



The National Federation of Services for
Unmarried Parents and their Children

Annual Report 2014



CONTENTS

1.	ABOUT TREOIR.....	Page 2
2.	MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR.....	Page 4
3.	A NOTE FROM THE CEO	Page 5
4.	NATIONAL SPECIALIST INFORMATION CENTRE.....	Page 6
5.	POLICY DEVELOPMENT / RESEARCH.....	Page 17
6.	TEEN PARENTS SUPPORT PROGRAMME.....	Page 20
7.	RAISING AWARENESS / PUBLIC RELATIONS.....	Page 22
8.	STRATEGIC ALLIANCES / MEMBERSHIP.....	Page 25
9.	GOVERNANCE.....	Page 26
10.	CASE STUDIES.....	Page 27
11.	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	Page 29

ABOUT TREOIR

Treoir, in partnership with its member agencies, promotes the rights and best interests of unmarried parents and their children through providing specialist information and advocating for their rights.

Treoir is the National Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children. In 1976 various agencies working with unmarried parents formed a federation to channel efforts and improve the quality of the services provided to unmarried parents and their children. Members include self-help organisations, adoption societies, maternity hospitals, childcare organisations, HSE and accommodation services. In 1995 the Federation was renamed Treoir, which is the Irish word for direction or guidance.

Treoir:

- Operates a free, confidential National Specialist Information and Referral Service on all aspects of unmarried parenthood, providing clear and up-to-date information free of charge to parents who are not married to each other and to those involved with them. These includes:
 - unmarried expectant parents
 - unmarried parents living apart
 - unmarried parents cohabiting
 - teen parents
 - opposite and same sex parents
 - grandparents and other relatives
 - those working with unmarried parents and their families
- manages the national co-ordination of the Teen Parents Support Programme
- advocates on behalf of unmarried parents and their children

COUNCIL

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Dearbhla Ní Riordáin	CUH Social Work Dept, Vice2 Chair
Christina Hughes	Miss Carr's Home Housing Assoc., Secretary
Thomas Quigley	Bessborough Care Centre, Treasurer

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Aisling Dowling-Deignan	Regional Adoption Service Tusla
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Anne Egan	NUI Galway
Mary McCarthy	Life Pregnancy Care
Ciara McKenna	National Maternity Hospital
Marie Naughton	Here-2-Help
Siobhan Roddy	Doras Buí

TREOIR MEMBERS

Aislinn	Doras Buí	Miss Carr's Home Housing Association
Barnardos	Foróige	National Maternity Hospital
Bessborough Care Centre	Health Service Executive	Rotunda Hospital
Boyle Family Life Centre	Here-2-Help	Sligo Social Service Council
Clarecare	Home-Start	St. Anne's Day Nursery
Coombe Women & Infants	Life Pregnancy Care Service	St. Catherine's Community Services
University Hospital	Limerick Social Services	St. Patrick's Guild
Cúnamh	Council	
CURA	Mary Immaculate College	

HONORARY MEMBERS

Dermot Walsh	Honorary President
Gemma Rowley	Honorary Life Member

STAFF

Margaret Dromey	Chief Executive Officer
Margot Doherty	Assistant Chief Executive (retired September 2014)
Margaret Morris	National Co-ordinator, TPSP
Brenda Forde	Senior Information Officer
Veronica Black	Information Officer
Beatrice Cronin	Marketing Manager / Information Officer
Bella Maher	Office Manager
Joanne Hickey	Office Assistant

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

I have pleasure in presenting the Treoir Annual Report for 2014. Treoir was very actively involved in promoting policy change during the year and had significant engagement with the Departments of Justice and Equality and Social Protection. While we did not always agree on policy direction, I wish to thank the officials with whom we had contact for their courtesy, helpfulness and willingness to engage.

The Children and Family Relationships Bill, when enacted, will change family law in Ireland dramatically. It is the most significant legislative change for our families since the Status of Children Act in 1987. We welcomed many of the provisions in the Heads of Bill but were concerned that it would not improve the position of unmarried parents who were not cohabiting. We proposed in our various submissions that:

- At the time of birth registration, parents should be informed about the lack of legal rights of unmarried fathers who are not cohabiting;
- There should be a mechanism in place for registering agreements by both parents that the requisite time for cohabitation (one year, 3 months post birth) had been complied with and that the father has acquired guardianship rights and responsibilities in relation to his child;
- There was a need to clarify the rights of lesser guardians – persons other than mothers and fathers – in relation to children and
- There was an urgent need to establish a Central Register for Guardianship Agreements by unmarried couples.

Since its foundation in 1976, Treoir has promoted the rights of all children to know the identity of both their parents. The Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014, when commenced, will make it compulsory to have a father's name on his child's birth certificate. Treoir believes this is the key to the preservation of identity and is very much in line with the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Treoir looks forward with optimism to the commencement of these significant pieces of new legislation. However, much more is required to be done to ensure true equality for unmarried families. It is imperative that constitutional protection is extended to unmarried families. It should be easier for unmarried fathers to acquire rights and responsibilities in relation to their children and a Central Register for Joint Guardianship Agreements should be initiated so that there can be proof of guardianship when the need arises.

Watch them Grow, an analysis of the Growing Up in Ireland data, commissioned by Treoir and undertaken by Dr. Owen Corrigan, was published at the end of 2014. A great deal of significant information was gleaned and the challenge for Treoir is to ensure that the findings impact on policy. Work is ongoing in this area.

I would like to thank all the members of the Council of Treoir for their commitment to Treoir and to improving the position of unmarried families in Ireland. I am particularly grateful to the executive of the Council 2 Christina Hughes, Dearbhla Ní Riordáin and Thomas Quigley – for their wise counsel and expertise. I compliment the professionalism and dedication of the staff of Treoir, under the excellent leadership of the Chief Executive, Margaret Dromey. I would also like to thank our funders – the HSE, Tusla, HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme and the Citizens Information Board - who continue to recognise the good work undertaken by Treoir and the quality of the information we make available to all involved with unmarried families.

Ruth Barrington, Chair

A NOTE FROM THE CEO

2014 was another challenging and productive year in Treoir. There was major activity on every front: responding to information enquiries, keeping publications up to date, raising awareness, policy development, research, outreach information sessions, co-ordination of the Teen Parents Support Programme and ensuring good governance for the organisation. There was an increase in calls to the Information Centre and I commend the Information Team for their knowledge and the sensitivity with which they deal with callers. Treoir website is extensively used and is effectively a one stop shop for a vast amount of up to date information on all issues relevant to unmarried parents.

Significant new family legislation was developed during the year that will benefit unmarried parents and their children. This is all very welcome but by no means as comprehensive as we would like. It will pose significant challenges for Treoir as all publications, leaflets, and web information will be out of date once the legislation is commenced and will require to be re-written, printed and disseminated widely. We may seek the assistance of our member agencies in the dissemination process. We will also seek assistance to ensure that out of date information is removed from their shelves as appropriate.

I am in awe of the staff and commend them for their excellent work during the year – the Information Team - *Brenda Forde, Veronica Black and Beatrice Cronin*, the coordinator of the TPSP – *Margaret Morris*, the office manager – *Bella Maher* and office assistant – *Joanne Hickey*.

For me personally the retirement of Margot Doherty in 2014 was a huge loss. Margot and I worked together for a long number of years and were not just colleagues but great friends. Margot was one of the founder members of Treoir and her contribution was immense over the years. We wish her well in her retirement.

I would like to thank the Board members for their commitment to the organisation and in particular I wish to thank our Chair, Dr. Ruth Barrington, who was a huge support to me during the year. Her skilled leadership of the organisation at a time of hugely significant change is greatly valued.

Margaret Dromey, CEO

NATIONAL SPECIALIST INFORMATION SERVICE

Treoir will maintain and develop the National Specialist Information Service for unmarried parents, same or opposite sex, expectant parents, parents living together or apart, their extended families and those working with them

CALLS TO THE NATIONAL INFORMATION CENTRE

Treoir National Specialist Information Service dealt with approximately 7659 queries in 2014, a 6% rise compared to 2013.

1. Contact Person

In 2014, 73% of the queries were made directly by individual clients. This 28% increase from the previous year is related to the optimised online performance of Treoir's Google advertising campaigns, website and social media platforms resulting in the direct streamline of clients to Treoir.

Professional and Family Members were the second and third largest audiences respectively requesting Treoir's Specialist Information Services while the lowest number of calls came from a Friend (Chart 1).

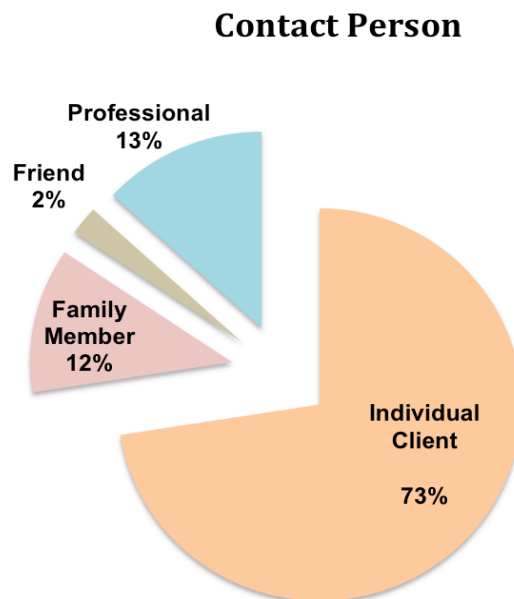


Chart 1

1.1 Individual Client

The largest group of individual clients contacting Treoir was Unmarried Mothers (47%) followed closely by Unmarried Fathers (34%). Pregnant and expectant parents were the third largest group (7% of which Crisis Pregnancy 3%, Pregnant 3% and Expectant Parent 1%) followed by unmarried parents who have subsequently married (5%).

Family members of the individual client (4%) and married parents who were formerly unmarried (3%) were the additional significant categories ([Chart 2](#)).

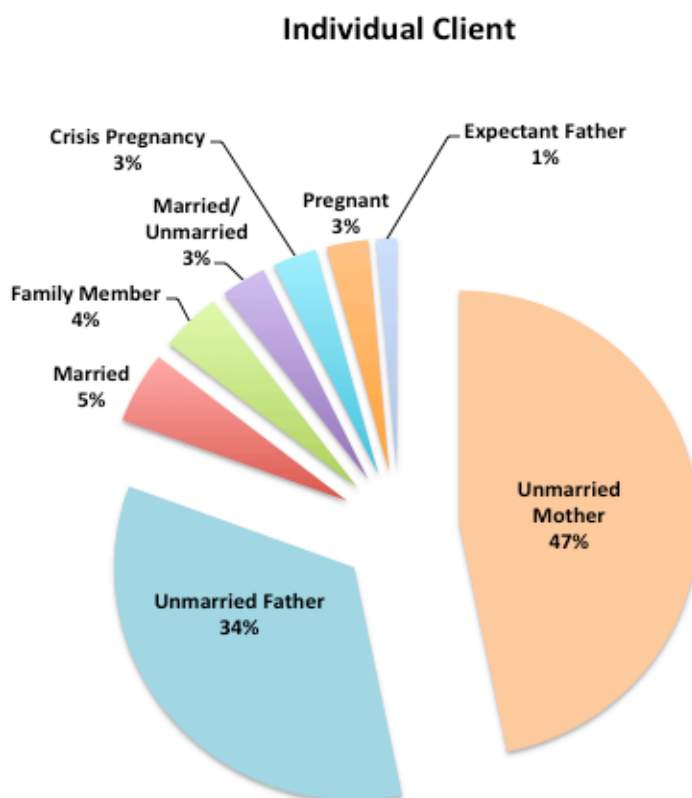


Chart 2

1.2. Professionals

The second largest group contacting Treoir's Specialist Information Service was professionals working with organisations offering family supports. The majority of queries received came from the Citizens Information Centres (25%) followed by Social Workers (15%), Family Resource Centres (14%) and Health Services (13%).

Hospitals and Community Services were next with 7% followed by Crisis Pregnancy Services (4%), Law Centres (2%), Education Workers (2%), Child and Family Agency (1%) and Doctors (1%) ([Chart 3](#)).

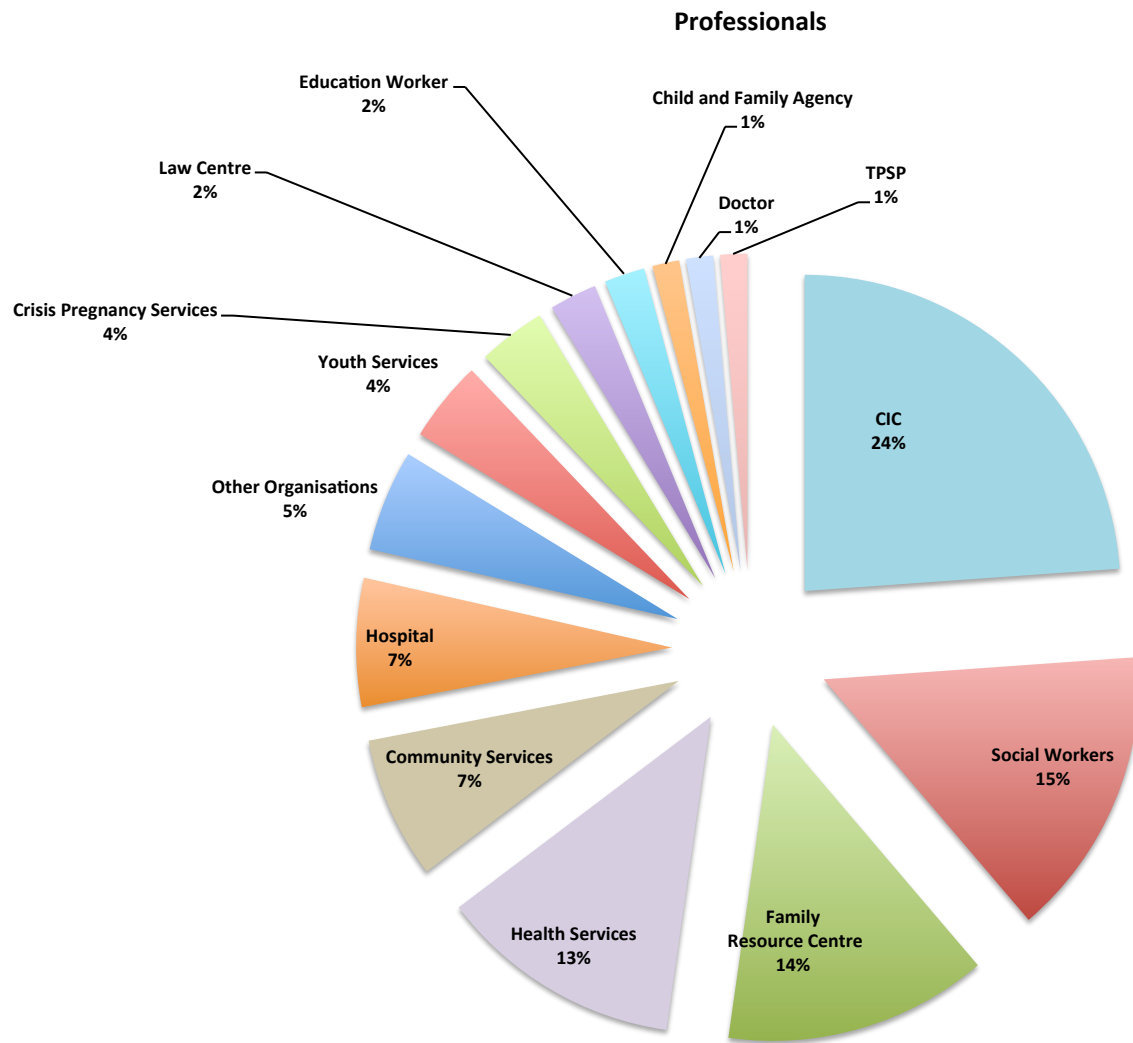


Chart 3

1.3. Family Members

Family Members were the third largest group requesting Treoir Services. The majority of family members were maternal grandparents (38%) followed by paternal grandparents (28%). Their queries were mainly related to access to their grandchildren and/or the rights of their adult child.

10% of the family members contacting Treoir were Adult Children and 10% were Aunts/Uncles while queries from other Siblings amounted to 7%; Wife/Husband of a Single Parent (3%) and Partner of a Single Parent (3%). Family members acting in loco parentis of a child/children made 1% of the total queries ([Chart 4](#)).

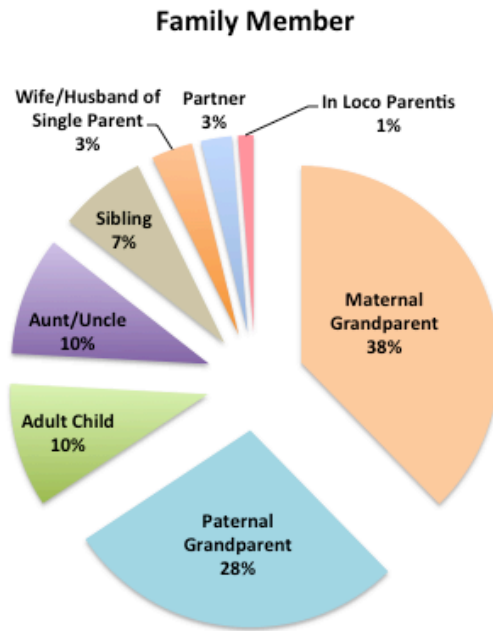


Chart 4

2. Type of Queries

The majority of queries dealt with over the course of the year were of a legal nature (68%) followed by social welfare issues (15%) (Chart 5). There was a slight increase in queries related to social welfare issues compared to 2013. It is likely that the number of social welfare queries will continue to rise due to the changes introduced to the One Parent Family Payment aimed at encouraging single parents to join the workforce. By July 2015, the One Parent Family Payment claimant must have at least one child below the age of 7 in order to qualify for the payment.

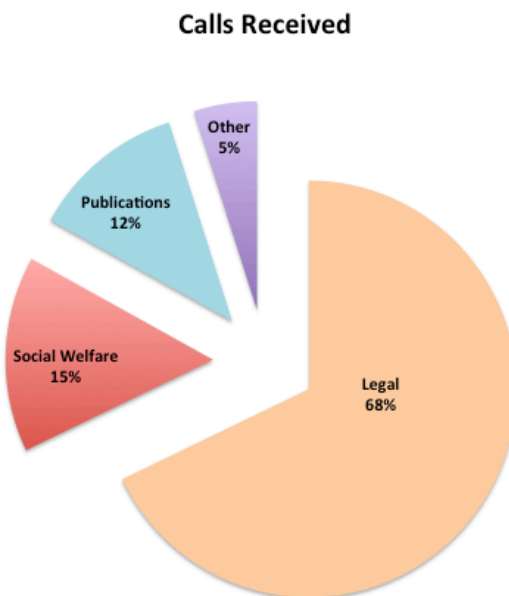


Chart 5

2.1. Legal Queries

The top five legal issues dealt with were related to Guardianship (29%), Access (21%), Maintenance (16%), Birth Registration (10%) and Custody (10%). A smaller number of queries were associated with Paternity (5%), Passport (4%), Adoption (2%), Cohabitation (2%), Abduction (1%) and Domestic Violence (1%) issues (Chart 6).

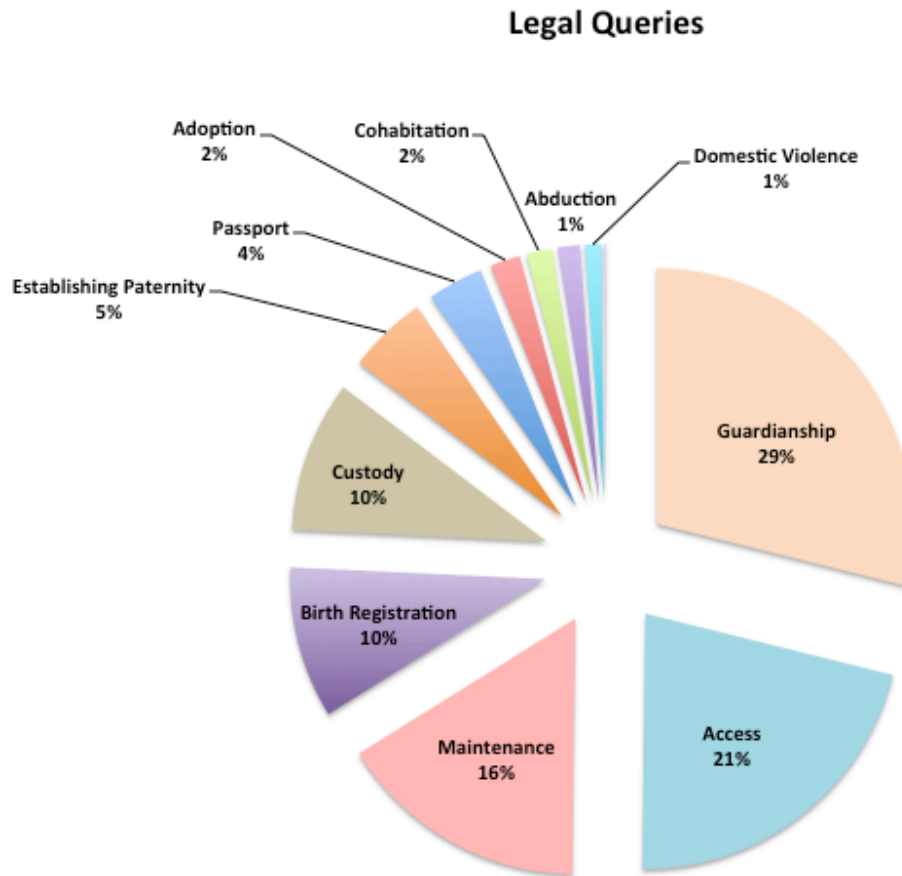


Chart 6

In comparison to 2013, there has been a minor decrease in queries related to Guardianship and Access combined with an increase in queries related to Custody and Birth Registration (Chart 7). In addition, there was an increase in queries related to passports and adoption from the previous year (Chart 8).

