



PreBudgetSubmission2015**2015** **Pre-Budget Submission**

Investment & Enhancement;
not complexity and
confusion: releasing the
untapped capacity of lone
parents and those sharing
parenting.

1.0 Introduction and Context

One Family is Ireland's national organisation for one-parent families. We work with all types and all members of one-parent families, respecting the realities of family life, to affect positive change and achieve equality and social inclusion for all one-parent families in Ireland. One Family is working to ensure a positive and equal future for all members of all one-parent families in Ireland – changing attitudes, services, policies and lives. Together with one-parent families and those working with them, we are committed to achieving equality and respect for all families. We support families as they parent through times of family, work and life change. We know that every family is unique, and so we work in a family centred way to bring about better lives for parents and children.

The families we work with and represent come in all shapes, sizes and forms – no two one-parent families are the same. Here are what the key facts and figures about one-parent families in Ireland show:

1.1 About One-Parent Families in Ireland

- 1 in 8 people in Ireland live in a one-parent family (Census 2011)
- 1 in 4 families with children in Ireland is a one-parent family (Census 2011)
- Over half a million people live in one-parent families in Ireland (Census 2011)
- 13.5 per cent of one-parent families are headed by a father (Census 2011)
- Almost 1 in 5 children (18.3%) live in a one-parent family (Census 2011)
- There are over 215,000 one-parent families in Ireland today – 25.8 per cent of all families with children (Census 2011)
- People in lone parent households tend to have the lowest disposable income out of all households in the state (EU-SILC 2012)
- Those living in lone parent households continue to experience the highest rates of deprivation with almost 69% of individuals from these households experiencing one or more forms of deprivation (EU-SILC 2012)

1.2 About the One-Parent Family Payment

- 92,326 people are currently receiving the One-Parent Family Payment (December 2011). This has increased from 59,000 in 1997
- 98% of recipients of OPF are women (2012)
- 56% of recipients have one child; 28% have two children; 11% have three children (2010)
- The percentage of OPF recipients under 30 years of age is falling (34.4%)
- The percentage of OPF recipients over 30 is increasing (currently 65.6%) (2011)
- The number of teenage parents in receipt of OFP fell from 4.4% in 1997 to 1.5% in 2010
- 38% working now on payment vs 60% a few years ago

1.3 Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2012 Results

Today's figures, on release at 16 April 2014, show:

- Well over a quarter of the population (27% or 1.2 million people) was affected by deprivation (doubled since 2008 and up from 24.5% in 2011)[i], that is not being able to afford two of a list of 11 very basic items
- 13% of people could not heat their homes adequately[ii]
- A third of children were living in deprivation[iii]
- Two and a half times as many people at work were in deprivation compared to 2008 (16.4% in 2012; 15% in 2011, and 6.6% in 2008).[iv]

- Lone parents, people not at work through illness or disability, and unemployed people were hardest hit^[v]
- The numbers of people at risk of poverty (living on less than 60% of median income) has risen back to pre-recession levels. Despite the fact that the income threshold itself has dropped by nearly 15% since 2008 to €10,621, there are now 96,000 more people falling below this lower mark, i.e. a total of 756,000 people in 2012 *[i] Page 1 of the CSO Statistical Release [ii] Page 20 of the same Release [iii] Page 16 of the same Release [iv] Page 16 of the same Release [v] Page 16 of the same Release*

1.4 Key and influencing facts about Lone Parents

- Lone Parents are predominately in the age bracket 25 to 54ⁱ
- Lone Parents have a less competitive level of education for to-day's economy and are therefore unable to take the chances available in the new knowledge driven labour marketⁱⁱ:
- Lone Parents want to work and are working; but many are challenged by access to childcare; education and training; and in-work assistance and investment ⁱⁱⁱCSO, 2011
- Lone Parents have lack of access to assured and secure housing, where there is longevity in the tenancy challenges many of those parenting alone and can place them unwillingly in a poverty trap. 20% of those parenting alone rent in the insecure private sector CSO 2011

1.5 Specific actions and investments for Budget 2015

The seven steps specific actions will enable Government to reduce the poverty of opportunity being faced daily by lone parents. While it will take some time to create and deliver an effective poverty reduction strategy, there are specific measures the government can take immediately to help reduce poverty. These include the following.

ONE:	Tailor child supports and reduce the depth of child and family poverty.
TWO:	Invest in early learning and child care, to create spaces, to increase the number, skills and remuneration of early childhood educators, and to reduce cost to parents.
THREE:	Increase investments in affordable assured and secured housing.
FOUR:	Make employment in science and technology more accessible.
FIVE:	Create ways for lone parents to tap into training to upgrade skills and invest in part-time education options.
SIX:	Make a commitment to income adequacy and security: appraise and invest in taxation reform.
SEVEN:	Include strong principles for social protection to ensure social assistance programmes provide an adequate income and are equitable.

2.0 Critical policies for Budget 2015

- Invest in affordable, assured and secure housing
- Enhance though reform Income Adequacy and Security: an essential for financial future planning.
- Enhance access to education and employment supports: invest in free fees for part time education: there is no behavioural economic rationale for only funding full time courses at third level
- Invest in children and family supports: use tax policy to deliver additional monies in the pay packet:
 - Introduce a child and out of school care tax credit, which is linked to quality, accessible and professional services;
 - Transform the FIS expenditure which is almost €282 million in 2014, (with close to 43,000 families benefitting) into a tax credit paid through the weekly pay packet.

The overarching message is that all people share in Ireland, and we must believe that government has a responsibility to help **people** develop their **strengths and their potential**. We must look to long-term programmes to empower our communities, rather than short-term patches.

