

# **lone parents in south tipperary**

## **a needs analysis at local level**



**august 2007**



Antje Hogan & Johanna Gilbertson:

**Lone Parents in South Tipperary  
A Needs Analysis at Local Level**

County Tipperary Information Service  
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The NDP Gender Equality Unit promotes equality between women and men in measures funded under the 2000-2006 National Development Plan (NDP). The Unit assists policy makers to incorporate a gender equality perspective in the development, implementation and evaluation of NDP policies, so that they respond to the needs of both women and men. This process is known as ‘gender mainstreaming’. The Lone Parent Initiative is an example of practice Gender Mainstreaming. The Unit is funded by the Irish Government and the European Union Structural Funds. For further information please log onto [www.ndpgenderequality.ie](http://www.ndpgenderequality.ie).

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## **executive summary**

This report entitled “Lone Parents in South Tipperary” is the result of an interagency project that has been facilitated by the Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform under the “Lone Parent Initiative”. It consists of three parts that examine the statistical profile of lone parents in South Tipperary, their needs and the services that are provided for them. Besides aiming to establish the labour market needs of lone parents as stipulated by the objectives of the “Lone Parent Initiative”, this research intended to determine the diverse circumstances, in which men and women parent alone, the needs of lone parents at local level, the range of services that are provided for them and any barriers or information gaps that may prevent them from accessing these services.

Methodologically, the research consisted of a mixed method approach which comprised documentary research as well as the use of questionnaires and interviews. The statistical profile which constitutes the first part of this report utilises the findings of the 2006 Census, while the needs analysis is based on the findings of a postal survey with more than 400 participants in addition to six interviews with lone parents of different backgrounds. The primarily quantitative services review, which concludes this report, is based on documentary research and a survey of approximately 40 local organisations, both statutory and voluntary.

As this research focuses on local needs and services, it is not concerned with policy issues that must be addressed at government level. However, the needs analysis highlights a number of deficiencies in this regard that complement the findings of other research that has examined lone parents in the national context. A short synopsis of the research undertaken by government and by interest groups at national level is included in this report and is referred to where appropriate. Common to all these studies is the premise that lone parents are at greater risk of economic disadvantage and social exclusion and this also forms the backbone of this (locally-based) study.

### **Statistical Review**

At 4,068, the number of lone parents in South Tipperary represents approximately 19 per cent of all families in the county, which is neither significantly higher nor lower than the national average. The number has not increased significantly since 2002 when viewed in the context of general population growth. The vast majority (85.4 per cent) are lone mothers. More than half of the lone parent households are in one of the county’s urban centres. The proportion of lone parents who live in multi-family households (i.e. at home with their parents) is slightly below the national figure, but nevertheless, must be considered to be substantial at 8.4 per cent. More importantly, this figure has seen a dramatic increase in recent years and illustrates the fact that many lone parents find it economically difficult to establish a household of their own. The shortfall between lone parent demand for housing and the supply of local authority provision, as exemplified by long waiting lists, also contributes to this trend.

The statistical review uncovered “pockets” of lone parents in rural areas that are significant in terms of service provision. These are located in the Fethard, Ardfinnan and Clogheen areas as well as in the north-east, west and north-west of the county. Although

the actual numbers of lone parents in these areas may not compare to those in the urban centres, an assessment taking into consideration population density, geographical dimensions and infrastructure clearly reiterates the requirement for targeted service provision to lone parents in these parts of the county.

## **Needs Analysis**

The profiling information gathered via the survey of over 400 lone parents in South Tipperary serves to illustrate the diversity of lone parent families, which is not necessarily captured by the statistical data available from the Census. This diversity is reflected in the growing number of lone fathers (who, interestingly, tend to parent older children), in the wide range of age groups represented, and in varied nationalities, family sizes, household compositions and cultural backgrounds. Additional caring responsibilities and a variety of circumstances that lead to a person parenting alone further broaden the range of experiences that exist among lone parents.

The needs of lone parents were examined in respect of childcare, accommodation, education and training, employment, finances and family/community support. The findings of the quantitative analyses under these headings were supported by a large number of comments from individuals and by the inclusion of five case studies that exemplified lone parents with regard to a selected criterion. As the overwhelming number of detailed comments and openly shared experiences could not be accurately reflected by any other means, various sections of the needs analysis include direct quotes from the respondents.

The findings of the needs analysis confirmed that the actual experiences of being a lone parent vary greatly, depending on the circumstances that lead to lone parenthood and factors such as personal disposition, extent of family support, the age and number of children, education and level of professional advancement at the time of becoming a lone parent, as well as additional obligations of other kinds. A common experience, however, is that of adversity in one's life (this alters in magnitude and severity) and, with few exceptions, a perception that parenting alone "happens" to a person and is not the result of preceding life choices. The latter needs to be addressed, if lone parents are expected to be proactive in overcoming the economic and social challenges that they face.

On the subject of childcare, the findings confirm that the cost is prohibitively high for many lone parents. In South Tipperary, they expressed a need for more flexible childcare facilities (that take account of school terms and work realities) and for more information outlining the different childcare options and possible subsidy schemes open to them. Lone parents also expressed a need for better after-school care. On another level, it emerged that childcare for pre-school children does not constitute an alternative to staying at home, but is rather seen as an added option for those who view themselves as stay-at-home parents.

The expectation of a family home that many lone parents harbour, is in stark conflict with the actual housing options that exist for them. As noted by other studies, the dependency of lone parents on affordable, and as such on local authority housing, is evidently high. For those living at home with their parents, inadequate levels of housing provision as well

as stigma and preconceptions present genuine barriers to establishing an independent household. For those, who live in private/rented accommodation, insecure tenancies and high rents coupled with an inadequate system of rent supports are perceived as being most problematic.

The barriers that exist for lone parents in accessing education and training primarily comprise cost, availability and affordability of childcare and complex interactions between educational allowances, Social Welfare payments and secondary benefits. The generally lower levels of educational attainment of lone parents mean that they would be more likely than other groups to benefit from easy access to education. Whilst the lack of basic qualifications does not pose immediate concerns, it is the low participation rates of lone parents in third level education and vocational training that must be addressed in the short- to medium-term. Locally, the availability of training and educational opportunities, in terms of their variety and geographical location, were expressed needs.

The greatest obstacle for lone parents in entering the labour market was found to be the failure of the welfare-to-work objective behind the current Social Welfare system. In the second instance, the cost and lack of childcare, as well as a need for more flexible employment opportunities, were perceived as obstacles to taking up employment. Whilst the likelihood of being employed as a lone parent increases once the child/children reach school-going age, there is no correlation with the number of children in a family. Finally, a need was identified for a career advice and information service that should complement FÁS- or VEC-led initiatives in order to ensure that they lead to sustainable employment for the individual.

In respect of income supports, the heavy reliance of lone parents on the following payments could be confirmed: One-Parent Family Payment, Medical Card, Child Benefit, Back to School Footwear and Clothing Allowance and Family Income Supplement as well as Rent Supplement. There are reasonable levels of uptake of the One-Parent Family Tax Credit among working lone parents. Efforts to revise the income support system for lone parents at government level are welcomed, as the findings of this research show that the current system is too complex and not sufficiently user-friendly, apart from the fact that it has failed to reach some of its objectives.

The findings of this research in respect of family and community supports show that a substantial number of lone parents depend on them in the light of minimal help from the other parent of their child/children. Almost one in five lone parents experience a lack of support from their own family. More targeted promotion and the geographical expansion of existing services are advisable if needs in this area are to be met, while counselling and emotional supports and a service that addresses the social needs of lone parents in South Tipperary represent a prominent gap in service provision.

## **Services Review**

Services in the area of family and community supports have considerably greater flexibility to address needs at a local level, particularly as they are largely provided by voluntary and community organisations. South Tipperary is fortunate to have a relatively strong network

of Family and Community Resource Centres (although there is a lack of coverage in Cahir), which means that a structure already exists that could be utilised for a more co-ordinated, integrated provision of services to lone parents in the county.

As the findings of this services review were largely prescribed by a quantitative approach rather than a qualitative assessment, the gaps in service provision outlined therein, are primarily determined on a geographical basis. However, two gaps could be identified outside of the geographical dimension: the need for better and more targeted information provision on existing services and that for a service addressing the social needs of lone parents as described above.

## recommendations

Based on the findings of this research it is recommended that the Lone Parent Initiative Network:

1. Be formally established as a Working Group under the auspices of the County Development Board, i.e. via the Social Inclusion Measures Group.
2. Reviews its current membership. It is imperative that representatives from all organisations involved in the provision of services to lone parents at local level are members of this working group. Representation of organisations from all parts of the county must also be ensured.
3. Ensures that the name it adopts differs from that of the existing informal network in order to avoid confusion with existing organisations.
4. Devises and subsequently implements an action plan. In doing so, the Lone Parent Initiative Network or its successor is advised to seek ways to:
  - (i) Address the acute gap in service provision in respect of the social needs of lone parents, i.e. the facilitation of social interaction between lone parents thus creating opportunities for pragmatic peer support and affordable social activities that include their children.
  - (ii) Develop a family therapy/counselling service that meets the needs of lone parents and their children. This service should be adequately resourced in order to be accessible to low-income families. Existing services in the county may serve as a viable model.
  - (iii) Establish and facilitate additional lone parent support groups initially in Cashel, Cahir and Glengoose. A phased expansion into rural areas should focus on the “pockets” of lone parents identified in the statistical review of this report. A close link between existing and future support groups should be encouraged.
  - (iv) Examine ways to provide information on existing services in the form of a publication to lone parents at the point in time when they “become” lone parents. Access points (Social Welfare Office, maternity and PHN and other suitable services) should also be determined to distribute this information in a targeted manner.
  - (v) Devise a website to facilitate peer support and exchange of information between lone parents from all areas of South Tipperary, particularly for those who live in rural areas where community supports are not available locally.
  - (vi) Examine innovative ways of offering integrated and holistic services to lone parents in South Tipperary, i.e. in the form of a seamless referral system with dedicated officers in each organisation. Necessary interagency protocols in terms of data sharing etc. should be developed and put in place.

- (vii) Develop a joint employment support service that meets the individual needs of lone parents and their children. Existing services in the county may serve as a viable model.
  - (viii) Encourage existing service providers to review the geographical dimension of their services and extend (resources permitted) these into areas of need as identified by this research.
  - (ix) Promote the inclusion of lone fathers and their children and of lone parents from the traveller community among organisations offering specific supports to lone parents. It is advised that existing traveller projects become aware of the needs of lone parents from their community and address them on an individual basis before referring them to the relevant public services.
5. Undertakes a qualitative assessment of the organisations involved in the provision of services to lone parents in South Tipperary in order to determine aspects of accessibility, timeliness and adequacy of service under the “tailored universalism”-approach.
  6. Aims to resolve issues evolving around the duplication of services and gaps in the geographical coverage of service provision to lone parents as derived from the service review in this report.

## background & context

This report, entitled “Lone Parents in South Tipperary – A Needs Analysis at Local Level”, is the result of an interagency project which was established in December 2006 following the announcement of a “Lone Parent Initiative” by the Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

**The Lone Parent Initiative Network**, the local working group, is as of yet an informal partnership of voluntary organisations and statutory agencies that either represent lone parents or are working towards the social inclusion of lone parents in the county. A steering committee consisting of representatives from the South Tipperary County Development Board (CDB), Clonmel Community Partnership (CCP), County Tipperary Citizens Information Service (CIS) and the South Tipperary Lone Parent Initiative (STLPI) was set up to oversee the initial research presented in this report which, in the hope of the steering committee, will inform the structure and work of the Lone Parent Network in future. A list of the members of the Lone Parent Initiative Network in South Tipperary is included in the appendices.

**County Tipperary Information Service (TIS)** was commissioned to undertake the research that was required as part of this project. TIS is a local organisation currently operating under the Community Service Programme which is funded by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. It operates on a not-for-profit basis and is available as a reliable partner for state and semi-state agencies, community groups and voluntary organisations in County Tipperary to provide good quality, local information services. These include research on the needs of marginalised groups that are at risk of social exclusion and on gaps in service provision, the production of local information materials that meet identified needs and the targeted distribution of information to the people who most need it.

This report forms part of a series of studies conducted and, in some cases, initiated by County Tipperary Information Service, into the needs of specific target groups, which provide supportive data for a wide range of social inclusion measures. The needs of people with disabilities, migrant workers and the unemployed in South Tipperary were examined in previous research, amongst other topics.

### Aims and Objectives

The research undertaken as part of the Lone Parent Initiative project in South Tipperary consists of three parts which complement each other. These are:

- (1) A statistical profile of lone parent families in South Tipperary
- (2) A social needs analysis in respect of the target group
- (3) A review of services for lone parents in the county

The project is funded by the NDP Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform as part of their Lone Parent Initiative. This initiative aims to

raise awareness of the labour market needs of lone parents and develop effective joined-up approaches to meet these needs at local level. Research funded under the Initiative increases the understanding of and capacity to respond to these needs.

Whilst the Lone Parent Initiative project in South Tipperary follows these objectives, further objectives beyond the remit of the Gender Equality Unit's initiative have been included with a view to offering the most comprehensive review of empirical data to serve as a basis for the future work of the Lone Parent Network in the county.

These integrated objectives are:

- To establish the diversity of lone parents in South Tipperary
- To establish the different needs of lone parents countywide
- To establish barriers lone parents may experience in accessing the labour market
- To establish information gaps lone parents may experience in respect of services that exist to support them
- To establish the level of current service provision to lone parents in South Tipperary
- To establish areas and/or issues with the potential for enhanced co-ordination between service providers in relation to lone parents as a client group

Based on these objectives, the research aimed to provide the data and findings to community, voluntary and statutory organisations in South Tipperary in the form of a comprehensive report in the hope that this will inform a more targeted, user-centred service provision to lone parents in the county.

## Methodology

As mentioned above, this research which was undertaken as part of the Lone Parent Initiative project in South Tipperary consists of three elementary parts, namely a statistical profile, a needs analysis and a review of services. The methods used to conduct each of these parts were of a mixed nature and contained both quantitative and qualitative approaches. An overview of the methods used is shown in Table 1 below.

Part of research	Method(s) used
Statistical Profile	Documentary Research
Needs Analysis	Questionnaires Interviews Documentary Research
Services' Review	Questionnaires Telephone Interviews

Table 1: Overview of applied research methods



The Lone Parent Initiative Network was closely involved in and actively shaped the research at all stages. In this way, this report is an example of an interagency project that took its course in the interest of optimal, all-encompassing results.

### *Statistical Profile*

The statistical profile largely reflects an analysis of nominal data that was collated as part of the Census 2006, which was conducted by the Central Statistics Office in April of that year. In addition to reviewing the Census publications, extensive internet research was conducted to ascertain if other accounts of quantitative data are (a) accessible and (b) adequate for local purposes. It was determined that a number of state agencies should have been in a position to provide data on various aspects that would have been useful in trying to establish a profile of lone parent families. However, most of these were unavailable at the time or could not be used for our purposes. Subsequently, local agencies and voluntary agencies were approached to share any records kept on lone parents that might have been of benefit. Where available, these were regrettably covered by data protection legislation. The only other source of information that was available and accessible for the purposes of a statistical profile apart from the data provided by the CSO proved to be housing statistics which are published by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government or had been made available by individual local authorities.

### *Needs Analysis*

The needs analysis was approached with a combination of strategies which included a survey of over 400 individuals, six case studies, and extensive desktop research. Methodologically, these involved the use of a questionnaire, interviews and documentary sources.

The questionnaire that was used for the needs analysis was composed in line with the objectives of the research and as such sought to establish the range of lone parents in South Tipperary, their needs in respect of childcare, accommodation, transport, education and training, employment and community/financial supports and any issues or barriers they may experience in terms of participating fully in society. A profiling section at the beginning of the questionnaire served cross-reference purposes and helped to establish factors that may become multiple disadvantages. Whilst the questionnaire aimed to gather predominantly quantitative data, a number of open questions were included to add a qualitative dimension.

Following a successful pilot study with a group of young lone mothers in Clonmel, the questionnaire was distributed in two ways. Firstly, agencies and voluntary organisations that provide services to lone parents were asked to distribute questionnaires to their clients. The distribution outlets included the Family Resource Centres, organisations that operate under community and local development programmes, statutory agencies including the VEC (via the Adult Education Programme), the HSE (via the Community Welfare Offices), youth services, Home School Community Liaison Officers and Citizens Information Centres. Secondly, the Department of Social and Family Affairs kindly facilitated a mail shot to over 1,900 individuals who were in receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment in May 2007. Between these two strategies, almost 2,500 questionnaires were distributed.

Altogether 410 questionnaires were completed, of which 402 were included in the analysis as valid replies. This represents a response rate of over 16 per cent which by far exceeded the expectations of the Lone Parent Initiative Network. All respondents completed the questionnaire on a self-completion basis.

In addition to the postal survey, a series of six interviews was conducted in May 2007 with individuals from varying backgrounds who had been approached by members of the Lone Parent Initiative Network and had subsequently volunteered to participate in the survey. The individuals were selected from a predefined set of criteria which included age, ethnicity, nationality and gender in a bid to exemplify the range of lone parents' backgrounds.

Finally, an extensive review of literature in relation to lone parents in Ireland was undertaken in order for this local study to be placed in a national context. Research into the needs of lone parents and that examining the risk of lone parents experiencing poverty and/or disadvantage has come largely from two factions: government or researchers commissioned by or affiliated to government and lone parent activists/support organisations. A small number of local research studies which resemble the scope of this project had been carried out elsewhere in the country. These were also included in the literature review.

### *Review of Services*

The research required for the review of services commenced in several steps. Initially, information was collated on existing services using literature (i.e. promotional leaflets, strategic publications) and online resources. At this stage, all public services dedicated to supporting lone parents and/or other vulnerable people were included, whether they operate at national or local level. Private services were not considered and do not form part of the review.

In the next step organisations operating at national level were contacted to establish whether they had any form of local representation in South Tipperary, while existing local statutory and voluntary services were included in a postal survey by way of a brief questionnaire. Organisations were screened according to a number of criteria:

- Organisations were required to be either statutory or voluntary (i.e. not private)
- The social inclusion of vulnerable people had to inform the organisation's operating policy
- Lone parents were to be a named target group or alternatively, the service provided by the organisation was required to facilitate the needs of lone parents
- The service was to be provided at any location in South Tipperary

All replies (completed questionnaires or telephone survey forms) from validated service providers were collated and categorised. Where necessary, further information was requested from service providers to establish missing details. Where service providers had opted not to participate in the postal survey, telephone contact was made to obtain the necessary information.

In a final step, the level of service provision was then superimposed on data from the census on the number and location of one-parent families in South Tipperary with a view to comparing geographically, provision with need.

## **Literature Review: The Main Studies on Lone Parents in Ireland**

At national level, research on lone parents in Ireland has largely been undertaken by two factions: government, who is currently reviewing employment and income supports for lone parents, and lone parent interest groups. It is generally acknowledged that one-parent families are at greater risk of social exclusion and poverty, not least because of the obvious income restrictions. In 2004, 31.1 per cent of lone parents in Ireland lived in poverty, with a further 48.3 per cent at risk of it.<sup>1</sup>

The enhanced delivery of public services to lone parents, particularly in such areas as childcare, healthcare and housing, has emerged as a major theme in recent studies, while the importance of income supports, educational opportunities and the removal of employment barriers have also been highlighted.

OPEN, the One-Parent Exchange Network, is an organisation which has been very proactive in researching the needs and social circumstances of lone parent families. In its 2004 report “One Size Fits All?”, Camille Loftus acknowledges that the social stigma previously attached to lone parent families has been largely eradicated, but emphasises that myths, preconceptions and stereotypes still exist that do not acknowledge the wide range of situations in which mothers or fathers parent alone. Concurring with other reports, “One Size Fits All?” outlines the shortcomings of social policy in Ireland in acknowledging this diversity. Examining the relative poverty rates and income trends of lone parents, the report concludes that childcare costs, a lack of childcare facilities, restricted educational supports for young lone parents and a failure of the welfare-to-work objective behind Social Welfare supports have contributed to lone parents being left behind, while the biggest obstacle for one-parent families is that they “continually find themselves trying to fit in to places that were never designed with their needs in mind.”<sup>2</sup>

A study commissioned by Doras Buí and the Northside Partnership in the same year raises additional policy issues, particularly in respect of the provision of housing for lone parents, the Rent Supplement scheme and income supports and taxation that acknowledge individual circumstances. More importantly, the researcher who was commissioned for this study, Grainne Healy, recognises confidence issues among lone parents and advocates “programmes to support confidence-building of lone parents”, as she perceives them to be a “vital stepping stone to help lone parents rebuild their confidence in themselves and their ability to support their families into the future”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Central Statistics Office: EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions, December 2005, as quoted in the Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for Lone Parents, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Loftus, Camille: One Size Fits All? Irish Governments’ Failed Approach to One-Parent Families 1994-2004. OPEN 2005, p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> Healy, Grainne: Lone Parents: Profile, Policy and Provision. A Local Study. Doras Bui and Northside Partnership: May 2004, p. 33.

By far the most comprehensive study on lone parents was carried out by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) in 2001. Their report widely established lone parents' risk of poverty as a concern, while also highlighting data deficiencies in official statistics that are collected regularly as well as definitional issues and their consequent impact on policy. The recommendations made by the NESF in the areas of housing/accommodation, health and social services, education/training, employment and income support are very detailed and specific.<sup>4</sup> The majority of research undertaken after 2001 supports the findings and recommendations of the NESF.

The Irish Government has acknowledged the variety of recommendations that stem from the NESF and other research. A Government Discussion Paper entitled "Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents" was published in early 2006 and not only reflects on academic research, but also on submissions received from lone parent activist organisations, such as OPEN, Treoir and One Family.

The recommendations of the Working Group on Social Inclusion, which undertook to review the current provision of income supports as part of the Government Discussion Paper, aim to move lone parents into full-time and high quality employment. The group suggests an integrated approach that includes income supports, educational and training opportunities, the provision of childcare and improved information and advice services.<sup>5</sup> In terms of income supports, a reform is envisaged, where the One-Parent Family Payment would be replaced by a means-tested Parental Allowance for low-income families with young children that is time-limited in respect of the age of the youngest child. When lone parents fall outside the remit of Parental Allowance (i.e. their children reach the age limit), they would be expected to return to either the labour market or education (with appropriate support). Failing that, they would be entitled to Jobseeker's supports. Parental Allowance will be more flexible in considering earnings from employment than the One-Parent Family Payment currently is. Also, Parental Allowance would be payable independently of, i.e. in addition to, any other Social Welfare payments in a bid to acknowledge individual circumstances. Current restrictions on cohabitations would be disregarded with the introduction of the Parental Allowance. Apart from these reforms in income support, the Working Group recommended policy interventions in respect of secondary benefits (Rent Supplement, Medical Card etc.), educational and training opportunities, childcare supports for lone parents, targeted teen parent support and information and advice services. In a press release dated the 27 April 2006, Former Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Seamus Brennan, promised to "to bring forward proposals for legislation during the course of this year to begin reforming restrictive social policies in the whole area of lone parents and low-income families."<sup>6</sup> Regrettably, at the end of July 2007, no proposals for legislation have yet been published.

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<sup>4</sup> A summary of the recommendations is available in the form of the leaflet "OPEN Informs 1" from <http://www.oneparent.ie/publications/122>

<sup>5</sup> Compare Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for Lone Parents, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.welfare.ie/press/pr06/pr270406.html>

## statistical review

### Census 2006

The main source of statistical information on lone parents in South Tipperary is the census that was conducted by the Central Statistical Office in 2006. Local authorities and state agencies do not hold records on lone parents in a consistent and co-ordinated manner, so this information – where accessible – may not be as reliable as the Census data. Information recorded from the postal survey that was undertaken as part of this research may be useful in filling the gaps that arise from these deficiencies.

According to the 2006 Census, there are more than 4,000 lone parent families in South Tipperary. The vast majority of these families, i.e. 85.4 per cent, are headed by mothers and the rest by fathers. This gender split corresponds closely with national statistics which show an 86 to 14 per cent divide. Similarly, the 18.9 per cent share that lone parent families hold in the county compared to the overall number of family units is neither significantly higher nor lower than the national figure of 18 per cent.

The census distinguishes between family units, which in this context are defined as “one parent together with one or more usually resident never-married children of any age” and households, which comprises “a group of people [...] living at the same address with common housekeeping arrangements”.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore important to note that the 4,068 lone parent family units recorded for South Tipperary correspond with 3,726 lone parent households, 326 of which include other, not necessarily related persons. This means that 342 or 8.4 per cent of lone parent families in the county live in households or communal establishments, in which they cannot be considered the main householder. The vast majority of them are lone parents living at their parents’ home. The number of lone parent families in multi-family households such as these is slightly below the national figure of 10.3 per cent.

	Number of lone parent households	Proportion of overall number of households (%)	Change since 2002 (%)
Clonmel	919	14.5	+ 0.5
Carrick-on-Suir	368	17.4	+ 0.8
Tipperary	341	17.6	+ 0.9
Cahir	174	13.5	+ 1.6
Cashel	172	16.0	+ 0.7

Table 2: Number of lone parent households in South Tipperary’s urban centres in 2006

<sup>1</sup> Central Statistics Office: Census 2006. Volume 3 – Household Composition, Family Units and Fertility. Dublin: Government of Ireland 2007, p. 144.

A comparison with the data available from the 2002 Census shows only a small increase in the number of lone parent households in South Tipperary considering the overall increase in the total number of households over the past four years. In 2002, a total of 3,253 lone parent households accounted for 12.3 per cent of the overall number of households. Although there were 473 additional lone parent households recorded in 2006, this represents only a marginal increase of 0.4 per cent when seen in the context of overall population growth. Table 2 shows the number of lone parent households recorded for the five urban centres in South Tipperary together with any increases since 2002. From this it is evident, that Clonmel has the largest number of lone parent households in the county while their increase since 2002 is the lowest among the five towns. Cahir, for example, had the largest increase in lone parent households, but in 2006 still maintains the lowest percentage of lone parent households in terms of the overall number of households in the town.

A look at the rural/urban dimension shows that there was no significant increase between 2002 and 2006 in the percentage of lone parent households located in the rural areas of South Tipperary. In 2002, lone parent households outside the five towns accounted for 10.4 per cent of the overall numbers of rural households. This compares to 10.6 per cent in 2006. Table 3 shows that lone parent households in the urban centres, in comparison, have increased by 0.7 per cent since the last census in 2002. In addition, their proportion of the overall number of private households (i.e. 15.5 per cent) is significantly higher than in rural areas.

	No. of lone parent households	Proportion of overall number of households (%)	Change since 2002 (%)
Urban Centres	1974	15.5	+ 0.7
Rural South Tipperary	1752	10.6	+ 0.2

Table 3: Number of lone parent households in rural and urban areas of the county

According to the 2006 Census, more than half of all lone parent households in South Tipperary, i.e. 53 per cent can be located in the five towns while the remaining 47 per cent are situated in the rural areas of the county. There has only been a small shift in this distribution since 2002 (see Table 4), namely a 0.6 per cent movement toward the urban areas.

	2002	2006
Rural lone parent households	47.6%	47.0%
Urban lone parent households	52.4%	53.0%

Table 4: Distribution of lone parent households in terms of urban/rural dimension

A comparison between lone parent family units and households in the county's towns shows not only notable differences among the towns (see the percentage of lone parents not in their own household in Table 5) but also sharp increases in the last four years in the number of lone parent families who do not (or presumably cannot) maintain a household of their own. In Cashel, more than 10 per cent of lone parent families live in multi-family households. Of the 46 new lone parent families in this town, only 27 could afford independent accommodation in the last four years. The percentage of lone parent families living in households other than their own has seen similarly significant increases in Clonmel (by 7 per cent) and Carrick-on-Suir (by 7.1 per cent).

