

Challenge for Change Campaign - Budget 2012 and One-parent Families

One Family is extremely concerned at the cuts targeted at one-parent families in Budget 2012. Our thousands of members, clients and supporters are also extremely concerned and our national helpline has been inundated with calls from worried and angry parents.

Here is the **context** in which one-parent families in Ireland live:

- 65% of the country's poorest children live in one-parent families.
- You are four times more likely to live in consistent poverty in a one-parent family than other families (SILC, 2010). In 2010 half of one-parent families had to go without essentials such as adequate heating for the home, substantial meals, clothing and footwear because they were unable to afford them.
- Those parenting alone were the most negatively affected by the previous budget, losing almost 5% of their annual income. This compared with just a 1.3% fall for high income married couples (TASC, 2011).
- Lone parents and their children were poor in the Celtic Tiger and remain so now.
- Low education levels (ESRI, Persistent at Risk of Poverty in Ireland 2011 and Growing-Up in Ireland 2011).

The **immediate financial impact** of Budget 2012 on the poorest families in Ireland is the following:

- An additional €6 per week to be paid towards rent supplement
- A loss of €120 per year towards fuel costs
- For the minority of one-parent families with three or more children, a loss of €228 per year for a family with 3 children and €432 for those with 4 children
- A significant loss of €50 per primary school age child and €55 for secondary school age child in Back to School Clothing & Footwear Allowance cuts
- An increase in VAT, fuel costs, school transport costs as well as school capitation grants
- The loss of €29.80 per child per week because of the cut in the two qualified child increases where the parent is on a Community Employment Scheme and One Parent Family Payment
- New CE scheme applicants will no longer be able to retain the One Parent Family Payment and their salary from their participation in the CE scheme.

The **activation measures** announced in Budget 2012 have been designed to cut costs to the exchequer rather than support lone parents into sustainable employment and they will not work. Some cuts actually will disconnect lone parents from the labour market in direct contradiction of government policy. Rather than alleviating high levels of child and family poverty they will increase them for the following reasons:

- We are in a recession and there are no jobs
- There are no specialist supports to help lone parents engage with education, training and the labour market
- The level of money in the Community Childcare Subvention scheme has been cut and there will be a €25 weekly contribution to costs from FÁS and VEC trainees for Childcare Education and Training Support
- There is poor provision of after school care in Ireland
- There is poor childcare provision in parts of the country

- There is very little part-time or modular education
- Budget 2012 has cut family supports through the Family Resource Centre programme and the Family Mediation Service at a time when more families are separating
- Slashing the income disregard will result in increased poverty levels and a disconnection from the labour market
- Education levels of many lone parents are low and they will require long term interventions to help them progress to degree level
- Disincentivising Community Employment as a means of gaining training, accreditation, work experience and a salary will increase a disconnection from the labour market
- Families in rural areas are disadvantaged with the additional travel costs and challenges of accessing education and employment opportunities.

In order to ameliorate the drastic levels of poverty in one-parent families and to support the gradual progression of lone parents into sustainable employment, we demand the following **changes to Budget 2012:**

- Devise an additional payment for the poorest children in Ireland to compensate for all the cuts to family income
- Reverse the decision to disallow the payment of partial One Parent Family Payment to those on Community Employment
- Maintain the income disregard at current levels for the foreseeable future at €146.50 per week
- Develop appropriate supports and services in partnership with the voluntary sector to progress lone parents particularly those with low education levels into sustainable employment and pause the lowering of the age limit for OFP eligibility until this is achieved
- Prioritise the case management of lone parents in the new National Employment and Entitlements Service and ensure all supports for those on the live register are available to OFP recipients.

An important issue is the provision of clear **information on the implementation** of all the cuts described in Budget 2012 as this is not yet available and this is causing huge concern and anxiety amongst the families we work with. We believe that it has been irresponsible to introduce cuts and changes without a clear plan on impact and implantation.

One Family is instigating a **national campaign** to support Ireland's poorest families and we call on supporters from all over Ireland and from every political background to join us. We know that many parents, family support workers, community organisations, health nurses, children, trade unions, politicians and civil servants are genuinely concerned about the impact of these cuts.