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**Towards a Better Future: Research on Labour Market needs and Social Exclusion of
One Parent Families in Galway City and County**

Conducted by

Child and Family Research Centre

NUI Galway

Project Team

Dr. Michelle Millar, Liam Coen, Dr. Henrike Rau, Michaela Donegan, Dr. John Canavan and Ciara Bradley

On Behalf of

The One Parent Family Research Steering Group



1. Introduction

In light of the fact that there is little reliable and up to date information on one-parent families in Galway City and County, the need to establish baseline data on the reality of life for those parenting alone was identified as important by a group of local service providers. This group became known as ROPE1. It commissioned a research project designed to gather basic information about the past and current level of engagement of those parenting alone in the labour market and their experiences of this process. Particularly, the research was interested in the barriers to engagement with education, training or taking up employment and the barriers for those who do to remain there. Likewise the research sought to identify those facilitative factors that enabled/would enable those who parent alone to engage with the labour market and education in a way that would improve life for them and their children.

The study consisted of a theoretical part and an empirical part. The theoretical part of the One Parent Family Study included an extensive literature review compiled by Dr. Mary Murphy, NUI, Maynooth. The empirical part of the study targeted policy makers, service providers and service users. Data collection was based on a multi-method strategy consisting of a) a questionnaire survey for One Parent Family Payment recipients in Galway City and County, b) semi-structured interviews with those parenting alone in selected locations and c) a set of qualitative interviews with policy actors involved in the design and delivery of services for one parent families.

This research takes place in the context of major policy changes in relation to one parent families, particularly in terms of existing barriers to entering the labour market and / or education and training. The most concrete expression in Ireland of the changes ahead has come in the Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents. These proposals suggest that policy changes are likely to involve major reform in welfare support for those parenting alone (DSFA, 2006). Critically, these proposals will incorporate conditionality in payment, with those parenting alone in receipt of the payment expected to begin connecting to the labour market as their children approach the upper age limit for payment of the Parental Allowance.

2. Key Findings of the One Parent Family Questionnaire (OPFQ)

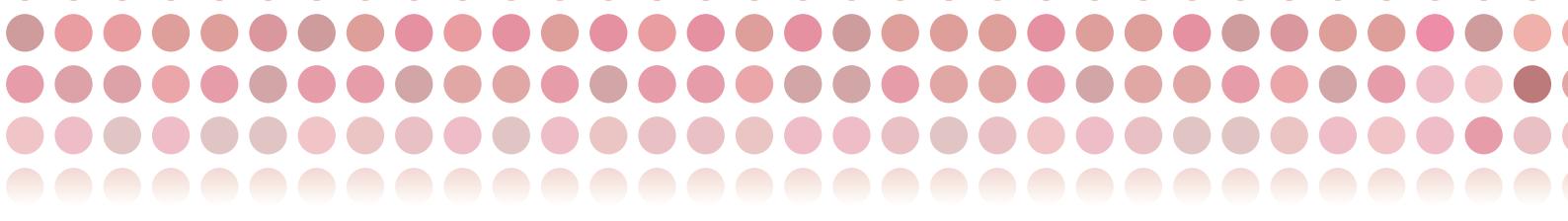
The OPFQ targeted men and women in Galway City and County who were in receipt of the OPFP at the time of the study (February 2007). Overall 3,144 parents who parent alone were written to and 676 (22%) participants completed and returned the OPFQ. A wide range of quality of life indicators are explored and the survey focuses on a range of perceived opportunities and barriers to further education and employment, as reported by the survey respondents. The results of the OPFQ reflect the complexity of one parent family life in Galway City and County and shows that OPFP recipients do not constitute a homogenous group but differ significantly in their needs, experiences and coping strategies. In particular their social and economic circumstances tend to vary and this affects both the quality of life of those parenting alone and their experiences looking for and taking up further education, training, or paid work.

