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## **One Family's Election Manifesto 2011- Achieving Equality and Social Inclusion among One-Parent Families**

### **1.1 Background**

Progressing the work of Cherish, established in 1972, **One Family** provides voice, support and action for one-parent families through membership, professional services and campaigning. Our aim is to affect positive change and achieve equality and social inclusion for all one-parent families in Ireland.

**One Family** works with all types and all members of one-parent families, respecting the realities of family life in Ireland.

### **1.2 Introduction**

One Family calls on all political parties when in government to back their commitments to protecting the most vulnerable in Irish society through concerted actions aimed at eliminating poverty and social exclusion among one-parent families and to prioritise this area in the next Programme for Government.

We also ask all political parties to support One Family in its work in assisting lone parents to progress from welfare and into work through the provision of a coherent programme of practical supports and adult education programmes, in recognition that education is the true route out of poverty and social welfare dependency and that activation policies must result in improved living standards and quality of life for one-parent families rather than simply reductions in numbers dependent on social welfare.

We are also asking that new government to commit to providing a greater level of support to those parenting alone and going through family change and to work with organisations like One Family in developing more relevant and cost effective services for one-parent families and those sharing parenting.

Currently one-parent families experience exceptionally high levels of poverty and social exclusion. See Section 1.4 below. Sixty five percent of children living in consistent poverty live in one-parent families. Such families are also more likely to experience specific difficulties in obtaining and sustaining meaningful employment as well as in accessing services. They are often trapped in a cycle of poverty, low education, and high social welfare dependency. Families in transition into one-parent families and those sharing parenting also experience particular difficulties and need additional support. One Family has been campaigning for 39 years to address these inequalities and to ensure that such families have the same access to respect and to the services they require, as other family types.

By adopting a co-ordinated and positive strategy to address these issues, with built-in safeguards for those that are most vulnerable, the next government can achieve significant economic and social benefits and can help to ensure that the growing number of children living in non-traditional families can participate fully in the Irish society of the future.

### **1.3 Proposed Policy Commitments to Achieve Equality and Social Inclusion for One-Parent Families**

One Family is asking each political party to place the following policies at the top of their social policy agenda and to prioritise them in the new Programme for Government:

- Significantly reduce poverty rates in one-parent families and child poverty rates.
- Develop and implement positive active inclusion strategies for lone parents that are responsive to individual needs and recognise personal and family circumstances, backed up by a range of educational and training services.
- Demonstrate that parenting is highly valued in Irish society by ensuring that adequate and appropriate parenting supports are widely available particularly for families separating or going through changes.
- Value all children and commit to ensuring that all children have the right to develop to their full potential by holding the Children's Rights Referendum, incorporating wording that will allow all children to be treated equally regardless of marital status of their parents.
- Ensure equality and respect for all families and for the growing diversity of family types by providing adequate support, backed by legislative and constitutional change.

### **1.4 Key Statistics on One-Parent Families (OPFs)**

#### **One-Parent Families**

- The number of one-parent families increased from 153,900 in 2002 to 189,200 in 2006-a 23% increase and means that one-parent families now represent 18% of all families.(CSO, 2002, 2006)
- In 2002 there were just over 273,500 children living in a one-parent family. This increased to over 311,700 children in 2006-a 14% increase. (CSO, 2002, 2006)
- The number of one parent families with children aged less than 20 increased by 70.4% between 1997 and 2006. (CSO,2007)

#### **Poverty in One-Parent Families**

- 17 per cent of one-parent families live in consistent poverty compared with 5.5 per cent of the general population (EU SILC 2009).
- 35 per cent of one-parent families are at risk of poverty compared to 14.1 per cent of the population as a whole (EU SILC 2009).

### **Children in One-Parent Families**

- 65 per cent of all children living in consistent poverty are living in lone-parent households (ESRI:2010).
- 53 per cent of lone parents with three or more children are in the lowest income quintile<sup>[1]</sup> (GUI: The Lives of 9 Year Olds; 2009).
- According to the OECD, parents in Ireland face the highest level of net childcare costs among OECD countries.

### **Educational Levels in One-Parent Families**

- 54 per cent of lone mothers with two or more children have left school at Junior Cert level or below compared with only 17 per cent of mothers in two parent families (Growing Up in Ireland, (GUI) Minister for Health and Children, 2009).

### **Social Welfare Support**

- The percentage of OFP recipients in the under twenty age group has dropped from 2.2 per cent in 2004 to 1.7 per cent in 2009 (DSFA, 2004, 2009).
- 29 per cent of Family Income Supplement recipients are also in receipt of One Parent Family Payment (Child Income Support Review, DSP, 2010).

### **Lone parents and Access to Work**

- High withdrawal rates of One Parent Family Payment and of Family Income Supplement may weaken incentives to increase income through employment (CIS Review, DSP, 2010).
- The employment rate among lone mothers in 2010 was 41 per cent compared to 56 per cent for mothers in couples (QNHS, CSO, 2010).
- Lone fathers are twice as likely to be unemployed as men in couples with children (QNHS, CSO, 2010).