	No. of lone parent family units 2006 and (2002)	No. of lone parent households 2006 and (2002)	Percentage of lone parents not in their own household 2006 and (2002)
Clonmel	1008 (836)	919 (821)	8.8% (1.8%)
Carrick-on-Suir	407 (323)	368 (315)	9.6% (2.5%)
Tipperary	366 (308)	341 (299)	6.8% (2.9%)
Cahir	181 (123)	174 (122)	3.9% (0.8%)
Cashel	192 (146)	172 (145)	10.4% (0.7%)

Table 5: Comparison of lone parent households and family units in South Tipperary's towns

As Table 6 shows, lone fathers and their children are more likely (although not significantly so) to live in a household of their own when compared to lone mothers. Lone fathers and their children account for 14.7 per cent of lone parent families in South Tipperary which is generally in line with national figures. Their proportion of all lone parent families has only marginally decreased in the last four years by approximately one quarter of a per cent.

	No. of family units	No. of households	Percentage of families not in their own household
Lone mothers	3,472	3,171	8.7%
Lone fathers	596	555	6.9%

Table 6: Gender divide in respect of lone parent families and households in South Tipperary in 2006

It is interesting to observe that lone father families have a tendency to be home to older children. Table 7 illustrates that only about 20 per cent of one-parent families headed by fathers comprise children who are all under 15 years of age compared to almost 45 per cent of lone mother families in this category. By far the largest group of lone father families are those where all children are aged 15 years or over. It would be more than speculative at this point to attempt to determine the origins of this divide as no data is available that could be used to cross-reference these families in terms of marital status, age of parent or any other relevant criterion.



	Lone mothers	Lone fathers
All children are aged under 15 years	1,543 (44.4%)	119 (19.9%)
All children are aged 15 years or over	1,553 (44.7%)	435 (73.0%)
Other	376 (10.9%)	42 (7.1%)

Table 7: Lone parent families by gender and age of children

Information on the number of children growing up in one-parent families is available in two regards. Firstly, it can be stated that 6,524 children or 21.6 per cent of all children in South Tipperary were living in lone parent families in 2006. Lone parents in the county have an average of 1.6 children. Other (two-parent) families have a slightly lower average of 1.36 children. Alternatively, it can be said that the 18.9 percent that are lone parent families are home to 21.6 per cent of children in South Tipperary. The vast majority of children who grow up in one-parent families, i.e. 86.4 per cent, grow up with their mothers.

	Lone mothers	Lone fathers
1 child	48.9%	9.1%
2 children	22.8%	3.6%
3 children	9.2%	1.4%
4 children	3.3%	0.4%
5 children	0.9%	0.1%
6 children	0.2%	0.03%
More than 7 children	0.2%	

Table 8: Exclusively lone parent households by number of children

Secondly, a breakdown of the number of children in lone parent families is available for those families who maintain a household and do not share this household with any other persons. This is true for 3,400 of the 4,068 lone parent families recorded in the 2006 Census. A breakdown of this grouping by gender of the parent and number of children is available in Table 8. It shows that 58 per cent of lone parents (48.9 per cent lone mothers plus 9.1 per cent of lone fathers) have one child only. More than one quarter of the lone parent households are home to two children, approximately one in ten has three children and circa 5 per cent of the lone parent families in their own household have four or more children. A comparison of the same data in 2002 shows no notable changes over the last four years, with the exception perhaps of a 10 per cent increase in the number of lone fathers who have only one child. This increase is the main contributor to the overall increase in lone fatherhood over this period.

### Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS)

In addition to the information that is available from the census report, data has been provided by the Central Statistics Office on the composition of family units in each electoral division in the country. This information is particularly useful in locating larger



concentrations or higher numbers of lone parent families outside urban centres although the latter remain undoubtedly the areas with the highest actual numbers of lone parent families.

According to the SAPS, there are quite a number of electoral divisions in South Tipperary that show an above average concentration of lone parent families in comparison to the overall number of family units. However, the general population density is very low in some of these areas, so that the high proportion of lone parent families translates into small actual numbers of such family units. In order, therefore, to determine those areas in South Tipperary with a comparatively high number of lone parents outside of the urban centres, it is necessary to view electoral divisions with a large concentration of lone parents in clusters. By omitting those electoral divisions that are immediately neighbouring urban centres (for example Clonmel Rural and Killaloan/Kilsheelan in the case of Clonmel or Mortlestown and Kilcommon in the case of Cahir), the following areas in the county gain significance in terms of their lone parent population:

- The Slieveardagh area in the north east of South Tipperary covered by the Killenaule, New Birmingham, Poynstown, Buolick, Ballyphillip, Faranrory and Ballingarry electoral divisions. These account for 222 lone parent families. One could also include the Mullinahone electoral division which is further south of this area adding a further 47 lone parents. Particularly New Birmingham (Glengoose), Mullinahone and Killenaule show very high proportions of lone parent families with up to 34.7 per cent of all family units.
- The Fethard and Peppardstown electoral divisions account for a total of 128 lone parent families. Both Cloneen (to the south east of Fethard) and Tullamain (to the west of Fethard) show above average proportions of lone parent families adding another 58 lone parent families to this grouping.
- In the north west of the county, the area comprising Cappagh, Donohill, Clonoulty West and Clogher shows a total of 111 lone parent families that are relatively isolated from the next closest urban centres, i.e. Tipperary Town or Cashel.
- In the western corner of South Tipperary, the Emly/Lattin/Cullen/Shroneil area is home to 97 lone parent families, which represents a relatively large proportion in comparison to the rest of the population.
- Finally, Clogheen and Ardfinnan – although geographically connected at one point – are two electoral divisions with relatively large numbers of lone parents that stand out in an area that shows low numbers/densities of lone parents otherwise. There are 94 lone parent families between these two electoral divisions.

Other electoral divisions that show either high numbers or high proportions of lone parent families are in the immediate vicinity of an urban centre which would potentially enable lone parents to access services in these towns.

Figure 1 shows all electoral divisions in South Tipperary according to the actual numbers of lone parent families as recorded by the Census 2006. It does not take into consideration the actual population density or the proportion of lone parent families in

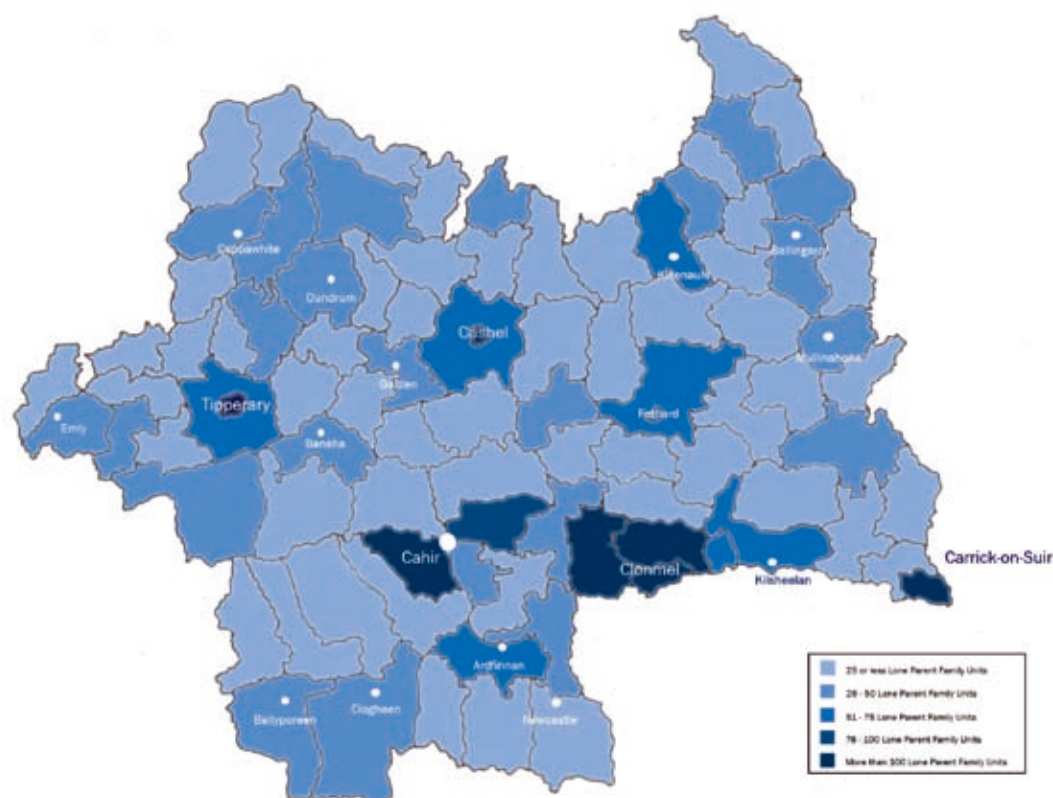


Figure 1: Map of electoral divisions by number of lone parents (SAPS 2006)

relation to the overall number of family units in an electoral division. This explains why not all of the above mentioned electoral divisions are emphasised by darker shades of blue which would indicate higher numbers of lone parent families. What becomes quite obvious, however, from Figure 1 is the concentration of lone parent families in the urban centres of South Tipperary (i.e. Tipperary, Cashel, Cahir, Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir) and their hinterlands.

## Other Sources of Statistical Information

Apart from the Census and SAPS data, the only other source of statistical information in relation to lone parent families are the records kept by state or semi-state agencies. In terms of housing needs, the information collated by the local authorities in respect of tenancy and waiting lists may serve as valuable indicators. In 2005, there were 328 lone parent families on housing lists in South Tipperary representing more than one third (36.6 per cent) of the overall applicants. A breakdown of these figures is given in Table 8. There are no figures available from the local authorities on the number of actual lone parent tenants in the same period.

Records on the housing needs of lone parents for the period after 2005 are inconsistent and only partly accessible. Current numbers are, for example, available from Tipperary Town Council. While lone parents made up only 15 per cent of housing applicants in 2005 according to Table 9, the figure reported by Tipperary Town Council earlier this year was 134 or 72.4 per cent of all persons on the waiting list. This would suggest a dramatic

increase in the number of lone parents in need of local authority housing. In terms of actual tenancy, lone parents accounted for approximately 60 per cent of all local authority tenants in 2006 and 2007.

Clonmel Borough Council – to give another example – reported 98 lone parents on their housing list in May 2007. This equates to 26 per cent of all applicants. Approximately one third of local authority houses in Clonmel are occupied by lone parent families.

Local Authority	No. of lone parent families on housing list	% of overall households on the waiting list
South Tipperary County Council	167	36%
Carrick-on-Suir Town Council	51	58%
Cashel Town Council	24	27%
Clonmel Borough Council	75	42%
Tipperary Town Council	11	15%

Table 9: Number and percentage of lone parent families on housing waiting lists with local authorities in South Tipperary in 2005<sup>2</sup>

It is evident, that the statistical information that is available on the housing needs of lone parents is too varied to allow any conclusions to be drawn. However, the above examples illustrate that lone parents clearly represent a group largely in need of affordable housing. This is expressed on the one hand by the numbers of lone parents on housing lists (ranging from 15 to 58 per cent of all applicants in 2005) and on the other hand by the large proportion of lone parent tenants (up to 60 per cent in Tipperary in 2006 and 2007).

## Summary

With a total of 4,068, the number of lone parent families who live in South Tipperary is largely in line with the figures quoted by the Central Statistics Office for the national context. Neither the breakdown into lone mothers (85.4 per cent) and lone fathers (14.6 per cent), nor the actual proportion of lone parent families (18.9 per cent) when compared to the overall number of family units is notably higher or lower than the national figures. In this sense, South Tipperary has a somewhat inconspicuous lone parent population.

More than half of the lone parent households in the county are located in the five urban centres, i.e. Clonmel, Tipperary, Carrick-on-Suir, Cashel and Cahir. The remaining 47 per cent are situated in the rural areas of South Tipperary, whereby larger proportions and/or numbers of lone parents could be identified in the north-western, north-eastern and western corners of the county, as well as in Fethard and the surrounding area and Ardfinnan/Clogheen. These “pockets” of larger numbers of lone parent households are

<sup>2</sup> Source: Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government: Housing Statistics. Available from: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/>

characterised by a certain degree of isolation from the urban centres. The density of lone parent families is approximately one third higher in the urban than in the rural areas. The number of lone parent families in the towns has increased at a slightly faster rate than the general population growth there.

Apart from this, the number of lone parent families has largely increased in line with general population growth. What has dramatically increased is the number of lone parent families who do not or cannot afford to live in a household of their own. While the 8.4 per cent proportion of lone parents who live in multi-family households (i.e. at their parents' home) is still below the national figure, it has risen by an average of six per cent in South Tipperary's towns over the past four years.

The proportion of children growing up in one-parent families is only marginally higher than that of children growing up in two-parent families. The vast majority of these children (86.4 per cent) grow up with their mothers. Children growing up with their fathers are more likely to be 15 years of age or older. The average number of children per family growing up in a lone parent family is higher than that in two-parent families, but only marginally so. Approximately 58 per cent of lone parent families have one child, 26 per cent have two children, 10 per cent have three children and six per cent have four or more children.

Statistical information to determine in detail the risk of poverty among lone parent families is not available at present. However, housing statistics published by the local authorities show that lone parents are a group largely dependent on affordable/local authority housing which is exemplified by notable proportions of lone parents on housing lists or in local authority tenancies.

# needs analysis

## Survey Participants

In total, 402 lone parents from South Tipperary participated in the postal survey, which at a rate of 16.1 per cent represented more than double the anticipated response.<sup>1</sup> As for its composition, the sample proved to be principally representative in respect of urban/rural divide, age, nationality, ethnicity, household composition and family size. Lone fathers, unfortunately, are underrepresented to some extent while no statement can be made on how representative the respondent group is in terms of marital status, as no such statistical information is available for reference purposes.

When compared to the number of lone parents in South Tipperary that is available from the Census 2006, the sample group accounts for 9.9 per cent of the actual number of lone parent families in the county.

Lone mothers accounted for 96.5 per cent of the respondents, while lone fathers made up 2.5 per cent of the sampling group.<sup>2</sup> The age group that dominated the sample fell in the range 20 to 44 years. Those aged 25 to 29 years formed the largest sub-group. Lone parents aged 15 to 19 accounted for 2.2 per cent of the sample. At the other end of the age scale, the over 60's represented 1 per cent. Almost 64 per cent of the respondents lived in one of South Tipperary's larger towns (i.e. Clonmel, Tipperary, Carrick-on-Suir, Cashel and Cahir). Those lone parents who live in rural areas made up 30.3 per cent of the sampling group. The parishes that were represented outside of the urban centres cover the county almost in its entirety. Among the urban group, lone parents from Clonmel accounted for the largest group with more than one quarter of the entire sample. Respondents from Tipperary Town and Carrick-on-Suir accounted for almost 15 per cent of the sampling group each. Lone parents from Cahir (4.5 per cent) and Cashel (5 per cent) complete the urban sample group.

Two thirds of the respondents stated they were never married. Those who were separated accounted for the second largest group in terms of marital status with almost 20 per cent. Only 7 per cent of survey participants were divorced. Although viewed critically, 2.2 per cent of the respondents referred to themselves as "deserted". A further 2 per cent of lone parents were either widowed or had a partner who had died. Four respondents stated that they were married in circumstances that nevertheless forced them to parent alone.

One in ten respondents was a non-Irish national, whereby British citizens formed almost half of this group. Other nationalities within the sampling group included, amongst others, Polish, Latvian, Nigerian, Japanese and American. A small number of respondents stated they held dual citizenship, i.e. Irish-British.

<sup>1</sup> Altogether 2,500 questionnaires were distributed via local agencies and community groups and through a DSFA-facilitated mail shot to all persons in receipt of One-Parent Family Payment.

<sup>2</sup> All percentages represent actual percentages unless otherwise noted. In other words, missing answers are taken into consideration for calculations.

Four lone mothers stated that they are members of the travelling community, of whom two were never married, one was separated and one widowed.

The survey was unable to source any respondents who are parenting children other than their own, with the exception of two lone parents who stated they were guardians to a family member (i.e. grandchild). The likelihood of children living in a foster/adoptive lone parent family is difficult to establish, but is presumed to be comparatively low. Consequently none of the survey participants exemplified this type of family composition.

Over half of the respondent group had one child only. Lone parents with two children accounted for the second largest group with 28.6 per cent. Less than one in five respondents stated that they had three or more children. The highest number of children recorded in the sample was 11, although the majority of these children were adults in this particular case. The largest number of dependent children was recorded by a widow with eight children ranging from 1 to 17 years of age. Among those with four children or more, one respondent was never married, nine separated, three widowed, one deserted and one married.

The Central Statistics Office distinguishes between lone parent households and lone parent family units. The importance of this distinction is evident in the sampling group, where almost 17 per cent do not maintain an independent household. In the sample, 402 lone parent family units compare to 332 lone parent households. Over 15 per cent of lone parents stated they were living in their parents' household. This compares to 8.4 per cent as recorded by the Census in 2006. In some cases, these living arrangements appeared to be of an involuntary nature and were further complicated by other extended family members or younger siblings who also shared the household.

As it was the intention of this survey to illustrate the diversity among one-parent families, no survey respondent was disqualified from the sampling group on the grounds of marital status, age or age of children, so long as he or she thought of himself/herself as a lone parent and (had) raised one or more children on their own. In other words, while the vast majority of the sampling group would satisfy the definition of a 'lone parent' as used, for example, by the census, the Revenue or the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the survey remained open under the above provisions to lone parents with non-dependent (adult) children, those cohabiting and those legally married.

## **Case Studies and Examples of Lone Parents' Experiences**

In order to highlight the diversity of lone parents in South Tipperary, a small number of interviews were conducted with selected lone parents that each exemplified specific circumstances that are believed to influence to some degree the experience of an individual who is parenting alone. In this sense,

- Fiona and Clodagh, who are sisters, represent young lone mothers in rural areas;<sup>1</sup>
- Phil represents older lone parents who have raised their children;

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<sup>1</sup> The names of all interviewees have been altered in order to protect their anonymity particularly as most of them are from small town or rural backgrounds.

- Mary exemplifies a widow and lone mother from the travelling community;
- Kieran represents lone fathers; and
- Evelyn, who originally comes from Africa, typifies the experience of non-Irish lone parents

Quite a large number of participants in the postal survey shared their experience of parenting alone in as much detail as the interviewees. In order to acknowledge their efforts, the five case studies are accompanied by a small number of other examples of lone parents whose comments illustrate common concerns and difficulties among lone parents. In an effort to remain as true as possible to the experiences and opinions of these lone parents, their comments are reprinted as they appear on the questionnaires with minimal editing.

### FIONA & CLODAGH

*“I wish I wasn’t parenting alone, but I don’t wish I was still with her father”*

Fiona and Clodagh are sisters who are both in their early 20’s and who, coincidentally, share the reality of being lone mothers. Although both sisters support each other emotionally and practically, their experiences as lone parents are quite different.

Clodagh, 23, the younger of the sisters, lives in a village in South Tipperary with her four-year old child. Pregnant at in her late teens, she initially raised her child with her then partner, but separated a few years ago and moved from another county to South Tipperary where some of her family live. Clodagh currently works in her first full-time job. During the interview, Clodagh acknowledged the difficulties lone parents such as herself face, but viewed her own circumstances in a positive light and was hopeful for the future.

Fiona, 25 lives with her mother and her 8-month old child in the same village as Clodagh and works part-time. As opposed to her sister who had the support of a partner initially, Fiona was “never emotionally involved” with the father of her child although she has known him for many years and has been parenting alone from the time her child was born. She suffers from depression and finds it somewhat difficult to cope as a first-time mother and lone parent.

Both sisters are supported by the fathers of their children. Fiona is in receipt of maintenance payments following a paternity test that forced her daughter’s father to recognise his child and now has agreed access times. Clodagh considers herself “a lot luckier than other mothers” in that her child’s father is “quite approachable”. He takes his daughter every weekend and on bank holidays, although arrangements are a little bit more difficult to make in this respect since she moved to South Tipperary.

Clodagh is availing of two separate community childcare facilities (a community preschool and a full-time day care service) and says that childcare costs were one of the reasons she moved to South Tipperary: Doing so has apparently halved her childcare costs. Fiona had to find a private childminder as none of the local childcare facilities accepts children under the age of 12 months. The cost of childcare is similar for both sisters at €75 and €80 a week respectively.



Accommodation has proven somewhat difficult for both sisters. While Fiona and her daughter are living at home, Clodagh is renting a house on the private market. Fiona would like to move into her own home, but cannot afford the move financially. She depends on landlords accepting Rent Supplement and is reluctant to avail of what she perceives to be the poor standard of accommodation available in this category. She is bound geographically to stay close to her family for support and cannot afford private/rented accommodation. Fiona has recently applied for local authority housing, but has been told that the waiting period before she could be accommodated would be approximately two years. Clodagh on the other hand would like to purchase a home, but cannot see how she will be able to obtain a mortgage when part of her income (i.e. Social Welfare payments) will not be taken into account. After a four-year waiting period on a housing list at her previous address, she chose not to apply for local authority housing in South Tipperary.

Both sisters view themselves fortunate with their jobs. While Fiona appreciates the flexibility that her job offers her in terms of working hours as well as the support she receives when taking up training opportunities, she hopes to be able to move into full-time employment once her daughter reaches pre-school age. At present, she says she has “no other choice, but to work part-time”. Referring to secondary benefits such as the Medical Card, she says “If I worked full-time, I’d lose out a lot”. She regrets the limited training opportunities that are available in her area, which seem to concentrate on IT, childcare and rural development. None of these are particularly appealing to her, but she has nevertheless enrolled on a teacher-training course. Clodagh has also enrolled on this course and sees this as an excellent opportunity to build up an income over time from tutoring. She strongly believes “that you have to better yourself education-wise”. While she agrees with Fiona, that particularly college education is inaccessible for her because of travel distances and additional childcare costs, Clodagh considers herself lucky to have “everything she wants to do” available locally. In her view, Back-to-Education courses are great opportunities for people like her. Like her sister, Clodagh is conscious of the flexibility that her work offers her.

Neither of the sisters mentioned financial difficulties. Clodagh’s income comprises of her wages and a Back-to-Work Allowance while her main expenses are; rent (€135/week), childcare and loan repayments. Clodagh says she doesn’t consider herself “particularly disadvantaged” because she has only one income. In fact, in some ways, she admits, budgeting has been a “small bit easier” since she has had the sole responsibility for her finances. Fiona is in receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment, which together with her wages and the maintenance payment from her child’s father form her income. Similarly to her sister, her main expenses are rent and childcare costs. She saves a small sum of money every week to have as a contingency fund.

The one area, where the experiences of both sisters differ greatly is that of being a mother. For Fiona, becoming a mother without the support of her child’s father has been a difficult and stressful experience that has been dominated by loneliness in many ways. Going back to work has made things easier for her, but she still wishes she could share the joys and fears of her daughter’s development with a partner. While her mother and



sister offer her support, she respects their limited time and their privacy. She misses the opportunity to talk to other lone mothers in her position and often wishes that there was a support group in her area. Financially, she feels she has lost out by a lack of information about the supports that are available for lone parents. The support she has received from services such as the Public Health Nurses was rather poor in her opinion, while she felt supports such as ante-natal classes were largely aimed at couples and made her feel “intimidated”. She now feels embarrassed when she has to explain her situation as a lone mother, but hopes that “things will get better over time”.

Clodagh finds it “easy enough” to avail of supports for lone parents or find information in this regard. According to herself, she is the type of person who will “deal with things herself”. She therefore never went to any support groups for lone parents, but knows where they are if she ever needs them. When looking for information, she prefers to use the internet. Contacting agencies by telephone can be very frustrating in her experience. As her parents have been separated for over 10 years, she takes them as an example that it is “doable to parent alone”. In some ways, it has even been a benefit for her to parent alone: “I probably would never have gone for a job opportunity here when I was going out with her father. I would never have gone to do courses or anything like that”. Summing up her experience she says she is convinced that “you are better off to parent alone, if you are happier than parenting with the father and you’re not happy. It comes across to the child.”

#### PHIL

*“If I had had more emotional support, I could have done things differently.”*

Phil is 54 years of age and the mother of four grown-up children. She has been parenting alone for over 20 years since she chose to leave her husband. She was divorced in the UK and has had no support from her children’s father since. In fact, her former husband was denied access to his children. Phil now lives alone; all of her children have left home. After years of hardship (her husband left her with debts, her business folded and she had to manage without many of the supports that are available for lone parents today), she decided, in her own words, that it was “me-time” as soon as her youngest son left home. Realising her long-existing dream, she obtained a Certificate in Psychology over a one-year course that she financed herself. She is convinced: “If I hadn’t been a lone parent for so long, I would be a psychologist by now”. Determined to follow her dream through, she is currently looking at the possibility of continuing her studies and enrolling on a four-year degree course. Finances are the only obstacle. At a cost of €12,000, she cannot afford to pay for the course herself. Unfortunately, as she no longer has dependent children, she is not eligible for any training or education grants offered by the state.

Phil’s experience of raising four children alone is in many ways different from that of young lone mothers today. After leaving her husband twenty years ago, she says, she felt intense pressure from society as women who left their husband were viewed differently by the public than, for instance, widows. At the time, she did not know any other women in her situation: “I was an oddity”. She believes that particularly her two younger children felt vulnerable and unprotected growing up without their father.

Phil thinks “It’s good that they [lone parents] have more supports now”. “There was nothing available for me, nothing. I really had a hard time and struggled trying to find work.” After losing her business, Phil worked part-time in the health system. She is currently in employment, but has to prepare for the time when her services are no longer required by her employer. Phil has depended on Social Welfare payments since she lost her business. Throughout this time, she has been able to purchase her home via the local authority housing tenant purchase scheme. While, according to Phil “things are an awful lot better” now, she finds it hard sometimes to overcome the shadows of her past: “I feel very guilty for my children’s sake that they hadn’t a better life – even though they always tell me not to.”

## **MARY**

Mary is a 54-year old mother of a large family. She is a recent widow. Most of her children are married and have left home, with the exception of her youngest. One of her children has passed away. When asked what one thing she would change if she could, she says she would “bring back her husband and [child] as none of the family occasions are the same without them”.

Mary is a member of the travelling community. She lives in a local authority housing estate in a town in South Tipperary. Whilst she is very happy to be able to live in a house that is spacious and allows her to “keep things neat and tidy”, she prefers to stay on her own and does not mix much with her neighbours. “I have been raised to fend for myself” she says.

Mary works part-time and loves her work. After having been a mother in the home all of her adult life, she is glad to have “got out of the home”. Her current job represents her first ever paid employment. Her wages are supplemented by the One-Parent Family Payment and the Family Income Supplement. She nevertheless finds it difficult to budget and cope financially. Offering food to visitors and extended family can take up considerable amounts of money and her determination to fulfil all of her youngest child’s wishes leaves little money for Mary to spend on herself.

While she received no formal education herself due to the fact that her family was travelling when she was a child, Mary is very worried about her youngest child’s education. Currently in secondary school, her child is struggling to continue attending, has only learned to read and write in secondary school and is at great risk of dropping out of school completely.

Besides the worries for her youngest child, Mary’s life is marked by a distinct loneliness. Within the travelling community she feels patronised: “You feel very low when your husband is gone and people look down on you.” Mary suffers from depression and feels that her biggest problem is that she has no time for herself.

## KIERAN

*“It’s a lot harder as a man, but to be honest I am happier being a lone parent now than when I was married.”*

Not originally from South Tipperary, Kieran has been living in a town there for almost 20 years. He lives with his child who is eight years of age. Kieran split up with his child’s mother after several years of marriage when his child was of pre-school age. Initially, his child lived with her mother after the split, but “things did not work out”. As Kieran had stayed at home with his child from the beginning, it was easy for him to consider full custody. Luckily, he says, this arrangement was easily arrived at and agreed by all without the involvement of any legal representation. Kieran’s ex-wife has access to the child every second weekend.

Kieran opted not to insist on maintenance payments or any other financial support from his wife for two reasons, as he explains. Firstly, his eligibility for One-Parent Family Payment remains untouched and secondly, with no financial dependence on his ex-wife he feels he has more autonomy in the care of his daughter.

Kieran feels that everyone should be given the opportunity to be a full-time parent. “My view of a parent is someone who looks after their child”, he says. Therefore, in his opinion, working full-time and having a child in childcare is not the best option. At the same, staying at home and not working at all is not viable for him as he likes to be busy. Working in fast-food outlets for the last 15 years has given him the advantage of flexible working hours, but has not satisfied him professionally. He is now enrolled on a training course and hopes to be in a position to have sufficient income from tutoring within the next two years to no longer be reliant on Social Welfare. Choosing a professional career in education allows him to retain his flexibility around his daughter’s needs as he hopes to be working when she is in school.

Kieran’s five-year experience as a lone father includes numerous examples of occasions when he feels he has been disadvantaged. The processing of his application for the One-Parent Family Payment took almost two years, while his wife had received the payment within a few weeks when she initially looked after their daughter. He often feels that “society frowns upon a father-child situation”. This was particularly the case when his child was younger. Now, he feels, he doesn’t encounter as much bias anymore. But he can’t be sure whether he has learned to ignore it or whether society has changed in this regard.

Kieran has been involved with a lone parent support group which is dominated by lone mothers. Interestingly, when asked if he would prefer to join a lone father group if it existed, he declines and says that he primarily views himself as a lone parent, not a lone father. He does admit, however, that settling in the group has been difficult for all parties and that it took almost a year before he felt accepted. The experiences are very different for lone mothers and fathers and the approach to solving problems is different as well. Nevertheless, when the group focuses on the fact that they are parenting alone for their children, there is some common ground. He agrees with a lot of lone mothers when he concludes “To be honest I am happier being a lone parent now than when I was married”.

## EVELYN

*“Living on Social Welfare is so difficult. It’s like trying to mix water and oil”*

Evelyn is not originally from Ireland. She has been living in South Tipperary for several years. She is the main guardian of a relative who is in his teens and for whom she has cared since he was born. She has no children of her own. The boy has special needs and although he is attending a mainstream school it is difficult for Evelyn to imagine that he would be able to care for himself in a few years’ time.

Evelyn has been unemployed for the last five years and says she finds it difficult to find work because she has to be available to look after her relative when he is not in school. This effectively means that she can only work weekdays from 9 am to 2.30 pm. Using childcare to free up time to work is not economical because the wages she would be earning would most likely equal childcare costs. In the absence of any employment opportunities that are flexible enough to meet her needs, Evelyn has participated in several education and training schemes. To date she has completed a variety of courses. Being able to take these courses has meant for her not only that she could train for potential employment, but also that she has a reason to get out of the house and meet people.

Evelyn’s financial circumstances have been more difficult since her relative turned 16 years of age, as this meant the loss of the Domiciliary Care Allowance which she had received up to that point. At present, Evelyn is in receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment and the Back to School Footwear and Clothing Allowance. Having lived in other countries before, she feels the cost of living in Ireland is “very, very high” and does not compare favourably to the assistance she receives from Social Welfare. Evelyn cannot afford to go out and socialise in the evenings or on weekends and feels that the interaction she has with people on the training courses and with friends and neighbours compensate her for this.

She speaks highly of her Irish friends, without whom she feels “she would not have what she has”. However, she admits, that most of this support is emotional or in the form of information. But when it comes to practical support or having somebody to step in for her every so often, she is left to fend for herself. Having talked to other lone parents, she is amazed how many Irish people are in the same position as her in this respect, even though they may have family closer by. Like Kieran, Evelyn is involved with a lone parent support group which she finds very helpful.

When asked whether she finds herself different to other lone parents, she says no. But she insists that circumstances are different for every lone parent and state assistance should acknowledge this. In her case, for example, the age of her relative should not be the decisive factor in her eligibility for a payment as his special needs mean he is not able to live as independently as other young people of his age. Evelyn also criticises the type of information that is available on Social Welfare supports. For a while, she has been seeking information on whether the One-Parent Family Payment or, for example, the Carer’s Allowance would be the more appropriate assistance in her circumstances, but cannot find suitable answers from anyone. With these difficulties in mind, she does not see herself as particularly disadvantaged because of the fact that she is not originally from Ireland: “It doesn’t make a difference where you are from when you are a lone parent”.

## THE VOICES OF OTHER LONE PARENTS<sup>2</sup>

A lone father, 43, who has two children aged 13 and 14. Their mother has died.

*I love looking after my children and I can tell you that it's a full-time job. Things can be hard but I get by, by good budgeting and not living above my means. I share everything with my children and we get on great. I was made redundant, paid off my mortgage. When I was working things were worse. I was always stressed out.*

*Parents should look after their children. That's where Ireland has gone wrong. Years ago mother was the brilliant person at home. Children had more stability and weren't fobbed off to anyone. [...] I believe parenting is a full-time job until they are 18 years old when hopefully they can take care of themselves. It's amazing no-one sees why there is so much anti-social behaviour; no parents minding their children. [The Government] should leave people who want to mind their children full-time alone. These people are doing a good job. [...]*

*I wish my partner was here but she is not. I promised her I would look after her two children and I will. I worked all my life from the age of 16 until I was made redundant. I reared my kids from babies when their mother died. For nine of these years [...] I had help from my mother, when I was working. I worked shifts, mostly nights, skilled worker. When I would come home I would have to mind my kids all day. Another day's work, loved doing it. [I] got two nervous breakdowns, got depressed. [When I] worked days for the last two years, things [were] a little better. But since [I was] made redundant, things have been great. Full time parenting is brilliant. [I] have [a] great relationship with my children [and our] family life [is] better.*

*They [the children] should get no homework. They should be given revision or time to study. Sometimes they get homework they can't do and spend hours trying to do something they can't do. Luckily, I can help my kids with homework because I was educated well. Working parents get stressed out helping their kids because they are tired after both working all day. They get annoyed [by] kids bothering them because they are tired.*

*Employers don't care about your children. Remember in my case, my mother helped me for years. Now she is not well. If a child gets sick in school, I have to be there to collect them, bring them to the doctor and care for them full-time. They could be sick for two weeks. Will an employer give you two weeks off?*

*My children come home every day for their lunch. [It is] great family time together. They are on holidays and mid-term breaks a lot. We have quality time together. [...] My children will never stay for lunch just to suit me. When I worked life was full of stress. My mother was great, but she is not well and has her own life now. People use grandparents for their own personal entertainment, give them nothing, use them, after they reared their own children. One parent should rear their children. They owe them that instead of fogging them to strangers so they can live in the fast lane. Gas the rich like doctors, solicitors etc. want to work, some earning €5,000 in both wages, but want to pay no-one [and] want childcare relief. Some joke. Parents should mind their children. Money isn't great on lone parent [payment] but don't live above your means. Parents! Mind your children! [...] My kids are now at the most dangerous parts of their lives: 13 and 14 with the drugs culture out there and anti-social behaviour environment. At least I know where my kids are every day and we have quality time. Bring back full-time parenting.*

<sup>2</sup> The views expressed in the following quotations are those of the respondents and do not necessarily reflect the views of the researcher or those of the Lone Parent Initiative Network.

**A lone mother of three children, who are aged 2, 4 and 16, comments on financial supports for childcare costs:**

*The early childcare payment is a farce. It should be paid on grounds of need not just given to everyone regardless of whether they ever use childcare. It should also be paid direct to a registered childcare facility and not given as a cash payment for parents to spend as they wish.*

*The childcare payment for a parent on a VEC course is unworkable. My children's father minded them till he went back to education to complete his leaving certificate. I have since been left with massive childcare payments, which leave me in debt. This payment is NOT sufficient to cover needs. It should be paid on the basis of the whole school year and not deducted during official time off. [At present, the] payment is only made during school term, but crèches charge regardless of terms as children have to be booked in. You cannot just remove them from childcare because you have a holiday from your course. It is not possible to find work for one's "Easter holidays" etc. The amount paid should be brought into line with the realistic costs of childcare. My fees are €300 per week. The maximum amount payable is €127. This I rarely get as holidays/days off eradicate this payment. E.g. the May payment was €175, whereas my childcare fees were €1,200!*

**A lone mother, who has a 2-year old son, comments on education and financial supports:**

*I am currently enrolled in UCC. I start my 4 year degree course in September in Cork. I cannot find accommodation that will accept Rent Allowance. The rent cost is more than the HSE will allow. Rent Allowance is a joke. You have to be living in the house to apply. But before you move in the landlord wants a deposit and one month's rent in advance. If I had that kind of money I wouldn't need Rent Allowance.*

*More room for individual circumstances from the HSE and Social Welfare [would be nice]. I need to move house for college but I have to give a month's notice and have to pay for a house in Cork too which I can't afford. Now I have to ask my parents can I live with them so I can save for my deposit while Rent Allowance is being processed in a new county. I don't see why they can't just transfer the application.*

*When I return to college [my financial situation] will be very bad. Childcare bills, transport fees - I'll have to sell my car, rent, bills. My income will only be One-Parent Family Payment. My mature student grant will more than likely be granted too late in the year. I'm hoping the grant will cover childcare costs of €150 weekly. Rent Allowance does not cover full rent so a lot of my OPF will have to cover the difference. After bills, there will be very little to live on. I can understand how lone parents cannot do more. We get more money for doing nothing. I want to further my career and [receive] very little help. [The] Social Welfare Office [is] very reluctant to tell me my entitlement. It's impossible financially.*

**A 39-year-old lone mother whose daughter is 18 years of age:**

*Parenting alone [was] very lonely, hard, [you are] always stressed out about money, always watching what you spend on food, clothing, shoes etc. It was tough. I would not say it was easy. I have great respect for lone parents and I think there should be changes made to the Council's rent system [and the] medical card assessments for lone parents, but not for their child. Give these children medical cards and stop expecting lone parents who choose to work in full-time employment to pay higher tax than a married woman, to pay two sets of medical expenses [and] high rents for their Council house. Example: In 2004 I was in full-time employment, paid a Council-rent of €96 and earned €298 per week. I paid €11 on top of my rent to have a parking permit to park my car outside my front door. No medical card for me or my daughter.*



*This government needs to wake up. The next generation of adults in this country is to a greater degree being reared by lone parents and if they continue to down-trod on lone parents in all financial areas including the employment and education system, what hope have these children of getting a proper diet/ medical needs etc. being met. It will eventually in the long term cost the country more money.*

**A creative, but sincere lone father who has a 14-year old son:**

*On what would solve his childcare problems: A possible allowance towards travel costs, i.e. reduction by way of a grant for tax and insurance, even fuel. They do it for disabled and notice parking spaces are for mother and baby. Also, farmers receive fuel at reduced prices.*

*On being able to support his son's education: It's very difficult to concentrate on helping with homework. [...] Everyone knows that teachers can't teach without their teacher's manual – the book with all the formula. How about a Parents' Manual for helping their children? Guidelines and helpful hints for the parent who did not excel at algebra or the origins of Buddhism. You know, the stuff that really matters! And make it a book! I don't want to see a www.com=nothing! I can build a house from the ground up. I can just about switch a computer to on! Give us help now because our kids will be helping you when you're old.*

*On having participated in employment schemes: If that means going to the FÁS office and being given jobs that have no relation to what you do, then yes!*

*On working and parenting: Potential employers don't want to know if your child is sick. He has houses to build. Who's to blame?*

*On lone parent groups: It's for single mothers. Testosterone must be illegal. [...] It's a valuable meeting place for women to drink coffee and eat cakes and [complain] about men.*

*Thank you for putting up with this rant at the horrors of parenting alone. But you must understand that although it is hard, I don't care what I have to go through to ensure my son's happiness and development. Don't make people beg and plead for information regarding their entitlements. Send them all relevant information without asking. We just don't know what we are entitled to. Thanks again for listening. You never know, a difference just might be made.*

**This is a 21-year old woman who has twins, one of whom has a disability:**

*I have twin girls. I went through a very difficult time when they were born. I nearly lost one of the twins. She now has Cerebral Palsy as a result of her illnesses.*

*[I would like] better childcare facilities for my twins so I can get more study done and not have to depend on my family and friends all the time [and] for my college to be more understanding to my situation. Twin girls under a year, one with cerebral palsy - not an easy situation and I get no extra help only my family and my friends. I wish the government would see me as a mother who is trying and give me a Back-to-Education Allowance or something to help with childcare costs. My family and friends are tired of doing everything for nothing.*

*Those who can work should be made to work. If I could, I would be gone out in the morning but with college, it's difficult but I am doing something with my life and trying to build a life for my kids. I just wish those who can do it would to make life easier on the rest of us who need our Lone Parent [payment].*

On what one thing she would change, if she could: *Not being a lone parent. Not claiming on the social welfare. It's shameful.*

*More information should be given to people in my circumstances as to my entitlements so that I don't have to struggle through my college years trying to bring up my kids. Those of you who work behind the desk in the local Social Welfare Offices, please don't paint us all with the same brush. Some of us actually need this money and are not just sitting on our backsides ripping off tax payers.*

**A lone mother, who has a 6-year old daughter and a 2-year old son:**

*I am a single parent and when I first was a single parent it was extremely difficult emotionally, socially and financially. I was not told what I was entitled to, which was very unconstructive. I feel if more information and help was given from day one I may have recovered earlier. I am now, thank God, in a much better place. Most if not all people who become single parents have something upsetting and dramatic happen in their lives. They need re-building of self-esteem and confidence and a helping hand to do so. They need to meet understanding people to help them to move on and get the necessary educational, financial and emotional support to be the parent for the future of these children and Ireland as a whole. Thank you for this opportunity to speak and be heard.*

**A lone mother who has a 9-year old son:**

*The first few months of having the child is extremely difficult and emotional. Then once the child is born, [it is] also very difficult and emotional. It took me years to put my life back together, but I was determined not to be dependent on the State. With help from friends and parents I gained the confidence to move on and get on with life. I went back to college, did my diploma [in] Montessori education which I paid for myself between loans and work. I barely managed. I went to Social Welfare but they were horrible to deal with. Thankfully I secured a permanent job for the last 5-6 years and the first year it was scary because I didn't have [the] Lone Parent (payment) or Medical Card, but once I became permanent I was fine. Maybe people who are in that position could be given help. I am one of the lucky ones. I have a loving child, loving husband-to-be and a lovely home, so I am lucky. I hope maybe the government could give more assistance to people in less well off situations; to go back to education and when they get that job to slowly take them off benefits. Maybe a co-ordinator who would be "human" and understanding and see how they are doing. It is an area to be looked into. Once you have got a job, you're on your own and that is a daunting challenge for any parent.*

**A lone parent with two children aged 12 and 18:**

*I know it sounds daft but sometimes I feel like I would love enough money just to go on holiday. When I see this written down it looks pretty selfish in the great scheme of things. Every once in a while I think that I am not living my life using all my abilities and talents and maybe that is why I am always saying there has to be more to life than this, but then I snap out of that and just get back to what I have to do. I feel like life is passing me by and for the first time I know of, I'm not sure what to do. However, I think that my son is now getting older, my daughter is moving on and soon I'm going to have to put me first and that is a very scary thought.*



**A lone mother from a village in South Tipperary who has a 13-year old daughter:**

*On education: Everything is money-based in Ireland. My child wants to do so many extra-curricular lessons but I just cannot fund it and it's a shame. It's the ones who "have" who benefit. I fear for when my daughter is of college age. I know I will never have the funds and never borrow as that is looking for problems.*

*What she would wish for: [Be a] bit more respected. I married, didn't work out, but have been put in a category. Where I live, the first 5 houses are single parents and a few remarks have been made about it. Not fair really, especially in your 40's when you have worked all your life.*

*This country has been very good to lone parents in my opinion, but when people abuse certain areas, it affects all. I applaud most single parents and the people who help them.*

**This lone mother is 45 years of age and has a 3-year old daughter:**

*I am considered an older mother, having had my child at age 42 years. Find it extremely difficult to adjust to being a full-time mother, having worked all my life. Hope to return to work in the next year, when I shall be housed through local council or Respond Housing.*

*I would wish to be given the chance to be self-sufficient by allowing me to work long enough to clear my debts without having my benefits taken away, as has happened in the past.*

*Parenting alone can be very stressful and lonely, in my experience. I found that I would have great doubts about my ability to rear my child with confidence and security. [A] lone parent has no-one to confide in and gain support with the child.*

**A 42-year-old lone mother who lives with her 13-year-old son:**

*It is a very tough job being a lone parent. It can be very taxing at times being a lone parent when you have to be strong and independent to the best of your ability, and also trying to give your child stability and guidance. Your child comes first in everything you do and every decision you have to make. It can be lonely but you do your best.*

*My son's school has information stating that I'm a lone parent and it upsets me that when the school is corresponding with me they continually address the mail as "The Parents of..." This also upsets my son as he is well aware there is only me and him and asks why do the school do this. Not all children are in contact with their fathers and I know several people who feel the same way.*

*There should be more part-time (morning) work made available for lone parents as more people would be inclined to keep in the workforce. Many part-time jobs are aimed at flexi- work and shift work (unusual late hours) which would not suit lone parent with no partner to help with childcare. Morning work would be perfect as this could be done when children are in school and then you could be at home when they return from school.*

*I would like to see a change in the media etc reports that constantly class ASBO kids as being from "lone parents/dysfunctional families" as very offending. I know plenty of "Two-parent families" who have trouble with their children and they are not branded like lone parents. This is so unfair and unjust.*

*[I would wish] for my son not to be “branded” as the child of a lone parent. He is an intelligent and gifted artist and I’m constantly being complimented on how mannerly and polite [he is], and how I’ve brought him up. I am not blowing my own trumpet, but I feel proud when others can see I’ve done my best as a lone parent.*

*It can be very tough parenting alone. You face a lot of ups and downs. It is quite difficult when your child is at the age of asking questions: why there is no dad. The best way I explained this is “Some children live with mums and dads, some live with nanny & granddad, some live with aunts and uncles, older sisters or with just mum or just dad.” When you are loved and looked after and given a good upbringing and the freedom to speak to a parent about any problems, this is the best part of parenting alone: to have love, trust, respect and health. It’s the best you can wish for.*

#### **A 50-year old woman from a village in South Tipperary, mother to a 15-year-old girl:**

*On education: Have to work more now and no time for her needs. Lone parents must be breadwinners and mums and housekeepers. This is a lot of pressure on one person. More courses with useful content and qualifications should be provided free, and better childcare support should be provided by government so lone parents could avail of them. Better transport for people living in the countryside. I firmly believe in education and training. There are many people who cannot get educated because of young children.*

*On employment: I feel that now I have finally got (more) free time as my daughter is old enough now - my age is coming against me gaining suitable employment. I am now 50. Also, I have not managed to get any decent qualifications, which might also help me get work.*

*I was one of the “lucky ones” in that I managed to get some land off my farmer parents. But have lived in a portakabin-type building for 5-6 years; there being no funds to get a proper house built. I think there should be something done about the fact that the Lone Parent payment is not taken as means for a mortgage, or there should be some way lone parents can get finance to own their own homes. Also, I think there should be a better social amenity provided at STLPI. It’s very hard for lone parents to meet new people/partners. I feel, now my daughter is 15, I have come nearly to the end of a long struggle to keep our heads above water.*

#### **A lone mother who has a six-year old daughter and lives with her parents:**

*On what she would wish for: Try and get a house. But not one that is in a village or town. I have never and will not apply to the council for housing as I don’t want my child to live there. I have lived in the countryside all my life and I would like a bit of freedom rather than living at home. But she is a great support.*

*On what should change: All medical staff (i.e. doctors) should learn not to have their nose in the air and not treat lone parents so badly. I had no support, only from my mother. Housing should not only be in villages and towns. ECDL course should have a cheaper price for one- parent families. Education staff needs to get educated on one-parent families. In the country they still haven’t moved on to accept one-parent families. I don’t intend to talk to strangers about my “personal circumstances”. A word for this is PROBLEMS.*

*Question: Will I ever get married living at home?*

*Answer: No because everybody has only one opinion of you.*

Question: Will the council build a house for me in the country?

Answer: No. Want you to move to village or town only.

Question: Why send this [questionnaire] 7 years on and ask questions?

Answer: To help one-parent families for the future and not the present. Married couples receive more support. In Clonmel, hospital did not even ask about child's father, only is he present, and I said no and she ticked a box and walked away. Hope this helps.

#### A lone mother, who has two children:

I have a 22 year old from my first marriage. Also a 4 year old. I'd just like to say times have changed for the better, as being a lone parent. Lately things have definitely improved, supportive. Gone is the stigma. Still hard, but from 1985, whole lot better.

[...] Ireland is very good regarding education. Parents must commit 100% also. I have been lucky. I had college place, secure family unit, travelled etc. However, I feel as I believe I did, give, support, encourage, fight, sweat for your child's education. It's the key, the future. 20 years ago it was very difficult for young lone parents. Definitely improved. They and their children have choices. Hopefully these lone parents are committed and open-minded and unselfish.

#### A 27-year old mother to a 3-year old boy who lives at home with her family:

I am currently waiting for housing from the Council and have been so for the last two years. I find it extremely stressful living at home along with trying to make a life for myself and my son. I work part-time and feel that sometimes I am being punished for this by the likes of Social Welfare. I feel I lose out on opportunities that parents who decide not to work are granted. I feel it's very unfair to reward those who refuse to work and punish those that do. In most cases I have found that I would gain more if I chose not to work.

I find it impossible to return to any sort of course to improve my education. As I already work part-time I do not have the time or childminding to avail of anything on offer without losing out on money which I cannot afford to do at the moment. Again this does not seem to be a problem for parents who have decided not to work but a major hold back on those that do.

The opportunities for employment are there for everyone. I have friends, who could easily obtain employment in the morning if they chose to do so, but they are receiving payments from the Social Welfare and they know they will lose out on those payments if they decide to return to work. They decide they are financially better off staying at home.

If I had my chance back again I think I would not have returned to work after the birth of my son. If I had been aware of the restrictions placed upon me by deciding to return to work, I would have chosen not to.

As you have read, I find that the only unfair topic in lone parenting is being penalised for working. I applied for Rent Allowance and was refused because I work part-time. I only earn around €180 a week from my job. With this the amount I received in my lone parent allowance was also cut because I had chosen to work. I could not afford to rent a place of my own on the money that I earn so when I approached my Welfare Officer she told me to share a house with other people. [...] I have since decided not to return to see the [Community] Welfare Officer as I found her extremely offensive. And as she refused my application for Rent Allowance I have no choice but to live at home. It is impossible to rent a house with other people as well as try to bring my child up in a stable environment.

**A 41-year old lone mother, who has a 16-year-old son:**

*I find life as a lone parent very stressful and demanding. Having no support and no choice of having a job leaves me feeling left out, also social life for me is non-existent since I cannot afford childminders' fees. This leads to a very lonely and desperate way of life every day.*

*For a lone parent education could be improved by running the programmes during school hours and for children, more assistant teachers for children who may have education or learning problems.*

*A lone parent with a young child could do with cheaper childcare services or better, a free service. A lone parent with a school-going child could do with a job offer in school hours. A community childcare service would be an improvement for lone parents both socially and for employment opportunities and could also lead to children getting to meet within the community.*

*Due to financial difficulties, lone parents find it hard to socialise. A venue where lone parents can meet each other and bring their children along and if it was within their budgets.*

*Personal experience: poverty. I got a house a year ago. I still have to sweep the carpet as I cannot afford a hoover, have no shower though [my son] is terrified of sitting in a bath & sometimes not having proper food due to the huge bills. Solitary life: When you think about socialising that takes money which is never there and so tend to have a very lonely life which a couple of times left me very depressed.*

**A 29-year old lone mother who has one son, 6 years of age. She has two jobs:**

*In my opinion very rarely do people "decide" to become lone parent and there is still a certain amount of stigma attached to the phrase "lone parent" which I think is very unfair. I work two jobs at the moment to get money together for a deposit on a house. I was receiving rent allowance and was very happy, then was offered a house by the local authority which I had no option but to accept, as I would lose my allowance which was necessary at the time for me to continue renting. Now I live on an estate where I and my son basically sleep and leave each day because I fear my son won't stay the nice child I have brought him up as. Because I work I am still paying as much as I was renting, so financially it is of no benefit to me. I consider myself very lucky though because of family and both bosses, I am in an unusual position where I can balance work and spend time with my son. I know people who aren't so lucky. Being a lone parent is tough and we don't all "push buggies" around and bleed the country dry, but sometimes that would be an easier option.*

**Finally, a 41-year old mother of one, who has been self-employed for ten years and is now unemployed:**

*Lone parents plus stay-at-home parents can get very lonely and depressed, especially if they have no social outlet. Due to this, the motivation to seek employment can be very low. Also, self-esteem and confidence is down. The longer they remain in this situation, the worse it gets. I personally don't know where to find employment or training opportunities for me, so I think a list should be made and posted to lone parents or stay-at-homes so at least they will know what is available to them.*

*I find it very important for a parent to be there for their child, particularly a lone child of a lone parent. I think they may need the reassurance that they are loved every bit as much as a child born to your conventional married couple. It is not impossible to be the breadwinner father-mother-friend-nurse-education-taxi-and-games-coach and partner to your child, if you got a little help. I was able to do this when I was self-employed, but now I don't know how I'm going to manage and I want to rear my child, not to give her to a stranger.*

*In my relationship, I dated my boyfriend for ten years when I got pregnant. I had a lot of problems with home life. Both parents dead and being of a big family, I let them down, as they were all respectably married and businesses going etc. My pregnancy wasn't a good time for me or my boyfriend and I took it out on him. When my child was born, she was like my parents reincarnated and gave meaning to life. My boyfriend continued his single life, without any responsibilities, while I settled into motherhood and working day and night as my work allowed me to work flexible hours. My boyfriend then comes along with a new young girl, a real beauty, buys a new house, a new job, car, foreign holidays and sporting his child to the last. He now wants our child to be the centre piece of his new girlfriend's life and so does she. I find myself full of anger and rage sometimes and the child can sense these things. This is why I think counselling should be made available. Also, father has moved on and benefited greatly from our economy while I have gone the opposite and ended up broke, and without a job. But I have had the greatest pleasure and joy of being with my child every day and night since she was born.*

### Summary

As can be seen from the case studies and the selected excerpts of some of the survey participants' comments, the actual experiences of being a lone parent vary greatly. At the same time, a number of issues can be observed that appear to be common to all lone parents.

Most importantly, all of the lone mothers and fathers included here describe some degree of adversity in their lives. In fact, among the entire sampling group of 402 survey participants, not one lone parent is an exception to this. The adversity that is described varies in magnitude and severity, but is almost exclusively perceived as a particular disadvantage that is outside the power of the individual to change.

At another level, the entire reality of lone parenthood is viewed as something that occurred with little input (be that described as choice, responsibility or conscientiousness) from the individual. One could say that there is a collective perception that parenting alone is something that happens to a person. It is evident that in some cases, this clearly is the only viable philosophical stance to take (i.e. where spouses or partners have passed on). However, as resonates in many of the comments made by the lone parents in this study, the struggle to recognise one's own life choices appears to be the biggest barrier in coming to terms with lone parenthood and the difficulties it presents. Frustration, anger and disappointment are subsequently often projected onto third parties that are expected to rectify one's circumstances. Of course, the responsibility for one or more children and the desire to raise them in the best possible way further fuels and complicates the burden many of the lone parents feel that they carry.

How lone parenthood is perceived by the individual beyond the collective experience depends on a great variety of circumstances. As shown by the example of Fiona and Clodagh, who as sisters have the same familial background, personality and personal dispositions play an important part in coping with lone parenthood. Like many women, both sisters will have experienced becoming a mother for the first time as one of the greatest moments of their lives, but doing so without the support of a partner, as Fiona has, evidently imposes a significant level of distress that colours the entire reality of parenting alone. Not surprisingly, when interviewed several months after becoming a mother, Fiona is still struggling to adjust to her new life.



Phil who represents a mother that raised her children at a time when fewer supports were in place for lone parents and societal pressures on single mothers were considerably greater, revealed the sacrifices she had to make in her life in order to do so. Although her children have moved on and lead independent lives, she is struggling to overcome the guilt she feels about bringing them up without their father and without perhaps the safety and security that they could have had in a two-parent family. For those who did make a conscious decision to parent alone (in many cases this choice represents an escape from problematical, sometimes abusive relationships), the life-long implications of this both for the parent and the child/children are often added burdens to the struggles of parenting alone.

Mary's experience of lone parenthood is overridden to a large extent by her cultural background as a member of the travelling community. Like Phil, most of her children are adults who have their own families. However, with a teenage child to care for and being a recent widow, Mary's experience of lone parenthood is relatively new to her and represents an immense change from the life she had prior to her husband's passing. Both within her community and as a lone parent, her situation is atypical. In comparison to other lone parents from the travelling community, she now is the head of a very large family. In the interview, Mary viewed herself as a widow in the first instance and rationalised the responsibilities that this placed upon her against the context of her culture. In this sense, her story illustrates that the lone parenting experience of women from the traveller community cannot be seen in isolation from their cultural backgrounds. It is imperative that supports for these women acknowledge this.

The experience of men who parent alone, as illustrated by Kieran's story and the comments of two other lone fathers included above, is marked by the gender difference although many of them themselves advocate an inclusive view of lone parents in society that would not segregate fathers and mothers. In their view, however, the reality remains that they are facing additional obstacles and receive less support than lone mothers. Besides a common perception among lone fathers of being discriminated against on the grounds of gender, it is the observation of this study that lone fathers are also likely to share the opinion that parenting is a full-time job. Kieran's pursuit of a job that will allow him to spend all his time with his daughter when she is not in school and the father who considers having been made redundant a lucky circumstance that allowed him to be the parent that his children need are only two such examples. What also emerges from the comments of the survey participants and interviewee is that men's approach to lone parenthood varies from that of women in that they tend to have a more pragmatic, problem-solving approach and focus on accepting, if not surmounting their situation rather than having an emotionally-driven response to it. One lone father maybe best describes it when he says: "Being a single parent is very hard, but you just have to get on with it."

Evelyn's experience as a lone parent is influenced by at least three aspects that dominate her story. Firstly, she is not the natural parent of the boy she cares for. Secondly, he has special needs that inhibit him from living as independently as other young people of his age. Thirdly, Ireland is not her home, but her adopted country. Neither Evelyn nor any of the other lone parents from non-Irish backgrounds who participated in the survey made

any reference to discrimination or disadvantage on racial or ethnic grounds. However, a common complaint among this group is a lack or an ambiguity of information on supports for lone parents. In some cases, the personal circumstances of these lone parents are outside the general eligibility criteria for Social Welfare payments and represent an additional, largely financial burden. The lack of family and friends that other lone parents may have (for example for babysitting) makes it extremely difficult for non-Irish lone parents to socialise and to make contacts that in turn could facilitate free time for them in the future, as well as providing much-needed personal support. While the fact that Evelyn is not caring for her natural child does not seem to have any emotional, practical or other implications, her experience of having a child with special needs presents a number of difficulties for her, both in financial terms and in terms of her own freedom. Surprisingly, very few of the lone parents who have children with disabilities and who participated in this study emphasised the additional caring needs that their children require and the added obligations this places upon them.

In summary, it can be said that multiple disadvantage is not uncommon among lone parents as a group. However, the impact of potentially adverse variables such as ethnicity, age, gender, availability of family supports, causes of or motives for parenting alone as well as the number/age and possible disabilities of children greatly depends on a person's disposition and his or her ability to counter the situation they are in. Often lone parenthood is perceived by those who are confronted by it as a predestination for hardship and deprivation. While this is certainly plausible in the light of the wealth of anecdotal evidence presented, it may prevent a large number of lone parents from becoming more proactive in taking responsibility for their life and their future. In this respect, emotional and psychological supports should receive much wider acknowledgment in the discourse about effective and long-lasting solutions for lone parents in Ireland than is the case at present.

## **Children and Childcare**

The lack and the cost of childcare has been identified in a number of studies on lone parents as a persistent barrier that prevents them from taking up employment and from remaining in or returning to education.<sup>1</sup> The establishment of the County Childcare Committees, increases in Child Benefit and the introduction of the Early Childcare Supplement in recent years have, however, had little impact on the overall difficulties that lone parents experience in terms of childcare. Even integrated education programmes which include childcare allowances (i.e. by FÁS and the VEC's) fail to address the childcare needs of lone parents adequately, either in the form of insufficient amounts to cover actual childcare costs or in that they fall short by failing to take account of how childcare facilities operate in practice. A need for more and better childcare facilities and after-school services still exists and continues to prevent many lone parents from taking up adequate, high quality employment or indeed, any work at all.

Childcare and childcare needs did not constitute a primary focus of this study, but rather represents a subject that appears to resurface continually through most sections of the questionnaire, be it in the form of a barrier to taking up employment, a cause for discontinuing education, a cost that creates severe financial difficulties for those in education or employment or an area where many, against their intentions, heavily depend on family. The role of childcare will therefore be examined in greater detail in the relevant chapters.

At this point, only quantitative data is examined in terms of the survey participants' immediate parenting circumstances, including the number, age profile and ordinary residence of children, the usage of childcare options, and factors impacting on their role as parents such as the disability of a child or caring responsibilities for other persons.

As stated in the chapter on the statistical profile of lone parents in South Tipperary, the vast majority of them (circa 58 per cent) have one child only. A further 26 per cent approximately have two children, while the remaining 16 per cent have three or more children. In the sampling group of this study, 52.5 per cent of survey participants stated they have one child, 28.6 per cent said they have two children and 18.9 had three or more children. The sample is thus quite representative in terms of family size.

Of the 740 children whose parents participated in the survey, just over one quarter (i.e. 26.6 per cent) were aged 4 years or under. More than half (55 per cent) were between 5 and 18 years of age and 16.8 per cent were deemed "adult children" at the age of 19 or over. Only 11.2 per cent of the sampling group had adult children only in this sense and were hence considered not to be in need of childcare. This group largely constituted the faction of the sampling group that stated that not all of their children were ordinarily living at home. Nine in ten respondents had all of their children living with them, 1.7 per cent were living without any of their children, while 8 per cent had some, but not all of their children living with them. The circumstances leading to separations from children apart from adult children, were predominantly custody arrangements and cases of non-Irish lone parents whose children remained in the home country.

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<sup>1</sup> Reference is made particularly to Healy, Grainne: *Lone Parents: Profile, Policy and Provision. A Local Study*. Doras Bui and Northside Partnership: May 2004 and Loftus, Camille: *One Size Fits All? Irish Governments' Failed Approach to One-Parent Families 1994-2004*. OPEN May 2004.



Seven and a half per cent of lone parents had a child with a disability, the severities of which varied greatly. A larger proportion of these were related to mental health and learning disabilities which included ADHD and dyslexia. Complex disabilities and conditions that require a great degree of extra care and understanding were equally common. Examples included autism, cerebral palsy and Crohn's Disease. Interestingly, few of the lone parents who had children with disabilities emphasised the added caring obligations this imposed upon them. When asked if they were satisfied with the supports they receive in respect of their child, the group was divided almost equally. No correlation was found between the type or degree of a child's disability and the satisfaction of the parent with the support they are receiving.

Another group of lone parents who had to cope with additional caring responsibilities were those who care for another person, most likely a parent or other family member. Over five per cent of the lone parents in the sampling group are carers. Similar to those lone parents who have children with a disability, few indicated difficulties with these added responsibilities.

In terms of childcare needs, the sample included 173 lone parents who had children at a pre-school age and 274 lone parents who had children of a school-going age. Of these, 61 lone parents had children in both categories and were potentially in need of pre- and after-school care for their children. Of those who have children with pre-school needs, almost half (45.7 per cent) stated that they were minding their children exclusively. A slightly smaller proportion, i.e. 41.6 per cent, avails of other childcare options. With 47.2 per cent, the majority of those availing of other childcare options used crèches and preschools. Family members were minding children in 40.3 per cent of cases, while 19.4 per cent could afford to use childminders.

At 67.5 per cent, the proportion of those looking after their children exclusively was significantly higher in the group of lone parents with school-going children. Only approximately one quarter of lone parents who have school-going children use other childcare options, preferably family members (69.3 per cent). A small proportion avail of community groups which offer after-school care (10.7 per cent) and childminders (14.7 per cent).

In order to determine if child caring responsibilities prevented those who are not in employment from taking it up, the preferred childcare options of those not employed were examined closer. It was found that 61.3 per cent of those with pre-school children and 87.6 per cent of those with school-going children were the sole minders of their children. Of those who stated they use other childcare options, the vast majority of parents of pre-school children availed of crèches or pre-schools (76 per cent) while those who have school-going children relied heavily on family members (70 per cent). The relatively high numbers of parents of pre-school aged children who avail of childcare facilities are an indicator that childcare is not viewed as an alternative to being a stay-at-home parent, but rather as an addition. The educational and social benefits of childcare facilities appear to become secondary once the child enters the school system. This would suggest that the use of childcare facilities is not disregarded by lone parents as a viable option, but that costs and availability of childcare, if any is indeed available, constitute barriers to taking up employment.

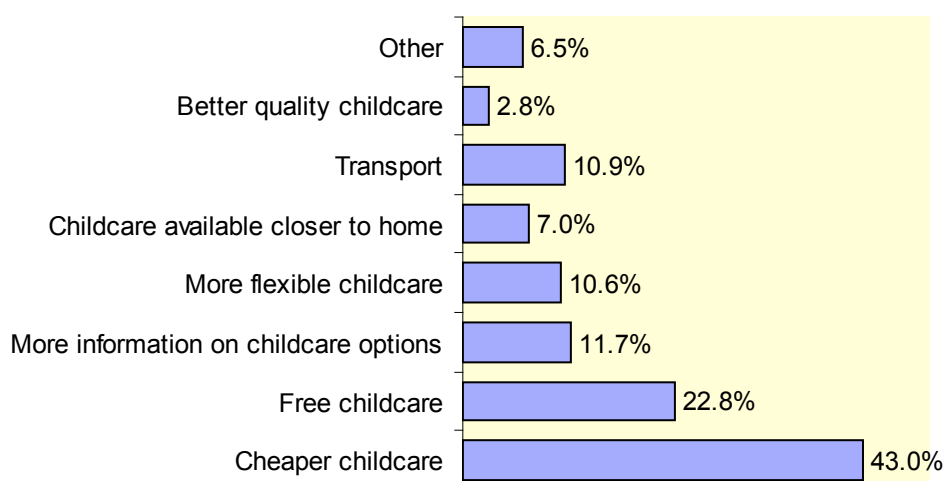


Figure 2: Aspects that would improve childcare difficulties for lone parents

When asked what would resolve their childcare problems, 43 per cent of the respondents with pre-school and/or school-aged children said that it would help their situation if childcare was cheaper (comp. Figure 2). More than one in five lone parents would like to see free childcare, whereas more flexible childcare to meet their needs, more information on childcare options or simply transport are each required by approximately one in ten respondents.

### Summary

Whilst this survey did not focus primarily on the childcare needs of lone parents, it did try to establish the range of situations of lone parents in terms of their children's care. Although a minority, there are lone parents with additional caring responsibilities that result from having a child with a disability or caring for a parent or other family member. These added responsibilities do not tend to be brought to the forefront by those affected. There are also lone parents who are geographically separated from some of their children due to custody arrangements or circumstances that force one parent to live in another country. Some lone parents have children of a pre-school age, some have school-going children and some have both. In individual cases, the age gap between two siblings can be fifteen years or more.

What most of the lone parents have in common, however, is that they depend on childcare facilities, private childminders or family for childminding. A closer look at those lone parents who are not currently in employment revealed that the use of childcare facilities is not necessarily viewed as an alternative to minding a child as a parent, but rather as an addition. It is assumed that educational and social benefits offered by crèches and preschools may be the primary considerations in the decision of a lone stay-at-home parent to use these facilities. In any case, it is first and foremost the cost of childcare that presents a difficulty for lone parents. In addition, lone parents wish for more flexible childcare facilities and for more information outlining the different childcare options.

## **Housing**

As many lone parent families are already living in or are at risk of poverty, they cannot afford and therefore cannot rely on rental accommodation. It is primarily provided either in the form of local authority housing or through the private/rented market. Compared to private/rented accommodation, local authority housing provides two key advantages in that rent amounts are calculated on the basis of income (and are therefore considerably lower than rents in the private market) and tenure is relatively secure.<sup>1</sup> Those who cannot avail of local authority tenancies and depend on the private/rented sector avail to a large degree of Supplementary Welfare, i.e. the Rent Supplement Scheme.

The NESF has recommended that “lone parents’ particular accommodation needs in relation to social housing should be considered in the design, development and allocation by local authorities of a range of housing sizes and types that take account of the changing make-up of families.”<sup>2</sup> At present, however, the housing needs of lone parent families are by and large met through the housing options available to the general population.<sup>3</sup> Those housing options correspond with housing policies that are co-ordinated on a local level by the local authorities. In South Tipperary, these are: South Tipperary County Council, Clonmel Borough Council, Cashel Town Council, Carrick-on-Suir Town Council and Tipperary Town Council.

Statistics on lone parent tenants of and applicants for local authority housing in South Tipperary were examined as part of the “Statistical Review” and further substantiated research findings from other parts of the country that highlighted the immense dependency of lone parents on local authority housing. Records from the county’s five local authorities for 2005 showed an average 35.6 per cent of lone parent families on housing lists. Clonmel Borough Council reported in May 2007 that one third of their tenants were lone parents, while this number was almost doubled in Tipperary Town.

Those research studies examining the housing needs of lone parents have focused in particular on the circumstances of young lone parents who are often forced to establish independent households in a relatively short space of time. Poor finances and lack of support can prevent them from doing so and, as a result, there is a relatively high number of young lone parents who remain in the family home. This can be beneficial in terms of access to family support and lower rent.<sup>4</sup> However, more often, these arrangements are involuntary and create tensions between family members due to overcrowding or in respect of parenting roles and responsibilities.

The findings of this survey confirm that the accommodation needs of lone parents in South Tipperary follow the above principles. One third of respondents (33.6 per cent) stated that they were local authority tenants, while a further 24.9 per cent are currently on a waiting list for local authority housing. This would mean that almost two out of three lone parent families in South Tipperary depend on the availability of affordable housing.

<sup>1</sup> Compare: Conroy, Pauline, Helen O’Leary and Ralaheen Ltd: *Do the Poor Pay More? A Study of Lone Parents and Debt*. OPEN: May 2005, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Lone Parents. Forum Report No. 20. The National Economic and Social Forum: October 2001, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Liza Costello and Lis Kerrins: *A Place to Call Our Own*. Research on the Housing and Housing Support Needs of Young Lone Parents in Tallaght. The Centre for Social and Educational Research: April 2003, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Lone Parents. Forum Report, p. 38.

Two thirds of those who are on a housing list (66 per cent) are currently in private/rented accommodation. A further 20 per cent of housing applicants are living with their parents. Those who are in private/rented accommodation are twice as likely as those in their parents' household to apply for local authority housing. Altogether 67.3 per cent of those in private/rented accommodation are currently on the housing list, which compares to 32.3 per cent of lone parents who live with their parents and have applied for local authority housing. At 63 per cent, the majority of housing applicants are from urban areas. No link could be established between housing need and the number of children. The breakdown of lone parent housing applicants by family size corresponds closely with the profile of the overall sampling group/lone parent population.

The vast majority (78.6 per cent) of lone parents living in their parents' home are aged 29 and under (see Table 10), which further substantiates the observation that many young lone parents experience difficulties in setting up their own home. As stated above, approximately one third of them have applied for local authority housing.

Age Group	Percentage
15-19 years	13.1
20-24 years	31.1
25-29 years	34.4
30-34 years	9.8
35-39 years	1.6
40-44 years	8.2

Table 10: Percentage of lone parents living in their parents' home by age group

The complex circumstances that are involved when lone parents live with their own families and the expectations they may have in terms of living in their own home are illustrated by the comments of several survey participants.

On the one hand, many of these lone parents wish they "had somewhere to live", as one young mother puts it, and "not to be squashed at home with a full house". On the other hand, the wish for one's own house is often coupled with potential new worries or with expectations that are not met by the current housing provision in South Tipperary. One young mother who has always lived in the countryside says that she would like to "try and get a house. But not one that is in a village or town. I have never and will not apply to the council for housing as I don't want my child to live there. I have lived in the countryside all my life and I would like a bit of freedom rather than living at home." Another lone mother is worried about what the loss of family support would mean to her if she moved into her own home: "I would like to have my own place/home, but that would give me more difficulties finding childcare."

The stigma associated with living in local authority housing is apparent in many comments, exemplified by a lone mother who says she finds "it is good to live at home with [her] parents." "I would find it easier living on my own," she admits, "but I would not live in a council house". Others, who are in private/rented accommodation and find it difficult to

manage high rents financially despite supports in the form of Rent Supplement, wish that they were “not [...] in Rent Supplement/private housing” and that they had “security in a council house even.”

### Summary

For many lone parents the expectations of a family home are in conflict with the reality of housing options that are available to them. With restricted financial capacities, a large proportion of lone parent families depend on local authority housing. The actual provision of local authority housing (i.e. the number of houses available and their location), the stigma attached to them and a preconception of what living in these estates may mean for one's circumstances are all barriers for those living in their parents' home to establish independent households. At the same time, these lone parents are aware of their especially high dependency on their parents as exemplified in one lone mother's wish for “enough money to be able to live alone and not depend on [their] parents' help so much.” Those who have their own home, but are confronted with insecure tenancies and high rents in the private sector, reflect on their situations differently and local authority housing is perceived in a more positive light.

The housing needs of lone parents in South Tipperary are no different to those in the rest of the country. The records available from the five local authorities in the county show that large percentages of tenants and housing applicants are, in fact, lone parent families. The provision of local authority housing to these families has not been examined in this study, but insights gained from the observations of the survey participants would suggest that current levels of housing provision do not meet actual needs. Long waiting periods and insufficient units of local authority housing outside urban centres were highlighted frequently by the respondents, while stigma is attached to some of the larger local authority estates that may need to be addressed in the interests of the local authorities, their tenants and housing applicants.

### Education and Training

It is widely acknowledged that access to training and education is “the route to economic independence” and therefore “a means of breaking the poverty cycle.”<sup>1</sup> In this context, a variety of studies have established that the participation rate of lone parents in education is comparatively low.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that barriers exist which prevent lone parents from accessing training and education that could potentially offer them pathways for greater economic independence. These participation barriers have largely been identified as being<sup>3</sup>

- Lack of high quality, affordable childcare
- Lack of progression to employment or to further education for participants
- Complexities in the interaction of Social Welfare, secondary benefits and educational/training supports which may result in a temporary loss of income
- Low self-esteem, lack of motivation and fear of educational environments

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<sup>1</sup> Healy, Grainne: Lone Parents: Profile, Policy and Provision. A Local Study. Doras Bui and Northside Partnership: May 2004, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Lone Parents. Forum Report, pp. vii, 57-69. See also: Healy, Grainne: Lone Parents, p. 12 and 17. Brown, Michael: Family Matters, p. 22-23. Government Discussion Paper, p. 19-20.

<sup>3</sup> Compare: Lone Parents. Forum Report, pp. 59-64 although the barriers included here also refer to employment.

- Costs of participating in education and training courses (either directly in respect of fees or course materials, or indirectly in the form of travel costs)
- Unavailability of suitable training opportunities locally

Participation barriers exist in varying degrees in all aspects of education and result in generally lower levels of educational attainment among lone parents. These levels would appear to have improved in recent times, particularly among young lone parents who would have benefited, for example, from legislation and policy interventions in respect of early school-leaving. However, the fact remains that poor educational attainment is prevalent among lone parents. This is also evident from the responses of the participants in this survey.

Among the sample (see Figure 3), lone parents who have only primary level education formed 8.2 per cent and consisted largely of the over 40s age group. By far the largest group with 70.2 per cent were those who had attained secondary level education. The majority of lone parents in this group (71.4 per cent) were found to be between 20 to 39 years of age. Almost 30 per cent of those who had secondary level education had only completed the Junior or Inter Certificate. The remaining 70 per cent stated that they had completed the Leaving Certificate as their highest qualification. Only one in five lone parents stated that they had any third level education.

It would appear from these figures that a lack of qualifications per se (i.e. because of early school-leaving among younger lone parents) is not an issue of primary concern.<sup>4</sup> Low participation rates of lone parents in higher level education and/or their return to education as adults may be the more immediate problem.

Almost one in five of the lone parents who participated in this survey stated that they had at one stage discontinued education or training, primarily because of childcare issues (29.1 per cent), pregnancy or the birth of a child (19.0 per cent), financial constraints (13.0 per cent), lack of support and/or difficulties in coping (11.4 per cent) and family reasons (11.4 per cent). The motivation to restart the educational or training measure that had not been completed previously was relatively high with 53.2 per cent of the relevant lone parents expressing an intention to do so.

National statistics on the uptake of vocational training by lone parents in the form of specific skills training, traineeships, apprenticeships or the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS as run by the VEC) in 2000 showed that less than 15 per cent of those who participated in these programmes were lone parents.<sup>5</sup> While no equivalent data is available for South Tipperary,<sup>6</sup> the participation rates of lone parents in vocational training must be deemed to be poor on the basis of the findings of this survey, particularly in the absence of high numbers of lone parents with third level qualifications. Only about 20 per cent of the survey participants have taken part in vocational training schemes. Within this group, vocational training in hairdressing/beauty therapy, computer/

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<sup>4</sup> For comparison: according to data from the 2002 Census, 23 per cent of lone parents under the age of 65 have no formal education or primary level only. In the under 35s age group, the percentage is slightly lower at 10. In this age group, 37 per cent have intermediate level qualifications (see Government Discussion Paper, p. 19).

<sup>5</sup> See table 4.1. in Lone Parents. Forum Report, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> With the exception of data that is available in respect of VTOS learners in Clonmel. According to this 11 of the 56 participants at present are lone parents. This would equate to 20 per cent.

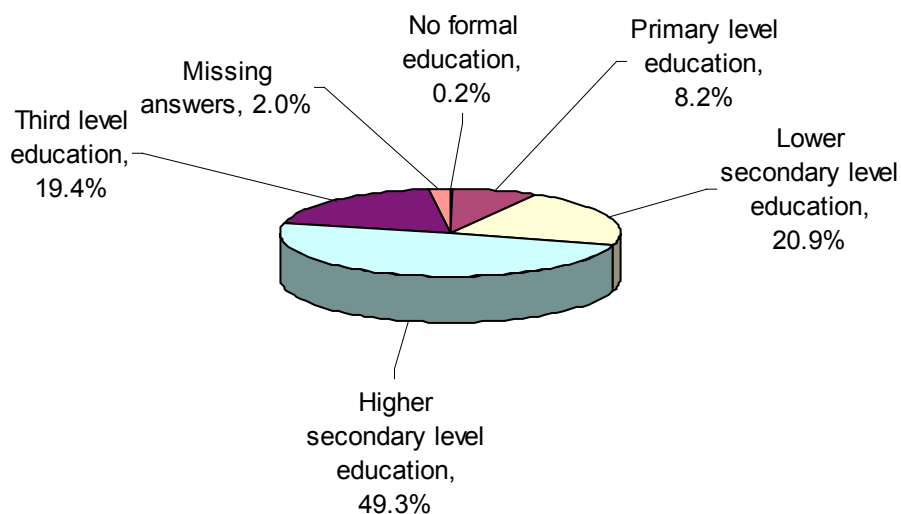


Figure 3: Levels of educational attainment among the lone parents in the sampling group

office skills and childcare is noticeably common. This may be a reflection of the naturally limited variety of vocational training opportunities that is available locally. Individual criticisms from survey participants pointing out a lack of choice in respect of training courses support this presumption.

When asked if being a lone parent prevented them from taking up more training and education, more than three quarters (77.6 per cent) of the respondents believed that this was so. In addition, almost two thirds (65.2 per cent) of survey participants said that they were unable to find the “right job” because of a lack of qualifications. An overwhelming 74 per cent of these – the equivalent of almost one half of the entire sample - saw causal links between being a lone parent, not having the right qualifications and not being able to obtain adequate employment, while 16.4 per cent felt these aspects were not interconnected.

In the hope that this would uncover additional participation barriers, the survey respondents were asked to freely comment on what would improve their level of education and training. However, the majority of responses reiterated known barriers, particularly childcare issues and potential financial difficulties due to extra costs or loss of benefits. The replies also implied specific needs in terms of the timeframe, contents and structure of education and training courses. In this regard it was suggested by the respondents that

- Courses should be offered predominantly on weekday mornings during school terms to accommodate lone parents with school-going children who are largely restricted to those times for their activities.
- Educational Allowances should cover training courses run by private training institutions in order to allow lone parents to avail of a greater variety of courses locally



- Childcare facilities should be attached to third level institutions to encourage lone parents to participate in longer-term (degree) courses
- Educational opportunities should be introduced that meet the needs of working lone parents in that they are integrated with employment
- Progression should be built into FÁS and VEC schemes and should include options for potential self-employment and work from home
- There should be more distant learning courses or better promotion of existing ones at local level
- Better training should be provided at local level, specifically in Cashel and Carrick-on-Suir

Personal fears or insecurities were not specified by the survey participants as barriers to taking up education and training, but did play a significant role in the section on employment (see the next chapter).

In addition to examining barriers to education for lone parents, the questionnaire aimed to establish the views of survey participants on their child's or children's education. As anticipated, the findings in this respect did not reveal many aspects that are specific to lone as opposed to other parents, with the exception of some instances where survey participants felt discriminated against or stigmatised by the school environment. Comments of this nature, however, were somewhat counterbalanced by remarks to the contrary, according to which schools were particularly forthcoming in supporting lone parents and their children. The vast majority of lone parents, i.e. 77.9 per cent, stated in any case that they were quite happy with the education their child or children had received to date. As indicated, criticisms that are non-specific to lone parent families predominated comments of the 5.7 per cent who said they were not satisfied with their child's/children's education. Examples here would be demands for smaller class sizes, more tailored education that meets the individual needs of a child and better interventions to prevent bullying and early school-leaving.

In respect of the capacity to support a child fully in their education, the vast majority of survey participants did not feel at a disadvantage compared to two-parent families. Less than one quarter (23.4 per cent) stated that they felt it was more difficult for them to make sure their child/children are getting all the support they need in their education. This compares to 59.5 per cent who stated that they had no difficulties in ensuring an optimal education for their children. Common difficulties expressed by the first group included time constraints/time pressures, difficulties in meeting the cost of education (and this included the lack of funds for tutoring outside of school and extra-curricular activities) and a lack of confidence by the parent in being able to enforce discipline or build up motivation in their child in terms doing school work. Although perceived discrimination against the parent or child of a lone parent family was the third most common reason cited in this context, those instances, while taken seriously, did not appear to be signs of a widespread trend.

What appeared to be a significant issue for lone parents was their inability to meet the needs of their school-going children financially. Many respondents complained about hidden costs in an otherwise free education system and felt their children were at a

disadvantage because they could not afford extra-curricular activities or private tutoring and were struggling to meet the costs of uniforms, books/class materials and school trips. Other lone parents were worried about not being able to finance third level education for their children.

### Summary

The findings of this survey have confirmed that access barriers to education continue to exist for lone parents. These include primarily (1) the cost, availability and affordability of childcare and (2) financial losses due to complex interactions between educational allowances, Social Welfare payments and secondary benefits. At a local level, the unavailability or limited variety of training and educational courses and/or the structure of courses in terms of when and where they take place may further prevent lone parents from embarking on education.

While the educational attainment of lone parents has improved, as illustrated by the fact that the majority of the survey respondents had at least completed higher secondary level education, the number of lone parents availing of third level education, vocational training or education in the context of the lifelong learning principle is markedly low. At almost 20 per cent, the proportion of lone parents who are unable to complete educational courses is also significant. Approximately half of the lone parents were aware of the interconnections between parenting alone, lacking qualifications and being unable to obtain high quality employment and of the implications this has for their economic independence.

Lone parents do not only face difficulties in terms of their own education, but can be in a difficult position when it comes to fully supporting their child's or children's education.

## Employment

The 2006 Report of the "Working Group of the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion" on employment obstacles for lone parents contains a comprehensive account of information on current employment trends among lone parents and on the barriers to taking up employment that they experience.<sup>1</sup>

With reference to the findings of relevant social studies and the submissions received from social partners and other interested parties, the report focuses on three factors that are presumed to contribute to the low rate of employment and poor quality of jobs available to lone parents:

- Low levels of educational attainment
- Deficiencies in the current system of income supports
- Limited access to jobs (barriers exist in relation to childcare, public transport, family-friendly work arrangements, integration of income tax and Social Welfare systems, training provision and the retention of benefits)

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<sup>1</sup> See "Report of the Working Group of the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion. Analysis of Obstacles to Employment for Lone Parents" In: Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents, p. 15-29.

The lower level of educational attainment among lone parents was discussed in the previous chapter. It was concluded that attainment levels tend to be lower among older lone parents and, viewed for all age groups, had generally improved over time. While it is important to guarantee the continuation of this trend, low participation rates of lone parents in third level and adult education as well as vocational training are a more immediate concern in terms of their ability to take up high quality employment.

The deficiencies referred to above in respect of the current system of income supports include

- the unlimited duration of payments such as the One-Parent Family Payment which encourages long term dependency,
- the existence of cohabitation rules which discourage the development of families and stable relationships and are inevitably the object of Social Welfare fraud and
- earnings disregards which have been proven to trap lone parents in part-time and low-paid employment.<sup>2</sup>

The comments received from the participants of this survey largely substantiate the counter-productivity of the Social Welfare system in this regard and are further explored below.

The employment rates among lone parents nationally are shown in Table 11 and are compared to two-parent families in Table 12. The equivalent data in respect of the sampling group in South Tipperary is very similar to the national figures and is represented in Figure 4. At 49.9 per cent, it shows a slightly higher proportion of lone parents in employment, whilst the percentage of lone parents who are not economically active is marginally lower than the national equivalent. The likelihood of a lone parent taking up employment increases significantly once all children in the family are of school-going age (compare Table 3). The probability that this employment is part-time is very high.

Lone parent ...	In employment	Unemployed	Not Economically Active
... with at least one child aged under 5	40%	4%	56%
... with all children aged 5 to 14	65%	5%	30%
... with children aged 5 to 14 and at least one child aged 15 or over	66%	5%	29%
... with all children aged 15 or over	38%	1%	61%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>50%</b>

Table 11: Employment status of lone parents for the period December-February 2007  
(Source: QNHS Quarter 1/2007, Table 24)

<sup>2</sup> Government Discussion Paper, p. 23.

	In employment	Unemployed	Not Economically Active
Couple with children	71%	2%	27%
Lone parent with children	47%	3%	50%

Table 12: Employment status of adult members in two- and one-parent families for the period December-February 2007 (Source: QNHS Quarter 1/2007, Table 24)

	Not employed	Employed
Lone parent with pre-school aged children only	61.6%	38.4%
Lone parent with pre-school aged and school-going children	64.1%	35.9%
Lone parent with school-going children only	40.4%	59.6%

Table 13: Employment status of lone parents in South Tipperary by age of children

A correlation between the number of children and the probability of a lone parent being in employment could not be found.

Of those lone parents who are not economically active, 85.2 per cent referred to themselves as stay-at-home parents who were pursuing no other activities; 11.5 per cent are part-time or full-time students and 3.3 per cent stated “other” circumstances. These included caring in the home or being permanently unable to work due to disability.

Although 35.6 per cent of the survey respondents had participated in one or more FÁS or VEC schemes in the past (or were partaking at the time of the survey), employment rates were not significantly different from the rest of the sample. Among the 88 participants who had availed of the Community Employment (CE) scheme, 51 per cent were subsequently in part-time and 7 per cent in full-time employment. Past or present VTOS students were less likely to be in employment with 30 per cent part-time and 8 per cent full-time employees. This compares to 41 per cent in part-time and 6 per cent in full-time employment among the group who had never availed of any of the employment/training schemes. The noticeably higher number of part-time employees in the CE-group is unfortunately ambiguous in that it includes overlaps in terms of those who are currently in employment through the scheme. In respect of prospects of progression into full-time employment, participation in these schemes can nevertheless be taken to be inconsequential, if they are not accompanied by individual career advice and job search assistance. Examples such as Evelyn (see chapter on Case Studies), who has been participating in a variety of training schemes and has not been able to secure part-time employment in a period of five years, demonstrate clearly the core of this problem.

The lack of progression stemming from employment and training schemes does not as such represent a barrier, but rather a degree of inefficiency in existing employment supports. In terms of actual obstacles that lone parents have to overcome in order to take up or improve the quality of their employment, childcare issues and financial losses due to the nature of the income support system are by far the most commonly experienced (see Figure 5).

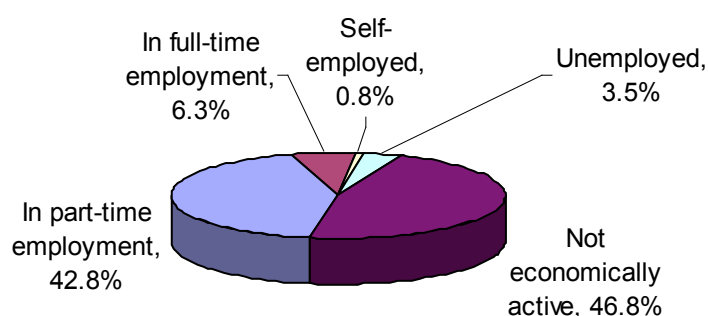


Figure 4: Employment status of survey participants in South Tipperary

Interestingly, the availability and cost of childcare appears to be an exclusively urban issue as none of the lone parents who live in rural areas stated that either of these factors prevented them from working or made it more difficult for them to combine working and parenting. This would suggest that the provision and affordability of childcare in rural areas either meets the needs of lone parents or that lone parents outside urban centres do not depend on public or private service facilities in this regard. The fear of losing Social Welfare payments or secondary benefits was equally strong among lone parents in urban and rural areas.

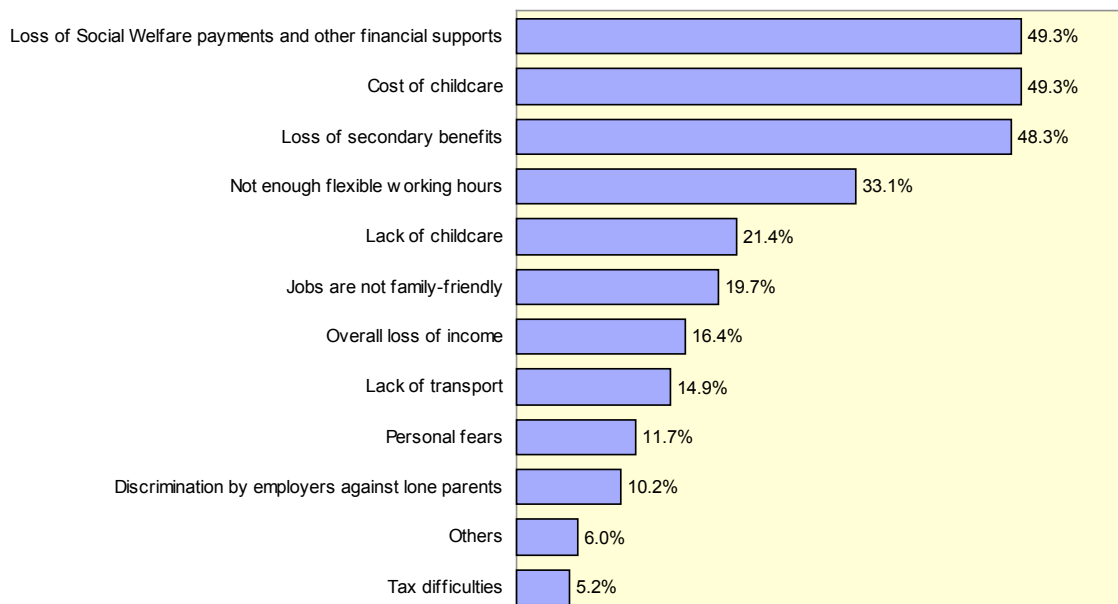


Figure 5: Barriers to employment for lone parents in South Tipperary

A failure by employers to create more family-friendly work environments or to offer more flexible working hours was perceived as a barrier to taking up employment by 19.7 and 33.1 per cent respectively. A lack of transport prevented 14.9 per cent of respondents from improving their work situation, two thirds of whom were from an urban background.

Lone parents who live in one of the towns in South Tipperary are four times more likely to have no access to a car than their rural counterparts. In total, 36.8 per cent of respondents stated that they did not own or had no use of a car for transport. Almost 76 per cent of them were urban residents. Among those who had no transport in the form of a car, 46 per cent depend heavily on lifts offered by neighbours, friends and family. Forty per cent stated that they frequently avail of taxis (two thirds of them several times per week) and one fifth use local buses and Bus Éireann. It is evident, that in the absence of public transport that meets the needs of working people, lone parents without a car are very confined in their employment options.

Finally, one in ten respondents identified each of the following issues as preventing them from taking up employment: personal fears (e.g. a lack of confidence) and employers' perceived discrimination against lone parents.

Survey participants were at liberty to include any other issues that they felt were making it difficult for them to work. The responses here included long-term illnesses/disabilities, caring responsibilities either in respect of a child with special needs or a family member, a personal lack of qualifications and/or experience and a general lack of employment opportunities in the area. A number of lone parents felt that they had a specific responsibility to their children not to work in order to be a full-time parent. This is illustrated by one mother who wrote: "Since my children lost one parent, I felt it absolutely necessary that I be there for them when they were growing up."

The majority of suggestions made by survey participants for improving their employment opportunities centred on childcare arrangements and pay and conditions. A summary of these and other suggestions can be found in Table 14.

### *Summary*

It is widely established that lone parents have lower employment rates than adults with no children or in two-parent families. The employment rates of lone parents in South Tipperary are largely in line with national figures, although the percentage of lone parents who are economically active is marginally higher.

Besides a link between lower employment rates and poorer levels of educational attainment, it is apparent that deficiencies in the current system of income supports have meant that the welfare-to-work objective has failed to encourage lone parents to take up employment. The reality is that those dependent on Social Welfare payments are likely to lose out financially if they were to move into part- or full-time employment. The unlimited duration of payments such as the One-Parent Family Payment has also proven to be counter-productive in that it encourages a degree of stagnation in terms of the educational and professional development of the recipient and thereby diminishes their chance of greater economic independence. All of these aspects were powerfully validated by the sampling group.

By far the biggest obstacles for lone parents to combining parenting and working are of a financial nature. The loss of Social Welfare payments, secondary benefits or other income formed three of the seven most commonly identified employment barriers. Many lone

parents suggested a bridging period when moving from welfare-dependency to work, during which payments and secondary benefits could be decreased gradually. Some secondary benefits, such as Medical Cards, should be open to all lone-parent families regardless of means, according to other suggestions.

Childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved provision of childcare in terms of local availability, cost (free or cheaper), flexibility and better quality</li> <li>• Provision of better after-school care</li> <li>• Alternative options for summer holidays</li> <li>• Provision of childcare facilities that are attached to educational institutions or work places</li> <li>• Childcare options or other alternative to come into effect when children are sick</li> <li>• Reduction in the length of school summer holidays</li> <li>• Subsidies for childcare providers instead of paying Early Childcare Supplement to all parents regardless of whether or not they avail of paid childcare</li> </ul>
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy intervention to encourage employers to increase number of part-time, job-share and work-from-home options</li> <li>• Better pay, less tax</li> <li>• More incentives for Social Welfare recipients to work</li> <li>• Targeting of career development and advice/information service</li> </ul>
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of better public transport</li> <li>• Alternatively, payment of more adequate travel allowances</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of more and a greater variety of options</li> <li>• Better promotion of existing educational and training opportunities among lone parents</li> <li>• Improved financial supports available to lone parents who return to education</li> <li>• Utilisation of resource centres as education outlets (“Community Colleges”)</li> <li>• The ring-fencing of Social Welfare and secondary benefits so that they remain unaffected by participation in educational or training courses</li> <li>• Individual advice service for lone parents on how to obtain maximum educational qualifications</li> <li>• Eligibility for funding to be extended to include courses operated by private providers</li> </ul>
Income Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retention of Social Welfare payments for a bridging period when taking up employment</li> <li>• Retention of secondary benefits for a bridging period when taking up employment</li> <li>• Medical card provision for all children of lone parent families</li> </ul>

Table 14: Summary of suggestions made by survey participants on how employment opportunities could be improved for lone parents



Whether a lone parent is employed or not depends, of course, on individual circumstances. However, the probability of employment is linked to the age of their child or children and puts a special emphasis on the childcare needs of working (lone) parents. The likelihood of being employed is highest among the group that has school-going children only. There is no correlation between employment status and the number of children in a family. Cost and lack of childcare were expectedly the main barriers identified by lone parents in South Tipperary to taking up employment in the first instance or to taking up high quality employment. Difficulties in terms of childcare are also experienced outside of standard arrangements and there is a call for innovative approaches to the problems that arise for working lone parents when children are sick or on school holidays.

A large number of lone parents who wish to work are also calling upon employers to introduce more flexible employment opportunities, not only in respect of working hours, but also in structural terms. Better provision of part-time positions, job-sharing and work from home may require policy interventions since they are not always in the economic interest of a business or an employer.

It was observed that participation in employment and training schemes, as offered by the VEC and FÁS, do not lead to permanent and sustainable employment for participants, and besides needing to be more targeted in provision, they also need to be accompanied by career advice and information services that acknowledge the needs and capabilities of the individual.

Lastly, an approach at government level to move all lone parents into employment does not take account of the view of some lone parents that their role is to be a full-time parent and co-educator of their children. Labour activation measures, educational and income supports represent only part of the support network that may be necessary for lone parents who, according to a lone mother from Newcastle, “have such a priority role to play in bringing up their children that more emphasis could be placed on how to empower them in the home and in the community. It should not necessarily be all about getting them out to work for gainful employment. More status should be given to their role in educating their children and giving them confidence to cope with their situation.” A separate chapter on Family and Community Supports examines needs in respect of such other supports.

## **Financial Supports**

Lone parent families are more likely than any other group<sup>1</sup> to be receiving income from Social Welfare. Many have incomes that are mainly or even exclusively derived from Social Welfare payments and secondary benefits.<sup>2</sup> These income supports relate to each other in a complex manner.<sup>3</sup> Taking up employment is therefore not always a viable option for lone parents to improve their economic situation.<sup>4</sup> The non-restricted duration of the

<sup>1</sup> “Group” in this context refers to family composition. Other groups are single adults, married or cohabiting couples and two-parent families.

<sup>2</sup> Conroy, Pauline, Helen O’Leary and Ralaheen Ltd: Do the Poor Pay More? A Study of Lone Parents and Debt. OPEN: May 2005, pp. 10 and 65.

<sup>3</sup> Loftus, Camille: One Size Fits All? Irish Governments’ Failed Approach to One-Parent Families 1994-2004. OPEN May 2004, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> This is illustrated in detail in: Out of the Traps. Ending Poverty Traps and Making Work Pay for People in Poverty. OPEN & EAPN Ireland: December 2005, pp. 53-61.

One-Parent Family Payment is, in effect, an additional disincentive to reduce the dependency of lone parents on the income supports that were introduced into the Irish Social Welfare system in the 1970s. The chronology of their evolution is outlined in Table 15.

1935	Provision for widowed parents as part of the Widows' and Orphans' Pensions Act
1970	Deserted Wife's Allowance
1973	Unmarried Mother's Allowance
1990	Lone Parent's Allowance
1994	Reform of the Lone Parent's Allowance and introduction of earnings disregard
1997	One-Parent Family Payment

Table 15: Evolution of Social Welfare supports for lone parents<sup>5</sup>

The complex interactions between different income supports and their uptake by lone parents, has been examined in detail.<sup>6</sup> The Government Discussion Paper on Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents appears to have acknowledged these shortcomings in the current Social Welfare system.

What was of empirical interest in this study was not so much the dependency of lone parents on specific Social Welfare payments, but rather their knowledge of supports that are available and their factual familiarity with the payments they receive. In this context, respondents were asked to name the payments, secondary benefits and other income supports, of which they are recipients and to identify those that they may not receive themselves, but of which they are aware. This course of action brought to light a number of issues that could be addressed by better provision of information on income supports.

The high dependence of lone parents on One-Parent Family Payment is indisputable. Approximately nine in ten lone parent families in South Tipperary rely on this payment. A small number of respondents are in receipt of predecessors of this payment, such as the Deserted Wife's Allowance. Almost three quarters (73.9 per cent) are Medical Card holders. A slightly higher number of lone parents (78.4 per cent) have Medical Cards for their children. Just under one third of the sample (31.6 per cent) is claiming the One-Parent Family Tax Credit. This equates to 57 per cent of those lone parents who are in employment. The Family Income Supplement (FIS) is paid to 15.2 per cent of the lone parents. An almost equal percentage (i.e. 15.4 per cent) is in receipt of Rent Supplement. Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance is claimed by approximately one quarter of the respondents, i.e. 26.9 per cent). More than half (54.5 per cent) of the sampling group have had to avail of Urgent Needs Payments from the Community Welfare Office. All other income supports are availed of at a significantly lower rate (of less than 7.5 per cent).

<sup>5</sup> A more detailed outline is included in *One Size Fits All*, p. 9-10.

<sup>6</sup> See in particular "One Size Fits All" and "Out of the Traps".

As it would have been impossible to ask respondents to outline their financial circumstances and other aspects that determine eligibility for the different payments, no comments can be made on the adequacy of income supports for the individual. However, in the case of the universal child payments, i.e. Child Benefit and the Early Childcare Supplement, it was possible to cross-reference uptake and basic eligibility. It was observed that 4.6 per cent of those who are eligible for Child Benefit on the basis that they have one or more children under the age of 16 were not in receipt of this payment (or did not know they are?). A much more significant discrepancy was noted in respect of the Early Childcare Supplement which was introduced in 2005 and is payable to all parents of children under the age of 6 in order to help them with childcare costs. Only 28.4 per cent of those who are eligible for this payment based on the information they provided on the age of their children, stated that they were in receipt of it. More than half of the relevant lone parents, i.e. 56.4 per cent, are in receipt of Child Benefit, but neither knew of nor received the Early Childcare Supplement. As this payment is paid automatically to any eligible parent who is in receipt of Child Benefit, it is evident that the majority of lone parents who are paid the Early Childcare Supplement are not aware of it. It follows then that it is questionable whether the recipients are in a position to meet the specific objective of this payment, namely to reduce childcare costs.

The fact that only one of the six widow/widowers stated they were in receipt of the Widow's Pension would suggest that the One-Parent Family Payment is the more attractive payment which seriously undermines the integrity of the Widow's Pension for those with children.

The awareness of those Social Welfare payments and income supports not being claimed by lone parents, is notably low in respect of some payments. Table 2 shows a list of selected payments together with their degree of familiarity among non-recipient lone parents.

It would appear that the entire range of Supplement Payments (with the exception of Rent and Family Income Supplements) and the secondary benefits available through taxation are comparatively less well known. While allowing for the fact that taxation is only of concern to those who are in employment, this presents a danger that the relevant payments are potentially not being claimed by lone parents in need of them due to a lack of information. An interrelation between familiarity with and uptake of a payment (irrespective of eligibility criteria) can be seen with the better known income supports: The top six payments listed in Table 16 are all among those payments which are actually claimed by significant numbers of lone parents.

### *Summary*

The high dependency of lone parent families on Social Welfare payments as their main source of income is well documented. There is a range of primary and secondary benefits available to lone parents, which are complemented by Community Welfare payments and employment or education incentive schemes. Recent research has highlighted the failure of the welfare-to-work objective behind these provisions in encouraging lone parents to take up employment as a means to greater economic independence.

Name of Payment/Scheme	Level of knowledge among lone parents who do not avail of this payment/scheme
Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance	75.5%
Rent Supplement	72.9%
Family Income Supplement	67.2%
One-Parent Family Payment	66.7%
Medical Card	66.6%
Child Benefit	64.0%
Maternity Benefit	63.2%
Widow's/Widower's Pension	50.1%
GP Visit Card	44.8%
Back to Work Allowance	43.2%
Back to Education Allowance	37.1%
Heat Supplement	22.4%
Mortgage Interest Supplement	14.1%
Travel Supplement	12.7%
Diet Supplement	12.0%
One-Parent Tax Credit	10.5%
Widowed Parent Grant	10.2%
Widow's Tax Credit	9.2%
Crèche Supplement	7.8%
Urgent Needs Payments (Community Welfare Office)	4.4%

Table 16: List of selected Social Welfare payments and secondary benefits by knowledge level among lone parents

The findings of this study confirm a high reliance of lone parent families in South Tipperary (as elsewhere in the country) on the One-Parent Family Payment, on the Medical Card, Child Benefit, the Back to School Footwear and Clothing Allowance as well as the Family Income and Rent Supplements. There is also a reasonable uptake among working lone parents of the One-Parent Family Tax Credit.

In addition, it was observed that the familiarity among lone parents with some of the benefits and schemes relevant to them is surprisingly low and may impact on how these payments reach those in need. The example of the Early Childcare Supplement, which is intended to alleviate childcare costs for parents of children under the age of 6, illustrated that universal payments easily miss their purpose when distributed without any form of engagement with the recipient. The lack of targeted promotion and information services

on the entitlements of an individual in respect of Social Welfare, on the other hand, may result in a potential loss for the person in need. Ultimately, these observations indicate an income support system that is too complex to be efficient, efficacious and most of all user-friendly.

## Family and Community Supports

*“Most, if not all people who become lone parents have something upsetting and dramatic happen in their lives. They need re-building of self-esteem and confidence and a helping hand to do so. They need to meet understanding people to help them to move on and get the necessary educational, financial and emotional support to be the parent for the future of these children.”*

(A lone mother from Cahir, separated, two children)

Family support services, peer support and confidence-building support services are important for lone parents to be able to exercise multiple family roles without the support of a partner or spouse. On a broader level, they facilitate the acquisition of skills to support families into the future and are therefore vital for the economic and social inclusion of lone parent families.<sup>1</sup>

Many, but not all lone parents are supported by their extended families, while the number of lone parents who can rely on support from the other parent of their children is markedly low. The availability of public support services is therefore of particular importance to lone parents as a whole. The National Economic and Social Forum recommended in 2001 that “a range of community-based family support programmes and structures should be put in place to address the very specific needs that lone parents experience in their day-to-day lives.”<sup>2</sup> Since then, the Family Support Agency was established with defined functions and responsibilities in the area of family policy and services. These include, amongst others, the provision of the Family Mediation Service and the administration of the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme.<sup>3</sup>

The Family Resource Centres generally provide supports to lone parents by facilitating peer support groups and by providing community-based childcare facilities, education and training courses as well as information and advice services for them. Additional family support and counselling services are provided on a voluntary basis by other organisations. Whilst the provision of these services in this area has improved in recent years, it has to be acknowledged that family support services in Ireland “have traditionally been a very underdeveloped area of welfare state provision”<sup>4</sup> and a lot of lost ground has to be made up before adequate service provision is reached. In this context it is also vital that family support services begin to acknowledge the needs of lone fathers, who now represent almost 15 per cent of all lone parents.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Comp. Healy, Grainne: Lone Parents: Profile, Policy and Provision. A Local Study. Doras Bui and Northside Partnership: May 2004, p. 7 and 8.

<sup>2</sup> Lone Parents. Forum Report No. 20. The National Economic and Social Forum: October 2001, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> See also the Family Support Agency Strategic Plan 2004-2006 available from <http://www.fsa.ie/strategy/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> Browne, Michael: Family Matters Ten Years On. A Comhairle Social Policy Report. March 2005, p. 28 as quoted from Daly, M. and S. Clavero: Contemporary Family Policy. Dublin 2002.

<sup>5</sup> The fact that family support services predominantly focus on lone mothers has been highlighted by the NESF (see Lone Parents. Forum Report No. 20. The National Economic and Social Forum: October 2001, p. 107) and was acknowledged by the Government in their Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents, p. 82.

In South Tipperary, the proportion of lone parents who are potentially in need of public family support services due to a lack of support from extended family or the other parent of their children ranges between 16 and 60 per cent as shown in Table 17. Those without any support from family and the parent of their children, i.e. 16.4 per cent, are the most vulnerable. The three quarters (75.4 per cent) who can avail of their (extended) family for support, rely on them for childcare (52.1 per cent), transport (7.3 per cent), emotional support (22.8 per cent) and financially (11.9 per cent). Viewed over the entire sampling group, this would mean that 40 per cent of lone parents avail of their family's help for childminding and/or babysitting. One in ten lone parents are financially supported by their family and 17.2 per cent fall back on their parents/family for emotional support.

Lone parents without any support from family or the other parent of their children	16.4%
Lone parents without any support from family	21.9%
Lone parents without support from the other parent of their children	60.7%

Table 17: Lone parents without family support and/or support from the other parent of their children

When it comes to the other parent, only one third of respondents stated that they were supported by them in some form. In approximately half of these cases, this support consisted of maintenance payments and/or custody/access arrangements. Only 7.5 per cent of the lone parents stated that they were emotionally or personally supported by the other parent of their children. Viewed over the entire sample, the proportions of those in receipt of support shrink considerably (see Table 18).

Lone parents in receipt of regular maintenance payments	20.6%
Lone parents who receive irregular financial assistance from the other parent	6.9%
Lone parents who have access/custody or childminding arrangements with the other parent	18.0%
Lone parents who are emotionally and personally supported by the other parent	2.8%

Table 18: Supports from the other parent of lone parents' children<sup>6</sup>

In anticipation of a large proportion of lone parents who would benefit from public family support services, respondents were asked several questions that aimed to establish the level of their knowledge and use of these services. In this context, Family Resource Centres, lone parent support groups and national support organisations for lone parents were examined. The findings suggest that lone parents could profit from better and more targeted promotion of existing services.

<sup>6</sup> Lone parents who reported that the other parent had died are excluded here.

At 37.1 per cent, the awareness of lone parent support groups in South Tipperary was relatively low among the survey participants, only 4.7 per cent of whom were regular users of such groups. These figures are, however, only partly representative, as the actual existence of support groups must be taken into consideration to establish a more truthful account. For this reason, lone parents in Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir were singled out, as support groups exist only in these two locations. Approximately two thirds of the lone parents in these towns are aware of the support groups, however only between 20 and 30 per cent of those who know about the groups avail of them. This is equivalent to between 14 and 17 per cent of lone parents in these towns. The variations in the uptake of lone parent support group services in Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir are shown in Figure 6.

Family Resource Centres (FRCs) and Community Resource Centres are slightly better known among 61.2 per cent of the respondent group. Of those who are aware of a centre in their area, approximately one third (32.1 per cent) have contacted it. A breakdown of the awareness and usage figures for Tipperary Town (Three Drives FRC and Knockanrawley Resource Centre), Carrick-on-Suir (Nano Nagle Resource Centre), Clonmel (Clonmel Community Resource Centre) and Cashel (Spafield Family Resource Centre) is provided in Figure 7. It is acknowledged that a Family Resource Centre is located in New Birmingham/Glengoose. However, the catchment area of this centre could not be defined and the number of lone parents from surrounding parishes who participated in this survey provides too small a sampling group for this purpose.

Family and Community Resource Centres were perceived by 28.4 per cent of the sampling group as great help. A further 22.9 per cent agreed that “it is good to know they are there, but I don’t think I will need their help”. Only 0.7 per cent of the lone parents felt there was no need for them, while approximately one third (32.3 per cent) had no opinion.

