



family resource centre
national forum

**Supporting Families
Building Communities**
2006 – 2009 Strategic Plan



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Foreword

The *Supporting Families, Building Communities Strategy 2006 – 2009* sets out the Family Resource Centre National Forum's commitment to family support over the next three years by delivering key strategic supports to its members: staff and volunteers of family resource centres (FRCs).

The FRC National Forum is a support network providing practical support to family resource centres involved in family support and social inclusion initiatives throughout Ireland.

The Board began the process of developing the plan in May 2005. The aim of the strategic planning process was to identify the key strategic priorities that will set the overall direction for the organisation for the period 2006 - 2009.

This process was overseen by a working group comprising representation from five regional fora and entailed consultations with key stakeholders working in family support and within the Family & Community Services Resource Centre Programme.

Key stages of the consultation process included three regional consultations, two national consultative conferences in June and November 2005 and inputs from key external influencers.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to this strategy: staff and volunteers of centres who participated so readily in consultations and the working group who oversaw the strategic planning process with diligence and dedication. Having identified the challenges ahead, I have the utmost confidence in the FRC National Forum's ability to implement this plan fully over the period 2006 - 2009.

Packie Kelly
Chairperson
FRC National Forum



Supporting Families, Building Communities is the Family Resource Centre National Forum's strategic plan for the period 2006 – 2009. This strategic plan will help guide the development of the FRC National Forum. In doing so, the National Forum will assist family resource centres in ensuring family support programmes are an integral part of local community activity. The overriding goal of this strategy is - in working from an equality and human rights perspective - to support family resource centres in ensuring families enjoy fulfilling lives, free from poverty, neglect, harm, discrimination and abuse. Volunteers are central to the success of family resource centres. The National Forum recognises and values the commitment of volunteers in managing centres and in working for the benefit of their communities.

The FRC National Forum established a strategic planning working group in 2005 to oversee the strategic planning process which informed the development of this strategy. This process entailed widespread consultations with key stakeholders, working in family support in statutory and voluntary organisations as well as a series of national and regional consultations with family resource centres.

The *Supporting Families, Building Communities Strategy* identifies seven strategic priorities which will support family resource centres in their work and inform the future development of the FRC National Forum:

- Influencing national policy on family support through participation of the National Forum in key organisational and inter-agency fora
- Promoting inclusive family support practice and provision within a community development context
- Informing the future development of the Family & Community Services Resource Centre Programme
- Providing guidance and leadership in the development of appropriate systems of support for members
- Supporting National Forum members through the development an effective organisational capacity
- Securing adequate sources of revenue to sustain the National Forum's mission and strategic goals
- Creating a high level of awareness of the National Forum and its work at a national level
- The FRC National Forum will develop an implementation plan which will set out actions, timescales and responsibilities to ensure the full delivery of the *Supporting Families, Building Communities Strategy 2006 - 2009*

Who we are

The FRC National Forum is the national representative body of family resource centres in Ireland. As a representative body, we provide information, support and networking and training opportunities for our members, family resource centres. The National Forum was established in 1998 and is funded by the Family Support Agency to provide effective support to our members. The National Forum supports those working with disadvantaged. It adopts an integrative approach to community development in addressing the needs of those most disadvantaged and in need. It aims to be a well-structured and vibrant group with clear work practices and the ability to influence change. The values to which the National Forum ascribes are equality, empowerment, openness, inclusiveness and good practice.

The FRC National Forum will ensure that its activities are:

- Built on the strength of families and communities
- Family-centered, easily accessible and inclusive of family participation
- Reflective of the changing needs of families and communities
- Respectful and supportive of staff and volunteers

The objectives of the FRC National Forum are:

- To influence national policy on issues affecting family resource centres
 - To ensure a quality of service amongst family resource centres
 - To introduce structures to support the work of staff and voluntary management committee and the ongoing development of family resource centres
 - To provide a platform to facilitate networking between family resource centres
- To provide an opportunity to enhance skills through participation in training programmes.

