



People who have availed of our supports and services write about their One Family and societal, work and family experiences. Featuring real life experiences ranging from 1979 to 2012, you can read what these strong parents have to say in their own words.

Marian Tannam's Story

Cherish (now One Family) will always have a fond place in my heart. It was one of the organisations that offered support to pregnant women who didn't have the support of a husband or partner. It was also unique in that it was an organisation run by women who had been through this experience themselves. Although my family were very supportive during my pregnancy (1979/80) and to myself and my son over the years, there was at times a sense of disapproval from society that someone should be pregnant and not married. Some people didn't know whether to congratulate you or sympathise. At Cherish meetings one could just be, feel normal and even 'enjoy' one's pregnancy. Years later at a Cherish conference the point was made by one of the speakers that in 1973 well over 90% of women who were not married gave their babies for adoption. This is a very stark figure and behind this statistic is the heartbreak of those who because of lack of support (family and state) had no choice but to give their babies up. The right to be happy about the joyous occasion of the birth of a baby was denied to many. In 1980 I did feel I had a choice. I also feel that Cherish which both supported pregnant women and lone parents and campaigned for the rights of lone parent families ensured that more women would have the choice of keeping their children.

Through my involvement in Cherish meetings, family activities, campaigns and in personal development courses provided, I moved from being a very shy young woman to an assertive person who served as a Board member and as Chairperson for a time. I became politicised and contributed to campaigns which sometimes involved speaking publically and to the media. I have carried these skills and commitment to challenging injustice with me through life. I eventually went to college as a mature student to study for a degree and masters. The many strong women in Cherish who were members, board members and staff influenced me and some became close friends. They are too many to list but staff member Mary Higgins must have a mention. Mary worked tirelessly on campaigns such as the one to abolish the legal concept of illegitimacy. She provided support and information for service users and played a key role in developing Cherish into a well-respected professional organisation. Cherish has contributed greatly to the recognition of one-parent families as a valid form of family.

The work of Cherish helped challenge the negative stereotypes that society held of lone parents. Lone parents were often pointed to as examples of bad parents and users of social welfare. Yet my experience was of women who were loving mothers, had made sacrifices to keep their children, took parenting seriously and attended parenting courses organised by Cherish at a time when such courses were almost unheard of. I did manage to juggle a job and childcare with family support but many women didn't have this support and had to avail of social welfare, as many two-parent families also did. Being a lone parent does not correlate with being a bad parent – nobody would suggest that a widow should give up her child. It is good to see Cherish continuing as One Family and working for the rights of lone parent families. I welcome this opportunity to be part of the 40th celebrations and send



good wishes to all those strong Cherish women! I also want to thank my son for being the best thing that ever happened to me, my life with him has been full of love, enrichment, possibilities and achievements.

Rebecca's Story

My partner left me when I was five months pregnant. I knew when I made the decision to become a parent that I would probably be doing it alone, but I was still devastated. I was evicted when I was five months pregnant from the place that had been my home for the last five years as the landlord didn't want any children in the place, and I had to leave college as my ex-partner was on the same course and I couldn't face seeing him every day. It was hard, but I kept my focus on my child and I found us a place to live, and after she was born, I managed to go back to education. I was very motivated and I was proud that I was raising her alone.

When my child was three years old, her father got in touch and wanted to see her. I was delighted at first, I had always wanted her to know her father, but I didn't realise that having him involved would bring a load of new issues and problems. In 2008, I arrived on the door step of One Family in tears. I was just so frustrated and confused. I had good friends, but they were all too involved in the situation to give impartial advice. One Family provided me with a space to cry and to talk about all the issues I still had with my ex-partner. They made me feel that my opinions and experiences were valid and gave me the confidence to deal with my ex-partner. Although we still have a few problems, he won't financially contribute to her upbringing or give me much support as a parent, One Family helped to sort out a way to make everyone happy, especially my daughter.

I wouldn't change anything, but it's hard being a single parent; I sometimes feel that everything is against us. Even though I have a degree, it's been impossible to find a job with enough income to pay for rent and childcare, and I worry that my daughter will never have the experiences and opportunities that she deserves. She is a very intelligent child, but I can't afford any extra-curricular activities to nurture her natural abilities and as an only child she is often lonely and such activities would be great for her social life. I would like a social life too, but I can't afford to go out very much and I don't have much chance to be able to go on dates and get to know someone, so I remain a single parent. I sometimes feel very isolated and very lonely, and I definitely don't have the confidence I used to have, but I do my best to remain positive and focused, and do my best to give my daughter a good life.