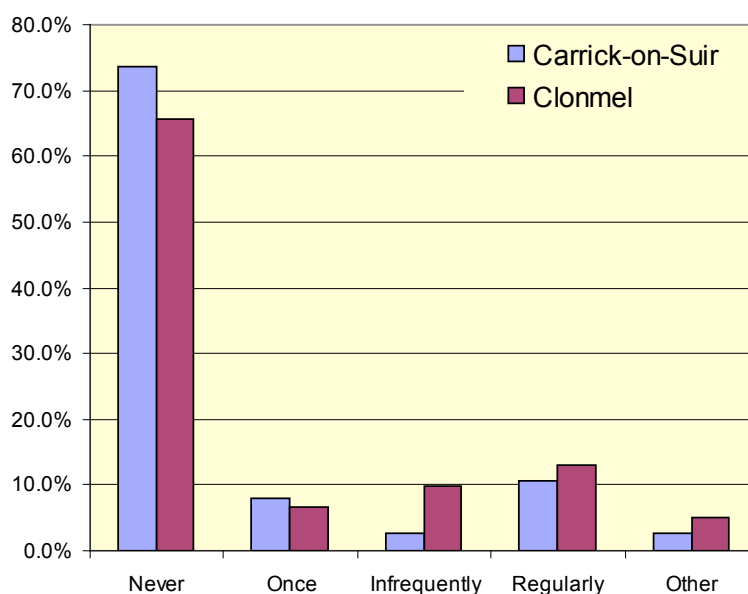


Figure 6: Uptake of lone parent support groups in Carrick-on-Suir and Clonmel (among those who are aware of them)



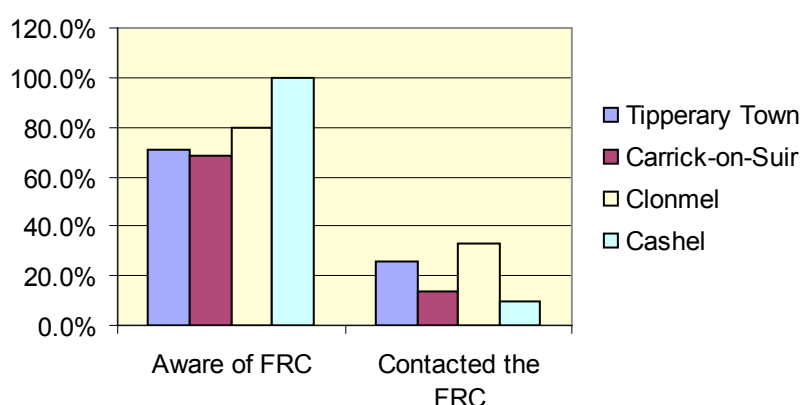


Figure 7: Awareness of resource centres among lone parents in Tipperary, Carrick-on-Suir, Clonmel and Cashel

Despite local supports offered through the resource centres and (in the case of South Tipperary) through STLPI<sup>7</sup>, a number of national organisations are active in the provision of information, advice and peer support for lone parents. The awareness of these organisations among lone parents in South Tipperary is notably low as can be seen in Table 19. While most of these organisations operate from Dublin, they offer accessible services for lone parents in the rest of the country through their websites and helplines.

Treoir	7.7%
OPEN (One Parent Exchange Network)	8.0%
www.solo.ie	3.5%
Gingerbread Ireland	18.7%
One Family	13.4%

Table 19: Level of knowledge of national support organisations for lone parents

When asked, in what areas they needed more support, the survey participants focused on essential needs including income supports, childcare, education/training and employment (see Figure 8). It is worth noting that supports in the different areas were requested by at least one in five lone parents, with the exception of taxation (which evidently is of interest only to those who have income from employment).

Finally, the respondents were asked to identify any other areas of support needed, which were not mentioned beforehand, or make specific suggestions as to what would help their situation. Apart from the supports included in the previous chapters, the responses included:

- A counselling service or other form of emotional support for lone parents
- A counselling service or other form of emotional support for children from one-parent families

<sup>7</sup> South Tipperary Lone Parent Initiative

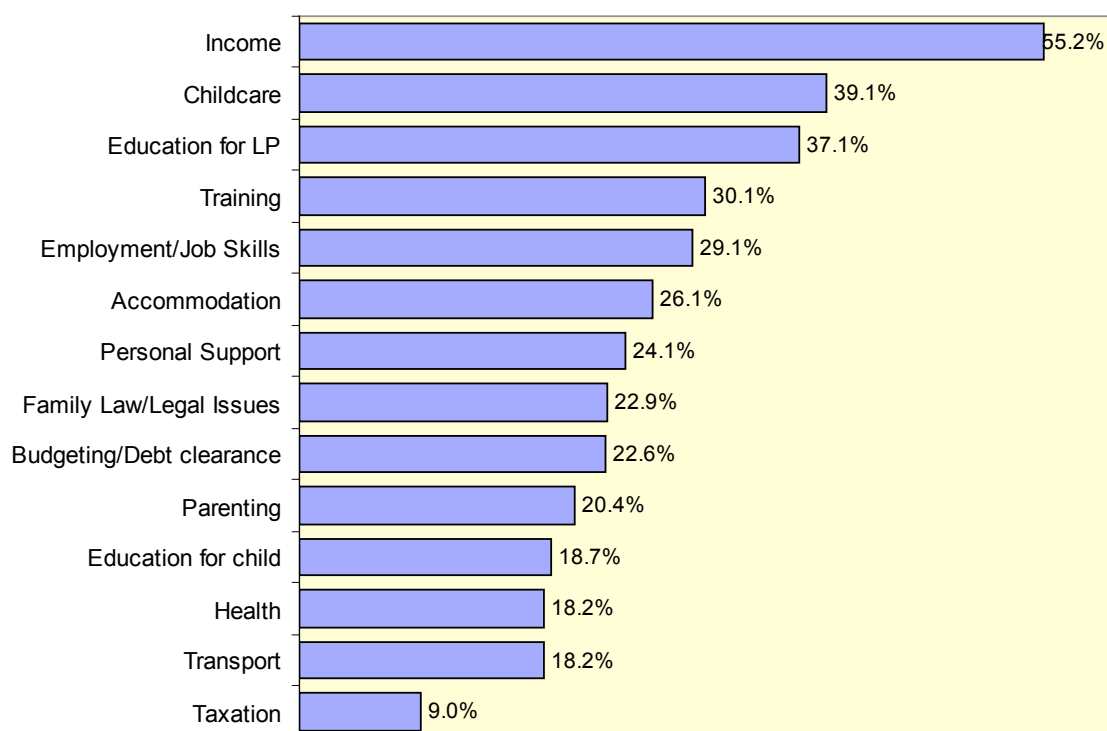


Figure 8: Supports wanted by lone parents in South Tipperary

- Specific parenting supports, i.e. for lone parents of teenage children
- A support group for young widows
- Social outlets for lone parents (some with, some without their children)
- Practical support (i.e. in the form of a maintenance person or “handyman”)
- Measures to tackle bias against lone parents amongst frontline staff in public services
- More adequate legal supports tailored to meet common lone parent issues, e.g. a liaison officer to help with solicitors
- Programmes to effectively tackle unplanned pregnancies among teenagers
- Specific measures to target Social Welfare fraud
- Legislation to bring in mandatory maintenance
- Grants for furnishings and furniture
- Funding for driving lessons and free travel in taxis
- Free TV Licence for lone parents
- Extension of FIS eligibility to non-working lone parents
- School transport in respect of after-school activities
- Better funding for/provision of summer camps, youth activities and outings

### Summary

The provision of public family support services is vital for lone parents, some of whom have neither the support of their family, nor of the other parent of their children. In South Tipperary, such services are largely delivered through the network of family and community resource centre and via the South Tipperary Lone Parent Initiative and include the facilitation of peer support groups, the provision of education, information/advice services and community-based childcare.

The findings of this survey confirm that lone parents would benefit from a more targeted promotion, and – as is discussed in the chapter on service provision – a geographical expansion of these services. Almost two thirds of lone parents receive no support from the other parent of their child/children. In cases where this support is provided, it is often restricted to financial assistance in the form of maintenance payments and a relief of childminding responsibilities in the form of custody or access arrangements. In terms of emotional and practical supports, many lone parents rely on their families. One in five lone parents, however, lacks this support from family. It is these lone parents who benefit the most from the availability of community-based supports.

Where these supports are available locally, it is important to ensure that all lone parents are aware of them. This survey has shown that only about one third of lone parents in Carrick-on-Suir and Clonmel are aware of lone parent support groups in these towns. Family and Community Resource Centres are much better known among lone parents. On average two thirds of lone parents in Tipperary, Carrick-on-Suir, Clonmel and Cashel were aware of the resource centres in their town. The uptake of lone parent support groups and other services is relatively low when viewed from the perspective of lone parents as a group. It would be necessary to examine if any barriers exist that prevent lone parents from using these services, before drawing any conclusions in respect of the demand for them.

In terms of organisations that operate at a national level and/or from Dublin, it is essential for lone parents in South Tipperary to raise awareness of the fact that these provide important information services via their websites and dedicated helplines. They may also present easily accessible sources for any service provider who needs information for a lone parent client.

Despite supports in respect of basic matters, such as income, childcare, education/training, employment and accommodation – all of which were examined in separate chapters – there appears to be a need for counselling and emotional support services. Part of this is covered through peer support groups, but there is also a genuine demand for professional counselling services both for lone parents and their children, particularly where traumatic experiences or difficult circumstances have led to a person parenting alone.

## **The Last Words<sup>1</sup>**

The previous chapters have empirically examined the needs of lone parents in South Tipperary in respect of childcare, accommodation, training and education, employment, finances and support from family and community. Whilst predominantly quantitative data has been used to validate these needs, it was the qualitative evidence gathered from additional comments and explanations of the survey participants that gave this research direction and purpose. For this reason, the “last words” shall be those of the lone parents who kindly participated in this survey and who were unexpectedly forthcoming in the detail with which they shared their experiences. This chapter comprises of two sections: some of the replies by survey participants when asked what one thing they would change in their lives and some of the additional (spontaneous) comments which give an insight into the range of experiences of lone parenthood.

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in the following quotations are those of the respondents and do not necessarily reflect the views of the researcher or those of the Lone Parent Initiative Network.

## If I could change one thing, it would be ...

- ... *a little more for me – an evening out once in a while.*
- ... *being able to share the load around decisions and responsibilities.*
- ... *to reduce the number of times the phrase “Mummy and Daddy” is used in schools, churches, public places. It hurts my kids, but it hurts me more.*
- ... *being a lone parent on continental Europe because much better supports are available.*
- ... *being able to incorporate into society.*
- ... *being able to spend more time with my children, i.e. not having to work full-time.*
- ... *to be better educated in relation to my child’s schooling needs and to be able to help with homework.*
- ... *to have better education for myself in order to be better able to support myself.*
- ... *to have better job opportunities where you could work your hours around your children.*
- ... *to be a bit more respected. I married, didn’t work out, but have been put in a category.*
- .... *to have furthered my career a bit more before becoming a lone parent and maybe not receive money from government, but to provide for my kids myself.*
- ... *to be able to finish my degree in order to improve our social situation.*
- ... *for my son not to be “branded” as the child of a lone parent.*
- ... *for people to be more helpful in explaining what you are entitled to.*
- ... *for the child’s father to take part in his life.*
- ... *to get a job for myself and try stop relying on Social Welfare.*
- ... *to get myself a hot chick! Her father owns a brewery and loves to cook.*
- ... *to have a family friendly area to live in.*
- ... *to have my husband here in Ireland.*
- ... *nothing! I think every day brings new challenges and you just deal with situations day by day.*
- ... *to have enrolled in college when my son was younger. But there’s still time and I’m not giving up.*
- ... *that my partner was here, but she’s not. I promised her I would look after her two children and I will.*
- ... *that I would have a council house.*
- ... *fathers care for their children as well as mothers.*
- ... *that I was able to take my children on holiday without having to worry about money.*
- ... *that I could buy the things my kids like, but I can’t afford.*
- ... *to get my own transport.*
- ... *that I was not a lone parent! I do not like the stigma that seems to be almost always associated with lone parents. I come from a well-brought up home with good education.*
- ... *that better sex education and counselling was provided to secondary school students to combat teenage pregnancy.*
- ... *that I would have a close friend.*

- ... that I did not get so stressed out and could actually enjoy being a mother. But it's very hard when all the financial pressure is on one person.
- ... that I could afford to bring my husband to court for maintenance.
- ... that I would have money to help my daughter more with education.
- ... to have a job because you get depressed week in week out when it's only you and your kids.
- ... to just have somebody to talk to about everyday things as it is lonely parenting alone.
- ... not to have meetings with local welfare officers.
- ... to have more room for individual circumstances from the HSE and Social Welfare.
- ... to never have a child again as I have no support from nobody.
- ... not to be a lone parent.
- ... to be able to bring up children with their parents in a loving, healthy relationship as I think that that is a child's basic right.
- ... to have seen the world first before having a child.
- ... that counsellors were readily available to help separating parents and children come to terms with the massive changes in their lives.
- ... that I could afford some nice furniture for my home and afford nice clothes on a regular basis for my son and bring him on days out like other children without the worry of money.
- ... that I could get a permanent place to live and call home for us.
- ... that I could say my partner was living with me.
- ... that the housing list wasn't so long.
- ... that the legal system in this country worked. Countless warrants were issued for maintenance and hardly any were acted on.
- ... the huge sense of responsibility.
- ... for her father to contact her more. This to me is far more important than money.
- ... to have a partner to support me.
- ... to win The Lotto.

### Additional Comments

*Life is so much better for us as a family since we left our home in Naas. My former spouse was an alcoholic. My children are the most important people to me. It would be great if I could have year-round childcare to look after them. I use after-school which is excellent and to be honest, is the only childcare I can afford. I couldn't afford a childminder and certainly not in the summer months. We don't have many problems now that can't be solved somehow. Perhaps a support group for my children to help them out but one that doesn't single them out as "different" because their dad doesn't live with them. Maybe after this research?*

*I suffer from depression since my husband left. I'm seeing a doctor in St. Vincent's for my mental health.*

*I am a female aged 41 and I came home one night from working and my husband of 20 years said to me he was fed up with all of us and he wanted to leave and I said "There is the door." Two weeks later he*

was still living at home and having the life of a single man and I kept asking when he was leaving and he would say "soon", but soon never came until one night he head butted me and I got a Safety Order. To this day he still wants to come home. I won't let him because I know he is sorry but he was and still is a mean person. I am doing OK. Don't go anywhere, but I have my kids and my house.

I enjoy parenting alone as my husband is an alcoholic who is still in addiction and barred from the family home.

I am separated 22 years. My husband never paid my maintenance. The local SWO wasn't much to me. I remember one Christmas getting £44 for 2 weeks for 3 people. I argued the point at the time but got nowhere. I got a part-time job. I now own my county council house. My daughter is buying her house. My son is renting from the county council. I can't drive for medical reasons but I get about. Being a lone parent isn't all that bad if you sit and think. It's not hard to work out a budget if you only buy must-haves. My children have no time for their father, but that's his loss. I can't thank my family enough for their support. Of course at that time there really was no help for one-parent families.

Personally I think that there should be a lot more help for people like myself, [who is] left a widow at 39 years old with 8 kids. There should be a support person to help. There should be help for us to cope with bills. There should be a better payment for us to help support, feed and clothe our children. As you know nothing is cheap these days. I have to struggle to have food on the table and to buy clothes and shoes for my children. I think that the government is a lot to blame for this.

I was a happily married woman raising my girls when I found out my husband lied about everything you could lie about, but mostly money. Being a lone parent is not perfect, it's bloody hard but I would be a lone parent any day than keep my girls in a situation we wouldn't, or should I say I wouldn't, know if there would be money for food or bills or Christmas or the mortgage. I take from the state what I need, not a penny more. While I do appreciate every penny....Sorry I got on my soapbox!

It's 1991 since I separated. I found going to my Community Welfare Officer an ordeal. I got little or no maintenance for my girls. As for wife maintenance, I never got a penny. Things have changed now; a lot more is available. I didn't avail of anything because at that time I felt like I was begging from the state. Fifteen years ago it was a stigma to be separated in a rural area. One was expected to try and track down a husband and seek maintenance, live on a pittance and rear a family.

My experience of being a mother is that it's been the hardest thing I've ever done. I love my child to bits but there are times I feel like walking out and not coming back. There are money worries - always, even though I've worked since she was 4 years old. I only recently got a car, have never been on holiday. It's not the ideal life. Fathers should be more responsible not just with money but should share the workload evenly, not just once a week etc. not that I even get that. It's hard to be the disciplinarian all the time as well as caring and running a home. Some help would be good.

It's hard to cope on your own mentally and financially especially if the father of your children is violent and you have separated. Trying to have a fresh start in life is not easy especially finding a house and keeping safe.

I know it sounds daft but sometimes I feel like I would love enough money just to go on holiday. When I see this written down it looks pretty selfish in the great scheme of things. Every once in a while I think that I am not living my life using all my abilities and talents and maybe that is why I am always saying there has to be more to life than this, but then I snap out of that and just get back to what I have to do. I feel like life is passing me by and for the first time I know of, I'm not sure what to do. However, I think that my son is now getting older, my daughter is moving on and soon I'm going to have to put me first and that is a very scary thought.



Parenting alone can be very stressful and lonely, in my experience. I found that I would have great doubts about my ability to rear my child with confidence and security. A lone parent has no-one to confide in and gain support with the child.

I fear for when my daughter is of college age. I know I will never have the funds and never borrow as that is looking for problems. This country has been very good to lone parents in my opinion, but when people abuse certain areas, it affects all. I applaud most single parents and the people who help them.

Well, I think personally we do get a lot of opportunity when you're on one-parent allowance such as help with school uniforms and shoes and medical card because my daughter had her tonsils taken out and was always up and down to Waterford hospital and Clonmel and Cork and if I had to pay for that I don't know what I would do and now my son is down to see ENT surgeon. So I think they're pretty fair to all of us lone parents out there.

All the regulations make it very difficult to get out of the hole you see yourself in. I personally lost out before the budget; I was getting so much on my lone parents [payment] and because I worked the few hours I lost out on an increase. So it doesn't give people the incentive to work even if they could. Childcare costs cripple them and take the bulk of their income so that's not an incentive. Not much offered course- or training-wise. They should widen the choices. Plus the way life has gone the attitude is I think that you may be better off raising your child yourself rather than [him] being raised in childcare. You end up paying loads for it, you miss out on so much of your child's life and you are still broke at the end of the week?!

It can be very tough parenting alone. You face a lot of ups and downs. It is quite difficult when your child is at the age of asking questions: why there is no dad. The best way I explained this is "Some children live with mums and dads, some live with nanny & granddad, some live with aunts and uncles, older sisters or with just mum or just dad." When you are loved and looked after and given a good upbringing and the freedom to speak to a parent about any problems, this is the best part of parenting alone: to have love, trust, respect and health. It's the best you can wish for.

Parenting alone is extremely hard and I feel that people look down on us for being on social welfare but I have to be everything, good/bad guy, cook, nurse, teacher, speech therapist, listener, cleaner and have no back up most of the time. But I also know that while I don't have the big car, fancy house, money: I have the very best interest in my kids and gave up so much to go it alone and most of the time I don't mind what people think. It's hard to get work as I've no childminder and my youngest is extremely attached to me and is very hard going so I'd feel extremely guilty leaving him yet. He will go to school in 1.5 years so hopefully then I'll start pursuing my hopes and dreams.

I am so lucky I have the support of my family. Before I started working I needed their help financially as the Social Welfare payment was not enough. Luckily now I am back on my feet. There are so many women who try to survive on the payment alone and it's not enough.

I find it difficult when I see other mums working and I'm being constantly treated differently. Since foreign workers started coming to Ireland I find it difficult to keep any job because they will do the same job cheaper. I've also just been told today that my working hours will be cut from 20 hours per week to a mere 8 hours from next week due to employer wanting "summer staff". I really feel used. I've been trying to find other work but because I can't work splits, shifts or weekend work, I'm told I'm not good enough. Some nights (most) I cry myself to sleep because I've a mortgage and other loans to clear plus I want to give my child the best start in life. I look at other single mums who have family and I try to imagine what my life would be like if mine were alive to help me. People sometimes just don't realise how lucky they really are.



Parenting alone is not something anyone sets out to do and every situation is different. I am very lucky to have good support from my family and friends. Not everyone is that lucky. Sometimes though, in school issues it can be very hard, especially confirmation and communions or school plays that sometimes you are made to feel out of place and any parent would not like their child to feel that. My daughter is the best thing that ever happened in my life and I just hope that I will be able to give her a happy life.

I find it lonely and demoralising and I think there is still a stigma attached to it – both for myself and my child. I'm privileged to have my own house and a very supporting family, but I would much rather both for myself and my child, if we were in a two-parent family.

I have been a lone parent for 18 months. While I am glad to be at home with my child I feel I have no future right now. Money is very tight which is very upsetting and if I was working it would be to pay for a childminder/crèche and to pay my rent which makes no sense at all which is very disheartening. Having only my family to count on it's very hard to go out and even have some personal time-out as I am depending on the same couple of family members for any babysitting. At the moment I am just taking each day as it comes and hopefully get a job once my daughter goes to school.

I have three boys pretty close together. Sometimes I do find it hard. I got post-natal depression. It's very hard to go through it alone. You feel like it's going to be like this for the rest of your life. Then you realise your children are the best thing that happened to you no matter what happens. It's just so hard when you're on your own sometimes. But other times you'd have it no other way. It would be nice to go out now and then. I found it very hard after my last baby as he is very clingy. I enjoy being on my own. They'll think of it when they're older "My mam was the only one that looks after us"!

I have two school-going teenage daughters. I am living on little over €200 a week, therefore have very little left over after shopping. The only time I can pay my bills or afford to give my children pocket money is when the children's allowance comes through. I am constantly driving them places because I don't want them hanging around the roads getting into trouble or mixing with the wrong crowd, much to their annoyance as I'm constantly told I'm the only mother who does this!! It's a tough job, every now and again I would like a guard to knock on the door to give them an earful. I think there should be more activities and clubs for the 15-18 year age group.

I try my best for my son. I am not a materialistic person but I do want to provide well for my child. I think the fact that if I go out and work and all my benefits are stopped straight away is ridiculous. I'd have to pay full rent, childcare, healthcare etc. Where do I benefit from my work and being away from my child?? I worked full-time at an accountant's office for 3 weeks 2 years ago. My book was stopped straight away, also rent allowance stopped. They (employers) gave me €320pw; rent €150. Left with €170 – less than what I receive for being unemployed! Still all other bills to pay, weekly shopping to be done etc. etc. Where is the justice in that? I could have done very well in that job but had to do part-time and eventually quit as I was not benefiting at all. I want to work! I reckon a lot of those schemes are organised by people who haven't a clue what it's like to parent alone.

I used to have a cleaning job years ago before I had my son. My daughter used to go to her dad's house. That was the only way I could do the job. Then he met someone and moved town so I had to leave it. It was only for two hours in the evening but I loved it. I was happy to say I had a job. Not much money but it was something to me. So I hope to get another cleaning job when my son is in school for longer hours. That's the only job I'm interested in and I don't have a problem doing cleaning.

## services' review

The following services' review represents one of the three correlated elements of this research and aims to offer baseline information in respect of the services that exist for lone parents in South Tipperary. To our knowledge, this is the first services' review for the target group that has been undertaken in the county. It is based on the data collated from a survey of organisations and agencies that exclusively or partially provide services to lone parents. The findings are presented by service topics that largely correspond with the headings used by the needs analysis. The academic background and national context of service provision to lone parents and to delivering services at a local level are summarised in a separate chapter that precedes the actual services' review.

### The Delivery of High Quality Services and Social Inclusion

The drive to set up an interagency forum in South Tipperary, such as the Lone Parent Initiative Network, is rooted in the conviction held by all partners that lone parents represent one of the groups in society who are at a greater risk of economic disadvantage and social exclusion. With reference to the various research studies on lone parents, the findings of the survey part of this study substantiate the call for a countywide body that would work in a dedicated manner towards better service provision for lone parents at a local level. A sizeable proportion of the population of the county, the one eighth that is made up of lone parents and their children, would benefit from this targeted approach.

It is widely acknowledged that the strategic provision of services at a local level, which meets the identified needs of the target group, can be an effective and efficient means of counteracting social exclusion. This is also supported by national policy, the main document of which is the "National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016" (or NAPS) that has been published by the Office for Social Inclusion and is the successor of the "National Anti-Poverty Strategy" from 1997.<sup>1</sup> The new action plan promises to enhance the co-ordination of services at national and local level for a more inclusive society. Accessible, flexible and customer-centred services as well as effective and efficient cooperation among agencies are identified as key elements in ensuring the delivery of social inclusion across all sectors of society.

Within the novel lifecycle approach of the NAPS, lone parents fall into the category of "People of Working Age" (Chapter 3) who should "be encouraged and supported to participate fully in social, civic and economic life",<sup>2</sup> while at the same time being able to attain income levels to sustain an acceptable standard of living and availing of greater access to education, employment, health and social care, housing and transport. To achieve this vision for lone parents, the government has announced reforms in the areas of income supports, education, training and employment initiatives as well as access to childcare.<sup>3</sup>

The vision of the Irish government, in short, is to fully and actively involve lone parents in the labour market to enable their economic inclusion, which may in turn lead to greater

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<sup>1</sup> The "National Action Plan for Social Inclusion" is available for download from <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/nationalactionplan2007.html>

<sup>2</sup> National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

social inclusion. With this approach, Ireland follows recent international trends in the discourse on social inclusion, which has seen a paradigm shift from social to economic factors as the main cause of marginalisation in society.<sup>4</sup> However, while socio-economic marginalisation may be central to an individual's experience of social exclusion, personal, spatial, environmental, economic or psycho-social disadvantages must be recognised as intensifiers of this experience.

For the purposes of this services' review, it was therefore important to include services which target intensifiers of social exclusion as well as those aiming to offer primarily economic/income supports or to facilitate employment and education initiatives. Such intensifiers include, amongst others:

- Poor health
- Lack of knowledge and information
- Low levels of education
- Geographical isolation
- Isolation from family and the community leading to loneliness
- Poor housing conditions
- Psychological/mental health problems

Service providers may choose to target any combination of these and other intensifiers to combat social exclusion and to encourage an individual to participate fully in society. The delivery of services to the public is consequently quite diverse and complex. This complexity is further fuelled by the co-existence of statutory, private and voluntary organisations.

The Irish Government appears to have recognised the implications of this for the service user with the introduction of the County Development Boards (CDB's) in early 2000 as the new key agencies in the improvement, co-ordination and integration of services at local level. To achieve the objectives set out by government, South Tipperary CDB has prepared a "County Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development 2002-2011" which includes a comprehensive Social Programme and reflects the CDB's responsibility for ensuring that public, local development and community services are accessible to all of the county's residents.

In spite of the fact that the CDB strategy has put an onus on individual service providers to achieve the overall social development objectives, the efficient delivery of services at local level has to overcome key challenges in respect of multi-agency cooperation if it is to meet its objectives. These include:

- Enhanced interagency cooperation
- An improved understanding between organisations
- A system of data sharing between organisations
- A better understanding of pathways between organisations (i.e. for referrals)

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<sup>4</sup> Compare NAPS, page 86 as well as Robin Peace: "Social Exclusion: A Concept in Need of Definition". In: Policy Journal of New Zealand. See also: EC Social Protection Committee: "Report on Indicators in the field of poverty and social exclusion". October 2001 available from: [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/index_en.html)

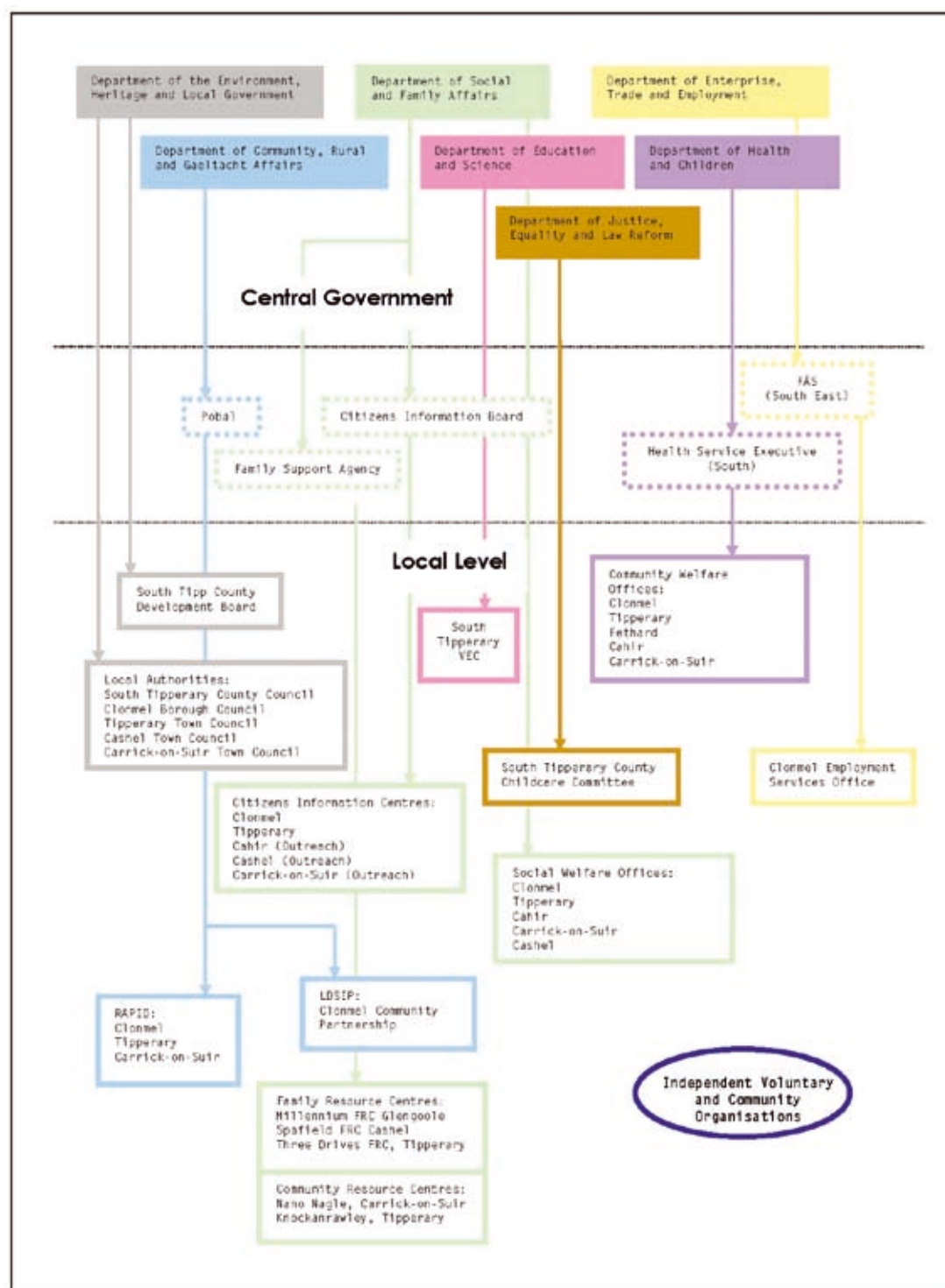


Figure 9: Key agencies in the delivery of services to lone parents at local level

A review of services is therefore imperative to provide the information necessary to overcome such challenges and to identify current levels of service provision as well as deficiencies and possible duplication. A qualitative assessment of individual services will not be provided at this point. However, the reader's attention is drawn to a recent report

published by the National Economic and Social Forum entitled “Improving the Delivery of Quality Public Services.”<sup>5</sup> This report contains a number of recommendations that need to be taken into consideration for future service provision if it is to deliver higher value and better quality services.

While it is acknowledged that government departments would have to be instrumental in implementing a new approach to public service delivery if local services and their users are to benefit, a number of the NESF’s recommendations could be reviewed at CDB level or by individual service providers in the interim. To summarise in the context of service delivery to lone parents at local level, this would imply that:<sup>6</sup>

1. Service design is based on the needs of lone parents and is accessible, timely, holistic and responsive in nature
2. Services focus on early intervention/prevention that utilises the “case management” approach
3. A forum is established that allows for joined-up, strategic planning in the delivery of services to lone parents (under the agreed auspices of a suitable lead agency such as the DSFA)
4. Quality standards are implemented that include a complaints or appeals procedure and emphasise customer care
5. Services explore innovative and experimental approaches
6. Community and voluntary organisations providing services to lone parents should be jointly supported by statutory organisations

It is clear that the Lone Parent Initiative Network, which has so far existed as an informal partnership of organisations, has the capacity to become the official forum recommended above to work toward an improvement of local service delivery to lone parents in South Tipperary. It would be vital in this respect that all of the key agencies (see Figure 9) who provide services to lone parents at a local level engage in this.

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<sup>5</sup> National Economic and Social Forum: Improving the Delivery of Quality Public Services. Dublin: NESF 2006 (= Forum Report No. 34).

<sup>6</sup> Comp. *ibid.* p. 112-117.

## Services for Lone Parents in South Tipperary

While there are a large number of services providing support to vulnerable people in South Tipperary, few of them have lone parents as a named target group and only one organisation (the South Tipperary Lone Parent Initiative) provides services exclusively to lone parents in the county. In the main, lone parents are availing of services that exist for the general public or for named target groups, of which they are one. The lack of more organisations that would solely provide services to lone parents is, in itself, not problematical if other services are integrated and meet their needs. In fact, recent research advocates ‘tailored universalism’ which provides for “equality of access by everybody” and for “services adapted to suit individual needs”, instead of “the present contingency target-group approach”.<sup>1</sup>

### *Income Supports*

Income supports for lone parents are devised at government level primarily by the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) as part of Social Welfare and by the Revenue through the Taxation System. Income support payments and so-called secondary benefits, which are supplements to the basic payment, are administered locally by the DSFA (through Social Welfare Branch or Local Offices) and by the HSE via the Community Welfare Service. A network of Citizens Information Centres (see “Information and Advice” below) provides an independent information and advice service in respect of these income supports.

Social Welfare Offices in South Tipperary are located in:

- Cahir
- Carrick-on-Suir
- Cashel
- Clonmel
- Tipperary

The locations of Community Welfare Offices in South Tipperary and Outreach Clinics (O) are:

- Bansha (O)
- Cahir
- Cappawhite (O)
- Carrick-on-Suir
- Cashel
- Clonmel
- Drangan (O)
- Dundrum (O)
- Emly (O)
- Fethard
- Killenaule (O)
- New Inn (O)
- Tipperary Town

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<sup>1</sup> National Economic and Social Forum: Improving the Delivery of Quality Public Services. Dublin: NESF 2006 (= Forum Report No. 34), p. 13

Revenue District Offices are in:

- Clonmel (Clonmel and Environs)
- Thurles (Rest of South Tipperary)

The chief Social Welfare payments applicable to lone parents are the means-tested One-Parent Family Payment as well as Child Benefit and Early Childcare Supplement which are paid universally to the parents of all children in the qualifying age range. Contributory Widow's or Widower's Pension is payable to lone parents when either their deceased spouse or they themselves have made enough PRSI contributions. Recipients of One-Parent Family Payment can avail of the Household Budget Scheme and may be eligible for other benefits, such as Family Income Supplement or Supplementary Welfare Allowance (comprising Rent Supplement, Mortgage Interest Supplement, Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, Diet Supplement, Heating Supplement, Exceptional Needs Payment or Urgent Needs Payment). The latter are administered by the Community Welfare Service. Income Supports in the form of tax credits include the One-Parent Tax Credit, the Widow's or Widower's Tax Credit and the Revenue Job Assist Scheme (see also "Employment").

### *Childcare*

Lone parents have a range of options in respect of childcare. A list of private and community-based preschool service providers who are registered with the HSE is available from South Tipperary County Childcare Committee. Community and Family Resource Centres play an active role in providing some of the community-based services.

Community-based childcare services are available in:

- Ardfinnan
- Ballingarry
- Ballylynch (Suir CDP)
- Ballyporeen
- Cahir
- Carrick-on-Suir
- Cashel (Spafield FRC)
- Clogheen
- Clonmel (Clonmel CRC)
- Drangan
- Emly
- Fethard
- Glengoole (Millennium FRC)
- Gortnahoe
- Grangemockler
- Holycross
- Killenaule
- Mullinahone
- Newcastle
- The Commons
- Tipperary (Knockanrawley RC, Community Service Centre)



Funding for childcare costs is available for those who avail of vocational training or educational opportunities from FÁS and the VEC (VTOS and Youthreach). The Community Welfare Service also has provisions to help with childcare costs in exceptional cases.

### Health

Health Services are provided through the Health Service Executive. In respect of lone parents, these can be divided into general and specialist services available to the general public and specific services for mothers and children. The HSE also administers the Medical Card/GP Visit Card Schemes and the payment of supplementary benefits through the Community Welfare Service (see “Income Supports”).

General health services are provided by hospitals and General Practitioners. A list of GPs is available from the Irish College of General Practitioners. Caredoc is an out-of-hours family doctors service for patients in South Tipperary, amongst other counties, with urgent medical problems who need to contact a doctor after surgeries close.

Hospital Services are available in:

- Cashel
- Clonmel

GP Practices are located in:

- Bansha
- Cahir
- Cappawhite
- Carrick-on-Suir
- Cashel
- Clogheen
- Clonmel
- Emly
- Fethard
- Mullinahone
- Tipperary

The Caredoc Service covers all areas in South Tipperary. Local treatment centres which can be directly accessed by the patient are in:

- Clonmel

Community Care Centres, which offer a wide range of health services, are located in:

- Ardfinnan
- Ballingarry
- Ballyporeen
- Ballysloe

- Bansha
- Cahir
- Cappawhite
- Carrick-on-Suir
- Cashel
- Clogheen
- Clonmel (Local Health Office)
- Dundrum
- Emly
- Fethard
- Killenaule
- Kilsheelan
- Mullinahone
- New Inn
- Newcastle
- Tipperary

The HSE employs Public Health Nurses who have a special responsibility for first and second-time mothers, including single mothers. Immunisations, health checks and various other services are also available. Public Health Nurses cover all areas of South Tipperary. The “Mother and Infant Care Service” is available for all women during pregnancy and up to six weeks after giving birth. The Community Mothers’ Scheme is an additional source of support. The services are similar to those provided by the Public Health Nurses, but also include the facilitation of Parent and Baby/Toddler groups.

The Community Mothers Programme is available in:

- Clonmel

There are no dedicated crisis pregnancy services in South Tipperary.

The psychological support services offered by the HSE are generally accessed by a referral system through GPs or other medical professionals. However, services such as support groups and counselling in this area are also offered for a variety of circumstances by voluntary organisations in:

- Cahir (GROW)
- Carrick-on-Suir (Comhar)
- Cashel (Aware)
- Clonmel (GROW and Comhar)
- Tipperary (GROW)

### *Accommodation*

Those lone parents who cannot afford to purchase a home and rely on private/rented accommodation can avail of Rent Supplement or claim the rent relief tax credit. Lone parents who own a home can avail of the Mortgage Interest Supplement (see “Income supports”).

Lone parents are among the local authority housing applicants who may be given a priority in terms of the accommodation that is offered. Rent payable for local authority housing is assessed on income and is therefore a more affordable option for low income one-parent families. The local authorities employ Community Liaison Officers (CLO) who are in a position to provide additional supports to lone parents.

The Local Authorities in South Tipperary are:

- Carrick-on-Suir Town Council (CLO)
- Cashel Town Council
- Clonmel Borough Council (CLO)
- South Tipperary County Council (CLO)
- Tipperary Town Council (CLO)

Local Authority Housing is located in the following towns and villages:

- Annacarty
- Ardfinnan
- Ballagh
- Ballingarry
- Ballinure
- Ballylooby
- Ballyneale
- Ballynonty
- Ballyporeen
- Ballysloe
- Bansha
- Boherlahan
- Burncourt
- Cahir
- Cappawhite
- Carrick-on-Suir
- Cashel
- Clerihan
- Clogheen
- Cloneen
- Clonmel
- Clonoulty
- Cullen
- Donaskeigh
- Donohill

- Drangan
- Dualla
- Dundrum
- Emly
- Fethard
- Glengoose
- Golden
- Gortnahoe
- Grange
- Grangemockler
- Holycross
- Kilcash
- Killenaule
- Killusty
- Kilross
- Kilsheelan
- Knockavilla
- Knocksaintlour
- Lattin
- Lismarock
- Lisronagh
- Lisvernane
- Marlfield
- Monard
- Mullinahone
- New Inn
- Newcastle
- Rosegreen
- Shronell
- The Commons
- Thomastown
- Tipperary

Voluntary and co-operative housing associations supply affordable, rented accommodation in order to fulfil a social need, thereby offering an alternative to local authority housing. In South Tipperary, the only organisation providing accommodation for one-parent families is the Respond Housing Association.

Accommodation provided by Respond is located in:

- Ardfinnan
- Cahir
- Cashel
- Clonmel
- Fethard
- Killenaule

### *Transport*

Iarnród Éireann Railway Stations, all of which are serviced by the Limerick-Rosslare route via Waterford, are situated in:

- Cahir
- Carrick-on-Suir
- Clonmel
- Tipperary

Respondents expressed repeatedly that services from these stations were inadequate, particularly for people commuting to work.

Bus Éireann services can be accessed from:

- Cahir
- Carrick-on-Suir
- Cashel
- Clonmel
- Tipperary

Ring-a-Link is a rural transport initiative that aims to provide a flexible transport service in Carlow, Kilkenny and South Tipperary that integrates with existing transport provision. The areas covered by this service in South Tipperary include:

- Aherlow
- Ardfinnan
- Ballingarry
- Ballylooby
- Ballyporeen
- Bansha
- Burncourt
- Cappawhite
- Castlegrace
- Clogheen
- Cloneen
- Clonmel
- Cullen
- Donaskeigh
- Donohill
- Drangan
- Dundrum
- Emly
- Fethard
- Grange
- Hollyford
- Kilfeacle
- Killenaule

- Kilmanahan
- Knockavilla
- Lattin
- Lisvernane
- Monard
- Mullinahone
- Sologhead
- Tipperary
- Toem

The Kilcommon/Upperchurch Rural Transport Initiative is a transport service for all with transport difficulties. It covers the following parishes in South Tipperary:

- Clonoulty
- Holycross
- Rossmore

### *Education and Training*

Educational and training opportunities that are available to lone parents are primarily the responsibility of FÁS and South Tipperary VEC. The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) is administered by the VEC and offers full-time courses that lead to recognised certificates. The DSFA offers a Back to Education Allowance that practically replaces the One-Parent Family Payment for lone parents who enter publicly-funded second or third level education.

For locations of the Social Welfare Offices, please refer to “Income Supports”.  
For locations of the FÁS Offices, please refer to “Employment”.

The offices of South Tipperary VEC are located in Clonmel. The VEC offers various programmes that may be of interest to lone parents. Besides VTOS, they include the Adult Learning Scheme (ALS) and Back to Education Initiative Courses (BTEI) and take place in the following locations:

- Cahir
- Carrick-on-Suir
- Cashel
- Clonmel
- Killenaule
- Tipperary Town

VEC funding for Community Education is open to applications from any locally-based group. As courses are generally short-lived and depend on community activism, they are not included here. However, many rural communities avail of this opportunity.

FÁS runs (or funds through the Local Training Initiative) training courses in the following locations in South Tipperary:

- Cahir
- Carrick-on-Suir
- Cashel
- Clonmel
- Glengoole
- Tipperary

A number of training schemes funded by the VEC, FÁS and other sources are delivered in the Family and Community Resource Centres (please see “Family and Community Supports”). These are included in the locations listed above.

Other organisations engaging in the provision of training and education for lone parents operate in:

- Cappawhite (Youthreach/VEC)
- Carrick-on-Suir (STLPI)
- Clonmel (STLPI)

The Department of Education and Science administers the Home Tuition Scheme that provides a grant to pregnant girls of school age for tuition at home.

Lastly, Tipperary Institute provides a variety of third level and adult education courses at their campus in

- Clonmel

This campus is also the site of the Institute’s Access Office, which particularly promotes access to higher education for persons who have experienced disadvantage of any kind, including lone parents.

### *Employment*

Employment supports refer to those who are in employment or who are considering returning to work. Some of the items referred to under income supports (i.e. the Family Income Supplement) may be considered an employment support as one of the eligibility criteria is that applicant is working for at least 19 hours per week. In general, however, the term “employment supports” refers to schemes, initiatives or support services that aim to assist and encourage lone parents and others to take up employment. Schemes include the Back to Work Allowance, the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, Revenue Job Assist, Community Employment (CE), and Job Initiative. Employment supports are administered primarily by the FÁS Community Services Division or the Social Welfare Branch/Local Offices. Responsibility for the Revenue Job Assist Scheme, which offers additional tax credits to those who take up employment, is administered by the Revenue Commissioners.



For locations of the Social Welfare Offices, please refer to “Income Supports”.

For locations of Revenue Offices, please also refer to “Income Supports”.

FÁS Offices are located in South Tipperary in:

- Clonmel

The Jobs Clubs in South Tipperary providing training to assist participants who are ready for work to develop the skills that they can use to find a job, are located in:

- Carrick-on-Suir
- Clonmel (Outreach via Clonmel Community Partnership)

A number of voluntary organisations are also involved in the provision of employment support services. These may involve personal assistance in the job search process, career advice, interview skills training, a placement service or assistance throughout the application process. The following organisations provide services in these areas:

- Clonmel (Clonmel Community Partnership)
- Tipperary (Knockanrawley Resource Centre)

Clonmel Community Partnership engages young lone parents in education and training options and provides targeted outreach services in this respect.

### *Information and Advice*

Lone parents can avail of the information, advice and advocacy services offered by the Citizens Information Centres. They are located in

- Clonmel
- Tipperary

and provide outreach clinics in:

- Cahir (O)
- Carrick-on-Suir (O)
- Cashel (O)

An information and advice service is also offered by the South Tipperary Lone Parent Initiative in

- Carrick-on-Suir
- Clonmel

### *Family and Community Supports*

Family and community resource centres and community development projects are generally in a position to support lone parents. The range of these supports varies by location:

- Carrick-on-Suir (Nano Nagle Community Resource Centre and Suir CDP)
- Cashel (Spafield Family Resource Centre)
- Clonmel (Community Resource Centre and Clonmel Community Partnership)
- Glengoose (Millennium Family Resource Centre)
- Tipperary (Knockanrawley Resource Centre and Three Drives Family Resource Centre and Community Services Centre, St. Michael's Street)

Family Support Services provided by the HSE through the Social Work Department primarily cover child welfare and child protection. Barnardos offers an additional interagency "case management" approach to child welfare. Child Psychology and Psychiatry services are accessible via GP referrals. Family Support Services are available in:

- Tipperary (Family Therapy and Counselling Service at Knockanrawley RC)
- Clonmel (Social Works Department and Barnardos)

Direct Access to the Community Care Psychology Service is available in the form of a drop-in-service at:

- Clonmel

Parenting supports are offered in the following locations:

- Tipperary (Knockanrawley RC)
- Clonmel (Community Parent Support Programme, Adlerian Network of Ireland)

The Home School Community Liaison Scheme can provide support to lone parents of children who are at risk of not reaching their educational potential. Home School Community Liaison Officers also offer support to pregnant students and teenage mothers. Schools in the following towns participate in this programme:

- Cahir
- Carrick-on-Suir
- Clonmel
- Killenaule
- Tipperary

Lone Parent Support Groups meet at:

- Clonmel (STLPI)
- Carrick-on-Suir (STLPI)
- Tipperary (Knockanrawley RC)

In addition, women's groups may offer support to lone mothers. These exist in many communities.

Youth Services may offer vital supports to young lone mothers and fathers. They are provided by the Tipperary Regional Youth Service, Waterford Regional Youth Service and Foroige (Neighbourhood Youth Project) and can be accessed in:

- Carrick-on-Suir
- Cashel
- Clonmel
- Tipperary

### *Other Supports*

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) provides information and advice for people who are in financial difficulty and may be of assistance to lone parents in respect of budgeting and income supports. MABS offices are in:

- Carrick-on-Suir
- Clonmel
- Tipperary

Free Legal Advice and Free Legal Aid are available through the Citizens Information Centre in:

- Clonmel

Services for victims of (domestic) violence are located in:

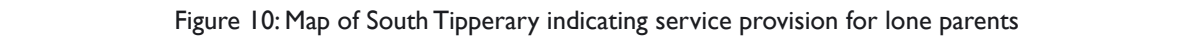
- Clonmel (Cuan Saor and Tipperary Rape Crisis Centre)

An Garda Síochána has Police Stations in:

- Cahir
- Carrick-on-Suir
- Cashel
- Clonmel
- Fethard
- Tipperary

Bereavement support is available in:

- Clonmel (National Association of Widows and Bereavement Support Group)



*Services by Location*

The following table lists the services available to lone parents in each village or town and is complemented by Figure 10, which illustrates the service provision density for South Tipperary.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Direct Access to</b>
Aherlow	Rural Transport Service
Annacarty	Local Authority Housing
Ardfinnan	Community-based Childcare Services Community Care Centre Local Authority Housing Voluntary Social Housing Rural Transport Service
Ballagh (Clonoulty)	Local Authority Housing
Ballingarry	Community-based Childcare Services Community Care Centre Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service
Ballinure	Local Authority Housing
Ballylooby	Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service
Ballylynch	Community-based Childcare Services
Ballyneale	Local Authority Housing
Ballynonty	Local Authority Housing
Ballyporeen	Community-based Childcare Services Community Care Centre Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service
Ballysloe	Community Care Centre Local Authority Housing
Bansha	Community Welfare Office (via Outreach Clinic) Community Care Centre Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service General Practitioner(s)
Boherlahan	Local Authority Housing
Burncourt	Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service

Cahir	<p> Social Welfare Office  Community Welfare Office  Community-based Childcare Services  Community Care Centre  Psychological Support Services &amp; Counselling (GROW)  Local Authority Housing  Voluntary Social Housing  Iarnrod Éireann Rail Service  Bus Éireann Service  Adult Education Service  FÁS Training Service  Citizens Information Service (via Outreach Clinic)  Home School Community Liaison Programme  Police Station  General Practitioner(s) </p>
Cappawhite	<p> Community Welfare Office (via Outreach Clinic)  Community Care Centre  Local Authority Housing  Rural Transport Service  Adult Education Service (Youthreach)  General Practitioner(s) </p>
Carrick-on-Suir	<p> Social Welfare Office  Community Welfare Office  Money Advice &amp; Budgeting Service  Community-based Childcare Services  Community Care Centre  Psychological Support Services &amp; Counselling (Comhar)  Local Authority Housing  Iarnrod Éireann Rail Service  Bus Éireann Service  Adult Education Service  FÁS Training Service  Jobs Club/Employment Service  Citizens Information Service (via Outreach Clinic)  Information Service for Lone Parents  Lone Parent Support Group  Community Resource Centre  Home School Community Liaison Programme  Youth Services  Police Station  General Practitioner(s) </p>

Cashel	Social Welfare Office Community Welfare Office Community-based Childcare Services Hospital Service Community Care Centre Psychological Support Services & Counselling (Aware) Local Authority Housing Voluntary Social Housing Bus Éireann Service Adult Education Service FÁS Training Service Citizens Information Service (via Outreach Clinic) Community Resource Centre Youth Services Police Station General Practitioner(s)
Castlegrace	Rural Transport Service
Clerihan	Local Authority Housing
Clogheen	Community-based Childcare Services Community Care Centre Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service General Practitioner(s)
Cloneen	Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service



Clonmel	<p> Social Welfare Office  Community Welfare Office  Revenue District Office  Money Advice &amp; Budgeting Service  Community-based Childcare Services  Hospital Service  General Practitioner(s)  Caredoc Treatment Centre  Community Care Centre  Community Mothers Programme  Psychological Support Services &amp; Counselling (GROW &amp; Comhar)  Local Authority Housing  Voluntary Social Housing  Iarnrod Éireann Rail Service  Bus Éireann Service  Rural Transport Service  Adult Education Service  Third Level Education Institution  FÁS Training Service  FÁS Employment Service Office  Voluntary Employment Service  Citizens Information Service  Information Service for Lone Parents  Lone Parent Support Group  Community Resource Centre  Child Support/Child Welfare Services  Parent Support Programmes  Home School Community Liaison Programme  Youth Services  Free Legal Aid/Advice Service  Services for Victims of Domestic Violence  Bereavement Support Services  Police Station </p>
Clonoulty	<p> Local Authority Housing  Rural Transport Service </p>
Cullen	<p> Local Authority Housing  Rural Transport Service </p>
Donaskeigh	<p> Local Authority Housing  Rural Transport Service </p>
Donohill	<p> Local Authority Housing  Rural Transport Service </p>

Drangan	Community Welfare Office (via Outreach Clinic) Community-based Childcare Services Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service
Dualla	Local Authority Housing
Dundrum	Community Welfare Office (via Outreach Clinic) Community Care Centre Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service
Emly	Community Welfare Office (via Outreach Clinic) Community-based Childcare Services Community Care Centre General Practitioner(s) Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service
Faugheen	Local Authority Housing
Fethard	Community Welfare Office Community-based Childcare Services Community Care Centre General Practitioner(s) Local Authority Housing Voluntary Social Housing Rural Transport Service Police Station
Glengoole	Community-based Childcare Services Local Authority Housing FÁS Training Service Family Resource Centre
Golden	Local Authority Housing
Gortnahoe	Community-based Childcare Services Local Authority Housing
Grange	Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service
Grangemockler	Community-based Childcare Services Local Authority Housing
Hollyford	Rural Transport Service
Holycross	Community-based Childcare Services Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service
Kilfeacle	Rural Transport Service

Kilcash	Local Authority Housing
Killenaule	Community Welfare Office (via Outreach Clinic) Community-based Childcare Services Community Care Centre Local Authority Housing Voluntary Social Housing Rural Transport Service Adult Education Service Home School Community Liaison Programme
Killusty	Local Authority Housing
Kilmanahan	Rural Transport Service
Kilross	Local Authority Housing
Kilsheelan	Community Care Centre Local Authority Housing
Knockavilla	Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service
Knocksaintlour (Cashel)	Local Authority Housing
Lattin	Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service
Lisnamrock	Local Authority Housing
Lisronagh	Local Authority Housing
Lisvernane	Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service
Marlfield	Local Authority Housing
Monard	Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service
Mullinahone	Community-based Childcare Services Community Care Centre General Practitioner(s) Local Authority Housing Rural Transport Service
New Inn	Community Welfare Office (via Outreach Clinic) Community Care Centre Local Authority Housing
Newcastle	Community-based Childcare Services Community Care Centre Local Authority Housing
Rosegreen	Local Authority Housing
Rossmore	Rural Transport Service

Solohead	Rural Transport Service
Shronell	Local Authority Housing
The Commons	Community-based Childcare Services Local Authority Housing
Thomastown	Local Authority Housing
Tipperary	Social Welfare Office Community Welfare Office Money Advice & Budgeting Service Community-based Childcare Services Community Care Centre General Practitioner(s) Psychological Support Services & Counselling (GROW) Local Authority Housing Iarnrod Éireann Railway Service Bus Éireann Service Rural Transport Service Adult Education Service FÁS Training Service Voluntary Employment Service Citizens Information Service Resource Centre/Family Resource Centre Family Therapy & Counselling Service Lone Parent Support Group Home School Community Liaison Programme Youth Services Police Station
Toem	Rural Transport Service

Table 20: Access to services for lone parents by location

### Summary

This review of services for lone parents in South Tipperary has primarily looked at quantitative data to establish current provision levels and establish potential service gaps or duplications. It was not within the scope of this research to assess services in respect of their quality and accessibility. Services offered by private providers were not examined either.

It is true to say that lone parents can avail of a large number of services under the above headings, some of which are statutory and others voluntary. Broadly speaking, it is possible to distinguish between services that meet basic needs (such as accommodation, income supports, public transport and medical services) and support services which are of assistance to an individual in specific circumstances. The level of service provision established in respect of the first category appears to be satisfactory in terms of its geographical dimension. However, associated issues specified in the needs analysis must be addressed at government level and until such a time, cannot have any implications for service delivery at local level.

In contrast, support services are more likely to be provided on a voluntary basis. However, they are of particular importance where they rebuild the capacity of a person for self-reliance thus reducing their dependency on welfare services. Their provision is considerably more flexible and offers a wider scope to adapt to local needs while their linkage to the community they serve is vital for the quality and sustainability of these services.

South Tipperary is fortunate to have a strong network of Family or Community Resource Centres, with locations in Clonmel, Carrick-on-Suir, Tipperary, Cashel and Glengoose in the Slieveardagh region. They constitute ideal resources for further developing the provision of support services. In fact, a Community or Family Resource Centre is needed in Cahir to service this fast-growing town and its environs and close a geographical gap in this area.