Many respondents are concerned about the financial implications and possible economic insecurity they associate with the transition from OPFP and related payments to paid employment, education or training. On the other hand, the OPFQ has shown the significance of social support networks that many (not all) parents can draw on, in particular with regard to parenting support given by grandparents and other members of the family. Access and mobility also play a crucial role in relation to employment, education and training opportunities. It is here that rural-urban differences are most pronounced. Many jobs, services and educational programmes continue to be based in Galway City and the larger towns in County Galway making it difficult to access these services and facilities. In a small number of cases, working from home or in the local area provided a much needed opportunity to have a small income and/or to experience social contacts outside the family. This said support from members of the family regarding childcare often remains a very important factor even in cases where part-time options are available.

1

Refer to Appendix for a list of the Steering Group.

2



The key findings of the OPFQ are:

- One parent families in Galway City and County form a demographically diverse group
- Mothers with children make up the largest number of one parent families
- The heads of one parent families cross all age groups
- 20% of OPFQ respondents classified themselves as non-Irish nationals
- Older parents are more likely to report health problems and respondents' perception of health (but not their reported health status) affects their quality of life
- Location – urban versus rural – significantly influences access to employment, education/training and OPF services of those parenting alone
- Housing insecurity, cost of renting and dependence on the private rental sector are key issues for many who parent alone
- Family in general, and parents in particular, provide vital support in parenting, thereby enabling those parenting alone to return to work/education/training
- The primary barriers to employment/education/training identified by participants include financial concerns; housing constraints; childcare issues; limited availability of suitable jobs/courses; accessibility issues; and difficulties balancing work and family life.

3. The lives and experiences of One Parent Families in Galway City and County

Of the 676 respondents who completed the questionnaire, 235 self-selected for interview. From this data base a sample of 60 were selected for interview with parents coming from a range of backgrounds and experiences spread over Galway City and County. This sample featured parents who are working, parents who are in education, parents in training programmes, parents who work in the home, parents who are newcomers to Ireland and members of the Traveller community. The picture painted by those parenting alone in Galway City and County of their lives and experiences in a one parent family in receipt of the OPFP is a stark one, fraught with difficulties and challenges. Yet it is also one of resilience, of strength, of managing to sustain healthy family life under the pressures of parenting alone and in particular the financial stresses that this brings. The participants in this study could easily identify the barriers they faced in being 'socially included' but they could also identify the solutions to these barriers.

Key Findings

- Poverty is a very real part of the lives of those parenting alone in Galway City and County and managing daily life on a low income was one of the most striking features of the interviews.
- Debt was a common experience among the participants and financial security was a stated desire of many of the participants.
- Social exclusion in the form of being unable to engage in activities outside the home in any form is evident.
- Housing insecurity was highlighted by many participants as being a major stress in their lives. Many problems were encountered with the Rent Supplement Scheme in private rented accommodation.

- Stigma is still acutely felt by many people parenting alone. The focus of the stigma has changed however from grounds of sexual morality to parents experiencing society as perceiving them as 'sponging off the state' and not valuing their role as a parent.
- Poverty, housing insecurity and stigma have a very real impact on the parents' well-being including their physical and mental health.
- Support networks were cited as very important with the parents own family providing support in most cases.
- Many of the parents interviewed stated that more information is needed regarding rights, entitlements, negotiating the social welfare system, future options in training, education or employment.
- It was also felt by many interviewees that their role as a parent - a sole parent - was not adequately valued and more value should be put on their parenting role.

4. Barriers in returning to and remaining in education/training and employment

Participants highlighted certain issues that made it difficult for them to return to, or remain in employment, education or training. Issues regarding their children, such as the effect that working or being in education or training has on their children, the age of their child, feeling guilty leaving their child and the type of childcare used, were all identified by parents as important. The level of family support, time management skills and their self confidence levels were also acknowledged by the participants as being a barrier to returning and remaining in education, training or employment. On a practical level, participants highlighted financial and physical obstacles, some of which are specific to either education and training, or employment, as barriers also.

The accounts of the barriers faced by those parenting alone in accessing training, education and employment reflect a complex set of scenarios facing parents. Chief among the priorities of parents is the well-being of their children, and the impact entering training or education or taking up employment, would have on them. Yet many spoke of the desire to enter employment, to progress in training and education so as to provide for their families and meet their needs. Notwithstanding feelings of guilt, these parents detail how they strive to maintain a home, rear children and, in some cases, work or pursue full-time education. Yet numerous barriers exist which serve to complicate their multi-faceted lives and constrain their desires. Any initiatives developed to socially include those parenting alone will need to acknowledge and address such circumstances.

Key Findings

- The key concern for many of these parents is the well-being, both physical and psychological, of their children. Being a parent is a key role for these participants;
- For those in education/training or working, significant barriers exist which make it difficult to maintain their current situation;
- Many parents suffer a sense of guilt about leaving their children to work or attend training and education courses. The inability of some to avail of networks of close family and friends to mind children can exacerbate this sense of guilt. For those who do have such networks, the benefit is enormous;
- Parents removed from the labour market or out of education/training for a long period of time are intimidated by their perceived lack of knowledge and skills, and the environment they might be about to enter;
- The impact of a loss – or even potential loss – of benefits if education or training courses are taken up plays very much on the mind of those parenting alone. The financial reality of such families often militates against availing of opportunities to enter education;

- For those seeking to enter employment, the absence of well-paid, flexible opportunities precludes their entrance into the labour market. The potential to be worse off, combined with an inability to take time off at short notice, is an important consideration for these parents;
- An absence of services, along with other structural barriers, such as transport, serves to further complicate the lives of those living in rural areas. The extra time spent travelling to and from urban hubs where services are provided adds to the levels of stress experienced by parents and can distress children;
- Childcare and in particular affordable, accessible, flexible childcare is deemed by many parents to be a key barrier to entering employment, or taking up training and education opportunities;
- For those parents in education and training, the existence of a number of family supports makes it possible to do so;
- The benefits of working or entering training/education are highlighted by parents as being manifold: broadening of social networks; greater financial security; greater sense of self-worth; greater sense of confidence; and a more positive outlook which can impact positively on parents and children.

5. Experiences with agencies

Parents were asked about their views of the organisations they engage with, and the services they use which are provided by such organisations. Parents found dealing with organisations quite difficult, primarily because they believe that some organisations are not forthcoming with information about entitlements and services. It appears that the onus is on the individual to find out about what is available to them. The rules and regulations surrounding services and entitlements are regarded as far from straight forward. Some participants spoke of having a positive experience when dealing with service providers in the statutory arena. However, the majority recounted difficulties in dealing with them. These difficulties come under three main categories: experiences with personnel of the service provider; experiences of visiting the service provider offices; and a lack of efficiency and consistency in the application of rules and regulations governing benefits and allowances by service providers. Quite often one bad experience with one representative of an organisation can leave a lasting impact on the respondents and can often make them reluctant to return to that organisation for information.

Key Findings

- Despite the numerous organisations providing services which can be accessed by those parenting alone, the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA), the Community Welfare Officers (CWOs), FÁS, and the City and County Councils are the organisations which they interact with most frequently;
- Many parents spoke about having positive experiences with the CWOs, ranging from supplementary supports and benefits to financial advice;
- However, many parents also spoke of negative experiences with CWOs. Such experiences were characterised by poor personal relations, a lack of sensitivity about the needs of individual parents, and an unwillingness on behalf of some CWOs to be forthcoming about benefits and available supports;
- Many of the parents who engaged with FÁS spoke positively about their experiences, particularly those on the Community Employment (CE) scheme. The dedicated one-to-one approach of staff in the organisation, and the differentiated level of courses, served to enhance their experience, enabled them to progress at their own pace and provided a social outlet for them;
- However, some parents were frustrated at the organisation's lack of awareness regarding their personal circumstances, particularly in relation to their availability to take up employment if offered;

- Although the DSFA was cited as a supportive and informative organisation in some regards, the majority of parents were dissatisfied with their initial experience of staff when applying for the One Parent Family Payment. Parents spoke of feeling intimidated in their encounters with DSFA staff and they experienced what they perceived as unacceptable delays in the processing of claims. A lack of information when applying for claims was also cited as problematic when engaging with the organisation, as was the inability of the organisation to allocate staff to specific parents;
- The regulations governing benefits financed by the DSFA were identified as complex and confusing. In particular, the threshold levels linked to benefits, and the impact of periodic work upon benefits, served to confuse many and ultimately discourage them from taking up training, education or employment opportunities. The threshold levels of the rental supplement scheme were deemed to be inappropriate to local market conditions;
- The City and County Councils, as housing authorities, play a significant role in the lives of many of the participants. While both councils were cited as engaging positively with them, there were a number of instances where experiences were negative. Such experiences centred specifically on an unwillingness on behalf of some staff to provide accurate information to parents, and more generally on a lack of professionalism in dealing with parents;
- The participants interacted with a variety of other organisations in the state and voluntary sector, including third-level education providers, family resource centres, local education projects, community development projects, rural development companies, housing organisations and the St. Vincent de Paul. The experiences of the parents who engaged with these organisations were positive. Such organisations provided a range of supports, from information and social support to financial assistance and business grants;
- Parents identified a number of difficulties common to all organisations providing services which they can avail of, either statutory or voluntary. Chief amongst these was an acute lack of awareness about some of the organisations they were asked about – many simply had never heard of the organisation mentioned to them while others were unsure or unaware about what they did. Others, particularly in rural areas, identified an acute lack of service provision generally as being a significant factor in their daily lives. Others again identified the potential value of organisations working together to provide a cross-referral service for parents.

6. The Views of National Policy Actors and Local Service Providers on Social Exclusion and the Labour Market Needs of those Parenting Alone

Interviews with policy makers and service providers aimed to generate insights on how to respond more imaginatively to labour market and social inclusion needs of those parenting alone. Additionally, the interviews aimed to access knowledge of both national and local actors of the influences, design and proposed implementation of the government proposals. In all, 23 interviews were conducted involving 29 actors covering a range of national and local statutory and voluntary agencies involved in formulating policies or who provide services for those parenting alone. The interviews highlight a number of issues pertinent to the current government proposals for those parenting alone. At the national level actors revealed that the DSFA (2006) proposals emanated primarily out of concern with poverty levels experienced by those parenting alone and their families. However, some non-statutory actors identified the economic drive behind the proposals as being the primary thrust and expressed concern that the proposals may result in placing those parenting alone into jobs at any cost rather than focussing on the needs of the parents. While officials viewed the proposals as being broadly positive for both parent and children, non-statutory actors were more cautious regarding the impact, highlighting the need to have services in place before the proposals. Key amongst these is the notion of making the scheme voluntary.

At the local level responses suggested the potential for the DSFA (2006) proposals, if implemented, to come unstuck through service provision difficulties. Such difficulties ranged from rules and procedures adding to the stress experienced by those parenting alone to the experiences of service users by individuals within these organisations. Most notable perhaps, is the lack of specific services for those who parent alone. Difficulties in accessing services in rural areas were also a significant concern for

those living in the County. While the national actors revealed that collaborative processes would be crucial to the successful implementation of the proposals, local accounts of such processes to date indicated some difficulties have been experienced, although all realised the importance and benefit of working together.

Key Findings

- The need for the proposals to be voluntary. Those parenting alone are not a homogenous group and applying a one-size-fits-all policy will simply not work for many of those parenting alone;
- The need to supply high-quality employment. If parents are to make work pay, it needs to be of a high quality and flexible enough to allow parents to be parents first and then employees;
- Service providers, statutory in particular, need to be encouraged to coordinate their services to meet the needs of those parenting alone. If education and training are key planks of the proposals, organisations in these areas need to be resourced so as to effectively target those parenting alone with a variety of services and interventions tailored to their needs, at times which suit the service users. Targeting by other service providers, such as housing authorities, would also relieve some pressure on those parenting alone;
- Both at a national and local level the primary service provider, the DSFA, is under resourced in meeting the needs of those parenting alone. Other actors identified an information gap when thinking about those parenting alone;
- Many statutory agencies are bound by rules and regulations to the extent that they cannot respond to the needs of individuals in exceptional circumstances;
- The impact of the withdrawal of secondary benefits and allowances is detrimental to the lives of those parenting alone and their children. The fear of losing benefits deters many parents from contemplating engaging in paid employment;
- Rural actors identified an unwillingness by statutory organisations to provide services in rural areas and an inability by parents to access services due to transport or childminding problems;
- Those parenting alone experience a huge number of universal and individual difficulties in their lives. The lack of self-esteem and confidence-building programmes affects the ability of those parenting alone to engage with services and opportunities for employment and education;
- While there is evidence to suggest that interagency collaboration, both between government departments and local service providers, is occurring, it is fraught with difficulty and stymied by some representatives not being fully engaged in the process;
- There is a need to address the inadequate supply of affordable and accessible childcare provision in the City and County. The inability of housing authorities to locate families in desired areas where supports may be available is another problem which should be addressed.

7. Discussion

The participants in this study describe the difficulties of daily living for those parenting alone. Any process which results in education, training and/or employment must take account of a number of barriers identified by the participants. Chief among these is the concern the participants expressed about caring for their children. The parents involved in this research very much view themselves, first and foremost, as primary carers for their children. Yet other barriers also exist. These include information and knowledge of the mechanics of the welfare system, the need to have high-quality, flexible employment, affordable, accessible childcare, and the need to build confidence and self-esteem.

Key Findings

Aspirations and Willingness to Work

Being in paid employment would ensure that there is more money coming in and is certainly a strong motivational factor in the parents desire to work. The respondents in both the survey and the interviews showed a willingness to engage in education, training and employment. The research findings clearly indicate that the transition from welfare to work is not straightforward. Instead, those parenting alone face many barriers preventing them from engaging in employment and education. In engaging these parents a high degree of understanding of individual circumstances is required, particularly around parenting and the needs of the family.

Parenting Alone

While policymakers see this proposal as having a minimal impact on parenting, both the survey and interviews with one parent families suggest this to be one of the primary considerations the parents have when entering and remaining in education or employment. The parents' decision surrounding involvement in employment or education is primarily dependent on whether or not it will impact negatively on their children. While wanting to work, what parents desire is employment that enables them to look after their children in a manner which the parent thinks is best for their child.

Poverty Traps and Secondary Benefits

Adult poverty, child poverty and child well being will only be addressed if the family's financial situation improves as a result of going back to work. Yet employment and poverty traps (in particular those relating to Rent Supplement, the Medical Card and the Back to School Allowance) form a significant barrier for participants entering education, training or employment. The over exposure of the participants in this study to the private rental market means entering well paid employment could leave them less well off.

Lack of Supports

Informal supports from the extended family for those parenting alone assists them in coping and dealing with the stress and demands of caring for their children. The absence of close family support, mainly due to geographic distance, can lead to greater social exclusion and isolation for those parenting alone. Parents' already limited ability to become involved in activities outside the home is further curtailed by such an absence. This lack of involvement leads to even greater exclusion as opportunities to create other forms of social networks and support are restricted.

Lack of Affordable and Accessible Childcare

Very few of the participants in the study have experiences with formal childcare. This was due to a preference for informal childcare arrangements and difficulties in accessing affordable childcare throughout the City and County. Those parents who could not avail of informal arrangements are prevented from looking for employment until their children begin school, as the cost of childcare was seen as prohibitive. As the proposals stand, there is an implicit assumption that childcare will not be a significant issue in the parent's decision to take up employment, as the children will be in school. However, thought does not appear to have been given to school holidays and what happens should the children become ill, or the reality that not all employment opportunities coincide with school hours.

Lack of Suitable Skills, Work Experience and Self-Confidence

There is a strong desire amongst the respondents to engage in further education and training prior to entering paid employment. Access to such services is limited for those parents living in the County. As with employment, even though education is a priority for many of the respondents, they will only engage in training that is available to them at a time that suits them and their children, with a preference for part-time courses run locally when the children are in school. A lack of relevant work experience

was preventing some participants who have recently engaged in education and training from subsequently finding relevant employment.

Lack of Information Regarding Services and Entitlements

Parents found dealing with agencies quite difficult, primarily because some agencies are not forthcoming with information about entitlements and services. It appears that the onus is on the individual to find out about what is available to them. The rules and regulations surrounding services and entitlements are regarded as far from straight forward. A lack of complete information prevents some parents from exploring options available to them, as does the greater fear of losing benefits. The welfare code is extremely complicated and difficult to understand, particularly in relation to what happens when someone who is in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment and secondary benefits takes up paid employment. Implementation of any activation measures will require agencies to be more pro-active in providing information in a straightforward user-friendly manner.

Lack of Specific Services for Those Parenting Alone

At present many services provided for those parenting alone are grouped in with other target groups. While some participants spoke of having a positive experience when dealing with service providers in the statutory arena, the majority recounted difficulties in dealing with them. As already outlined, many participants suffer from a lack of confidence and low self-esteem. However, personnel working with service providers which cater for those parenting alone have in some cases come across as intimidating and overpowering, discourteous and unprofessional, making parents feel overwhelmed and further damaging their confidence. Statutory offices can be daunting places, and although some agencies have catered for those parenting alone in recent times, there is still much room for improvement. Quite often one bad experience with one representative of an agency can leave a lasting impact on the respondents and can often make them reluctant to return to that agency for information.

Lack of Flexible, High Quality, Well-Paid Employment

315 of the respondents to the survey have looked for employment in the last 12 months. More broadly, many of those in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment who work do so on a part-time, low-pay basis. The low-pay aspect is perceived as the exchange for greater flexibility afforded by part-time work. While such a trade-off may suit those parenting alone, many felt that they were under utilised in their jobs while there. This research has highlighted that one of the primary barriers to those parenting alone is the lack of flexible employment which will result in an increase in income levels. Service providers interviewed identified the difficulties parents will encounter in securing flexible, high quality well paid employment which is part-time and family friendly. This will be even more difficult for those parents located in rural areas who experience aggravating issues such as lack of transport, accessible childcare and support networks.

8. Recommendations

In light of the findings and discussion the research team would like to make the following recommendations:

Parenting

- In terms of the current policy proposals we recommend that the activation process be voluntary. An activation process built on employment may be damaging to one of Irish society's family forms most vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. Those parenting alone are on a continuum of ability to engage in paid employment with some more ready than others. Whilst many parents are ready to begin the activation process some are not in a position to do so. Forcing them to take up paid employment before they are ready will undermine their role as primary care givers, exacerbate their already low levels of self-esteem and endanger the stability of the family unit.
- Even if the policy proposals are proceeded with on a compulsory basis we recommend that it not be implemented until all mechanisms to support the proposals are firmly established. To implement the proposals at present may undermine the activation process. National policy actors need to provide resources and establish procedures for local service providers to prepare themselves to implement this set of proposals.
- The activation process must begin by taking into account the individual circumstance and parenting needs of each One Parent Family Recipient. Initiation of the activation process must begin by addressing the self-identified needs and aspirations of the parent with regard to education and employment. These needs and aspirations must remain central to the activation process throughout its implementation

Poverty Traps

- The Rental Accommodation Scheme can provide those parenting alone with secure and permanent housing and leave them less exposed to the vagaries of the private rental market. We recommend that the scheme be rolled-out as soon as is possible so that all vulnerable groups in need of permanent housing be accommodated under the scheme.
- We recommend that the way benefits and entitlements interact to cause poverty traps be reviewed and a more flexible approach be adopted to the administration of secondary benefits in the meantime.
- Individual parents beginning the activation process must have their own benefit situation investigated to ensure that none are worse-off for taking up paid employment.