These figures reflect the current confusion often displayed by Treoir's clients regarding Guardianship and Custody, which are often mistakenly believed to be the same. In addition, queries related to passports are often linked to Guardianship, for instance applying for a child's passport if the client is a sole guardian or who is entitled to hold a child's passport. Also, Birth Registration queries are frequently related to Guardianship, for instance wrongly believing that having the father's name on the birth certificate gives the father legal guardianship rights in respect of his child.

QUERIES TOPICS 1

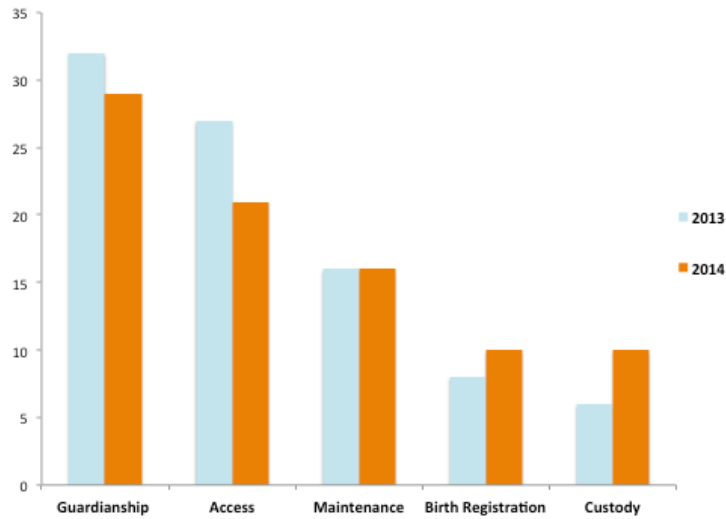


Chart 7

QUERIES TOPICS 2

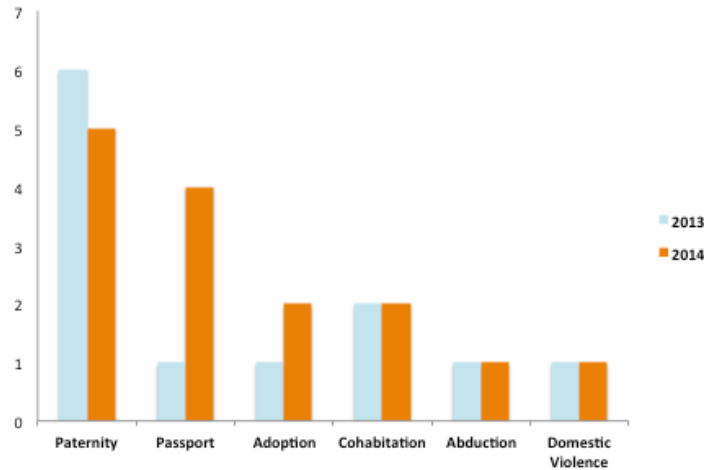


Chart 8

2.2. Social Welfare Queries

The majority of the Social Welfare queries dealt with by Treoir Specialist Information Service were related to the One Parent Family Payment (52%) followed by Rent Supplement (13%), Family Income Supplement (9%) and Welfare to Work (5%) (Chart 9).

Although compared to 2013 there has been a decrease in the number of queries related to One Parent Family Payment, there has been a significant increase in the number of queries related to the alternative payments for those transitioning out of the One Parent Family Payment: Jobseeker Transitional Payment and Jobseekers Allowance. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of queries related to childcare and Family Income Supplement. Overall, the figures reflect the change of circumstances of those families affected by the Social Welfare changes as well as the main areas of concern: overcoming childcare costs and earning enough to survive as a single parent.

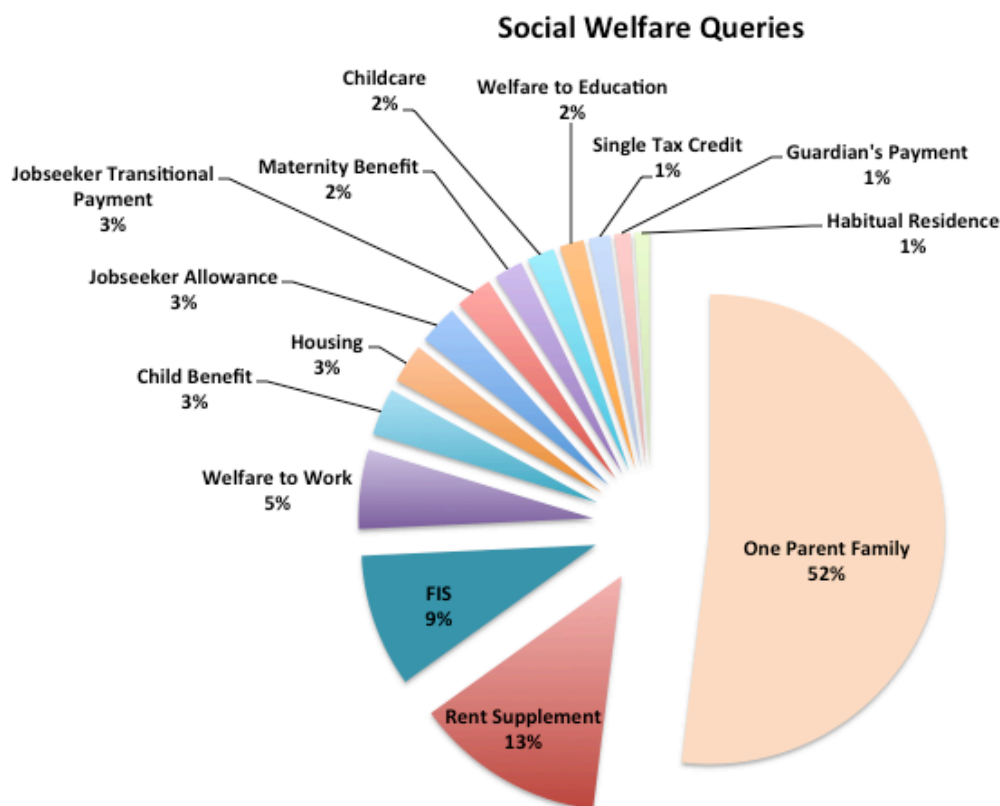


Chart 9

2.3. Other Queries

Of the additional queries dealt with by the Specialist Information Team, the key topics were Parenting (50%), Mediation (14%), Counselling (9%) and Income Tax (8%). While in comparison to 2013, the number of queries related to Parenting have decreased, there has been a significant increase in queries related to Mediation and Income Tax ([Chart 10](#)).

Treoir Specialist Information Team played a role in promoting non-court based family dispute resolution amongst unmarried families, in particular, raising awareness about the Family Mediation Services as an alternative to the court, when possible, to reach agreements regarding guardianship, custody, access and maintenance. The Family Mediation Services showed in its last annual report an increase of over 10% in the number of couples agreeing to mediate.

In addition, the increase in the number of Income Tax queries is related to the replacement of the One Parent Family Tax Credit - which was available to both lone parents who are sharing the care of their child(ren) - by the Single Person Child Carer Credit which is currently available to the main carer only. When the main carer is not working she/he may assign the Single Person Child Carer Credit to the other parent, provided that parent has the child in their care for at least 100 days per year. In practice, Treoir is receiving many queries from frustrated parents who work and cannot avail of this financial support because the other parent, who doesn't work, is reluctant to relinquish it.

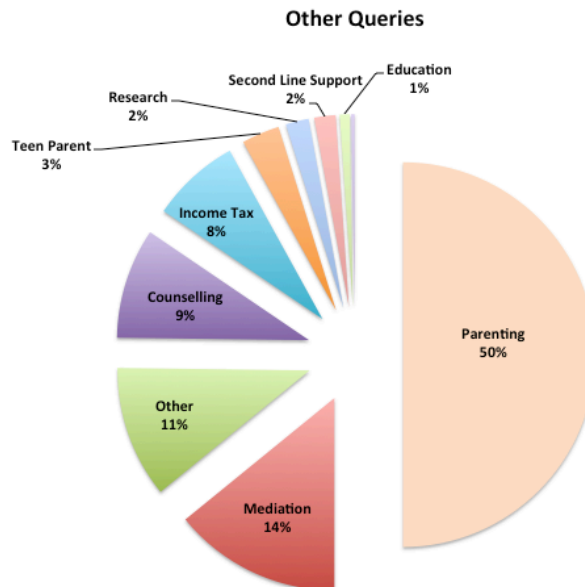


Chart 10

3. Miscellaneous

The majority of clients contacting Treoir found out about Treoir's Specialist Information Centre online. This figure represents a 10% increase from 2013 due to the optimized performance of Treoir's Google advertising campaigns, website and social media platforms resulting in the direct streamline of clients to Treoir (Chart 11).

The next two main groups were Repeat Calls (18%) and clients who were referred by Citizens Information Centres (12%). There has also been an increase in the number of clients contacting Treoir because they are familiar with the services provided by the organisation as a result of Treoir's raising awareness activities.

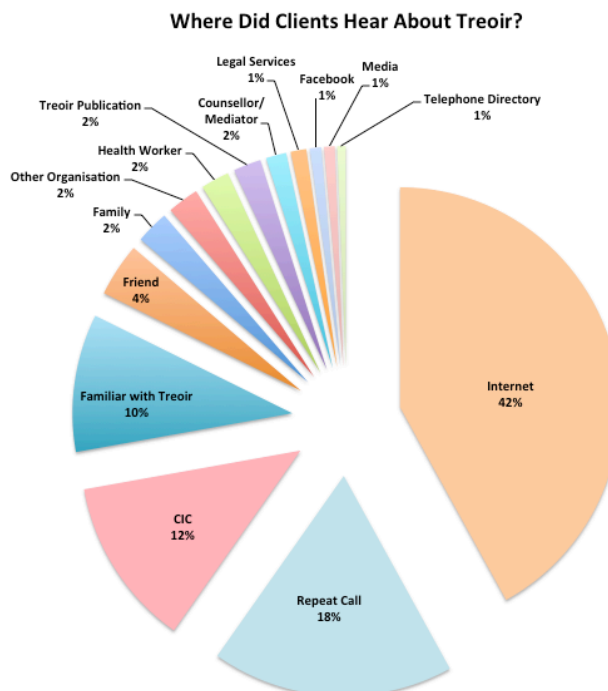


Chart 11

The majority of clients made contact with Treoir over the phone (85%). However, there has been an increase in email queries (13%) including queries received via Facebook email (1%). 2% of the queries were dealt with in person (Chart 12).

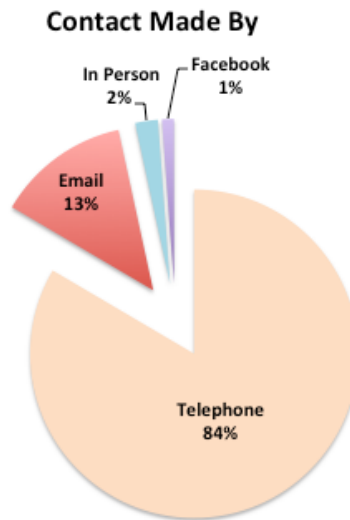


Chart 12

The client age group was 30-39 in 40% of the cases followed by 25-29 in 24% of the cases. Clients under the age of 20 amounted to 4% while clients age 20-24 amounted to 13% of the queries (Chart 13).

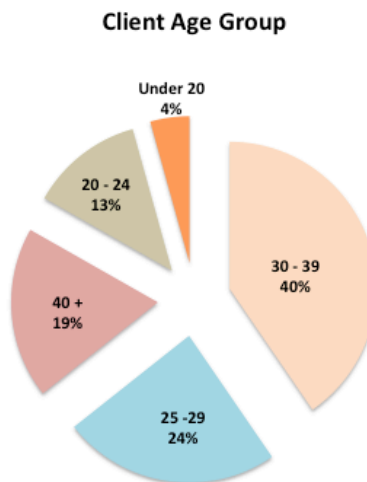


Chart 13

95% of callers were based in Ireland with the majority of calls received from clients living in Dublin followed by Cork, Galway, Kildare and Kerry. 41% of international calls came from UK followed by non-European Union countries (31%) and EU countries (28%).

January and May were the months with the highest number of queries while November and December were the months with the lowest number of queries.

"Treoir were great on the other end of the phone just non-judgmental and great advice"

B. PUBLICATIONS

Information Pack 2014

The *Information Pack for unmarried parents* was published in March 2014. The *Information Pack* is Treoir's principal publication and is updated and published every year. It is funded by the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme. The Pack contains essential information for unmarried parents, their families and those working with unmarried parents. 15,000 copies were printed and distributed through the maternity hospitals, Citizens Information Centres, Crisis Pregnancy Counselling Agencies, Family Resource Centres and other outlets. The Pack is sent out on request and is available to view and download from the Treoir website.

Information Leaflets

The 12 Treoir Information Leaflets were updated and reprinted in 2014. These leaflets contain information on legal matters, e.g. guardianship, access, maintenance, birth registration etc., and on parenting issues. They give more substantive information on the legal issues addressed in the Information Pack. The leaflets are regularly updated and are sent out on request and available to view and download from the Treoir website.

Information Workshops Brochure

A brochure was developed and produced to advertise the availability of free information workshops, which Treoir tailors for groups of 10 plus.

"Treoir's information pack is a fantastic resource full of helpful and practical information"

C. WEBSITE

The main purpose of Treoir's website is to provide information to unmarried parents, extended family members and professionals who work with them. The home page is regularly updated with activities and items of interest.

New publications are added and information leaflets are regularly updated. All publications are available to download and hard copies may be requested. Where required information sections are updated with any new and relevant legislation or, as is the case with the 'money matters' section, amended to reflect changes as they happen.

Treoir's submissions and press releases are available for viewing together with Treoir's Annual Reports and audited accounts.

There is an active e-mail contact section on the website whereby enquiries are made.

In 2014, there were 60,656 visitors to the Treoir website and 159,788 page views. Visitors in the main were from Ireland (86.8%). The information pages most visited were: (in order) maintenance, guardianship, access & custody, birth registration, passports and money matters. The most visited target area from the homepage was 'Fathers'.

"I have just come across your website and am very impressed with the level of detail & amount of information available."

D. OUTREACH

Treoir provides outreach information workshops to groups of unmarried parents and to groups of workers who provide services to unmarried parents.

The aim of the workshops is to provide accurate and up to date information on matters of relevance to parents and their children. Topics covered include:

- the legal rights and responsibilities of parents who have not married each other (such as custody, access, guardianship, birth registration, getting a passport etc.)
- social welfare allowances, employment and training/education opportunities which are available to parents
- shared parenting and explaining family relationships to children.

Workshops are tailored to respond to the needs of individual groups.

In 2014 Treoir provided 23 information workshops to groups throughout the country. Workshops took place in Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kerry, Kildare, Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford and Wicklow. Three hundred and twenty one people participated in the workshops, which were attended by parents, workers and students.

Eleven workshops were delivered to parents in a variety of settings, including young mothers and fathers in Community Youth Projects, mothers in the Teen Parents Support Programme, fathers in prison, fathers and mothers in Family Resource Centres, fathers attending an Adult Education Centre, grandparents and unmarried parents in a community project and mothers participating in an education / training programme.

Treoir hosted eleven workshops to groups of workers who provide services to unmarried parents and their extended families. The workshops were attended by Public Health Nurses, Hospital Social Workers and Crisis Pregnancy Counsellors. Workers from Community and Youth Work Services, Citizens Information Centres, Services for the Homeless and a Children's Residential Centre also attended. One workshop was provided to a group of secondary school students.

A secondary benefit of the workshops is that participants are made aware of all the services provided by Treoir including its publications, its role in advocating for the rights of unmarried parents and the National Information Service etc.

Treoir is made aware of the many and varied issues that may impact on the lives of parents and children through the workshops around the country. For example it emerged at one workshop that parents were given incorrect information regarding their options when they no longer qualified for One-Parent Family Payment due to the age of their youngest child. Some parents complained of how they were treated by social welfare officers. The workshop provided an opportunity to inform the participants that the Department of Social Protection has information on its website on the procedures for making a complaint or comments on the service. The website states that the Department is committed to providing customers with a high quality service. Comments will be dealt with in confidence and the information will help them to improve their services. It also states "So please Help Us to Help You".

Treoir policy and advocacy on various matters may be informed by and reflect the issues identified by participants in the workshops.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT / RESEARCH

Treoir will advocate effectively on behalf of unmarried parents to ensure the best outcomes for them and their children

A. POLICY

Treoir was extremely active in 2014 on the policy front. We try to influence policy that impinges on unmarried parents, whether solo parenting or sharing parenting. The key issues during 2014 were:

Children and Family Relationships draft legislation

Oral and written submissions were made on the draft heads of bill throughout the year. While Treoir welcomed many of the provisions in the proposed legislation we were particularly concerned that it would not improve the position of unmarried fathers who were not cohabiting. Our recommendations were mainly that:

- Unmarried parents should, at the time of birth registration, be presented with information on the lack of legal rights of unmarried fathers who are not cohabiting, including information on the Statutory Declaration.
- There should be a mechanism in place for noting, affirming or registering agreements by both parents that the cohabitation requisite time (one year) has been complied with.
- The need to clarify the rights of “lesser” guardians.
- The need for a Central Register for Guardianship Agreements.

The work is ongoing and it is expected that the legislation will be passed in 2015.

Justice Catherine McGuinness addressed the AGM on the General Scheme of the Children and Family Relationship Bill in May 2014.

Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014.

A number of meetings were held with officials of the Department of Social Protection during the drafting of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Bill 2014, which was enacted in December 2014. It is awaiting commencement.

This legislation is hugely significant for unmarried parents as it will be a requirement, with some exceptions, to have a father’s name on his child’s birth certificate. Treoir members believe that a child has a right to his/her identity. Having the father’s name on his child’s birth certificate is an important step in achieving this.

An aspect of the legislation that concerns Treoir and which we brought to the attention of officials of the Department of Social Protection is that if parents do not agree on the surname for the child then no surname will be assigned until agreement is reached. This we believe may not be in the child’s interest and hopefully some compromise will be made during the drafting of the regulations.

Adoption Certificates

We wrote to Minister Fitzgerald, then Minister for Children, outlining our concern that, following the Adoption Act of 2010, when adoption (birth) certificates are issued the adoptive parents are named as the mother and father and there is no reference to the fact of adoption.

Prior to the Adoption Act 2010, when adoptees sought a 'birth certificate' from the General Register Office they were issued with a certificate which looked exactly like a birth certificate but stated that it was an *Extract from the Adopted Children's Register*. The heading for parents stated "Adoptive Mother" and "Adoptive Father". There was no concealment of the fact that the person in question was adopted. This we believe was good practice and in the best interest of adopted people. We will seek to have this issue addressed in upcoming adoption legislation.

Pre Budget Submissions

Submissions were made to the Department of Social Protection and the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform:

1) Social Protection:

Treoir's recommendations:

- Social welfare payments should not be cut
- A housing strategy needed to be developed and implemented
- Solo parents in receipt of One Parent Family Payment should be fully supported with training allowances to partake in suitable education and training to enable them to enter the labour market for a reasonable financial return
- An increase in the amount of affordable, quality childcare, with preference given to solo parents returning to work
- Re-instatement of the earnings disregard for solo parents.

We were pleased at the end of the year to learn that Minister Burton had heeded the calls of Treoir and others to maintain the earnings disregard at €90 per week for those on One Parent Family Payment and not to implement the planned reduction to €60. The other issues of concern have still to be addressed.

"May I commend Treoir on your pre-Budget submission. It is an extremely well composed and just argument against a discriminatory tax."

2) Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform:

The Government announced the abolition of the One Parent Family Tax Credit in Budget 2013. It was replaced by the Single Person Child Carer Credit, the major difference being that it would be available only to one parent – the "primary" carer. This was a very valuable tax credit that working lone parents availed of and it was particularly important for working non-resident fathers who were paying maintenance for their children. Generally fathers are not the main carers so they can no longer avail of it. Its abolition resulted in lone parents losing from €13 - €47 per week, depending on income.

Ultimately of course it was the children who lost out as in some cases it was necessary to reduce maintenance payments. Treoir advocated for a re-instatement of the tax credit. This has not happened though some minor concessions were made e.g. if the main carer was not availing of the Single Person Child Carer Credit they could assign it to the other parent provided that person had the child in their care for 100 days per year. Treoir believes this arrangement is unworkable.

There is a need for a whole government approach to support shared parenting. Measures such as the above demonstrate that the Department of Finance is actively working against this, while other departments are actively promoting co-parenting. See <http://www.treoir.ie/policy.php>.

B. RESEARCH

Watch them Grow -Unmarried-cohabitant and Solo parenthood in Ireland - an analysis of data from the *Growing Up in Ireland* cohort studies waves 1 and 2 was launched by Senator Jillian van Turnhout on 29th September 2014. The study, undertaken by Dr. Owen Corrigan, was commissioned by Treoir and funded by the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme.

The purpose of the study was to ascertain:

- how the children raised in one-parent families fare in terms of general health and emotional wellbeing compared to children in other family types
- what are the social and financial circumstances of unmarried mothers raising children alone
- the extent of contact with non-resident fathers and
- impact of movement in and out of different family types.

A wealth of information has been gathered. Some of it we were already aware of but a great deal of new information has come to light and the challenge for Treoir is to ensure that the findings impact on policy development. Work is ongoing on this. The full report and key findings are available on www.treoir.ie.

TEEN PARENTS SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Treoir will support those working with young parents in Ireland

A. WHAT IS THE TPSP?

The TPSP consists of eleven separate projects located throughout the country in a range of statutory, community and voluntary organisations. The projects, which are funded by Tusla and the HSE, work with young people who become parents when they are aged 19 years or under and, where needed, supports them until their children are 2 years of age. The main aims of the TPSP are to provide early interventions which enhance and support the wellbeing of young parents and their children, empower young parents in their parenting role and ensure equality of opportunity for parent and child.

B. TPSP CO-ORDINATION AND SUPPORT

During 2014 the National Co-ordinator of the TPSP continued to support and co-ordinate the 11 TPSP projects throughout the country.

This was achieved through:

- regular contact with projects and meetings with project staff and management when required
- keeping TPSP staff informed of changes in government policy and legislation in areas which affect young parents such as education, housing, social welfare, birth registration and guardianship
- maintaining contact with key staff in relevant government departments such as Education and Science, the Childcare Directorate in the DCYA, Youth Affairs Section of the DCYA, the Department of Social Protection and the National Education and Welfare Board
- collecting, collating and analysing detailed data from the TPSP database in relation to referrals received and supports offered by the TPSP. This is used for the annual TPSP Summary of Work, to explore outcomes and to inform advocacy work undertaken by the National Co-ordinator on behalf of young parents.

To ensure that communication flows among all strands of the TPSP structure, in 2014 the Co-ordinator organised 2 meetings each of all TPSP staff, TPSP Host Organisations and the TPSP National Advisory Committee. Among the issues raised at these meetings and followed up by the Co-ordinator were:

- Childcare needs of mothers in education
- Repeat births among young mothers
- Support for young mothers reared in the care system
- Changes to Supplementary Welfare Allowance, the One-Parent Family Payment and the Rent Supplement Scheme
- Medical card eligibility and
- Housing

C. REPORTING TO TUSLA

The TPSP Co-ordinator provided the Corporate Planning and Corporate Performance Section (CPCP) of Tusla with quarterly updates on the 1,043 young parents, their children and families who were offered support by the 11 TPSP projects during 2014.

D. TPSP WEBSITE

The TPSP website www.tpsp.ie is constantly updated with items of interest to young parents and those involved with them. In 2014, there were over 53,000 viewings of the website.

E. TPSP TOOLKIT

In 2014 funding was secured from the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme to run 2 additional workshops for non-TPSP professionals working with young parents and their families. This has proved to be a very efficient way of disseminating learning and good practice from the TPSP to areas where there are no specific support services for teen parents. In total, 84 non-TPSP staff now have access to the TPSP Toolkit including youth workers, social workers, family support workers, aftercare workers, staff in family resource centres, crisis pregnancy counsellors and those working with marginalised groups such as young Traveller mothers.

During 2014 the TPSP Toolkit was updated to take account of policy development and structural changes in the area of Family Support and the updated version made available to all those who had attended workshops during both 2013 and 2014.

F. POLICY AND ADVOCACY

- **Centre for Effective Services**

The National Co-ordinator represents the interests of teen parents on the Centre for Effective Services (CES) Special Interest Group on Parenting. This Group met 4 times during 2014.

- **Tusla Education and Welfare Services**

During 2014 the School Completion Programme (from which 8 of the 11 TPSPs benefit) moved to the Education Welfare Services (EWS) of Tusla. There were 2 meetings with senior EWS staff in 2014 including attendance by senior staff at a meeting of all TPSP staff in May 2014.

- **New Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education**

The National Co-ordinator made a submission on the above on behalf of TPSP and in November 2014 attended a roundtable meeting between the Department of Education and Skills, the Higher Education Authority and representatives of the voluntary and community sector.

RAISING AWARENESS / PUBLIC RELATIONS

Treoir will continue to raise awareness of issues affecting unmarried parents and will promote the availability of Treoir Services

Throughout the year Treoir made concerted efforts to highlight issues of relevance to unmarried parents and their children. This was a particular priority in light of the momentous changes in family law that would come about with the enactment of the Children and Family Relationships Bill and other significant legislation. Treoir used all means possible to inform its clients, service providers, policy makers and the general public of the social and legal inequities in relation to unmarried parents and to address the mass of misinformation that continues to prevail.

A. MEDIA

Press Releases

Several press releases were issued during the year including:

Unmarried Fathers – winners and non-winners

Treoir made a presentation on the General Scheme of a Children and Family Relationships Bill to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality. While welcoming many of its provisions, Treoir highlighted startling shortcomings and expressed deep concern that the bill would do nothing to improve the legal position of non-cohabiting unmarried fathers.

Don't penalise the poorest families

At the pre-budget forum in Dublin Castle, Treoir made recommendations in response to the Department of Social Protection's intention to remove the One-parent Family Payment from many thousands of lone parents. Among the recommendations was the re-instatement of the earnings disregard for lone parents to encourage them to avail of part-time employment.

Government policy decisions and impact on child wellbeing

"Watch them Grow", new research commissioned by Treoir and published in 2014 aimed at investigating differences in outcomes for unmarried and married families.

Media Interviews

Treoir was interviewed by numerous radio stations, both local and national on topics including fathers' rights, teenage parenthood, step-parent adoption, maternity legislation and registration of fathers' names on the birth certificate of their child. The chairwoman was interviewed on RTE television in relation to Treoir's research based on the Growing Up in Ireland longitudinal study and the Assistant CEO appeared on TV3 to discuss the Children and Family Relationships Bill 2014.

Treoir information staff gave several interviews to national and regional newspapers and a number of articles were published on the online news channel journal.ie.

It Says in the Papers

Our daily *It Says in the Papers* service, with web links to news items of relevance in the national daily newspapers was emailed to all member agencies and continues to be a very useful source of information for our members.

B. E-BULLETIN

Treoir's online news bulletin was produced and disseminated in May, October and December 2014. The Bulletin keeps our members up-to-date on items of interest, including recent legislation, changes in social welfare, upcoming conferences/workshops, new books and websites etc.

"It is most useful to get the online info you send which I in turn forward to colleagues. Thank you."

C. GOOGLE ADWORDS GRANT

Google Adwords Grant is the nonprofit edition of Google's online advertising tool. Google grants Treoir, as a nonprofit organization, \$120,000 per year in in-kind AdWords advertising to promote its mission and initiatives on Google search result pages. In 2014, Treoir designed and managed several online advertising campaigns to ensure that users searching in Google for information related to unmarried families were directed to the relevant specific pages of Treoir's website and offered the opportunity to ring Treoir's National Specialist Information Service.

Through Google adverts Treoir experienced in 2014 a 28% increase in the total number of sessions or period of time a user is actively engaged with Treoir online. 72% were new visitors while 28% were returning visitors. The Google Adwords grant has played a crucial role in promoting Treoir's services online and ensuring that Treoir's clients are provided with key information.

D. SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Interesting items of relevance were posted regularly on our Facebook and Twitter sites. Our Facebook page has become a valuable resource as a way of keeping our clients informed and addressing areas of misinformation. Many of our posts generated a great deal of comment and debate. Comments were kept on record and trends noted which helped inform policy and kept us apprised of the concerns of our followers.

In addition to queries received by email and telephone, this year saw an increase in the number of clients contacting us with queries on our 'message' page. Our number of followers doubled during 2014, helped by several 'boosts' of significant pieces of information, e.g. the importance of fathers in the lives of their children. This was made possible through support from the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme. We will continue to work at building our audience in order to engage and inform our clients.

E. PROMOTING TREOIR SERVICES

Treoir's national, free, confidential service is available to all who are in need of up-to-date and accurate information in relation to the rights and responsibilities of unmarried parents and their children. We promote this service through:

- Our website
- E-Bulletin
- Social media platforms
- Member agencies
- Workshops
- Networking
- Dissemination of our many publications

STRATEGIC ALLIANCES / MEMBERSHIP

Treoir will develop strategic alliances and seek to engage more fully with members

A. STRATEGIC ALLIANCES / MEMBERSHIP

Treoir is committed to developing strategic alliances and to engaging more with members. This aspect of the work is increasingly a challenge due to the demands on the service.

Funders: We endeavoured to maintain good relationships with our funders, HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme, HSE and Citizens Information Board and to comply with reporting requirements. While significant funding cuts have been experienced over the years we are extremely grateful to the funders for their continued support.

Our membership is fundamental in shaping our work, policies and strategies and we actively encourage our members to influence policy. We particularly sought their input to the pre-budget submission. Meetings for members are held from time to time. Generally they take the form of a short input by an expert and followed by detail discussion. We hosted a number of members' meetings on issues of relevance during 2014 including the Civil Registration Amendment legislation and the Children First Bill.

We communicated with many officials of government departments, Ministers and politicians in relation to policies affecting the families with whom we work.

We had a great deal of contact with officials of the following Departments in 2014:

Department of Social Protection in relation to Civil Registration (compulsory birth registration), on Adoption/Birth Certificates and on Social Welfare policies which impact negatively on solo unmarried parents.

Department of Justice and Equality in relation to the Children and Family Relationships Heads of Bill. We had several communications with the drafters and a delegation from Treoir met with Minister Fitzgerald, T.D. to discuss the Draft Heads of the Bill.

We were in communication with a number of agencies and individuals in an effort to promote the findings of 'Watch them Grow' the longitudinal study and were honoured that Senator Jillian van Turnhout agreed to formally launch the research in September 2014.

We continued to be active members of the Children's Rights Alliance and were also involved in an "All Families Matter" campaign to seek constitutional protection for unmarried and other diverse families.

GOVERNANCE

Treoir will have a robust governance and HR system to deliver a professional service which is fully compliant with company and charity legislation

The Board members, under the chairmanship of Dr. Ruth Barrington, worked tirelessly to implement the strategic plan and to oversee the operation of the organisation. While closely monitoring the governance of the organisation the Board also took a keen interest in policy development, as family legislation was being developed during the year that would have huge significance for unmarried parents and their children.

The Board met six times during the year and the Audit and Finance Committee met five times. Members' attendance at meetings was very impressive. The majority attended all of the meetings.

Service Level Agreements of funders now demand evidence of good governance and while the requirements of funders are onerous, particularly for small organisations, every effort is made to adhere to the requirements. Treoir is keenly aware of its responsibility in relation to the use of the public funds it receives and endeavours to obtain the best possible value. No staff member receives a salary in excess of €60,000 and no bonuses or incentive schemes are in place. Staff salaries were originally in line with HSE grades but no increments have been paid since 2009 and salaries were reduced by 10% in 2010. A defined contribution staff pension scheme is in operation. There is not a defined benefit scheme.

The past number of years have been particularly challenging for Treoir due to a significant reduction in funding and an increasing demand for the service.

Browne Murphy and Hughes auditors were engaged to prepare the audited accounts and to file accounts with the Companies Registration Office.

CASE STUDIES

The following cases illustrate the complex nature of the queries dealt with by Treoir's National Specialist Information Service. The concrete examples demonstrate the skills and knowledge required to provide key relevant information and to deal with personal and sensitive circumstances.

CASE STUDY 1: Birth Registration, Guardianship and Family Relationships

A mother contacted Treoir regarding maintenance. The father was refusing to pay maintenance for his child. The mother of the child applied to court and father was ordered to pay maintenance. The father of the child refused to put his name on the child's birth certificate and to have any contact with the child. Having read Treoir's leaflet on birth registration the mother of the child became aware that the birth could be re-registered to add the father's details on the production of a court order which names the father. She contacted the court for a certified copy of the maintenance order, which named the father.

When she explained to a legal professional why she required the copy of the court order she was informed that the father would become a guardian if his name was entered in the Register of Births. This was incorrect information. The Treoir Information Officer informed her that having the father's name on the birth certificate does not give the father any legal rights in respect of his child. The Information officer explored with the mother the issue of explaining family relationships to a child where the father is not involved in the child's life. A copy of the Treoir booklet ***Family Links – Steps and Stages** - positive pointers for lone parents who are helping their children to understand their family situation* was sent on request to the caller.

This case is an example of the misinformation that is common among some of the professionals who provide services to unmarried parents and highlights the necessity of specialist, up-to-date information on matters of relevance. Treoir, through its work workshops for workers, seeks to address this situation.

CASE STUDY 2: Child Passport and Abduction

A father who is joint guardian of his child contacted Treoir regarding getting a passport for his child to take the child on a holiday. The mother of the child refuses to sign the passport form and will not give her consent to take the child out of the country. The Information Officer explained that it is an offence for a parent or guardian to take or send a child under 16 years out of the State without the consent of the other parent if that parent is a guardian.

Where joint guardians cannot reach an agreement on an important issue concerning the child, then either of the guardians can apply to the court for its direction on a matter concerning the welfare of the child and the court will make a decision based on what is in the best interest of the child. The court can make an order dispensing with the consent of a guardian for the passport. This court order will then be sent with the application for the child's passport. The court can also grant the father permission to take the child on holiday.

This case highlights the complexities involved in two guardians trying to act jointly in the best interest of the child when their interests are tangibly opposite.

CASE STUDY 3: One-Parent Family Payment and Jobseeker's Allowance

A father in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance contacted Treoir regarding changing his social welfare claim to One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) as his 11 year old child had come to live with him. He had the main care of the child and he would not be available for full-time work due to his responsibilities for the child. The Information Officer explained that he would not qualify for OFP due to changes introduced to OFP. As a new claimant he must have at least one child below the age of seven in order to qualify for the payment. Neither would he qualify for Jobseeker's Transition Payment, which would have enabled him to work part-time. This payment is only available to parents who lose their entitlement to OFP and whose youngest child is under 14 and who are entitled to a Jobseeker's Allowance payment.

Parents on Jobseeker's Transition Payment are exempt from the Jobseeker's Allowance conditions that require them to be available for, and genuinely seeking, full-time work. They can work part-time and still receive Jobseeker's Transition Payment once they satisfy a means test. The Information Officer informed the father that he could apply for a payment for the child on his Jobseeker's Allowance claim. She also suggested that he apply for Child Benefit.

The above example shows the hardship that many single parents are currently experiencing due to the changes introduced to the One Parent Family Payment.

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We are indebted to Dr. Owen Corrigan, who undertook the research on "*Watch Them Grow*" an analysis of the Growing Up In Ireland data. We thank Senator Jillian van Turnhout for launching the report.

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Andrea Kennedy contributed greatly to policy development during her time on her JobBridge programme with Treoir. We thank her for her work and wish her well in her career.

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- Dara Breathnach and Carol Baxter, Department of Justice and Equality
- Elizabeth Canavan, Department of Children and Youth Affairs for an excellent input at our AGM in 2014.

We would also like to thank Justice Catherine McGuinness for her input on the Children and Family Relationship Heads of Bill at the AGM 2014.

Rosemary Grant has done sterling work in chairing the National Advisory Committee of the Teen Parents Support Programme. We thank her sincerely for that.