Who we represent

The FRC National Forum works on behalf of family resource centres. There will be 100 family resources established throughout Ireland. Family resource centres are community-based organisations who take a proactive and innovative approach in identifying the needs of the family and in providing community-based supports. The aim of a family resource centre is, essentially, to help combat disadvantage by supporting the functioning of the family unit. Centres can provide services for lone parent families, young mothers and others considered in need of extra support. They can act as a first step to community participation and social inclusion. Social inclusion is about ensuring the marginalised and those living in poverty have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives, allowing them to improve their living standards and their overall well-being.

Family support is a set of beliefs and an approach to strengthening and empowering families and communities so that they can foster the development of children, youth and family members. It entails statutory and voluntary agencies working together to become responsive, flexible, family-focused and holistic in meeting the needs of families. In adopting a family support methodology, family resource centres strive to transform Irish society into caring communities of citizens that put children and families first, and that ensure all children and families get what they need to succeed.

Our structure

The FRC National Forum is a company limited by guarantee, with an elected Board comprising two Directors and two Alternate Directors from each of the eight regions within which family resource centres are based. Directors are nominated for election from within the Forum membership base on a regional level. The Board sets the direction for the organisation and is the legal authority entrusted with the responsibility to ensure the organisation is soundly governed.

The National Forum meets nationally every four months and on a regional basis every two months. Such regional meetings are co-ordinated by regional representatives elected at National Forum meetings. It is the responsibility of these representatives to promote the work of the National Forum at a regional and local level and to relate issues of concern and information.



Key achievements

Since its establishment in 1998, the FRC National Forum has undergone considerable change and has grown to become a dynamic national organisation with an active membership base throughout Ireland.

We have delivered strategic supports, information and training to family resource centres in eight regions and developed a network structure to support members at a regional level. We have also assisted members in actively participating in local development structures.

The National Forum delivers national tailor-made training programmes designed to equip members with the requisite skills to effectively bring about inclusion within their communities. To date national training programmes have included strategic planning; communications; social economy; governance and HR management.

In 2005, the National Forum ran a successful conference 'Community Arts, Education and Supporting Parents April 2005' celebrating the Year of the Family. It has contributed to the development of family policy in Ireland through submissions to the *Constitutional Review of the Family*, the *Family Support Agency Strategic Plan 2004-2006* and *Families and Family Life in Ireland: Challenges for the Future*.

In 2003, the Forum successfully lobbied for recognition within the Family Support Agency (FSA) and contributed to the development of the Family & Community Services Resource Centre Programme. We continue to work closely with the Family Support Agency through participation on its Board and working groups.

Our environment

The environment in which the FRC National Forum operates is a changing one. Families in Ireland today have wide-ranging and diverse needs. Issues such as childcare, balancing work and family life, caring for older people, lone parenting and low income supports have all contributed to the pressure and burdens of family life.

The establishment of the Family Support Agency in 2003 marked an important step in the development of effective and responsive services and supports for families today. The family resource centre model is ideally placed to meet the diverse needs of families. In order to support its members in strengthening and supporting families, it is essential that the National Forum develops strong links with other agencies working, not only in family support, but in social inclusion. The National Forum will become involved in the *National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion* through participation in the Social Inclusion Forum. It will influence the development of inclusive social policy through participation in 'social partnership' structures at a local level, regional and national level.

The National Forum will strengthen its relationship with the Community Development Programme (CDP) and will participate in and contribute to the social inclusion strategies of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) at local and regional levels.

Establishing and maintaining formal linkages with agencies such as Barnardos, Combat Poverty Agency, Support Agency Network and The Wheel will also be a central element to the National Forum's future development.

Key goals and strategies

Strategy 1

Influencing national policy on family support through participation of the National Forum in key organisational and inter-agency fora.

Goal

To represent and advocate for family policy issues at regional and national level on behalf of the members of the FRC National Forum.

Objectives

- Create awareness of the FRC National Forum among agencies within the statutory and voluntary sectors
- Seek regional representation on local development structures
- Link into National Anti-poverty Strategy via the Social Inclusion Forum and NAP/Inclusion consultation process
- Build networks and partnerships with anti-poverty groups
- Provide capacity building/training and support to members to ensure effective participation
- Participate in the Combat Poverty's 'Having Our Say' Programme to promote awareness and knowledge of policy decision making processes
- Create awareness of current social policy among members through National Forum meetings, seminars and the dissemination of policy papers
- Establish formal relationships with members of the Community & Voluntary Pillar of Social Partnership
- Promote the Family & Community Services Resource Centre Programme as a credible and effective model of family support

Key Result

Representation and advocacy of family policy issues at regional and national level on behalf of the members of the FRC National Forum.