Supports for those parenting alone

- There is a need to explore the introduction of intervention programmes to assist those parenting alone cope with the demands around parenting through capacity building and self development, in particular, for young parents and those who have recently experienced the breakdown of a relationship.
- We recommend that the issue of providing support for children in one parent families in Galway City and County be explored, with particular reference to those children whose parents are separating due to the breakdown of a marriage or long term relationship.
- We recommend that the establishment of locally based support groups throughout Galway City and County be encouraged as this would provide an important source of informal support where those parenting alone can support one another in a non-judgmental and positive environment
- The formal family support interventions already in existence in Galway City and County should be explored with regard to what local service providers can do to enhance informal and formal supports to One Parent Families.

Education, skills and work experience

- We recommend that the individual education, training and employment history of those involved in the activation process be built upon. This will involve recognising their existing strengths and working with the parents to identify areas where they need training or upskilling in order to achieve their preferred type of employment.
- We recommend that all education and training for those parenting alone are grounded on personal development and capacity building as well as supporting individuals in their role as parents.
- We recommend that education and training providers in Galway City and County explore the possibility of including a work placement inbuilt in the course or supervised period of work experience on completion of their course work which would be supportive of individuals in their role as parents
- Whilst we recognise the resource limitations, local service providers need to be more focused in addressing the educational and training needs of those living in rural areas and examine more creative ways to provide locally based courses in these areas.

Childcare and the needs of adolescents

- Family members and friends of those parenting alone who are already engaged in the provision of informal childcare, or are thinking of doing so, need to be made aware of how they register as a childminder and the tax and benefits implications of so doing.
- Childcare financial supports provided by education and training providers need to be reviewed and kept in line with real price increases in childcare in Galway City and County.
- The provision of additional affordable community based childcare facilities should be developed in Galway City and County.
- Creative and innovative ways in which care can be provided outside of the home for older children and young adolescents need to be explored and fostered in Galway City and County. This should consider both after school activities as well as well as covering school holiday periods.

Information

- We recommend the creation of a self contained booklet with all the relevant information for those parenting alone regarding benefits, entitlements, education and training and opportunities as well as supports for re-entering the labour market in Galway City and County be produced. Such a booklet should contain information on all agencies working with those who parent alone and include contact names, email address, webpage and telephone numbers. This booklet should be posted out to all currently in receipt of OPFP and handed out by the DSFA to new claimants during their initial interview.
- In particular, such information needs to contain user friendly accounts and examples of how the OPFP, as well as secondary benefits, will be affected should a parent return to work.
- We recommend that an internet portal be established whereby those parenting alone can easily access current information to a range of services in Galway City and County, voluntary and statutory, and that this be publicised extensively.
- We recommend that when inquiring about benefits and entitlements individuals are given a checklist of all the information and paperwork that is required from them to successfully complete the application process.

- As the research highlighted the high costs associated with contacting agencies particularly by telephone, we recommend that agencies explore the possibility of introducing free-phone numbers or a text service in which the agency can call the individual back.

Family Friendly Employment

- We recommend that employers in Galway City and County and their representatives be encouraged to engage with the ROPE Committee processes.
- Employers in Galway City and County need to be consulted in order to understand the demand for flexible part-time work and how they might be assisted in employing interested parents in such work.
- We recommend that ROPE examine the possibility of entering into a pilot programme of employment with a large locally based employer or a number of smaller employers who offer flexible part-time employment suited to the needs of those parenting alone.

Service Provision

- We recommend the training of those front-line staff that interact with those who parent alone in Galway City and County so as to ensure they are aware of the needs and experiences of the individuals they come in contact with.
- We recommend that dedicated staff groupings dealing with those parenting alone be established in agencies involved in the activation process. Such attachment with this particular group would improve the experiences of those parenting alone as well establishing a network of core front line staff across the statutory and voluntary sector
- We recommend that senior management in those agencies in Galway City and County working for and with those parenting alone establish a forum for information sharing and strategic, seamless collaboration so as to improve services and outcomes for those parenting alone. This forum should include all organisations: community, voluntary and statutory.