Katherine's Story

I first came into contact with One Family in 2005. I had heard of them by reputation and I knew that they would be somewhere to turn to with my particular circumstance of a crisis pregnancy. What they gave to me was calm advice that was clear and relevant and impartial, and most importantly tailored to my circumstance. While I was there I was given free counselling, and they also had childcare facilities so that my child could be taken care of during the time I spent with the counsellor. It was also a big help to have telephone support when I needed it.



I had been working when I became pregnant, and after my child was born I made the decision to return to work straight after. It wasn't an easy decision, I think every mother would find it difficult to leave their child, but it was the best decision for me. I have managed to make things work for us, but I think that women need more support in the work place, in particular single mothers. When you are out of the work place it's very difficult to return and in some circumstances social welfare traps people into poverty. I think we need to challenge people's perception of what a single parent is. We are no different from other parents, and we are just as good as others parents, why wouldn't we be? And society tends to forget that behind every un-married mother there is a father who has responsibilities.

There are highs and lows to single parenting, but many of them would be no different than in a parenting together situation. Isolation is the biggest challenge, but at least I have the security of knowing my child is being raised how I want her to be. Single parenting forces you to hold yourself accountable and to be the best parent that you can be.

Joanna's Story

I contacted One Family to discuss my concerns regarding proposed changes to the One Parent Family Allowance especially the reduction and planned phasing out of the income disregard and the impact that this would have on my ability to work. Whilst all family types have challenges when it comes to issues of childcare, they are more acute when it comes to one-parent families. I am a qualified teacher but I do not have a permanent or a temporary job. I rely on day to day subbing. I do not know if I am working from one day to the next. My father was a huge support to me in that he would help care for my daughter, bringing her to school when I got called at 7.45 am in the morning for work at short notice. He died suddenly and on top of the huge loss his death posed to my daughter and me, there was also a huge impact in terms of my capacity to be available for casual substitute teaching work. Like other newly qualified teachers, I have found it challenging to obtain employment. I have had three interviews so far in the past number of months out of ninety applications and all have been unsuccessful. All I want is a job and to be able to support myself and my daughter but this dream is proving rather elusive.

I love my daughter. We have a fantastic relationship and we are very in tune with one another. However, other people's negative attitudes towards our situation undermine my self-confidence and make me feel vulnerable. I have seen my daughter being excluded from play dates because she is not part of a stereotypical two parent family. I also feel that at school her family situation is not acknowledged or discussed, thus creating a sense of exclusion for her and myself. I do not feel comfortable when I drop her to school. I constantly feel judged in her school environment. She is now at an age that I do not have to walk into the school to drop her off and collect her. My objective this year is not to go into her school at all except for the parent teacher meeting as I dislike how I feel when I enter the four walls of the school. When teachers talk about inclusion in the classroom, they are typically talking about children with additional learning needs and those of different ethnic backgrounds. For me, inclusion is broader in that it is also about recognising that children come from different family types. Twenty per cent of children belong to one parent families and in a lot of classrooms in Ireland, the only family type that is mentioned is the one based on two parents, this is not a reality for a lot of children such as my daughter.



I know that One Family is there to support my daughter and me if we need help. At the moment we do. I need to do a mock interview so I can improve my chances of getting a job and it will facilitate this. More importantly, One Family understands the challenges that my daughter and I face in our day to day lives and such understanding brings comfort and reassurance that there is an organisation fighting for us. I do not feel alone.

Annette's Story

When I contacted One Family I was very upset. My baby was three months old and I was on maternity leave. I was on my own, a single parent, 27 years old, and I felt as though my world had collapsed. My friends were great, but after three months they were back getting on with their lives – the type of life that had been mine a year ago with socialising and a career. Now I had no partner, a baby, and could not see how I was going to manage. Do not get me wrong – I love my daughter, she is the best thing ever, but I would never have seen myself in this situation and if I am honest I was angry and embarrassed – I wasn't sixteen; how did I let this happen?

The community nurse suggested One Family. Perhaps some counselling would help. I really struggled with that; it was like admitting I could not cope and I hated that feeling. But about three weeks later I picked up the phone, I felt so low that anything was worth a try. It was the best step ever. The woman on the phone was so nice to me I started to cry. She said she would get someone to call me back and a couple of hours later a counsellor did so. She listened and suggested I come in and have a chat and see what they might have to offer. She made it so easy.

I kept my appointment and have never looked back. Over the next few months I made sense of all the changes that had so quickly happened in my life. I started to see it all in a much more positive way – a new life with new challenges but best of all centred round my daughter. I got practical help when it came to going back to work and I wanted to delay it if I could. The One Family building is always busy and everyone is friendly and they give an amazing range of services. I will always be grateful I got the one thing I needed, and it's made all the difference to me and the family I have.

Linda's Story

I first came across One Family in 2008. Once I had made contact I found out about the social groups. I was looking for ways to get play-dates for my child, she didn't have many friends in our area and I wanted to help her socialize and mix with other kids. I also wanted to meet people, I don't have any family in Dublin and I was stuck on my own a lot at weekends and finding it difficult to make new friends.

The social group opened up a multitude of windows. My daughter enjoyed playing with other kids and I made one friend in particular who is still a very close friend now. We have gone on to develop our own support network and I've now got friends who are in a similar circumstance, we help each other out and give each other support. One Family gave me the opportunity to make friends, and I can't thank them enough.

Cathryn's Story

I had a traumatic pregnancy with my child's father five years ago. Through counselling at One Family it has allowed us to get past all the anger and hurt and to work as a family. I will still phone to use their resources when I feel cornered by being a mum, especially a single one. And I can say every time I have got in contact the staff has pulled through to help with the situation. I also value the field trips One Family do for us every year. I have some very close friends whom I have met from these days out. And we help each other out as a family. Some friends have done the parenting courses and all have benefitted from learning how to create a better family unit.

One thing I have learnt from One Family is that there are a lot of diverse types of families out there. And we all have our own issues and problems, but One Family offers us knowledge and help. I am and always will be thankful to One Family.

Cecilia's Story

When I first found out I was pregnant, my partner said he would be supportive, but it was clear from his behaviour that he wasn't going to be there for me. I had come to Ireland to work for a charity so when I came to One Family in 2006, I was pregnant, in a foreign country, and I was lost.

When I found out I was pregnant I had to think about what I was going to do, I spoke to someone at PACT, and they recommended One Family. It was really reassuring to find other parents in the same situations. I have used a few of the services there, I did some counselling and some parenting classes, and I've also done a course that has helped me get back into further education, but one of the best things was a Christmas Party that they gave for the kids, it was good not to feel alone, and to feel part of a family at Christmas.

Christmas can be a hard time without your extended family, however, I realised that I have my immediate family: my son. Therefore I became aware of the blessing of being together, healthy and happy.

I came to Ireland to help people who were struggling with isolation and loneliness, but for the first two years of my son's life, I was the one who was isolated and lonely. After my son was born, there would be times when I didn't speak to another adult for days and all I could do was concentrate on my son and his life. I think it's best for the child to have contact with both parents, and ideally to share parenting, but it doesn't always work out. Both parents have to be committed, and for me that just wasn't the case. My child is older now, and at school, so I have the time to return to education and I'm taking steps to build a life for both of us.



Louise O'Neill's Story

I first came to One Family back in 2003 when it was still called Cherish. I had been going to a young mothers group and they told me about the parenting classes, and I availed of those services.

When I first arrived, everyone was so welcoming and friendly; you felt they were here to help. I have used a few of the One Family services. I did a New Futures course a few years back. When I started there, I didn't have much confidence, but the course really helped with my self-esteem. It was good to feel that my opinion was valued and it was great to meet other single parents. I did go on to get a job from the course, although I'm currently unemployed and I'm looking for a job that I would like to do that I can fit in around my child's schedule.

I also did some counselling at One Family, and I think this is what I found most beneficial. At the time, my daughter's father had been gone for seven years but he got in contact and wanted to be introduced into her life. One Family had me deal with the emotional issues that came with his coming back into my daughter's life and all the issues that came with shared parenting.

I was fourteen when I got pregnant and it was good to know that I had some support. One Family gave me an opportunity of work experience and they provided me with childcare while I got this experience. There is so little support out there for single parents – it's great that One Family exists, the work they do is brilliant.

Tracey Skerrit's Story

I had two children at eighteen, a boy and a girl. I faced a lot of issues during the first few years of being a parent including prejudice, poverty, discrimination, low self-esteem and isolation. I could not mix with my peers as I had two children and did not have the same freedom they had. I missed being with other people and having someone to share parenting experiences with. I got in touch with One Family, then known as Cherish, in 1996. I began by attending the drop-ins and then progressed to computer classes and the Moving On programme. I loved being around other parents and sharing experiences. My confidence grew and became involved with the management committee and took part in various campaigns. As time went on the support I gained helped me to begin practising youth work again. I applied for the position of programmes officer in Cherish and begin working on a fulltime basis.

Then with the support of the organisation I began to look at my formal training and education. I went to NUI Maynooth where I studied Youth and Community work and then to UCD where I studied Equality Studies. Although I have moved on from One Family, I now work in the Teen Parent support programme, I still refer people to One Family for information, counselling and support. Today, just like back when I was a young parent, they face many obstacles and as the economic climate worsens they and other vulnerable groups seem to be the ones who will pay the ultimate price for the greed and mismanagement of resources.



Maria's Story

I found One Family in an internet search. I wanted some help in how to tell my daughter her dad had moved back and wanted to get involved in her life. He had moved abroad when she was two and when she was three and a half my current partner Derek moved in with us. Her sister was born a year later and when the baby started to say dada my daughter started calling Derek dad too. She was happy so we just left it. She is eight now and always calls him daddy, at school and everywhere.

When her father moved back and said he wanted to get to know her I went into a panic. I thought it would really upset my daughter to find out that Derek was not her dad. My mother said I should not tell her and just say no her dad. I wished I could but it did not seem right.

I spoke to a counsellor on the phone first. She said two things I always remember – that truth is important in the big issues and that the key to telling my daughter the truth was being comfortable with it myself. I made an appointment and saw her four times. She would ask me questions, like she was my daughter, to see how I felt answering. She said keep it simple, answer but do not over explain. At the fourth session I told her I used the very same tactics telling my mother that we had told my daughter the truth and it worked! She laughed and said well done.

One Family showed me that if you can get help when you need it, it makes all the difference in how your life goes forward.

Christine's Story

Well, where shall I begin?

With the moment of the shock when the father of my little girl left shortly after her birth? Or the deep feeling of helplessness and failure I was thrown into when I was suddenly alone? Totally alone as a foreigner in a country I had never been in before and where I knew no one as we had just arrived? Or with the inside feeling of fear of not being able to go on, being so desperate to even end it all? Or with the telephone call which thank God changed my life as they referred me to One Family?

I'll start at the very beginning with a brief introduction to my story:

I was freshly married and came to Dublin due to a great job offer. On January 5th 2005 we stepped out of the plane, hearts full of hopes and dreams and heads full of many plans for how our lives would be from now on. Two foreigners on new terrain, how exciting!

Within six months I fell pregnant and I was overjoyed and thought my now ex-husband would be as well. But shortly the birth he suddenly left and deceit, lies and more followed and resulted in a night-time escape when my little one was just two weeks old. On one hand I was overjoyed with the birth of my long longed for daughter and on the other I was in a



state of nearly paralyzed shock at suddenly being alone, feeling deserted in a housing estate with no friends and family around.

I felt so alone and totally overwhelmed – what do you know with your first child? Nothing! Also a very strong feeling of shame and embarrassment. I felt I had “failed” to have a “normal” family. Within the emotional confusion, and still in pain from the delivery, I fell into depression. I stopped eating, lost immense weight and nearly drowned in my pain – coupled with the practical mess of having debts and not enough money. I was at the absolute end.

I found the number for Parent Line in the directory and when they picked up the phone I simply broke down. I told them my story and told them that I urgently need help. They were very helpful and connected me with the agency that would save my life. One Family.