Strategy 2

Promoting inclusive family support practice and provision within a community development context.

Goal

To recognise the value of the family resource centre model as an effective community engagement for disadvantaged families.

Objectives

- Promote a social inclusion and community development focus within the Family & Community Services Resource Centre Programme
- Build partnerships and strategic alliances with other organisations to ensure continuation of the community development approach to family support work
- Create awareness of social inclusion policy among members through training and seminars
- Assist family resource centres in identifying existing service providers and supports and areas where there are gaps in provision
- Assist family resource centres in lobbying for adequate services and resources within communities
- Assist family resource centres in liaising with service providers, in establishing referral services and the provision of related information and in facilitating outreach centres for other services e.g. MABS/Citizen Information Centres/Local Employment Services.

Key Result

Recognition of the value of the family resource centre model as an effective community engagement for disadvantaged families.

Strategy 3:

Informing the future development of the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme.

Goal

To support the development of a strong, vibrant and inclusive Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme.

Objectives

- Ensure existing family resource centres are adequately resourced so that they may deliver effective supports to the community
- Consolidate the existing work of family resource centres and their role in community development practice
- Recognise the role of family resource centres in the development of major services in childcare, youth, parenting and the emergence of new communities
- Develop consultation mechanisms with family resource centres and the FSA in the local expansion of the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme
- Ensure that the community development ethos of the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme is preserved
- Effectively advocate for the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme, developing and maintaining strategic links to government and other organisations

Key Result

A strong, vibrant and inclusive Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme.

Strategy 4:

Providing guidance and leadership in the development of appropriate systems of support for National Forum members.

Goal

To deliver quality training and development programmes and supports to staff and volunteers.

Objectives

- Undertake regular comprehensive training needs analysis with resource centres
- Establish a training and development working group to oversee the development of appropriate support systems
- Liaise with the Support Agency Network in the design of tailor-made training programmes at local and regional levels, as appropriate
- Co-ordinate and deliver national training events where appropriate and secure adequate funding to do so
- Establish links with relevant training agencies and explore the value and availability of accredited training programmes
- Facilitate FRCs in becoming members of the National Children's Resource Centre

Key Result

Effective, responsive and flexible support structures for Family Resource Centre staff and volunteers established.

Strategies 5, 6 and 7

Promoting the organisational, resource and communications capacity of the FRC National Forum.

Goal

To create an effective operational structure enabling the achievement of all strategies and the efficient running of the organisation.

Objectives

- Build, maintain and review the performance of the Board through the delivery of key supports and training
- Establish internal systems of communications and disseminate information to members in ways that are timely and user-friendly
- Develop and review systems to support the future growth of the organisation including reviews of quality of service
- Ensure all family resource centres become active members of the FRC National Forum
- Explore the broadening of the FRC National Forum's revenue base and develop effective strategies to address its future financial viability
- Review existing financial policies and procedures and develop new policies as necessary to improve accountability and financial safeguards
- Devise a targeted media strategy

Key Result

Effective operational procedures enabling the achievement of all strategies and the efficient running of the organisation.

Implementing the plan

The FRC National Forum seeks to ensure its work is inclusive, focused and measurable. This strategic plan reflects an organisation that is dedicated to assuring the well-being of all families. Responsibility for the implementation of the *Supporting Families, Building Communities Strategy* lies with the FRC National Forum. The Board of the FRC National Forum will actively support the achievement of the strategic goals and objectives described in this strategy. An implementation plan (2006 – 2009) will detail tasks, assigned responsibilities and timeframes and will be monitored by a working group comprising members of the Board of the FRC National Forum.

The implementation of the strategy will be supported by the following:

- An effective organisational structure
- A prioritisation of key activities
- Development of an annual work plan
- Formal bi-annual reviews and
- The identification of performance indicators for the National Forum's work

