

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 12 May 2004

Art imitates real life for families in Ireland

Family Diversity Initiative calls for change in family policy and legislation to provide for the reality of family life

The Family Diversity Initiative (FDI) today called for urgent government action to amend family policy and legislation which favours the family based on marriage at the expense of the full equality of all family types. This call was made at the launch of the Initiative's "visual identity", a series of cartoon images depicting the diversity of families in Ireland today.

Speaking at the launch, FDI Chairperson Karen Kiernan commented: "These images are of real people who live in the modern reality of family life. That reality is that not all families are the same. As a result it is necessary that family policy and family law reflect the reality of family life".

Kiernan called for a constitutional amendment to Article 41.2 to provide equality for all families in Ireland stating that the continuation of a preferred family type in law that is not the only type in reality negatively impacts on the equality and experiences of at least 20% of Irish households.

FDI spokesperson Catherine Lynch noted some of the inequalities facing families. "We know that not all families are the same. At least 12% are one-parent families, 8.4% are cohabiting, and the list goes on. Unfortunately there are also inadequate systems for capturing the reality of the numbers of people living in diverse family types, such as the significantly under representative figure of 1,300 same sex couples and the lack of figures on ethnic origin and disability of family members" said Lynch.

Speaking at the launch Senator David Norris echoed the call for the need for change on policy and especially in legislation. "I am currently in the process of finalising draft legislation which would go some way to enshrining equal rights for families based outside of marriage to redress the current inequalities for thousands of families with little or no legal protection."

ENDS

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Note to editor:

The Family Diversity Initiative (FDI) is a coalition of organisations working with and representing the interests of diverse families in Ireland. This coalition recognises that the family exists in different structures and circumstances and challenges discrimination. Our vision is to achieve an Ireland in which people define their own families and which all these families are treated equally. Our mission is to promote equality, acceptance and understanding in Ireland for all families.

The objectives of the FDI are to:

- Co-ordinate and develop effective partnership working between NGO's who promote and represent diverse families, including the sharing of relevant resources.
- Identify key knowledge gaps in the experience of diverse families and seek to address these by research or other appropriate means.
- Support and co-ordinate policy interventions that address the institutional and social barriers to equality and social inclusion faced by diverse family groups.
- Co-ordinate an effective public awareness campaign on family diversity in Ireland.
- On achievement of the above objectives the Family diversity Initiative will re-assess its future.

FDI underpinning principles

- An understanding of "family life" that derives from our Vision Statement that people define their own families.
- Promoting equality of opportunity and social justice in its work and within the operating policies/ practices of the initiative.
- Acknowledging the right of people and families facing discrimination/ inequality to participate in solutions to redress that inequality.
- Partnership working with relevant external people/organisations which furthers the mission/aims of FDI.

The FDI currently includes membership from a range of organisations working with and representing families with varying structures and those who live in varying social situations. Current members of the steering group include, Age Action Ireland, Children's Rights Alliance, Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), Focus Ireland, Forum of People with Disabilities, National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI), One Family – Voice, Support, Action for One-Parent Families (formerly Cherish), One Parent Exchange and Network (OPEN), Treoir- National Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children.