### **One-Parent Families and Family Law**

- In 2009 there were a total of 1,100 judicial separations and 3,341 divorces awarded in both the Circuit and High Courts which represents a 14 per cent increase since 2002 (Court Service Annual Report 2009).
- A total of 1,861 applications for guardianship were granted to unmarried applicants in 2009 (Court Service Annual Report 2009). A total of 976 applications were made in

2009. Of those 687 orders were granted while 243 were withdrawn/struck out and a further 46 were refused (Court Service Annual Report 2009).

- 45 per cent of mothers said they had no formal or informal custody arrangement with the child's father (GUI, Minister for Health and Children 2009).

## 1.5 Goals for the Next Government

One Family has identified 10 goals for the period of the next government in order to effectively address poverty and social exclusion among one-parent families.

1. *Reduce consistent poverty rates among one-parent families to the current overall consistent poverty rate over 5 years as part of achieving the EU 2020 Poverty Targets – a reduction from 17% to the overall average of 5.5% through a combination of income supports for families, elimination of existing poverty traps and by ensuring greater access to quality services for lone parents such as childcare, education and training and thus to employment.*
2. *Eliminate consistent child poverty over 5 years which is currently at 9% through reforming child income supports in a way that safeguards existing state payments to children and targets children in low income families for further supports and related services.*
3. *Ensure equality for all children, regardless of the marital and legal status of their parents, under the constitution, in legislation and in social policy over the life time of the government through introducing constitutional amendments that ensure equal rights for all family types and for all children, backed up by legislation and by the gradual provision of the necessary resources.*
4. *Increase the percentage of lone parents in quality employment – 60% of lone parents on the One-Parent Family Payment are estimated to be working, through the operation of income disregards, but increasing numbers are trapped in low paid, insecure employment due to a combination of weak educational qualifications, low skills, lack of access to affordable, quality childcare and increasing work related costs such as the USC. Progression to quality employment requires *positive activation* which in turn means access to appropriate education, training and childcare.*
5. *Ensure that one-parent families with unmet housing needs have those needs addressed over the next 5 years, through utilising the current housing stock to provide a combination of social housing, affordable housing and through the effective and more widespread operation of the Rental Allowance Scheme in recognition that one-parent families are overly represented on local authority housing lists and on rent supplement and that rent supplement greatly exacerbates the poverty traps already experienced by many such families.*
6. *Provide adequate supports to families, especially families going through relationship change, separation or divorce including legal supports and family and child support*

services for the increasing numbers of families in Ireland that are experiencing relationship breakdown.

7. *Value parenting and provide adequate supports for parenting within all family types* through the provision of a greatly increased range of non stigmatising parenting supports which can be tailored to individual and changing family circumstances and through ensuring that all families are supported to balance caring and work.
8. *Provide accessible, quality childcare for one-parent families* wishing to access personal development, education, training and employment, including after school care.
9. *Provide full medical cards for all children on a gradual basis* in order to ensure that all children receive the health supports that they need on an equal footing, and that fear of loss of the medical card is not to act as a disincentive to moving off social welfare.
10. *Support the development of new and tested services* backed up by research for those parenting alone and in shared parenting situations.

## **1.6 Initial Actions required by the next Government to achieve these Objectives**

We recognise the very difficult financial circumstances that the next Government must act within and the importance of ensuring that government funded programmes and supports are increasingly cost effective. We also recognise that the recovery will come and that it is vital that all can participate in such a recovery. We therefore propose the following initial steps.

### ***Child Support***

Reform income supports and services for children living in poverty in a way that has an optimum impact on child outcomes and which is complemented by an income supplement that assists lone parents to participate in the labour market. [\[2\]](#)

### ***Activation***

Halt reforms aimed at progressively moving lone parents from the One-Parent Family programme onto Job Seekers Allowance and instead focus on providing customised supports for lone parents that meet their needs and are most likely to lead to sustainable employment and careers.

Provide a coordinated programme of ‘moving on’ supports for lone parents wishing to enter or extend their involvement in the labour force, building on existing provision in FAS and One Family, and including access to relevant personal development, mentoring, education, training and childcare.[\[3\]](#)

Remove poverty traps that currently do not make work pay for many one-parent families, particularly rent supplement.

Work with employers to support lone parents to access employment and to develop their skills and education.

Provide grants for part-time courses leading to recognised educational qualifications for lone parents that facilitate an appropriate combination of work, caring and participation in education.

### *Social services*

If the goal of reducing poverty among one-parent families is to be achieved it will be necessary to not only improve their income prospects but also to ensure access to a range of relevant services for such families. This should include:

- Setting reasonable but challenging targets for one-parent families in social housing, affordable housing and on the Rental Accommodation Scheme.
- Extending the level and type of family and child support available during and after family break-up, including the roll out of family and child centres for families experiencing relationship breakdown.
- Support families in their parenting role through the widespread availability of parenting courses and other tailored supports that reflect individual and changing family circumstances.
- Extend the Teen Parent Support Programme and other programmes that support young parents to stay in the educational system.
- As resources become less constrained over the period of the next government, provide medical cards for all children under 6.

### *Legal*

Introduce a constitutional amendment that gives express recognition to children's rights, including welfare rights, and places a responsibility on government to vindicate such rights.

Introduce a constitutional amendment that recognises and places equal value on the diversity of family types in Ireland today.

### ***Supporting Innovation through Partnership***

In our view the objectives outlined above are much more likely to be achieved if politicians, government departments, state agencies and relevant community and voluntary organisations work together in a spirit of partnership. Each stakeholder possesses specialist expertise and experience which combined together can achieve the most positive outcomes for one-parent families. Organisations such as One Family are uniquely placed to support the development of many of the proposed new services and we call on the next government to resource us to do so. This could include funding One Family to:

1. Further develop our adult education programmes for lone parents based on identifying and responding to individual needs; and
2. Develop parenting supports that recognise and respond to the growing range of family and parenting situations in Ireland today.

### **Research and Evaluation**

In a time of seriously constrained resources it is vital to ensure that policy change and the development of available supports is based on the best possible evidence. We are calling therefore for the allocation of a small amount of funding for research and evaluation specifically looking at the implications of a growing focus on shared parenting and, at how best to achieve more positive outcomes for children in one-parent families.

#### **1.7 One Family's Election Campaign**

One Family is running an election campaign to encourage our 1100 members and clients, as well as other NGOs, to register to vote, and to campaign both nationally and locally on these issues and to lobby election candidates to obtain their support for our manifesto. We are advising our members to ask election candidates the following questions:

#### **Poverty and Social Welfare Issues**

- What will your party do in government to reduce the very high poverty rates experienced by one-parent families? Is this a priority for you?

- Specifically what will your party do in government to reduce poverty among children living in one-parent families?
- What are your views on the recent social welfare changes that require lone parents whose youngest child is over 14 to go on to Jobseekers Allowance rather than on the One-Parent Family Payment and of plans to gradually reduce the age of the child at which such changes come into effect?  
(<http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Policy/Legislation/Bills/Documents/swbill2010.pdf>)
- What will you do in government to ensure that adequate supports are in place to assist those parenting alone to access the education and training and childcare they require to progress from welfare and into sustainable employment?
- How will you work to ensure that the housing needs of one-parent families are adequately addressed over the period of the next government?
- **Constitutional and Legal Change**
- Do you support the current wording for the children's rights referendum and if so why? Do you believe it will result in equality for all children regardless of marital status?
- Do you believe that the definition of the family in the constitution should be changed? (Currently only the marital family is recognised in the Irish constitution). If not, why not?
- Do you support the Law Reform Commission's proposals to give automatic guardianship to unmarried fathers? Do you believe that adequate safeguards are envisaged in the LRCs draft Bill to ensure that the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration in all issues affecting them? ([http://www.lawreform.ie/ fileupload/Reports/r101Family\(1\).pdf](http://www.lawreform.ie/fileupload/Reports/r101Family(1).pdf))
- **Supporting Families and Children**
- Will you support proposals to allocate additional resources to families experiencing marital and relationship breakdown?
- What plans do you have to ensure that parenting supports are widely available for all families in your area?

Further information is available from: [www.onefamily.ie](http://www.onefamily.ie) or email

[policy@onefamily.ie](mailto:policy@onefamily.ie)

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[2] The Department of Social Protection's recent report 'A Policy and Value for Money Review of Child Income Support and Associated Spending Programmes' 2010 could form the basis for discussions with NGOs and other interested parties on the best way to proceed with such reforms.

[3] This should include the introduction of standards and safeguards that will ensure that no one on social welfare is pressurised to take a job that will make them worse off than they currently are, or that will place unreasonable childcare burdens on them in recognition that positive outcomes for children are associated with employment that leads to higher incomes for one-parent families.

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**Central to the mission of One Family is our aim to affect positive change and to achieve equality and social inclusion for all one-parent families in Ireland. In order to do this we are involved in a range of activities to raise the issues of concern to one-parent families in Ireland and to achieve equality and social inclusion for all.**

**This involves us in:**

- Carrying out quantitative and qualitative research on key areas affecting the lives and experiences of one-parent families which inform both our policy positions and our service development
- Monitoring and evaluating One Family services to ensure that practice informs policy and is evidence based and that services remain relevant to client's needs
- Developing and promoting policy positions in key policy areas.
- Lobbying for changes to improve the position of one-parent families in Ireland
- Carrying out campaigns in key areas where we believe change is most urgent
- Networking with other organisations in Ireland and internationally, in areas of common concern.