and accountability.
2. FRCs adopt a community development approach to delivering family supports. This is a holistic approach,

grounded in the principles of empowerment, human rights, inclusion, social justice, self-determination, and collective action.

3. FRCs focus on early intervention and prevention, and on supporting families from the 'cradle to the grave'. We offer services and information that extend far beyond the needs of families with young children, working with older members of the community, minority groups, people with disabilities, and a range of diverse service-users.

Because the Family Resource Centre programme has moved between various government departments and agencies over the past 25 years, these defining characteristics of our work are being diluted and dismantled. Within Tusla, the FRCs' focus on early intervention, prevention and a 'cradle to the grave' model of family support is misunderstood. State agencies are under pressure to rationalise and streamline services; this does not sit with the tailored community development ethos of FRCs.

The FRCNF is calling on the next government to commit to preserving the autonomy of FRCs and the unique model of family support they offer.

Providing Multi-Annual Core Funding to all FRCs

Each of the 11 new FRCs established in 2018 receive a core operating budget of €160,000 per annum in their start-up phase, and employ three full-time staff. This is a welcome recognition by government of what the standard should be nationally – for all FRCs. Currently, 74 of the 121 FRCs (over 60%) have only three full-time staff-members, and the core funding received by each FRC annually ranges from as little as €80,000 to just over €160,000.

The FRCNF is calling on the next government to provide ring-fenced, multi-annual core funding for every FRC – set at a minimum level of €160,000 per annum and with a minimum of a three-year funding commitment to support strategic planning. In addition, the FRCNF is calling for the next government to ensure each FRC has at least three full-time staff-members, allowing us to provide a greater range of supports in response to local community needs.



Pledge to Support FRCs

The FRCNF is asking all general election candidates to pledge to support families and protect FRCs. We invite you to visit your local FRC and sign the following pledge there. We will be sharing details on our social media networks of all candidates that sign the pledge:

If elected in the 2020 general election, I will support families and FRCs by working to:

1. Establish a dedicated government unit – permanently housed within an appropriate government department – to administer the Family Resource Centre programme.
2. Preserve the autonomy of FRCs and the unique model of family support they offer.
3. Ensure all FRCs receive ring-fenced, multi-annual core funding – a minimum of €160,000 per FRC per year – and have at least three full-time staff-members to ensure they can provide the full range of support services that marginalised communities need.

Signed: