

SUPPORTING ONE-PARENT FAMILIES IN IRELAND

B&OPEN

ISSUE 1 SPRING 2007 • FREE



**Funding from
Vodafone**

**New offices
open in Smithfield**

**Government wants
to change support
to Lone Parents**

**Need support
with Education?**

**Why it's so
hard to make
ends meet**

**How to
join OPEN**



OPEN

CONTENTS

News3-5

Including:

- Lone parents achieve Leader certificates
- 'The Future is OPEN' training programme launched
- Are lone parents' living in poverty?
- Doras Bui celebrates 20 years!

Need support with education?6

Do you sometimes wish you could find new ways of dealing with the same problems? Help is at hand! Lone parents in Cavan share their experience of the Parents' in Education Programme

Changing supports to lone parents8

Abolishing the One Parent Family Payment is just one of the ways the Government wants to change supports to lone parents

Why it's so hard to make ends meet9

Everything costs so much but what is the minimum amount needed by a one parent family to live in a low cost, acceptable way?

Join OPEN!10

OPEN's New Membership Policy

Meet OPEN's

Board of Management11

Members of the Board of Management tell us about their experience of OPEN

Dates & Events/
Useful Contacts12



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HELLO READERS!

Welcome to the first issue of **B•Open**, OPEN's new quarterly magazine for you.



This first issue brings news of a number of exciting developments in OPEN – Vodafone has pledged funding to us over the next two years; our new National Centre for Lone Parent Groups was officially opened; our development programme for OPEN members, *The Future Is OPEN*, was launched and the Network's first Regional Office for the border counties in Cavan is to open soon – you will find more on all these stories in this issue.

Almost a third of lone parents live in consistent poverty, which means a person is deprived of basic necessities because they can't afford them. Poverty is an issue that affects lone parents more than most; statistics show that lone parents have the highest rate of poverty of all household types. Addressing this issue is a strong priority for OPEN – we have set up a Pro-Active Policy programme on income adequacy and will keep you up to date on this.

Did you know that the Minister for Social and Family Affairs put forward some radical proposals last April on social welfare reforms, including abolishing the One Parent Family Payment and requiring lone parents to get jobs? The Minister might not realise that almost 7% of people on incomes low enough to place them 'at risk of poverty' are in fact working for a living. See how the new proposals compare to the current system on page 8.

Above all, **B•OPEN** is a forum for YOU, the members – drop us a note, email us or call us – whatever suits you (see contact details below) but please let us know what you think and what you would like to read more about in your magazine! *Happy reading!*

Frances Byrne

Frances Byrne
Chief Executive, OPEN

P.S. Not a member? If you're curious about how to join OPEN – see page 10 for information on OPEN membership!

OPEN is the national network of one-parent families; representing community-based self-help groups throughout Ireland. OPEN works to provide quality supports & services for lone parents and children and to promote their inclusion and progression within wider society. For further information please see www.oneparent.ie

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NEW OPEN OFFICES IN SMITHFIELD



Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Seamus Brennan TD, officially cuts the ribbon on OPEN's new offices and training facilities in Smithfield, with Joan Courtney, OPEN Chairperson (left) and Maria Creighton, former Chairperson. The facility includes meeting rooms, which are available free of charge to member groups

Our wonderful new National Centre for Lone Parent Groups was officially opened by Minister Séamus Brennan TD last May in Smithfield, Dublin, on the United Nations Day of Families. It was a great occasion attended by representatives of member groups all over the country and was a celebration of the many achievements of OPEN members over the years.

Doras Buí, one of OPEN's founding members who celebrated their own 20th anniversary in 2006 (see page 5), made a presentation on their work, including showing a film made in 1989 on the experience of being a lone parent in Coolock. Strikingly, while many things have improved, the main priorities for Doras Buí at that time – access to childcare, training, education and employment, and a decent income – remain as pressing today as they were 18 years ago.

Sharon Kenny, currently participating in *The Future Is OPEN* training, gave a brief and inspiring presentation on how the training had helped her to understand and contribute to discussions on the recently launched government proposals on supporting lone parents.

Best of all, the new National Centre has a state of the art training facility, a free resource for all OPEN member groups for training, meetings and other events. This has been named the Maria Creighton Room in honour of Maria, who embodies what OPEN is all about: inclusion; respect and participation. She was a founding member of the Claremorris Lone Parent Group 'New Beginnings' and joined the Board of OPEN in 1999, becoming Chairperson in 2002 for a three-year term. She has energetically and ably represented us at local, regional, national and international events.

The room was one of Maria's dreams for OPEN and is dedicated to her for her tireless commitment, passion and vision.

If your group wants to book the Maria Creighton Room for training, a meeting or other event, contact Colette Alcock, Tel: 01-8148860 or calcock@oneparent.ie.

Vodafone Ireland Foundation pledges €250,000 to OPEN

Vodafone Ireland Foundation announced plans in December to work with two of Ireland's most impressive charities, the Irish Association for Young People in Care and OPEN. The Foundation plans to work with both organisations on projects aimed at improving the lives of children, young people and their families. In addition, the Foundation can provide strategic advice and practical support for personnel where appropriate, which will add significant value to the grants of almost €250,000 that the Foundation will make available to each organisation over the next two years.

The new grant was welcomed by Frances Byrne, Director of OPEN. "We see this as a real opportunity for the 91 different member organisations that we have throughout the country working to improve the lives of lone parents and their children. This grant will enable us to run an exciting new programme called 'Happy Days', which will enhance the lives of thousands of children."

Vodafone Ireland Foundation was established in 2003 and is the first Foundation of its kind in Ireland. It is amongst 22 Vodafone Foundations around the world and is part of the company's commitment to be a responsible global citizen. Since being set up, Vodafone Ireland Foundation has funded 89 projects throughout Ireland, spending €1.6m.



L-R: Frances Byrne, Chief Executive, OPEN, Jan Moltram, Chair of the Vodafone Ireland Foundation with Jennifer Gargan, CEO of the Irish Association of Young People in Care (IAYPIC)

Did you know?

12% of families in Ireland are headed by a lone parent

42% of lone parents receiving social welfare are between 25 and 34 years of age

38% of those on the housing list in 2005 were one parent families.

Source: CSO, Department of Social and Family Affairs and Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government

LONE PARENTS ACHIEVE LEADER CERTIFICATES



Participants and facilitators enjoying the celebration evening to mark the completion of Open's Leadership Programme

Congratulations to twenty-four new Lone Parent Leaders who received certificates recently on successfully completing Open's Leadership Programme. It was a fantastic and emotional celebration of each person's achievement and their commitment to attending week in, week out, for seven months – staying the course no matter what the obstacles.

The Leadership Programme is one strand of Open's training and development programme *The Future is Open*. With the support of the Department of Social & Family Affairs, OPEN successfully piloted this programme in north Dublin and the north-east region of the country.

Commenting on the group's success, Frances Byrne, Chief Executive of OPEN said: "It has been a privilege and pleasure working with you all and we look forward to working with you in the future as you impart your leadership skills to other lone parents within your group and community."

Newly accredited lone parent Leaders

Olivia Boylan
Jackie Haughey
Audrey Nolan
Aurelie Poulard
Ann McHardy
Glenda McEnroe
Sharon Kenny
Alison Heasley

Natalie O'Hanlon
Susan Brennan
Gillian Walsh
Anneli Haljasorg
Ann Asforis
Nuala McGinnity
Lisa Loughran
Collette Dowdall

Veronica Gray
Sharon Prendergast
Irene Kane
Seamus Connolly
John Murray
Miriam Troy
Philamena Nugent
Julie Birdy

'THE FUTURE IS OPEN' TRAINING PROGRAMME LAUNCHED

OPEN launched its comprehensive training and development programme *The Future is Open*, across the country last summer. In total 21 launches – three in each of our seven regions – were held to bring the programme to three groups:

- Member groups
- Government departments and agencies
- Education and training providers, community development projects and family resource centres.

The Future is Open (TFIO) was created by lone parents for lone parents. The programme has been developed to meet the specific challenges and needs of OPEN member groups. However, to deliver the programme nationwide, we need support and resources from other agencies.

Launching the programme across the regions gave us the opportunity to seek support from the statutory, community and voluntary sector and we were absolutely overwhelmed at the level of support offered, which includes funding opportunities; venues for meeting and training; childcare; trainers, and access to rural transport initiatives.

OPEN is now confident that every local lone parent self-help group in the country will be able to access those elements of TFIO required to meet their needs.



ARE LONE PARENTS LIVING IN POVERTY?

The answer is yes, lone parents have the highest poverty rate of all households. But how is poverty measured?

There are two measurements of poverty used: relative income poverty and consistent poverty. Let's look at each:

- **Relative income poverty** measures the number of people below a certain income level, for example, 60% of the average income
- **Consistent poverty** adds deprivation to the relative income poverty measurement. Where a person cannot afford basic necessities and their income is below the threshold, they are in consistent poverty.

If you, as a lone parent, have to rely on social welfare as your only source of income, you will be in relative income poverty and have a high risk of being in consistent poverty.

OPEN is actively developing practical measures that will help lone parents experiencing poverty. We are regularly meeting with policy makers on your behalf so lone parents will have a way to improve the quality of their lives.

FIRST REGIONAL OFFICE TO OPEN IN CAVAN

OPEN is delighted to announce that our first regional office is to open in Cavan to serve the counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth. OPEN has received significant funding under the EU PEACE II programme to implement *Opening Up, Opening Out* – a capacity building programme designed specifically for lone parent groups in the border counties.

Through this programme we will deliver:

- Accredited leadership training to 12 lone parents from Donegal, Leitrim and Sligo
- An active citizenship programme in each of the six southern border counties
- Peace and reconciliation training, in collaboration with the Glencree Centre for Reconciliation, to lone parents from the region who have completed the leadership and/or active citizenship programmes.

We look forward to working with our 15 member groups in the region as active participants in this programme.

Padraic Smyth is OPEN's Development Officer in this region, you can contact Padraic at: psmyth@oneparent.ie, Tel: 087 9401985



DORAS BUI

CELEBRATES 20 YEARS!

The Doras Buí Parents Alone Resource Centre in Coolock, Dublin, one of Ireland's first lone parent groups, is this year 20 years providing high quality services and support to lone parents. Doras Buí director, Noreen Byrne, tells us about their achievements over the years and the challenges that remain

In 1986 the number of lone parents in Coolock was twice the national average. Doras Buí was founded to support lone parents to become economically and socially independent, and to campaign for changes in government policy. At the time, people parenting alone were stigmatised and labelled.

"The group didn't have a building back then so Dublin Corporation gave us a house on Bunratty Road. The area was known as the 'red light district' and lone mothers were seen as 'loose' women. We were trying to get the centre up and running but there was serious opposition and resistance from the local community," explains Noreen.

Over the years, while some things have changed for the better, many of the same issues remain: "Things have changed dramatically since then. There is more acceptance now but perhaps a level of snobbery still among the wealthier classes that there is a high percentage of teenage girls getting pregnant and becoming dependent on social welfare payments while the taxpayer foots the bill. Of course this has no basis in fact. At policy level the same issues are still there for lone parents 20 years on. We have this new proposal from the State on supporting lone parents but the jury is still out as to whether it will be of any help or not".

Doras Buí is rightly proud of what it has accomplished since 1986. "One of our greatest achievements is our own purpose-built centre. We got a small grant from the state in 1990, but we developed a funding strategy and we raised the rest ourselves," says Noreen.

Doras Buí was founded to support lone parents to become economically and socially independent, and to campaign for changes in government policy.

Doras Buí can be proud of the role it has played in building lone parents' confidence, empowering them to move on with their lives – the Centre's Board of Management is made up entirely of lone parents who use the service: "They have the capacity to carry out their responsibilities as Board members because of their involvement in the centre and the supports they received here".

Doras Buí has earned the respect of the local community: "We are very well thought of and our centre is very much part of the community. We are 'dug in' with the local people and are seen as a valuable resource locally."

What are the main challenges facing a local lone parent's group?

"Funding! It's always difficult to find the funds to provide the level and standard of service you want, and staying true to your organisation's ethos while partly state-funded can be difficult at times. We want to provide the best quality care and

service to the children at our crèche but we have to do it on a tight budget".

What can other lone parent groups take from Doras Buí's experience?

"Be clear about what you want to achieve. Think practically about the needs of the group and be realistic about what is achievable. Don't be afraid to fight your corner. Never forget that lone parents are experts in parenting alone, they know what the issues and the challenges are, so be confident. Strut your stuff, sell yourselves and always put forward a positive, professional image of the group".

Doras Buí welcomes any of OPEN's lone parent groups who would like to visit their centre in Coolock. Contact Noreen Byrne, Tel: 01-8481872 / 01-8484811, Email: info@dorasbui.org



Participants in the Cavan course receive their certificates.

NEED SUPPORT WITH EDUCATION?

Do you sometimes wish you could find new ways of supporting your children through education? Help is at hand!

Parents in Education is a programme to support you, the parent. Many people find it hard to encourage their children in education and to deal with schools, particularly if they had a bad experience of education themselves.

The Parents in Education programme helps parents to develop the skills and self-confidence to support their children and to develop a good relationship with schools.

The programme is run over three years with the National College of Ireland. It is aimed at lone parents who wish to develop the skills and self-confidence necessary to motivate and encourage their children to remain in second level education, to continue on to third level, and to allow for the development of effective parent-school partnerships. **Parents in Education** aims to foster a working partnership between parents and schools so that both can work together to support, motivate and encourage young people in their educational development.

Year One of the programme involves building personal and parental self-esteem and exploring the nature of leadership.

Objectives include:

- To support parents in enhancing their self-confidence
- To strengthen the links between home and school
- To encourage parents to support their children's education.

Parents who successfully complete Year One will receive a certificate and can progress into the second year, which continues to develop and nurture parent's confidence and involvement with their children's schools and educational development.

Year Two involves:

- Imparting leadership skills
- Understanding the effective management of committees
- Developing mentoring skills.

JANE'S* EXPERIENCE

"My name is Jane; I am parenting alone and have participated in Year 1 of the Parents in Education Programme. I have found this course to be a grounding force in my life. Before now I would have viewed everything through rose-tinted glasses – how I was brought up, my schooling experience, and how I was performing as a parent. This course has given me the tools to take an objective and honest view of myself, my strengths and my weaknesses. It has encouraged me to use both to get the best out of a given situation.

The parenting skills have been invaluable to me, as you can imagine life with a six year old; I need all the constructive help I can get.

Actively listening to my child and others has been a bit tricky, but I feel I am getting a handle on it now. I have found that problem solving in our house has become a time for working together rather than the battlefield it once was.

As a family we are more productive, supporting each other in a constructive way. My outlook on life has improved, my view of myself has got better and I see my son in a new light.

It would have been easy to continue along the self destructive path I was on but this course has given me the tools to see things for what they are and to make informed choices. I have found parts of this course invasive and uncomfortable, however, without it I would not be emerging as a patient, encouraging parent I am today.

Our children are our future – let's give them parents they can push against who don't fall over".

Objectives include:

- To encourage parents to participate on school/parent committees
- To give parents the study skills necessary to support school work
- To provide the skills and knowledge necessary to become effective mentors.

Participants who successfully complete year two will receive their second certificate.

The third and final year of the programme builds on the skills learned in years one and two with particular focus on group work and facilitation skills. On successful completion of the third year, parents can explore the option of moving on to train as facilitators for **Parents in Education** within their community.

Lone parents in Cavan share their experiences of *Parents in Education*

A group of eight parents in Cavan completed year one of the programme in 2006 and graduated in the autumn.

Some of the supports which helped these parents to fully participate and helped to ensure a high level of attendance throughout Year One were:

- One-to-one support and mentoring for each of the participants
- Diet and nutrition workshops
- Stress management and relaxation workshops.

As the main focus of the first year is building confidence, participants were asked to make a short presentation at the last session to their peers, the facilitators and a National College of Ireland representative. This presentation involved parents talking about their experience of the programme and how it affected their lives. It aimed to encourage participants to speak out in front of a group, owning their experience of the programme. The eight participants spoke openly, honestly and whole-heartedly about their very personal and positive journeys, the stories included here give a good idea of how they felt. Participants graduated from the National College of Ireland on 18 October, 2006. Year Two of the Parents in Education programme is now well underway in Cavan. Best of luck to all in this group!

**All names have been changed to protect identities.*

Parents in Education is one part of an exciting and unique training and development programme created by lone parents for lone parents, called *The Future is OPEN*, which is available to OPEN member groups. If you would like further information please contact **Freda Keeshan, Head of Training. Email: fkeeshan@oneparent.ie, Tel 01 814 8860**

SIOBHAN'S* STORY

"When I first heard of this course, I didn't think I could do it as I cannot read or write. Because the meeting about the course was only for lone parents I thought I would go and hear what it was about. I was very nervous but interested in what I heard. So after the meeting I spoke to OPEN and they assured me that I had nothing to worry about and I could do the course so I decided to give it a go.

It is the best thing I have ever done, I only regret that it was not there 13 years ago when my marriage fell apart and I was left on my own with the kids. I look forward to coming every Wednesday and I now have a much better relationship with my children. People can't believe the change in me. I am much calmer now and can speak out in a calm way.

Before I hated going to the parent teacher meetings in the school I always felt afraid, I had no confidence and felt I was not able to talk to the teachers. Now I am no longer afraid, I had to go to the school a few weeks ago about my child's place in September and I was glad I could do it. I didn't think I could learn to read and write before but now I know I can and I am ready to learn".

HOW THE GOVERNMENT WANTS TO CHANGE SUPPORTS TO LONE PARENTS

Last April, Seamus Brennan TD, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, published a Discussion Paper setting out a number of proposals to change the way the state provides support for lone parents. This Paper suggests some very big changes, the main one being to abolish the One-Parent Family Payment and replace it with a new Parental Allowance.

However, it's important to remember that these are just proposals – while government has said that these are the kind

of changes they would like to make, it isn't certain whether the changes will happen, or when they might be brought in.

The table below summarises some of the main differences between the situation at the moment, and the proposals made in the Government's Discussion Paper.

One of the main differences is that the proposed Parental Allowance could only be claimed until the youngest child turned eight – instead of aged eighteen, as is currently the case.

Current Situation	Proposals for Change
To claim the One-Parent Family Payment a parent must be living alone; you cannot claim the payment if you are living with your partner or husband/wife.	The Parental Allowance could be claimed by <i>all</i> parents on low incomes, whether they live alone, with a partner, or are married.
Only one of a child's parents can claim the One-Parent Family Payment.	The Parental Allowance would also only be paid to one parent, and would not be split between them.
Paying the One-Parent Family Payment directly to the parent gives lone parents some level of security in relation to their income.	The Parental Allowance will also be paid directly to the parent, even if their partner was also receiving a social welfare payment.
If a lone parent moves in with a partner who is on a social welfare payment, the couple receives about €62.50 a week <i>less</i> than they do when living apart.	If a lone parent moves in with a partner on social welfare, the couple will not receive any less money than they would have living apart.
If a lone parent moves in with a partner who is working, their wages will be included in the means test for a social welfare payment.	A partner's income from employment will still be included in the means test for the Parental Allowance.
Lone parents can claim the One-Parent Family Payment until their youngest child is 18, or 22 if in full time education.	The Parental Allowance will stop when the child is much younger – the Department's proposal is that it would stop when the youngest child turns eight.
Lone parents who do have paid work have their One-Parent Family Payment reduced as follows: The payment is still paid at full rate if earnings are less than €146.50 per week. If earnings go over €375 per week (€400 from May 2007) , a half rate One-Parent Family Payment can be paid for six months, after that, you're not entitled to any One-Parent Family Payment. Between these two levels, half of the amount over €146.50 is counted as means, and the payment is reduced accordingly.	Under the proposed Parental Allowance, parents who have paid work would have the payment reduced as follows: Lower limit would reduced to €120. Upper limit would remain at €400. Where wages are between these two levels, €4 out of every €10 earned above the limit will count as means, reduced from €5 out of €10.
Lone parents do not have to look for, or accept, employment unless they want to.	A couple of years before the Parental Allowance finishes, parents would have to come to interviews about going back to work. When the Parental Allowance is finished, parents who are unemployed would have to apply for a different social welfare payment; for most, this would be Unemployment Assistance.
Where both people in a couple are on unemployment, they are paid one full rate of €185.80 per week, and one reduced rate of €123.30, plus €22 for each child.	This will mostly stay the same, meaning that when the Parental Allowance is finished, a parent living with an unemployed partner could both have their payments reduced by about €31 per week.
To get an unemployment payment, you must be looking for full-time work.	If the new Parental Allowance is brought in, you will be able to claim unemployment if you want to work part-time – defined as 19 hours a week.

OPEN has made a submission on these proposals, which you can read, along with more information on the proposals, at <http://www.oneparent.ie/policy/149>; OPEN will continue to try to influence how these proposals are developed – so tell us what you think! OPEN is eager to hear your group's views, you can email Camille or Grainne at cloftus@oneparent.ie or gotoole@oneparent.ie, drop us a line at OPEN, 7 Red Cow Lane, Smithfield, Dublin 7, or call us, Tel: 01-8148860. We'll keep you informed of any developments.

WHY IT'S SO HARD TO MAKE ENDS MEET

Everything costs so much that it seems impossible to make ends meet. But what is the minimum amount needed by a one parent family to live in a low cost, acceptable way? The Vincentian Partnership has researched the real cost of living; Camille Loftus, OPEN's Head of Policy and Research, explains some of the findings

Set up in 1996 to work for social and economic change, the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) has carried out a number of studies to raise awareness about the reality of living on a very low income. The Partnership has recently completed detailed research that aimed to work out the 'minimum essential budget' needed to provide a 'low cost, but acceptable' standard of living, for six different household types. One of these was a one-parent family and OPEN was a member of the project's Research Advisory Committee.

People from different household types were actively involved in working out what essentials a household's budget needs to cover. Focus groups were held that included people from a range of different backgrounds and income levels. Each focus group drew up a budget to cover areas such as food, clothes, household goods and services, fuel and transport, and the cost of social participation. Budgets were broken down into essential, desirable or luxury categories. Once a list had been agreed, these were costed to produce a Minimum Essential Budget.

One parent family budget

The budget for a one-parent family was based on a lone parent with two children – a three year old girl and a 10 year old boy. The family was living in local authority accommodation, and in the examples given below, didn't have a car, so relied on public transport. Different budgets were developed to compare costs when the parent was unemployed, working part-time (20 hours), or working full time (37.5 hours), for the National Minimum Wage.

The different budgets highlight the fact that there are costs associated with being in employment; for example, the cost of childcare or rent increases when there is additional income in the household. The cost of being employed can be particularly high for lone parents, who have only one wage coming into the household. The table opposite summarises the findings of the research.

The research shows why the poverty rate for one-parent families is so high: living on a social welfare income doesn't provide enough income to meet the family's basic needs, while even if the parent worked full-time, there still wouldn't be enough money to provide for basic necessities. The only way this family can make ends meet is to work part-time, but all too often part-time workers are trapped in low paid

jobs, with few opportunities to progress and increase their income.

The budget for a one-parent family was based on a lone parent with two children – a three year old girl and a 10 year old boy.

It is clear that the cost of childcare is a major barrier to lone parents wanting to get back to work; however, withdrawal of social welfare supports also plays a role. When considering the proposed reforms to supports for lone parents, as proposed by the Department of Social and Family Affairs in 2006, it is

vital that the findings of research such as this are fully taken into account.

Minimum essential budget for a one parent family

Item	Living on social welfare	Working part-time	Working full-time
Food	€87.22	€87.22	€87.22
Clothing	€23.07	€23.07	€23.07
Personal care	€14.28	€14.28	€14.28
Household goods	€24.46	€24.46	€24.46
Household services	€15.60	€15.60	€15.60
Social participation	€48.25	€48.25	€48.25
Educational costs	€6.37	€6.37	€6.37
Housing	€31.37	€67.36	€71.50
Transport	€25.00	€25.00	€25.00
Household fuel	€35.00	€35.00	€35.00
Personal costs	€2.00	€3.90	€4.80
Childcare costs		€82.50	€220.00
Savings/contingencies	€13.46	€13.46	€13.46
Total costs	€326.08	€446.47	€589.01
Total income	€278.25	€518.19	€545.74
Balance	- €47.83	€71.72	- €43.27

For more details, see the publication 'Minimum Essential Budgets for Six Households' (2006) Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice. Tel: 01 8780425; Email: vpj@eircom.net; Website: www.vpsj.ie

JOIN OPEN

NEW MEMBERSHIP POLICY



If you are not already a member of OPEN, now is an ideal time to join. If you are a member, you might like to know more about our new membership policy.

In line with our strategic plan, OPEN's Board of Management has agreed a new membership policy and its aims are:

- Maintaining OPEN's values, vision and operating principles
- Welcoming diversity
- Allowing a range of individuals, groups and organisations to participate in and/or support the work of OPEN.

This will be achieved through having two strands of membership, full members and others.

1. Full members

Full members are local lone parent self help groups.

The group can be funded or non-funded but must have a management/steering group of no less than four people. The lone parent group can be based within another organisation during set-up but must have the clear intention to become self-sufficient within a specified time period. Lone parents in OPEN member groups can avail of a range of supports including financial contribution to social care, travel and mentoring.

Full members, subject to the existing (and any future) Memorandum of Association:

- Have full voting rights and are therefore entitled to attend and vote at OPEN's Annual General

Meeting and Extraordinary General Meetings

- Can nominate and elect members to the Board of OPEN
- Have access to OPEN activities and services at no cost to the group
- Receive our magazines and kits free of charge
- Are expected to identify their membership of OPEN.

Membership fee

There is no membership fee for full members.

2. Others

In order to involve interested people and other groups/organisations who are interested in OPEN's work, the Board has decided to expand our membership base. This level of membership will be available to both individuals and groups.

Other members will:

- Receive OPEN's regular magazines, B•OPEN & OPENplus
- Be eligible to participate in most OPEN programmes/activities and receive our Kits, on a reduced-cost basis
- Request special supports and expertise from OPEN in developing programmes for one-parent families.

Membership fee

Individual lone parents (unwaged) may join OPEN and receive free membership while OPEN seeks an annual contribution from other members as follows:

- Lone parents (waged) & other individuals – €15
- Community Development Projects/ Family Resource Centres – €25

- National non-governmental organisations and Area Partnerships/LEADER companies – €50
- National organisations, for example, trade unions – €75.

More information on getting involved with OPEN

If you are a lone parent looking for a local group, please contact us at: Tel: 01 814 8860 or Email: enquiries@oneparent.ie for contact details of your nearest group.

To find out more about what being a member group of OPEN means, and the supports provided to local support groups, please contact our Regional Development Officers as follows:

Northern Region

Covering the counties of Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Galway, Mayo, Roscommon, Cavan, Louth, Meath, Monaghan, Longford and Westmeath

Contact: **Padraic Smyth**

Email: psmyth@oneparent.ie

Eastern and Southwestern Regions

Covering the counties of Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow, Clare, Cork, Kerry and Limerick

Contact: **Olive Power**

Email: opower@oneparent.ie

Or contact:

OPEN

National Centre, 7 Red Cow Lane, Smithfield, Dublin 7

Tel: 01 8148860

Email: enquiries@oneparent.ie

www.oneparent.ie

OPEN, representing lone parent groups in Ireland

OPEN has been representing the views of local lone parent self-help groups nationwide since 1994. With a membership of 91 groups, OPEN has also joined a number of important initiatives, including the Community Platform and the End Child Poverty Coalition, to influence national policy.

OPEN represents the diversity of interests of lone parents (particularly those living in/or at risk of living in poverty) and promotes their inclusion

and progression within wider society. OPEN's mission translates into two key objectives:

- To assist member groups to strengthen their capacity to provide information, services and supports for lone parents (especially those who are isolated) living in their communities.
- To campaign for policy change that recognises family diversity, supports access to appropriate public services, economic independence and improves the quality of life for lone parents and their children.

MEET OPEN'S BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

We asked members of the Board of Management to tell us about their experience of OPEN



Joan Courtney
Chairperson

"I am the chairperson of OPEN. I got elected on to the Board in November 2000 and was nominated as chairperson in February 2004. I have grown both personally and professionally since becoming involved with OPEN. All of the Board of OPEN are lone parents and we now have 91 groups all over Ireland. It is a wonderful experience being chairperson of OPEN. We work consistently to highlight policy issues affecting one parent families from doing research and publications and doing pre budget submissions. 2006 was a very exciting year for OPEN. We started a new training programme called The Future is Open and opened our new office in Smithfield – a resource for all lone parent groups to use for meetings and training"



Bernie Moore
Board Member

"It means a lot to be part of such a great team in such a fantastic organisation. Joining the board two years ago has given me a lot of experience; experiences I would never have had imagined! It is great being able to give our local group a voice, a national voice. I know OPEN does this for 91 groups, but I guess having two local group members on the National Board makes it more personal"



John O'Neill
Deputy Chairperson

"I'm involved because OPEN were, and continue to be, the ONLY voice for lone parents"



Breda Dunne
Board Member

"I joined OPEN because I knew that this was the group that would accept me without judging, would include me in every way and help to keep the issues that affect me in policy changes"



Sharon Prendergast
Board Member

"The reason I am part of OPEN is so I could help to make changes and be part of them"



Nuala McGinnity
Board Member

"Although I have only been part of OPEN's Board of Management a short time, it has been really enjoyable. I have gained lots of experience in this time and I am really looking forward to the future working with OPEN."

OPEN's values

Respect: All individuals, groups and organisations making contact with OPEN are treated with respect and all enquiries from individual lone parents are dealt with in confidence. Member groups are centrally involved in the planning and delivery of all Network activities.

Inclusion: Membership of OPEN groups is open to all lone parents who have responsibility for the care of a child / children regardless of their gender, marital status, family status, age,

disability, race, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or membership of the Traveller Community.

Participation: All OPEN groups are treated equally and are eligible to nominate individual/s from their group to sit on the Board of Management.

ABOUT OPEN

DATES & EVENTS

Regional Forums

The purpose of the regional forums is to provide a space where OPEN members can come together and share information, discuss policy issues and to be a support and resource for each other. Establishing a more systematic and coherent regional representation to/from the national office is also a key objective of the regional work.

Next Forum meetings within your region are:

South Eastern

Carlow, 8th February 11am-1pm, hosted by St Catherine's Community Services Centre
New Ross, 17th April, time and venue to be confirmed

South West

Ennis, Tuesday 24th April, 11am-1pm, hosted by Ennis Access Project

North East

Monaghan, 22nd February, 11am-1pm, hosted by Dochas in Teach na Daoine Family Resource Centre

Exciting Training Trainers initiative – first time in Ireland

OPEN in collaboration with the Race Equality Foundation UK is bringing the **Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities** parent programme to Ireland in February.

The programme integrates positive discipline approaches as a vehicle for fostering high self-esteem, self-discipline and social competence in children. Parents are also provided with a mechanism to connect with community resources and encouraged to form a community action group to address social, political and economic issues related to the prevention of family and community violence.

The Training Trainers programme will begin on February 26th 2007. The programme will then be delivered to our member groups across the regions from next September. Watch this space for more details!

Strategic Planning Process

We will be undertaking a national consultation process with our members over the coming months to inform the development of the Networks next strategic plan.

In addition to a questionnaire that will be distributed nationally there will be a series of local and regional focus group meetings.

This process will ensure our work continues to be informed by the experiences and needs of all our groups. It is crucial that all OPEN members participate.



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Tel: 01 814 8860 www.oneparent.ie

Useful Contacts

Some specific contact information for supports & information for Lone Parents Families (in alphabetical order):

COMHAIRLE

National support agency responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice and advocacy on social services

Tel: 01 605 90 00

Email: info@comhairle.ie

For Citizens Information Advice Centres

LoCall number: 1890 777 121

Email: information@comhairle.ie

Website: www.comhairle.ie or www.citizensinformation.ie

FAMILY MEDIATION SERVICE

Service to help couples in Ireland who have decided to separate or divorce, or who have already separated, to negotiate their own terms of agreement, while addressing the needs and interests of all involved.

Dublin: 1st Floor, St. Stephen's Green House, Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2

Tel: 01 634 4320

Email: fmsearlsfort@welfare.ie

Cork: Hibernian House, 80A South Mall, Cork

Tel: 021 425 2200

Email: fmshibernian@eircom.net

Limerick: 1st Floor, Mill House, Henry Street, Limerick

Tel: 061 214 310

Email: fmsmillhouse@eircom.net

Galway: 1st Floor, Ross House, Merchant's Road, Galway

Tel: 091 509 730

Email: fmsgalway@eircom.net

FREE LEGAL ADVICE CENTRES

Non-governmental organisation which campaigns for full and equal access to justice for all and which promotes and operates a range of services to meet the legal needs of those living in poverty.

Tel: 01 874 5690

Email: info@flac.ie

Website: www.flac.ie

PARENTLINE

Offers support, guidance and information on all aspects of being a parent.

LoCall. 1890 927 277

Email: info@parentline.ie

Website: www.parentline.ie

RAINBOWS IRELAND

Helps children and adults who have been bereaved through parental death, separation or divorce, to work through the grieving process which follows any significant loss.

Tel: 01 473 4175

Email: ask@rainbowsireland.com

Website: www.rainbowsireland.com

SHARED PARENTING IRELAND

Support group for single / separated parents who wish to continue parenting following relationship breakdown.

Tel. 087 2939 512

Email: eolas@sharedparenting.org

Website: www.sharedparenting.org

TREOIR

Treoir provides accurate, confidential and free information to parents who are not married to each other and to those involved with them.

Locall. 1890 252 084

Email: info@treoir.ie

Website: www.treoir.ie