It took another courageous attempt to get in contact with them and when I did I remember that they immediately helped me. They called several times to offer me free counselling. I finally agreed to call to their office. I can still see that day, when I arrived, grabbing the old fashioned, brass door handle and opening the door. I had the overwhelming feeling of coming home. That was the start of my very personal journey towards a new life. It did not take long for One Family to become my family. The crèche was a godsend for someone like me who was isolated without any support. With the staff’s loving and professional care my daughter made an incredible step in her development.

I started with a wonderful counsellor in weekly sessions. I attended everything on offer – all the self-development courses and seminars.

My weeks, my months, my two years were built around One Family, their support, information and encouragement. Step by step I regained my self-confidence and I started holding my head high in a totally new way.

I was a crumbled mess when I came in and left as a person full of hope for the future.

Now it is 2012 and I cannot believe how far I have come since then. It is still not easy. Being a single parent is the hardest job there is, 24/7 being there for your child, with no other person to assist you or give you relief, usually being on social welfare as the working hours in Ireland are not child friendly, which means very little money.

But the most important thing I learnt in One Family is not to be ashamed or embarrassed about being a single parent. I once read a quote which I feel is very true ‘a single parent is Superman/woman in disguise’. And the comforting knowledge that One Family is there to fight for us is a great help. Thank you, One Family, you saved my life and I will never forget that.

Melissa Curry’s Story

As a single parent pretty much from the early months of pregnancy, I have endured and managed the past ten years pretty much on my own. I was told by a very dear friend of mine in the early days that I would become a ‘Warrior Mother’ as many of us do. My son arrived



into my life very suddenly, and his unique needs have taken me on a very interesting and painful but now rewarding path.

We have spent many of the formative years juggling between hospitals, child psychiatric clinics, healing centres, parenting courses and so forth. It was quite clear our path was to be very different to what I imagined and destiny had its own ideas. On arrival to Dublin where we have now been living for the past seven years, I realised I was on my own big time and I needed to make contact with a service that could help me bear the weight of my exhausted situation.

I had lost everything: my business, my friends, family and myself. I had never ever thought I would land in such an economically and emotionally deprived situation with another life under my wing. I will always remember making that call for help and soon after walking through the One Family door in central Dublin. Relief and great sadness swelled inside, but I knew I was in the right place and felt safe.

I am forever grateful to One Family and all its members and carers, for sharing such vital support and advice to both myself and my now ten year old son. They are a wonderful organisation who provide us lonely and often emotionally exhausted single parents with a refuge, a home, a peaceful environment and services from where we can start to negotiate a new foundation and pathway for ourselves and our little ones. I was aware I was carrying a lot of anger and pain and worry, so I availed of the in-house counselling services where I worked through the mountain that stood before me. I am still hanging on tight and one hell of a Warrior Mother, with a bright young son who has made it into mainstream school and has become the heartbeat of his rugby team. I am so thankful to all who helped me face my worst fears and encouraged us both to become strong and capable, and, to become a family.

Patricia's Story

I am 55 and I have a seventeen year old daughter. I lost my job after 25 years doing bar work for the same company. When I first came to One Family in 2009, I felt like I had nothing. I'd had my daughter late in life and I'd been in an unhappy relationship with her father. I felt that I'd spent my life trying to make them happy and that I wasn't important. It was OK when I was working and I had an outlet, but when I lost my job I realised I had to find a new direction.

I heard about One Family and the New Futures programmes through the principal of my local school and I applied for a place and got it. At the start of the course I was anxious and nervous as to where the New Futures course was taking me and I was hoping it would kick start me into doing something positive. As time went on I started to love the course. It helped me explore myself and my needs, I realised my self-esteem was low. I also realised I had excellent communication skills and sewing skills.

The course taught me how to make decisions and put things into perspective. During it I was offered another bar job and it was very hard for me to turn down the wage – and it would have been in my comfort zone. But, I realised that I am an excellent dressmaker and curtain maker – and that I'd been making things for people for free for the last ten years. I made a



conscious decision to turn down the bar job and continue on the course and pursue an area where I could use my sewing skills.

One Family gave me the support I needed to put the plans I had in my head for years into action. Knowing that there were other people in my position gave me added confidence. Knowing that there was someone to discuss it with who understood what it was like to be a lone parent also helped me. Every day I get up now I am really excited about what the day will bring.