In order to determine which specific services are needed in a particular area, qualitative research will be required. The quantitative analysis provided here can merely uncover broad geographical gaps. From this, it would appear that

- Employment support services are needed in Cashel and Cahir
- Better access to public (rural) transport is needed in the northeast and southeast of the county
- An independent information service ought to complement the range of public services in the Glengoose area
- Services in Tipperary need to be linked to the Lattin/Cullen area (i.e. through outreach)
- The Ardfinnan and Clogheen areas are under-served in respect of community welfare services and training/education
- Fethard generally lacks family support and community services and may need more accessible education and training opportunities

A service for lone parents that is currently not provided anywhere, but has been a recurring theme in the comments and suggestions of the survey participants, is one that would respond to the social needs of this group. A local organisation dedicated to organising activities (including informal meetings, day trips, holidays, etc.) that both meet the social needs and financial capacities of lone parents does not exist. By freeing up capacity in terms of information provision (i.e. through referrals to dedicated Information Officers in the CICs) and education (i.e. by transferring this brief onto CRC/FRCs), the South Tipperary Lone Parent Initiative may be able to fill this gap.

Lastly, there is an immediate need for better information provision on the services that exist to support lone parents. With so many agencies involved in service provision at local level and such a variety of individual circumstances, a lack of clarity in respect of the role of organisations and the services they provide presents an insurmountable barrier for anyone in need of support. The provision of information on these services at the point in time when a person becomes a lone parent (in as far as this is possible) may be the most important service of all.

# appendices

## **Appendix I – Members of the Lone Parent Initiative Network**

- Pat Holland (South Tipperary County Development Board & South Tipperary County Council)
- Phil Shanahan (Clonmel Community Partnership)
- Antje Hogan (Co.Tipperary Citizens Information Service)
- Liz Moloney (South Tipperary Lone Parent Initiative)
- Liam Murphy (Department of Social and Family Affairs)
- Margaret Flood (South Tipperary Lone Parent Initiative, Carrick-on-Suir)
- Michelle Putti (Millennium Family Resource Centre, Glengoole)
- Tadg Browne (Community Liaison Officer, Clonmel Borough Council)
- Tess Collins (Community Liaison Officer, South Tipperary County Council)
- David O'Donnell (Department of Social and Family Affairs)
- Hilary Ryan (Clonmel Community Partnership)
- Gerry Hickey (South Tipperary County Childcare Committee)
- Eileen Condon/Veronice Crowe (County Tipperary S.R.VEC)
- Angela Joy (Health Service Executive)

## Appendix 2: Lone Parent Households in South Tipperary by Electoral Divisions

Electoral Division	Lone Mother FU	% of LP FU	Lone Father FU	% of LP FU	Total LP FU	% of all FU	Overall FUs	Couple FUs
082 Carrickbeg Urban	90	90.0%	10	10.0%	100	34.6%	289	189
083 Carrick-on-Suir Urban	273	88.9%	34	11.1%	307	36.8%	835	528
084 Cashel Urban	156	92.3%	13	7.7%	169	42.4%	399	230
085 Clonmel East Urban	209	86.7%	32	13.3%	241	37.4%	644	403
086 Clonmel West Urban	356	86.4%	56	13.6%	412	38.0%	1,085	673
087 Tipperary East Urban	205	91.1%	20	8.9%	225	45.8%	491	266
088 Tipperary West Urban	94	87.8%	13	12.2%	107	36.9%	290	183
089 Carrick-on-Suir Rural	14	82.3%	3	17.7%	17	16.8%	101	84
090 Garrangibbon	26	96.3%	1	3.7%	27	23.9%	113	86
091 Kilmurry	11	73.3%	4	26.7%	15	25.9%	58	43
092 Newtown	17	89.5%	2	10.5%	19	25.3%	75	56
093 Ardmayle	16	80.0%	4	20.0%	20	18.0%	111	91
094 Ardsallagh	9	81.8%	2	18.2%	11	13.9%	79	68
095 Ballysheehan	11	78.6%	3	21.4%	14	18.4%	76	62
096 Cashel Rural	47	87.0%	7	13.0%	54	17.7%	305	251
097 Clogher	10	90.9%	1	9.1%	11	27.5%	40	29
098 Cloneen	17	85.0%	3	15.0%	20	23.8%	84	64
099 Clonoulty East	15	93.8%	1	6.2%	16	16.5%	97	81
100 Clonoulty West	22	81.5%	5	18.5%	27	21.6%	125	98
101 Colman	7	77.8%	2	22.2%	9	11.7%	77	68
102 Cooleagh	14	87.5%	2	12.5%	16	16.2%	99	83
103 Drangan	17	81.0%	4	19.0%	21	17.8%	118	97
104 Fethard	49	80.3%	12	19.7%	61	39.6%	154	93
105 Gaile	33	89.2%	4	10.8%	37	26.8%	138	101
106 Graigue	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	1	4.0%	25	24
107 Greystown	10	62.5%	6	37.5%	16	19.8%	81	65
108 Killeenasteena	12	85.7%	2	14.3%	14	13.6%	103	89
109 Killenaule	49	76.6%	15	23.4%	64	27.7%	231	167
110 Kilpatrick	30	90.9%	3	9.1%	33	19.4%	170	137
111 Knockgraffon	20	80.0%	5	20.0%	25	17.9%	140	115
112 Magorban	11	84.6%	2	15.4%	13	12.7%	102	89
113 Nodstown	16	80.0%	4	20.0%	20	22.7%	88	68
114 Oughterleague	20	80.0%	5	20.0%	25	28.4%	88	63
115 Peppardstown	58	86.6%	9	13.4%	67	25.6%	262	195
116 Tullamain	33	86.8%	5	13.2%	38	26.2%	145	107
117 Ardfinnan	42	80.8%	10	19.2%	52	25.6%	203	151
118 Ballybacon	10	90.9%	1	9.1%	11	13.6%	81	70
119 Ballyporeen	28	87.5%	4	12.5%	32	18.4%	174	142



Electoral Division	Lone Mother FU	% of LP FU	Lone Father FU	% of LP FU	Total LP FU	% of all FU	Overall FUs	Couple FUs
I20 Burncourt	15	100.0%	0	0.0%	15	20.0%	75	60
I21 Caher	32	84.2%	6	15.8%	38	23.6%	161	123
I22 Clogheen	31	73.8%	11	26.2%	42	24.6%	171	129
I23 Coolagarranroe	13	76.5%	4	23.5%	17	17.3%	98	81
I24 Derrygrath	13	65.0%	7	35.0%	20	18.2%	110	90
I25 Kilcommon	84	83.2%	17	16.8%	101	26.9%	376	275
I26 Kilcoran	6	75.0%	2	25.0%	8	10.0%	80	72
I27 Mortlestown	69	88.5%	9	11.5%	78	30.2%	258	180
I28 Newcastle	18	85.7%	3	14.3%	21	20.8%	101	80
I29 Tubbrid	8	80.0%	2	20.0%	10	10.6%	94	84
I30 Tullaghamelan	22	78.6%	6	21.4%	28	15.2%	184	156
I31 Tullaghorton	6	75.0%	2	25.0%	8	15.4%	52	44
I32 Ballyclerahan	30	90.9%	3	9.1%	33	16.8%	196	163
I33 Clonmel Rural	216	85.0%	38	15.0%	254	28.3%	899	645
I34 Inishlounaght	93	86.9%	14	13.1%	107	17.7%	605	498
I35 Kilcash	9	64.3%	5	35.7%	14	11.1%	126	112
I36-I37 Kilsheelan/Killaloan	49	79.0%	13	21.0%	62	24.4%	254	192
I38 Kiltinan	6	66.7%	3	33.3%	9	17.6%	51	42
I39 Lisronagh	25	100.0%	0	0.0%	25	15.2%	165	140
I40 Anner	8	80.0%	2	20.0%	10	15.4%	65	55
I41 Ballingarry	33	91.7%	3	8.3%	36	26.9%	134	98
I42 Ballyphilip	12	75.0%	4	25.0%	16	23.2%	69	53
I43 Buolick	25	78.1%	7	21.9%	32	27.1%	118	86
I44 Crohane	5	83.3%	1	16.7%	6	15.8%	38	32
I45 Farranrory	20	74.1%	7	25.9%	27	27.8%	97	70
I46 Fennor	15	83.3%	3	16.7%	18	16.2%	111	93
I47 Kilcooly	8	80.0%	2	20.0%	10	18.2%	55	45
I48 Kilvemnon	10	76.9%	3	23.1%	13	18.1%	72	59
I49 Modeshil	10	90.9%	1	9.1%	11	19.3%	57	46
I50 Mullinahone	42	89.4%	5	10.6%	47	28.3%	166	119
I51 New Birmingham	32	97.0%	1	3.0%	33	34.7%	95	62
I52 Poyntstown	9	64.3%	5	35.7%	14	35.9%	39	25
I53 Ballycarron	6	100.0%	0	0.0%	6	13.6%	44	38
I54 Ballygriffin	6	66.7%	3	33.3%	9	17.3%	52	43
I55 Ballykisteen	18	85.7%	3	14.3%	21	17.2%	122	101
I56 Bansha	32	80.0%	8	20.0%	40	26.3%	152	112
I57 Bruis	12	85.7%	2	14.3%	14	20.6%	68	54
I58 Cappagh	39	88.6%	5	11.4%	44	29.5%	149	105
I59 Clonbeg	22	81.5%	5	18.5%	27	22.0%	123	96
I60 Cullen	13	76.5%	4	23.5%	17	30.4%	56	39

Electoral Division	Lone Mother FU	% of LP FU	Lone Father FU	% of LP FU	Total LP FU	% of all FU	Overall FUs	Couple FUs
I61 Curraheen	8	72.7%	3	27.3%	11	20.0%	55	44
I62 Donohill	25	86.2%	4	13.8%	29	23.8%	122	93
I63 Drumwood	15	93.8%	1	6.3%	16	16.5%	97	81
I64 Emly	25	78.1%	7	21.9%	32	26.7%	120	88
I65 Glengar	6	100.0%	0	0.0%	6	13.3%	45	39
I66 Golden	28	82.4%	6	17.6%	34	23.1%	147	113
I67 Kilfeakle	9	69.2%	4	30.8%	13	14.4%	90	77
I68 Killadrisfe	12	85.7%	2	14.3%	14	15.2%	92	78
I69 Kilmucklin	17	65.4%	9	34.6%	26	23.9%	109	83
I70 Lattin	26	83.9%	5	16.1%	31	29.5%	105	74
I71 Rathlynin	5	71.4%	2	28.6%	7	10.8%	65	58
I72 Rodus	6	85.7%	1	14.3%	7	16.7%	42	35
I73 Shronell	15	88.2%	2	11.8%	17	24.6%	69	52
I74 Solloghobeg	9	100.0%	0	0.0%	9	21.4%	42	33
I75 Templeineiry	19	86.4%	3	13.6%	22	27.5%	80	58
I76 Thomastown	14	82.4%	3	17.6%	17	22.7%	75	58
I77 Tipperary Rural	54	78.3%	15	21.7%	69	18.6%	371	302

## Appendix 3 - Questionnaire with Answer Percentages

I-1 Are you...

Male	10	2.5%
Female	388	96.5%
No answer	4	1.0%
	402	100.0%

I-2 How old are you?

15-19 years	9	2.2%
20-24 years	67	16.7%
25-29 years	101	25.1%
30-34 years	53	13.2%
35-39 years	56	13.9%
40-44 years	55	13.7%
45-49 years	34	8.5%
50-54 years	13	3.2%
55-59 years	5	1.2%
Over 60 years	4	1.0%
No answer	5	1.2%
	402	100.0%

I-3 Where do you live?

Aherlow	2	0.5%
Ardfinnan	6	1.5%
Ballingarry	2	0.5%
Ballylooby	2	0.5%
Ballyneale	1	0.2%
Ballypatrick	1	0.2%
Ballyporeen	5	1.2%
Bansha	7	1.7%
Boherlahan	1	0.2%
Burncourt	2	0.5%
Cahir	18	4.5%
Cappawhite	10	2.5%
Carrick-on-Suir	57	14.2%
Cashel	20	5.0%
Clerihan	4	1.0%
Clogheen	4	1.0%
Cloneen	1	0.2%
Clonmel	103	25.6%
Clonoulty	2	0.5%
Donohill	1	0.2%
Drangan	1	0.2%

Dualla	1	0.2%
Dundrum	3	0.7%
Emly	6	1.5%
Fethard	15	3.7%
Glengoole	1	0.2%
Golden	5	1.2%
Grange	2	0.5%
Grangemockler	6	1.5%
Hollyford	2	0.5%
Killenaule	3	0.7%
Killusty	1	0.2%
Kilross	1	0.2%
Kilsheelan	3	0.7%
Knockavilla	2	0.5%
Lattin	2	0.5%
Lisronagh	3	0.7%
Lisvernane	1	0.2%
Mullinahone	3	0.7%
New Inn	4	1.0%
Newcastle	1	0.2%
Rosegreen	3	0.7%
Rossmore	1	0.2%
Sologhead	1	0.2%
Tipperary	59	14.7%
No answer	23	5.7%
	402	100.0%

Rural	257	63.9%
Urban	122	30.3%
No answer	23	5.7%
	402	100.0%

I-4 What best describes your marital status?

Never married	266	66.2%
Widowed	6	1.5%
Divorced	28	7.0%
Deserted	9	2.2%
Separated	78	19.4%
Married	4	1.0%
Other	5	1.2%
No answer	6	1.5%
	402	100.0%

## I-5 What is your nationality?

Irish	351	87.3%
UK	24	6.0%
UK and Irish	4	1.0%
Latvian	5	1.2%
Polish	2	0.5%
American	1	0.2%
Belarussian	1	0.2%
Hungarian	1	0.2%
Italian	1	0.2%
Japanese	1	0.2%
Mexican	1	0.2%
Nigerian	1	0.2%
Russian	1	0.2%
Nationality not stated	4	1.0%
No answer	4	1.0%
	402	100.0%

Irish (including Irish/UK)	355	88.3%
Other	43	10.7%
No answer	4	1.0%
	402	100.0%

## I-6 Do you belong to the Irish Travelling Community?

Yes	4	1.0%
No	394	98.0%
No answer	4	1.0%
	402	100.0%

## I-7 Please tell us who lives in your household apart from yourself.

Lone parent household with child/children only	320	79.6%
Lone parent household with child/children and other family members	12	3.0%
Lone parent living in parents' household	61	15.2%
Lone parent living with child/children and non-related persons	6	1.5%
No answer	3	0.7%
	402	100.0%

I-8 You are parenting alone for one or more children. Is this child or are these children...

Natural Child/children	394	98.0%
Natural Child and grandchild	1	0.2%
Adoptive Child	0	0.0%
Grandchild	0	0.0%
Foster Child	0	0.0%
Other	1	0.2%
No answer	6	1.5%
	402	100.0%

I-9 Would you like to share any other information about yourself as a lone parent?

II-1 How many children do you have?

1 child	211	52.5%
2 children	115	28.6%
3 children	41	10.2%
4 children	20	5.0%
5 children	5	1.2%
6 children	4	1.0%
7 children	4	1.0%
8 children	1	0.2%
11 children	1	0.2%
	402	100.0%

II-2 Please tell us the age and sex of each child!

Children aged 4 and under	197	26.6%
Children aged 5 to 18	407	55.0%
Children aged 19 and over	124	16.8%
Children age not stated	12	1.6%
	740	100.0%

II-3 Do your children usually live with you?

No. of children who do not ordinarily live with their parent	97	13.1%
No. of children who ordinarily live with their parent	643	86.9%
	740	100.0%

II-4 Do any of your children live with a disability?

Yes	30	7.5%
No	359	89.3%
No answer	13	3.2%
	402	100.0%

II-5 If you have children living with a disability, are you satisfied with the support you are receiving?

Yes	14	46.7%
No	14	46.7%
No answer	2	6.7%
	30	100.0%

II-6 If you have children of pre-school age, how are they usually cared for?

Lone parent looks after child/children exclusively	79	45.7%
Lone parent uses other childcare options	72	41.6%
Missing answers	22	12.7%
	173	100.0%
<i>Of those who use other options</i>		
Crèche/Preschool	34	47.2%
Family Members	29	40.3%
Childminder	14	19.4%
Others	2	2.8%

II-7 If you have children of school-going age, how are they cared for after school?

Lone parent looks after child/children exclusively	185	67.5%
Lone parent uses other childcare options	75	27.4%
Missing answers	14	5.1%
	274	100.0%
<i>Of those who use other options</i>		
Community Group	8	10.7%
Family Members	52	69.3%
Childminder	11	14.7%
Others	6	8.0%

II-8 Do you care for any other person(s) apart from your children (i.e. a parent or other family member)?

Yes	21	5.2%
No	367	91.3%
No answer	14	3.5%
	402	100.0%



II-9 If you have problems with childcare, what would help your situation?

Cheaper childcare	166	43.0%
Free childcare	88	22.8%
More information on childcare options	45	11.7%
More flexible childcare	41	10.6%
Childcare available closer to home	27	7.0%
Transport	42	10.9%
Better quality childcare	11	2.8%
Other	25	6.5%

III-1 What type of accommodation do you live in?

Local Authority	135	33.6%
Private rented	98	24.4%
Owner-occupied	91	22.6%
At home with parents	62	15.4%
With relatives other than parents	2	0.5%
Respond Housing	4	1.0%
Shared Ownership	2	0.5%
Women's Refuge	1	0.2%
Hostel for Asylum Seekers	1	0.2%
Other	5	1.2%
No answer	1	0.2%
	402	100.0%

III-2 Are you currently on a housing waiting list from your local authority?

Yes	100	24.9%
No	284	70.6%
No answer	18	4.5%
	402	100.0%

IV-1 Do you own or have the use of a motor vehicle (i.e. that you drive yourself)?

Yes	250	62.2%
No	148	36.8%
No answer	4	1.0%
	402	100.0%

IV-2 What type of transport do you avail of?

Lift	68	45.9%
Hackney/taxi	57	38.5%
Local Bus	30	20.3%
Ring-a-Link	1	0.7%
Bus Éireann	31	20.9%
Trains	19	12.8%
Other	16	10.8%
No answer	16	

V-1 Which of the following types of school have you completed to date?

None	1	0.2%
Primary School	33	8.2%
Secondary School	282	70.1%
Third Level	78	19.4%
No answer	8	2.0%
	402	100.0%

V-2 Which of these certificates and degrees have you obtained to date?

None	33	8.2%
Junior/Inter Certificate	84	20.9%
Leaving Certificate	110	27.4%
Higher Cert	106	26.4%
Bachelor's Degree	12	3.0%
Master's Degree	1	0.2%
Others	6	1.5%
No answer	50	12.4%
	402	100.0%

V-3 Were you at any time unable to complete a course or degree?

Yes	79	19.7%
No	261	64.9%
No answer	62	15.4%
	402	100.0%

V-4 If yes, please tell us why this was so.

Pregnancy/Birth	15	19.0%
Financial constraints (affordability of fees, loss of income)	11	13.9%
Lack of support to cope/stress	9	11.4%
Difficulties in finding or affording childcare	23	29.1%
Lack of transport	2	2.5%
Course not enjoyable	1	1.3%
Inflexible course times	1	1.3%
Family reasons	9	11.4%
Illness/disability	3	3.8%
Work obligations	2	2.5%
Not specified	10	12.7%

V-5 If yes, do you plan to complete the course or degree at a later time?

Yes	42	53.2%
No	35	44.3%
No answer	2	2.5%
	79	100.0%

V-6 Have you undertaken any vocational training to date (i.e. apprenticeships)?

Yes	83	20.6%
No	283	70.4%
No answer	36	9.0%
	402	100.0%

V-7 Do you feel that you could take more education and training courses if you were not parenting alone?

Yes	312	77.6%
No	73	18.2%
No answer	17	4.2%
	402	100.0%

V-8 Do you feel that you cannot get the “right job” for you because you may not have the necessary qualifications?

Yes	262	65.2%
No	120	29.9%
No answer	20	4.9%
	402	100.0%

V-9 If yes, is that because you cannot avail of education and training opportunities as a lone parent?

Yes	194	74.0%
No	43	16.4%
No answer	25	9.6%
	262	100.0%

V-10 Are you happy with the education your child/children have received to date?

Yes	313	77.9%
No	23	5.7%
No answer/not applicable	66	16.4%
	402	100.0%

V-11 Do you feel as a lone parent it is more difficult for you to make sure your child/children are getting all the support they need in their education?

Yes	94	23.4%
No	239	59.5%
No answer	69	17.1%
	402	100.0%

V-12 Have you any comments about how education for you and/or your child/children could be improved?

VI-1 What best describes your current employment status?

In part-time employment	171	42.8%*
In full-time employment	25	6.3%*
Self-employed	3	0.8%*
Unemployed	14	3.5%*
Not economically active	187	46.8%*
No answer	2	
	402	100.0%*

\*Valid Percent

VI-2 If not employed, which of these best describes your situation?

Stay-at-home parents	155	77.1%
Unemployed	14	7.0%
In education	21	10.4%
Other	6	3.0%
No answer	5	2.5%
	201	100.0%

VI-3 Have you ever or are you currently participating in any of the following schemes/ initiatives?

Community Employment	88	21.9%
VTOS	40	10.0%
Job Initiative	19	4.7%
Job Start/Work Programme	9	2.2%
CSP/SEP	0	0.0%
Supported Employment	3	0.7%
Workplace Scheme	5	1.2%
Other/Not Specified	17	4.2%
	181	45.0%

VI-4 Do any of the following make it difficult for you to combine working and parenting – or (if you are not currently employed) prevent you from taking up employment?

Tax difficulties	21	5.2%
Others	24	6.0%
Discrimination by employers against lone parents	41	10.2%
Personal fears	47	11.7%
Lack of transport	60	14.9%
Overall loss of income	66	16.4%
Jobs are not family-friendly	79	19.7%
Lack of childcare	86	21.4%
Not enough flexible working hours	133	33.1%
Loss of secondary benefits	194	48.3%
Cost of childcare	198	49.3%
Loss of Social Welfare payments and other financial supports	198	49.3%

VI-5 Have you any comments about how employment opportunities could be improved for lone parents?

VII-1 Please tick the payments or supplements you are currently receiving.

Child Benefit	352	87.6%
Early Childcare Supplement	59	14.7%
Family Income Supplement (FIS)	61	15.2%
Guardian's Payment	0	0.0%
Maternity Benefit	3	0.7%
Health & Safety Benefit	0	0.0%
One-Parent Family Payment	351	87.3%
Widow's/Widower's Pension	1	0.2%
Widowed Parent Grant	0	0.0%
Occupational Injuries Benefit	0	0.0%
Back to Education Allowance	3	0.7%
Back to Work Allowance	4	1.0%
Back to School Clothing & Footwear Allowance	108	26.9%
Rent Supplement	62	15.4%

Mortgage Interest Supplement	5	1.2%
Diet Supplement	2	0.5%
Heat Supplement	18	4.5%
Crèche Supplement	2	0.5%
Travel Supplement	1	0.2%
Other	11	2.7%

VII-2 Have you in the past received any payments from the Community Welfare Office?

Yes	219	54.5%
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VII-3 Are you currently receiving any of these payments/supports from the HSE?

Medical Card	297	73.9%
Medical Card for Child/Children	315	78.4%
GP Visit Card	29	7.2%
GP Visit Card for Child/Children	30	7.5%
Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA)	12	3.0%

VII-4 Are you receiving any of these tax credits?

One-Parent Tax Credit	127	31.6%
Widow's Tax Credit	1	0.2%
Incapacitated Child Tax Credit	1	0.2%

VII-5 There are so many financial supports that it is difficult to know them all. Can you please tick those you have heard of before (regardless if you are receiving them)?

		% of those not in receipt, but know about it
Child Benefit	32	64.0%
Early Childcare Supplement	43	12.5%
Family Income Supplement (FIS)	229	67.2%
Guardian's Payment	23	5.7%
Maternity Benefit	252	63.2%
Health & Safety Benefit	15	3.7%
One-Parent Family Payment	34	66.7%
Widow's/Widower's Pension	201	50.1%
Widowed Parent Grant	41	10.2%
Occupational Injuries Benefit	43	10.7%
Back to Education Allowance	148	37.1%
Back to Work Allowance	172	43.2%
Back to School Clothing & Footwear Allowance	222	75.5%
Rent Supplement	248	72.9%
Mortgage Interest Supplement	56	14.1%

Diet Supplement	48	12.0%
Heat Supplement	86	22.4%
Crèche Supplement	31	7.8%
Travel Supplement	51	12.7%
CWO Needs Payments	8	4.4%
Medical Card	83	79.0%
Medical Card for Child/Children	45	51.7%
GP Visit Card	201	53.9%
GP Visit Card for Child/Children	133	35.8%
Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA)	30	7.7%
One-Parent Tax Credit	29	10.5%
Widow's Tax Credit	37	9.2%
Incapacitated Child Tax Credit	18	4.5%

VIII-1 Are you aware of a support group for lone parents in your area?

Yes	149	37.1%
No	250	62.2%
No answer	3	0.7%
	402	100.0%

VIII-2 If yes, how often do you use the services offered by the support group for lone parents in your area?

Never	86	57.7%
Once	14	9.4%
Infrequently	13	8.7%
Regularly	19	12.8%
Other	7	4.7%
No answer	10	6.7%
	149	100.0%

VIII-3 Is there a Family or Community Resource Centre in your area?

Yes	246	61.2%
No	113	28.1%
No answer	43	10.7%
	402	100.0%

VIII-4 If yes, have you ever contacted the centre to find out about their support services?

Yes	79	32.1%
No	162	65.9%
No answer	5	2.0%
	246	100.0%



VIII-5 How do you feel about community supports such as the Resource Centres and support groups?

They are of great help.	114	28.4%
It is good to know they are there, but I don't think I will need their help.	92	22.9%
There is no need for them.	3	0.7%
I don't know.	130	32.3%
Other	21	5.2%
No answer	42	10.4%
	402	100.0%

VIII-6 Which of these national organisations who are dedicated to lone parents have you heard of before?

Treoir	31	7.7%
OPEN	32	8.0%
www.solo.ie	14	3.5%
Gingerbread Ireland	75	18.7%
One Family	54	13.4%
Others	7	1.7%
No answer	232	57.7%

VIII-7 As a person parenting alone, do you feel you need more support in any of these areas?

Taxation	36	9.0%
Transport	73	18.2%
Health	73	18.2%
Education for child	75	18.7%
Parenting	82	20.4%
Budgeting/Debt clearance	91	22.6%
Family Law/Legal Issues	92	22.9%
Personal Support	97	24.1%
Accommodation	105	26.1%
Employment/Job Skills	117	29.1%
Training	121	30.1%
Education for LP	149	37.1%
Childcare	157	39.1%
Income	222	55.2%

VIII-8 Do you have the support of family and friends?

Yes	303	75.4%
No	88	21.9%
No answer	11	2.7%
	402	100.0%

VIII-9 Do you have the support of your child's/children's other parent (incl. maintenance payments and personal help)?

Yes	147	36.6%
No	244	60.7%
Not applicable (i.e. because widowed)	8	2.0%
No answer	3	0.7%
	402	100.0%

VIII-10 Can you think of any other supports you would like to have that weren't mentioned yet?

VIII-11 If you could change one thing in relation to your situation as a lone parent, what would that be?

## Appendix 4: List of Abbreviations

ALS	Adult Learning Scheme
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CCP	Clonmel Community Partnership
CDB	County Development Board
CDP	Community Development Project
CE	Community Employment
CIC	Citizens Information Centre
CIS	Citizens Information Service
CLO	Community Liaison Officer
CRC	Community Resource Centre
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DSFA	Department of Social and Family Affairs
ECDL	European Computer Driving Licence
FRC	Family Resource Centre
GP	General Practitioner
HSE	Health Service Executive
MABS	Money Advice & Budgeting Service
NAPS	National Action Plan for Social Inclusion
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
O	Outreach
OPEN	One Parent Family Exchange
OPF	One-Parent Family Payment
PHN	Public Health Nurse
RC	Resource Centre
SIM	Social Inclusion Measures (Group)
STLPI	South Tipperary Lone Parent Initiative
TIS	County Tipperary Information Service
VEC	Vocational Educational Committee
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

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