One Family Budget Panel, (membership outlined below) has identified several solutions that Budget 2015 must address.

1. **Revenue needs to be increased to do what with, let's not assume they will make a good choice.** This can easily be affected by closing several of the tax loopholes that wealthy Irish and international companies are currently able to access.
2. Budget 2015 must address the urgent issue of **housing in Ireland**. This includes homelessness, high rents, and the use of the private landlords to meet social ends.
3. The government's provision of **income support must be better tailored** so that it goes where it is needed. This relates to better systems of support, adequacy, security and assessment as well as increasing support to those currently trying to get back into the workforce. It also means stopping the harmful policy of exclusion from back to work incentives.

2.1 One Family Budget Panel

The Budget Panel was formed in January 2014 in response to the demand of lone parents for a solution-focused voice at national level to develop and inform policies that are cost efficient and enable lone parents to take equal chances in the economy. The panel consists of **twelve parents**, comprising those parenting alone and sharing parenting, parents from each Province : urban and rural are represented.; the age distribution of representation goes from 24 to 55; 60% of the parents are working either part or fulltime; 45 % of parents are in education and/or training full or part-time; the gender split is 85 % female and 15% male; 65% of parents in receipt of some form of social assistance either One Parent Family Payment, Family Income Support; Carer's Allowance. The panel make up a representative sample of lone parents across Ireland and have collaborated with One Family to produce a pre-budget submission which reflects the **lived reality** for one-parent families in Ireland. Using the **personal narrative** of those parenting alone has allowed One Family to obtain deeper levels of meaning, make important connections and identify subtle nuances which would otherwise be absent from the Budget submission. The Budget Panel has given One Family the opportunity to obtain a variety of views from a range of people with widely

differing but relevant perspectives. The panel contains parents who are in education, in employment and those who are dependent on State supports. The information gathered from this group has informed One Family's budget strategy and ultimate submission. The Budget Panel along with our monthly Facebook surveys and opinion polls have incorporated an important element of member participation to One Family's advocacy work.

2.2 The Fundamentals

The One Family Budget Panel believes the crafting of Budget 2015 must take account of the fundamental equality of people, and their equal entitlement to the things that make life worth living. The continuing stigma and lack of compassion within society is a very real concern for lone parents in Ireland:

“It's all very worrying and I think the stigma is getting worse”

“No one realises how vulnerable a single parent on benefits actually is. The housing and childcare are the two biggest practical issues I faced, along with stigma and isolation and loneliness and all the rest of it...when you cannot find a roof over your head it really hurts, it affects your mental health also”.

2.3 The role of the Government

Given the Government's resources, their power and influence, their democratic and legal legitimacy, and their status as representative of the people, the One Family Budget Panel see government as having the fundamental responsibility to ensure that all people have access to the goods and services they need.

This is especially true when it comes to equitable and affordable access to the essentials of life such as housing, healthcare, education, income adequacy and security, support and employment assistance.

One example of inequity in the current income support system was highlighted by a member of the Budget Panel:

“For all the talk and publicity about anti-discrimination, there are many instances of legalised discrimination against lone parents in this country: Even if childcare was available, One Parent Family recipients cannot avail of employment where the employer is receiving Revenue Job Assist or JobsPlus schemes.”

“What we need now, both lone mothers and fathers, is for policy makers to recognise the difficulties we face in parenting alone. We're not looking for favours, just equal opportunities to provide for our kids to the best of our abilities.”

Prosperity and growth do not always alleviate poverty and disadvantage. Despite enormous growth in prosperity over the last 30 years, Ireland today is far less equal than it was in the 1980s.¹ Those on low incomes are doing even worse relative to those on high incomes, and those below the poverty line are by and large significantly more disadvantaged, especially in terms of inequality of access to the essentials of life.

“I believe my child deserves the same rights and to be treated with the same dignity as any child of a two parent family. What prevents this from happening is lack of adequate and affordable childcare.”

¹ OECD, 2011, An Overview of Growing Income Inequalities in OECD Countries: Main Findings

However, the claim that the only way to promote prosperity is to reduce government involvement is simply incorrect. While there will be contexts in which state-lead intervention damages the economy, there are many countries that are very economically stable, despite high taxes and high levels of government service provision. The Scandinavian countries come to mind. The solution is obviously complex, but it is certainly not as simple as reducing government size for its own sake, and trusting that the market will be able to step in.

2.4 Budget Panel Opinion

For these reasons, One Family Budget Panel believes that a **fundamental principle** of the Budget 2015 must be **partnership** with the **whole of government** and the **community sector** as a major building-block for government action in ensuring that people's fundamental human rights are protected.

“It is ridiculous in this day and age that all governmental data systems that relate to individuals are not linked up - this goes across the board and affects every one of us in all applications.”

Without partnership disillusionment and anger grows at the lack of Government response to a number of pertinent issues impacting on the lives on lone parents.

“It seems to me that there is a fundamental misunderstanding at government level of the difficulties being experienced by working parents of children, even more so in cases of lone parents. What sort of message is being sent!! Policy makers need to get their act together and provide quality, affordable childcare options for those parents who are trying so hard to engage in employment.”

“Rents in Dublin are ridiculous. How can the Government be allowing this to happen when they reduced the rent caps so significantly? There is no political will.”

“It seems to me that there is little or no consultation whatsoever between the policy makers and the persons such policy affects. This is apparent in respect of policy right across the board. Is there no provision for government departments to actively consult with the man/woman on the street prior to implementing such policies? It just seems to me that policies in general are just launched out there with a "we'll see how this goes" attitude!!”