Vivien's Story

Three months after coming to Ireland initially in 2008, I was searching for a single parent support group as I wasn't familiar with my rights, with circumstances in general and I also wanted to meet other single moms. I used to live in the states (that's where my child was born in 2001) and in New Jersey I was a member of a single parent support group; I thought I'd find something similar in Ireland too. That is how I found One Family.

My very first contact in the organization was Sarah who helped me a great deal with practical issues, social welfare matters and was just there to lend me an understanding ear. I'll always be grateful for all her help. She was the one who recommended courses and counselling services to me as well.

That is how I found Sherie. It has nearly been four years now since I first started seeing her in counselling sessions and I still see her now, although less frequently. She is an amazing lady. I can only talk about her in superlatives. A kind-hearted, understanding and superbly intelligent professional. I cannot thank her enough for all her support. She is one of the most remarkable human beings I have ever met.

In the summer of 2009 I lost the job I had at the time and relied heavily on the technical support of One Family. When I had to deal with authorities I was well prepared, well-informed and knew my rights, thanks to the organization.

In the fall I learnt about the course called New Steps, led by a lady called Martina who is now a gestalt psychologist. Over the course she always emphasized the importance of positive thinking and introduced Louise L Hay to us. It was invaluable information for me.

Coming from Eastern Europe I have a tendency to be over critical and to take things way too seriously. During the course I learnt to deal with these issues better and to appreciate small things in life more. I'm a lot more grateful for a lot of things. I became a "follower" of Louise L Hay, read her books, do positive affirmations and listen to her cd to this day. I am now interested in meditation and positive psychology because of her. It was a brilliant course.

In September 2010 I began New Futures; another course that was designed to help single parents with the transitional phase of getting back to work or study. There I got familiar with organizational skills, planning, budgeting, being more conscious of how to design, carry out tasks, how to be more aware of what goes on around me. It was hands on preparation for finding a proper job. This is where I realized I needed to pursue my long time passion: therapy, and combine it somehow with my current profession. After finishing the New



Futures course I applied for a postgraduate course at UCD and got offered a place that I couldn't take. Nevertheless it was excellent preparation for this year's application.

My One Family key worker at the time, Helen, had also been a great help. She told me about volunteering options. I found a local community in September last year, where I've been able to help other foreign nationals with their conversational English skills. I am going back to teach there as a volunteer for the second year.

In June this year I found out that I got accepted to another post-grad course (Drama-therapy) in Maynooth. If I manage to be supported financially, I'll start university this September.

For the first time in four years I'm doing what I have been doing all my life: teaching (this time I even get a salary for it...). In July a language school employed me for the summer and another one offered me a part time position for the coming school year. Life is treating me well despite all the hardship and obstacles we have had with my child.

My daughter, Amy is in fifth class in a Church of Ireland school. Her grades and the feedback I've gotten from her teachers so far have been exceptional. What is unbelievable for me is that her most successful subjects are the Irish and the English language. She is practically bilingual (Hungarian/English) and adores Irish. As for extracurricular activities, she does chess coaching, swimming and Hungarian history/literature.

I, for one am very grateful for this country. As a single mother I have gotten a lot more help than I would have ever had in Hungary or in The States for that matter. Even though the country is in recession, Ireland for us is the land of opportunity. It is a country where children are valued. There's nothing more important for me than my child's well-being; her happiness and her future. Nothing else matters as much.

Sheila Rafferty's Story

I first came into contact with One Family in 2007. I went for counselling as I was struggling as a parent to a two year old with an absent father and trying to adjust to parenting within a relationship with my partner at the time. It was also at this time that I found out I was pregnant again. One Family supported me through this time, helped me build my confidence and enabled me to view my situation from a different perspective.

I know that I can rely on One Family and I have popped in once in a while since 2007. I know that the option will always be there. The counsellor I saw dealt with me in a manner that was extremely respectful and confidence boosting.

I live in Dublin, and the reason I live in the city as a lone parent is that there are far more resources for lone parents, in saying that these resources are always under threat of losing funding. Childcare and job flexibility are the biggest challenges to lone parenting. Lack of social housing and the restrictive format of rent allowance are huge factors in keeping a big portion of the lone parent population in poverty.