Budget 2015 outcomes must be about people. Following from the importance of human rights, and the necessity of Government's moral responsibility for ensuring that rights such as education, housing, health, employment and community-participation are fulfilled, the One Family Budget Panel believes that the central **purpose of Budget 2015** must be, and can only be, **ensuring better lives for people** and in particular for those parenting alone, those sharing parenting or those going through a family transition.

For that reason, we have been concerned that the vast majority of government discussion around previous Budgets has focussed on **“balancing the budget”**, **“paying back debt”**, **“economic restraint”**, **“living within government's means”**, etc.. All of these things are important. But, like all conversations about finances, the purpose of money cannot simply be to have it: the point of Budget 2015 cannot be simply to make sure that Ireland's money is well-managed. The purpose must be to help achieve a long-term, strategic goal of a strong, diverse and inclusive society.

2.5 Maximising the well-being of families

Therefore, One Family Budget Panel believes **Budget 2015 must express how best to maximise the wellbeing of families**, particularly those parenting alone living in Ireland, **rather than focussing only on trying to save money**. Government **fiscal responsibility** is an important **tool to increasing quality of life**, but it is only a tool rather than the end goal.

An over emphasis on cost saving measures by Government has put an increasing strain on those parenting alone to make ends meet and has negatively impacted on their quality of life.

“To be very honest I just see more and more struggle for myself into the future. And psychologically that isn't very healthy for anyone. I'm working full time. I have a Masters. And I have nothing to show for it. I work because living on social welfare meant poverty. But I'm still financially and psychologically poor.”

“I love to work, I have always done something! It's never really paid off for me, the volunteer work, CE schemes...I'm a natural entrepreneur always coming up with ideas but nothing can materialize because I'm trapped.”

2.6 Long-term, sustainable fixes

One of the core values of One Family is advocacy. We advocate because we believe that our assistance and programmes are not the ultimate solution to poverty and disadvantage in Ireland but that we must mobilise community and government to stand behind longer-term and more sustainable changes to the way our society is structured. Longer-term planning enables government and society together to provide supports to those in need. Longer-term changes also save government and the community large sums of money. Investing in education, housing, health, and employment today will see savings in the future, as people's own strengths are socially and economically harnessed.

One Family Budget Panel believes that a core element of the budget must be assistance that aims at prevention rather than cure, and programmes that provide the material resources for people to achieve their potential, rather than provide short-term fixes, or stigmatise and humiliate people further entrenching their exclusion.

2.7 Evidence-informed policy

All policy changes should be supported by robust evidence, showing that they are likely to achieve the desired outcomes. This is in contrast to empty rhetoric or ideology that can sometimes drive policy and or attitude.

In the context of the budget, evidence-informed policy means investing in programmes and supports that are proven to truly realise the aims they seek to achieve, and that have been formed after consultation with experts in the particular field. For example, the notion that lowering unemployment supports, such as the income disregard will help people into work is simply not supported by the evidence: experts argue that the very low rates are actually making it much harder for people to find work, but instead trap people in poverty.

“The reduction of the amount of income disregard to €90 in 2014 and €60 in 2016 is completely and utterly counterproductive to assisting lone parents returning to work. It must be considered within this context. We must remember the purpose of the payment.”

“Finding employment that allows lone parents to accommodate their responsibilities is difficult enough without being penalised by a reduction in income disregards that will essentially penalise lone parents for

attempting to free themselves from social welfare dependence by working.”

2.8 Social Investment

One Family Budget Panel believes that Government has a responsibility to invest in programmes that will really improve the quality of life of people in Ireland. Programmes such as One Family’s the internationally recognise and successful New Futures initiative. Also, this means investment should only occur if there is good evidence it will achieve its aim. Investment in child and out of school care provides evidence.

“I gave up my fulltime job after I had my son as I could not afford the childcare. Even to work part time meant that any money I would earn would go directly to childcare. Still I stuck with the part time for as long as I could as I really wanted to be able to work.”

“The costs of childcare are crippling and outrageous - money hungry businesses. If there were a more affordable childcare scheme it would give those parenting alone more incentive to return to work either part or full time.”

“Seven years since I had my son, a degree and an internship later and still nothing had changed. I am still unable to work fulltime because of childcare. This country is not set up to support working lone parents”

3.0 Investment

Budget 2015 can and must consider not only government expenditure (which the discussion by government and the media has mostly been about to date), but also revenue, or the amount of taxation government can levy. Indeed, these are really two sides of the same coin: expenditure can be seen as revenue foregone, and revenue foregone can be turned into revenue proper.

Revenue is not fixed and, there are a wide range of ways in which government could increase its income without damaging the economy or business confidence. This is about taxation reform. Simple measures that could increase revenue include cutting tax exemptions along with other measures that would rein in some of the government hand-outs (revenue foregone, and expenditure itself) to the rich, including benefits being paid to people who are already very wealthy.

“I am of the opinion that there is a need to expand/introduce more tax bands to cater for the different earning capacities of our society. There is also a need to seriously consider "childcare grants" based on the circumstances of each case.”

Similarly, some types of improved efficiency – and therefore cheaper expenditures – will in fact be best addressed by changes to taxation and the greater use of tax credits as a means of providing in-work supports. This would be a far better mechanism to distribute and manage FIS (Family Income Supplement), as well as supporting the delivery of child and out of school care. The Single Person Child Carer Credit must reflect the realities of modern family life rather than penalising parental commitment and responsibility. Therefore, the One Family Budget Panel proposes the introduction of a Shared Child Support Credit and associated tax band to replace the removed One-Parent Family Tax Credit. These in-work tax credits should be available at the same rates as the previous One-Parent Family Tax Credit and should be available to both parents who live apart and who have responsibility for children.

We propose that the new Shared Child Support Credit only be available to parents who have a written Child Support & Parenting Agreement in place. This is a written agreement between parents on the amount of child maintenance to be paid towards the financial costs of raising their children after separation including an agreed plan in relation to parenting issues as appropriate. This will ensure that parents are taking appropriate financial and/or parenting responsibility for their children in order to claim the tax credit. This measure will promote good shared parenting practices and the payment of child maintenance which is good for children, society and the economy.

A Child Support & Parenting Agreement can be drawn up between parents, legal practitioners or organisations such as One Family. Costs should be minimal and such an agreement would be of huge benefit to families sharing parenting decreasing adversarial court visits.

Changes to the tax credit entitlements (in Budget 2014) of people parenting alone fail to recognise the realities of shared parenting and the negative impact on non resident parents and children in particular.

“Often the 'secondary' claimant's expenses are in fact higher than the 'primary' claimant's - they pay maintenance, don't get child benefit, and often have to spend money travelling long distances to visit their children.”

“My net income per month has been reduced to the tune of €200 per month.”

“I feel as I have been discriminated against by Revenue and the Government on these tax credit changes based on the fact that I am a dad and not the recipient of the children's allowance. This has affected my net income, which is no more than the average industrial wage, by reducing it by €47 per week. This is crippling my ability to survive and meet my financial commitments and most importantly my ability to do the things I have endeavoured to do with my children.”

3.1 Priority Housing

There is a grave shortage of affordable and assured housing in Ireland, which is a key element of the level of housing insecurity. Housing insecurity must be decreased. Rental prices can become more affordable for those on low incomes when rent is more firmly regulated and if on the supply side social landlords are invited and promoted in the market. A spectrum of tenure options must be explored: options which range from economic renting, mid-renting, shared-ownership and other forms of tenure which deliver assurity and security. Our priority is that the Rent Assistance needs to reflect the real cost of renting today.

In relation to the Rental Accommodation Scheme; a major concern for panel members are the very low RAS rents which are offered to landlords by local authorities. The scheme also dictates who the next tenant will be if a RAS tenant moves out during the agreed contract period, leaving a landlord in a position where they cannot choose their own tenants. These restrictions disincentivise RAS uptake for potential private landlords. and consequently limit options for parents, as it matches landlord profit against parents' needs.

“Where I live now has brought great security and this means everything to me and my kids, yes we struggle financially but we are much closer as a family in a safe home.”

“The stress and lack of help and worry each time rent caps were reviewed and more money needed to "top up" was exhausting and finding somewhere on RAS also was tiring. Council housing or RAS had some security, but Rent Supplement was just awful.”

“If I had a social landlord I would be able to afford to go to work.”

The government also need to consider appropriate supports for those parenting alone who own their own home and are struggling to meet high mortgage repayments.

”I'm more or less trapped in my home - which is a far better situation than some, I do know. I am €100K in negative equity. I bought the house with my now ex husband and because we were 'jointly & separately liable', he has now done a runner and left me to sort out the full mortgage.”

“I have a mortgage but since the breakdown of my marriage I am in significant arrears. Other party not engaging. I am struggling to keep a roof over my daughters head. No mortgage supports available to me.”

3.2 Children and Families

All children should be equal, but many children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are currently not getting enough support to succeed. Budget 2015 is obliged to provide a plan to provide tailored investment to the disadvantaged. One Family Budget Panel calls for a rational approach to addressing the underlying structural causes of unemployment, underemployment and insecure work. This, rather than a misplaced fixation on divesting on social expenditure, will achieve the desired results of long-term economic sustainability and vastly improved levels of employment participation for the people who are currently excluded from the labour market or consigned to its insecure fringes.

It cannot be emphasised strongly enough; **lone parents want to work and are willing to engage in employment and education but this can only happen if structural and societal barriers are removed or alleviated.**

“We are caught in positions that revolve around our child care hours and location. It is extraordinarily difficult to further our careers as generally promotion equals more hours, and/or additional training which is impossible when you have to race back before the crèche closes.”

“Secure housing gives me the option to become independent from State benefits and to use my skills and education to earn a living and give back to society as well as teaching my son the importance of hard work and being independent.”

“Employers must be incentivised to provide workable options to parents. For example e-working, on-site crèche facilities etc.”

3.3 Transforming poverty reduction

The One Family Budget Panel believes that Budget 2015 must address Ireland’s poverty reduction strategy² and must reaffirm:

- Timelines and targets.
- Specific measures of progress.
- Social forecasts and social audits.

² http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/The-National-Social-Target-for-poverty-reduction_holder.aspx

- An integrated strategy, across departments of the whole of government and across levels of government.
- Focused strategies to address causes of poverty among groups most affected by poverty: lone parent families, families sharing parenting, families in transition, women, single adults, young families with children

Families with children experiencing poverty are increasing. Poverty rates among those parenting alone are among the highest of all groups. Our national poverty reduction strategy will need to address the causes of poverty for those parenting alone and will require specific inclusive policies to address the root causes of the poverty they experience.

”Happy parent equals happy child. If the mental well being of children’s parents continues to be affected by the stress and strain and shame of poverty then the children will continue to be hurt by this poverty as well.”

“I have to borrow a tenner off my teenage daughter to get by until Thursday, I give her an allowance 20 euro on Thursday and end up borrowing it again.”

Our national poverty reduction strategy should seek to reduce earnings inequality – primarily by raising the market incomes of low wage workers. This will involve a combination of updating employment standards and enforcing them, investing in income adequacy and security, and approaches to ensure that low wage workers, particularly those sharing parenting and parenting alone have opportunities for skills development and training, opportunities which exist today mostly for already highly skilled and well-paid workers.

“ It’s the feeling of being trapped by your circumstance, of knowing that you’ll never get out of it that causes the low feelings and by feeling like a failure as a mother towards your child. It’s the fact that it’s not a temporary situation that causes these feelings for me. And it seems to be so hard for other people to understand, and makes it all the more difficult to handle, causing further isolation, maybe secrecy of the situation, bringing only further feelings of inadequacy.”

“I have had to put food back at the till and look around me to see if anyone knew me in the local shop, I am an educated woman with so much to offer and yet live like this - you would wonder why people are suffering with depression and low self esteem it’s circumstantial.”

In-work poverty is also prevalent amongst working lone parents in Ireland. The Irish rate of in-work poverty (people with a job but who are living in poor households) is similar to the EU average. It increased slightly after the recession (from 7 per cent in 2007 to 8 per cent in 2010)³. The risk of being in-work poor is higher for those in a low-skilled occupation, people working part-time and those with no educational qualifications. Compared to adults in jobless households, the working poor do not appear to be as disadvantaged in terms of education, social class or household structure.

“If you looked at me you'd never think I have only €16 to my name. I wear a suit to work in a very well known company, my son is in a good crèche, I live in a 3 bedroom house (because it's €100k in negative equity so I can't afford to sell it). And here I am, without money for food.”

³ ESRI, 2012, Work and Poverty in Ireland

“I regularly go to work with no money for three days in a row. If there was thunder and lightning I'd still have to walk home. I cringe when people come round the office with charity stuff or there is a cake sale. But looking in I look comfortable enough. Utter madness.”

3.4 Specific actions for Budget 2015

The seven steps specific actions will enable Government to reduce the poverty of opportunity being faced daily by lone parents

While it will take some time to create and deliver an effective poverty reduction strategy, there are specific measures the government can take immediately to help reduce poverty. These include the following.

ONE: Tailor child supports and reduce the depth of child and family poverty. “Supports need to go to those in need; not to families who use supports as a means of savings - they use it like an endowment for the future and in turn delivers advantage in life chances”

TWO: Invest in early learning and child care, to create spaces, to increase the number, skills and remuneration of early childhood educators, and to reduce cost to parents. “As a lone parent, we cannot just choose the cheapest form of childcare when returning to work. We must find a childcare provider who understands our situation, is easily accessible to either work or home as we have long days and who we trust implicitly.”

“There as least three different schemes for low income parents and they all operate in different ways, surely it would make sense to unify them into one scheme, with one set of eligibility criteria, the way the schemes work at the moment is a bit of mess, some are for private childcare provision, others only for public etc.”

“There are thousands of children who fall outside the childcare schemes available, preschool is for 3-5 year olds, not everywhere has afterschool and not every childcare provider is registered etc. nor under their remit.”

THREE: Increase investments in affordable assured and secured housing. “I got a council house 4 years ago. It has opened my world literally. I seriously don't think I could manage if I didn't have my council house.”

FOUR: Make employment in science and technology more accessible. “There is insufficient capacity in Ireland's STEM education pipeline, but more fundamentally, it jeopardizes lone parent's future economic competitiveness and threatens to leave us behind.”

FIVE: Create ways for lone parents to tap into training to upgrade skills and invest in parttime education options.⁴ “Apprenticeships are a good model for employers to invest in the skills of their employees they then get a skilled and productive workforce. Government should look at modern apprenticeships model across a variety of

⁴ NES, 2014 Jobless Households: An Exploration of the Issues





areas to give those parenting alone the opportunity to work for an employer, learn on the job and build up knowledge and transferable skills, and gain a nationally recognised qualification that will be needed throughout our working life.”







SIX: **Make a commitment to income adequacy and security: appraise and invest in taxation reform.** “Poverty cannot be used in its general form in my opinion but must be defined from the outset as a specific social and economic experience. I currently am poor in some ways financially but I'm also poor in social terms in so far as I'm confined to my house when my son goes to sleep every night because I can't afford to go out or host someone in my home.”

SEVEN: **Include strong principles for social protection to ensure social assistance programmes provide an adequate income and are equitable.** “I agree with addressing the different dimensions of poverty and challenging beliefs is one issue that needs to be looked at. I know when I am stressed my kids feel it, it's the elephant in the room, we all feel it, it is something I am very conscious of.”

4.0 The Government Doing Better

In our Government Report Card (benchmarked against **10 Solutions: enabling those parenting alone**) on the progress towards effective engagement with those parenting alone the Government achieved an overall D grade. Let us see if Government can learn from its lessons and its rhetoric in empathetic listening, so that they can turn that D into a B and take a strong place in Europe as a pivotal social democracy enabled economy and society.

Report Card 2014		Name: Irish Government	
Assessed against One Family's 10 Solutions for Smarter Futures. Ten practical and economic solutions that would greatly improve the quality of lives of the adults and children of one-parent families in Ireland today.			
Solution		Comment	Grade
ONE Flexibilities and the Jobseeker's Transition Payment (JTP)		Listening to One Family, Government has delivered an effective response which recognises the caring needs of parents in that lone parents on JTP only need to be seeking part-time work. Good work!	B-2014 Expected 2015 B
TWO Wrap-around Childcare		After school care pilot in place. Need to recognise that affordable and accessible childcare is an economic issue which enables parents to manage work. Comprehensive plan is needed for all of out of school care. Must take this more seriously.	D 2014 Expected 2015 B-
THREE Bridging Programmes		Little understanding demonstrated about the needs and timescales required for all those who are distant from the labour market to ensure they can take their equal chances. Some improvement in effort but no impact.	D 2014 Expected 2015 A-
FOUR Expert Guidance		Greater effort is required to tailor supports to parents' real needs. Professional skills required to improve	E 2014 Expected 2015 C+

		poorly resourced state delivery of welfare to work services. Must work smarter.	
FIVE Responsive Learning		Some improvement here. But no national plan for accessible part-time learning and development and this needs to be in place. More efforts required outside Dublin.	D 2014 Expected 2015 B
SIX Progression Opportunities		Plan in place but no jobs yet. Greater effort needs to be made in growing jobs in the domestic economy. All else will fail if this is not addressed properly.	D 2014 Expected B
SEVEN Income Security		More children and families are poor and frightened. Government needs to take an innovative approach to reform. Massive effort required.	E 2014 Expected 2015 C+ to B-
EIGHT Work-life Balance		Austerity means we are now an economy not a society. Repeated Budget attacks such as those on maternity leave and One-Parent Family Tax Credit are unacceptable. Government and employers need to support caring responsibilities of parents. Must pay more attention.	F 2014 Expected 2015 C
NINE Joined-up Delivery of Services		Less talk and more action needed. Greater effort and whole of Government understanding on how outcome-based budgeting can help the poorest in society. Team work required.	D 2014 Expected 2015 A-
TEN Poverty and Parent Proofing		Some improvement here since Budget 2012; but efforts not rigorous enough to really make a difference to the cumulative impacts of budget measures. Greater attention needed.	D 2014 Expected 2015 B+
Overall Assessment Since Budget 2012, the benchmark assessment, there have been some changes. There is great potential to deliver a modern welfare, tax and social support system. If we expect lone parents to plan for their future, we need to acknowledge that they need a financial base that can be relied on. Unfortunately our welfare system cannot claim to provide this. Income security is what is needed; a basic foundation on which people can rely and plan for their family's future. If Government does not pull its socks up, it is impossible to imagine that any changes will do more than transform an awful system into a bad one. Need to focus on listening and communication skills.			
Grading Scale	A – Excellent B – Above Average C – Satisfactory D - Needs Improvement E - Extra Effort Urgently Required F - Fail		

Our case studies illustrate impact and how the Government can secure progress in achieving a B grade making the rationale for Budget 2015 simple:

Investment & Enhancement; not complexity and confusion: releasing the untapped capacity of lone parents and those sharing parenting.

5.0 Investment in lone parents

In our Budget Statement for 2015, One Family and the One Family Budget Panel believes the main priorities for government are:

1 A comprehensive overall plan to reduce child and family poverty

To achieve the broad changes needed to tackle this complicated and intractable issue, Ireland needs a comprehensive whole of government plan to reduce child and family poverty with focused-goals, measurable outcomes and regular reporting requirements.

2 Focus on the causes of poverty

The government's current focus on vulnerable children is too narrow and does not take poverty into account. It ignores the social and economic conditions that create or exacerbate children's vulnerability and ignores poverty as a major contributing factor to family violence.

3 Supporting Children & Families

A growth strategy that will generate meaningful jobs is a key issue, but economic growth alone will not fix the problem, particularly if growth is not distributed equally. Deliberate and significant redistribution is also required. The Government must ensure the recovery does not just result in gains for a privileged few while the poorest miss out yet again.

1. Budget 2015 must ensure an adequate income for families to meet their needs, and protect children from poverty and material hardship.
2. Low income families need protection against the gradual erosion of government support, through proper indexation
3. Full indexation of all aspects of family assistance is required, not only to protect against inflation but also to reflect the growing economy and increase costs of living.

6.0 A clear rationale: the 3 Rs: Re-imagine >>>Re-engineer>>>Re-form

Social assistance needs to be re-imagined as a system or set of systems that lift people out of poverty. Poverty reduction and building personal capacity for fuller participation in the community and the labour market should be our explicit objectives. Social assistance should be seen as an opportunity to identify and support people who are at risk of persistent poverty. Not only is an investment in in-work and or education/training benefits socially responsible, it is also the economically prudent thing to do. Putting money into the hands of low-income families inputs it back into local economies and communities who most need it. Increases to incomes will go directly to the purchase of food, clothing and other household necessities, benefiting not only low-income families but also our national economy. Social assistance has the potential to create the kind of economy that will better support people grappling with change. But this long-term thinking must be accompanied by short-term action – the kind that can assist with both short-term and long-term income support needs. The current fragile state of economic recovery demands that we take steps to improve programmes in the interim. Helping people to better participate in and benefit from inclusion in the economy and community will both encourage economic activity over the short term and provide a strong foundation for longer-term economic growth. We must take steps to re-engineer the system. Without this, it is impossible to imagine that changes will do more than transform an awful system into a bad one.

Welfare to work and community economic development needs to be used as a response to the dislocation caused by our new economy. This approach seeks to address the needs of all communities and people by integrating social, economic and educational goals of the community. Welfare to work services must provide the overall strategic direction for the response and a mechanism to ensure that support is appropriate, timely, local and cost-effective. By far the most significant achievement of welfare to work services is mobilising and then maintaining a broad coalition across government, its social partners, and other

stakeholders. This provides both a means to work together and resolve problems, and a mechanism to ensure that support was joined up, work focussed and appropriate to the local labour market.

No welfare to work solution or service is typical, and the characteristics of people vary widely. There is a clear social and economic imperative to intervene– both to support individuals to re-enter work and to minimise the impact on communities, and while welfare to work responses must follow the broad approach exercised (helping individuals to look for work, working with local employers, and providing job-focussed training to the hardest to help) success requires a huge effort from a range of stakeholders. A local coherent response means, the outcome for many is a positive one.

7.0 Case Studies

Each case study illustrates how the complexities of the Irish social protection system (across the whole of government) creates challenges and limits opportunities. Our case studies from both clients and the Budget Panel illustrate why fundamental reform of our approach needs to fully recognise the realities of modern family life; the aspirations of parents; and the desire for parents to take an active role in both Irish society and economy.

Case Study One: Sarah

Sarah is a lone parent with one 14 year old child who is doing his Junior Certificate this year. They live in rural Co. Kerry. Sarah has spent over ten years on the One Parent Family Payment and has only recently secured employment.

OFP income disregards are of major importance to Sarah as a long term jobseeker, receiving OFP (€217.80 per week), with no financial support from her child's father. Sarah feels that the significant reduction in income disregards from €130.00 per week to €90.00 with future proposals to reduce to €60.00 is very contradictory given the publicity about welfare traps and making work pay for all. For Sarah, the costs of living have put considerable strain on her and her son.

“Grocery, utility and fuel costs have risen sharply. My child's clothing and shoes are taxable adult sizes and this Junior Cert year has already cost €70 just for mocks, the €109 for the actual Junior Cert has yet to be paid for as does a pre summer deposit for Transition year. All of which cannot be accommodated together with everyday living expenses out of OFP and €130.00 per month Child Benefit.”

Sarah is in a continuous cycle of debt with her mechanic, local shop, credit union, bank, provident, phone company and electricity supplier. Car ownership and car maintenance is an expensive necessity for her living rurally in order to access shops, GP, education, amenities and employment. Sarah feels OFP income disregards are very important to ensure their car is physically and legally roadworthy with enough fuel to attend work, family obligations and social activities. Sarah is very conscious of the impact living in poverty is having on her son and she is keen to be a positive role model for him as he grows up.

“It is especially important that our children benefit from our employment and experience an improved standard of living to encourage their future ambitions, otherwise they may think there is no benefit to working when they are adults.”

From Sarah's perspective, she is being penalising by the Government even though she is already facing considerable struggles as a lone parent.

“Finding employment that allows lone parents to accommodate their responsibilities is difficult enough without being penalised by a reduction in income disregards that will essentially penalise lone parents for attempting to free themselves from social welfare dependence by working.”

Case Study Two: Helen

Helen is separated and has one seven year old son. She lives in Dublin. Helen gave up her fulltime job after she had her son as she could not afford the childcare. Even to work part time meant that any money earned would go directly towards childcare costs. Despite the challenges, Helen stuck with part time employment for as long as she could as she really wanted to work.

When Helen’s son was three she returned to fulltime education, completing a degree in Social Care. Helen’s childcare costs were subsidised while she attended college but when she completed her degree the high costs of childcare once again became a barrier to employment.

“There was only an afterschool club near me with no morning service. Where would my child go during summer holidays, midterms, Christmas and Easter Breaks etc and how much would this cost?”

Helen managed to secure a six month social care internship, after which she was offered fulltime employment. Helen was delighted by this even though it involved working twenty four hour shifts. While she knew this would be difficult she thought this was the answer to her childcare problem as the majority of the childminding would be outside of 9-5 working hours.

After three months of working these shifts Helen became physically and emotionally exhausted and depressed. This was also affecting her son. Despite the significant challenges, Helen was willing to go to any lengths in order to be able to work and to provide for herself and her son. Unfortunately, Helen was left with little choice but to go back to part time work and to a life on benefits.

“He was already without a dad in the home, now mammy was gone two to three overnights as well and exhausted for the rest of the time.”

Despite educating herself and being willing and able to work, Helen was left unable to work fulltime because of childcare costs. Helen is frustrated with the current system and feels that it is not doing enough to support lone parents.

“This country is not set up to support working lone parents. Intreo still send me letters about fulltime education. They have no answer for me when I question them about childcare. Next July I will lose my One Parent Family Benefit entirely. Am I meant to leave my eight year old child home alone to fend for himself?”

Being unable to work fulltime has left Helen feeling depressed and isolated. It has also placed her and her son in a poverty trap.

Case Study Three: James

James is a separated father with one nine year old daughter. He is sharing parenting and has a 50:50 court ordered custody arrangement. James works full time and is also studying for a degree part time. Despite working full time James struggles financially. This is primarily due to very high mortgage costs. Like many separated families, James has been left to pay a joint mortgage on his own without the help of his former partner and he is in significant arrears.

The bank has refused to renegotiate his payments unless both parties on the mortgage agree to this.

“I am struggling to keep a roof over my daughter’s head. No mortgage supports available to me. I’m lucky enough to be in full time employment however mortgage repayments alone account for 75% of my net monthly income.”

James fought every step of the way (via the courts) to be awarded joint custody of his daughter. Child benefit is paid directly to the mother despite James caring for their daughter 50% of the time. James was in receipt of the One Parent Family Tax Credit in 2013 but this has been taken away since changes to the tax credit entitlements of single parents were introduced in January 2014. James’ net income has been reduced by €200 per month as a result of these changes.

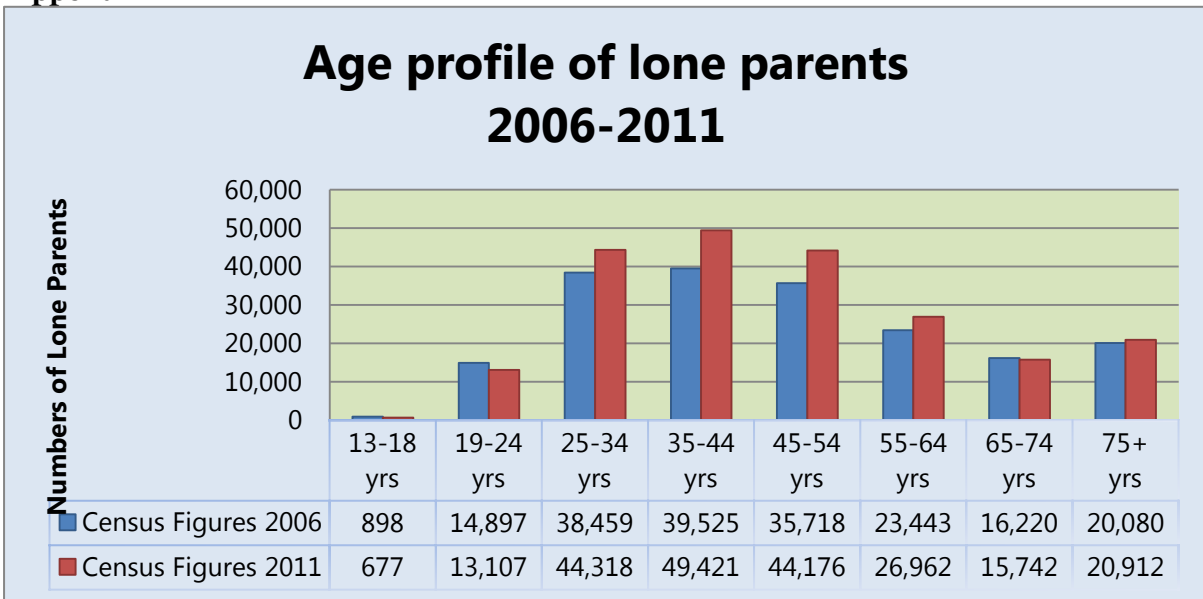
James feels very strongly that these tax credit changes are unfair and that each case must be considered on its individual merits. James is not looking for the full tax credit but believes that the credit should be provided on a pro-rata basis.

“Personally, I just can't fathom why the tax credit was just not split equally between both parents. My view however is that the whole purpose of the change in practice is nothing more than a cost cutting exercise. My frustration is almost beyond words. A relatively simple administrative procedure has become more convoluted than any reasonable person could have thought possible.”

James earns slightly in excess of 40k gross per year. Yet when he factors in substantial mortgage repayments, tax, PRSI, USC etc. and the cost of living, he is often left with no disposable income at the end of the week.

“I always find myself just outside of the support thresholds. There is no comfort provided by the current system in our circumstances. I can and do run a tight budget yet struggle on a week to week basis. What's the point? The 'coping classes'!! If I hear that expression once more I might just explode!!”

Appendix 1



ii Appendix 2

Highest level of education attained	Total Lone Parents						
	Total	Lone Mothers	% of Lone Mothers	Cumulative % of Lone Mothers	Lone Fathers	% of Lone Fathers	Cumulative % of Lone Fathers
No formal education or training	5,468	4,371	2.3%	2.3%	1,097	3.8%	3.8%
Primary education	36,780	29,425	15.8%	18.1%	7,355	25.3%	29.1%
Lower secondary	45,733	39,406	21.2%	39.3%	6,327	21.8%	50.9%
Upper secondary	45,002	40,706	21.9%	61.1%	4,296	14.8%	65.7%
Technical or vocational	23,045	20,996	11.3%	72.4%	2,049	7.1%	72.8%
Advanced certificate or completed apprenticeship	8,494	6,797	3.6%	76.1%	1,697	5.8%	78.6%

Higher certificate	9,038	8,159	4.4%	80.4%	879	3.0%	81.6%
Ordinary bachelor degree or national diploma	11,462	10,218	5.5%	85.9%	1,244	4.3%	85.9%
Honours bachelor degree, professional qualification or both	9,290	8,259	4.4%	90.4%	1,031	3.6%	89.5%
Postgraduate diploma or degree	7,718	6,813	3.7%	94.0%	905	3.1%	92.6%
Doctorate (Ph.D) or higher	587	436	0.2%	94.3%	151	0.5%	93.1%
Not stated	12,698	10,698	5.7%	100.0%	2,000	6.9%	100.0%
Total	215,315	186,284	100%		29,031	100%	

CSO, 2011

Appendix iii

	Lone Parents - Total	% of Total LP	Lone Parents - Male	% of Total Male	% of Total LP	Lone Parents - Female	% of Total Female	% of Total LP
In labour force								
At Work	91,583	43%	12,444	44%	6%	79,139	43%	37%
Unemployed								
Looking For First Regular Job	1,686	1%	117	0%	0%	1,569	1%	1%
Unemployed Having Lost or Given Up Previous Job	29,242	14%	4,776	17%	2%	24,466	13%	12%
Total in labour force	122,511	58%	17,337	61%	8%	105,174	57%	50%
Not in labour force								
Student	6,593	3%	306	1%	0%	6,287	3%	3%
Looking after home/family	47,243	22%	1,359	5%	1%	45,884	25%	22%
Retired	25,113	12%	7,469	26%	4%	17,644	10%	8%
Unable to work	9,882	5%	1,758	6%	1%	8,124	4%	4%
Other	834	0%	74	0%	0%	760	0%	0%
Total not in labour force	89,665	42%	10,966	39%	5%	78,699	43%	37%
Total aged 15 years and over	212,176		28,303		13%	183,873		87%

CSO, 2011

Number of lone parents, classified by principal economic status	
Principal Economic Status	N
Persons at work	91583
Unemployed looking for first regular job	1686
Unemployed having lost or given up previous job	29242
Student or pupil	6593
Looking after home/family	47243
Retired	25113
Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability	9882
Other economic status	834
Not stated	3139
Total	215315