

Initiative for

Lone Parents



Donegal County Development Board
Bord Forbartha Chontae Dhún na nGall



Increasing understanding of, and capacity to respond to, the labour market needs of Lone Parents in County Donegal



Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Introduction

[1.1] Background

In 2006 Donegal County Development Board secured funding from the NDP Gender Equality Unit of the Department for Justice, Equality and Law Reform under the Initiative for Lone Parents. This Initiative aimed to raise awareness of the labour market needs of lone parents and to develop effective joined up approaches to meet these needs at local level. The research presented an opportunity to examine the personal and organisational factors which can enhance or inhibit a lone parent from taking up or remaining in employment. It is proposed that the learning from this Initiative will inform national policy on the labour market integration of lone parents, as well as local approaches for engaging with this client group.

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An Straitéis provides for a vision of “a community where those who are socially excluded, or at risk of experiencing social exclusion, have equality of opportunity, participation and outcomes”

[1.2] Policy Context

In February 2006 the Irish Government published a Discussion Paper on Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents. Recognising that employment can provide a route out of poverty and social exclusion, these proposals recommend the implementation of an integrated programme to support the movement of lone parents into more full-time and quality employment, thereby enhancing their incomes and reducing the risk of poverty to them and their children. A comprehensive package is recommended including the following proposals:

- ♦ Reform of income support
- ♦ Expanded availability and range of education and training opportunities for lone parents
- ♦ Extension of the National Employment Action Plan to also include lone parents
- ♦ Focused provision of childcare
- ♦ A targeted Teen Parent Support Initiative
- ♦ Improved information and advice services for lone parents.

These Government proposals have been developed within the framework provided by Governments commitment to tackle child poverty as set out in Sustaining Progress, the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion and the National Childrens Strategy. This commitment is also reflected in the new Framework for Social Partnership. Towards 2016, the National Development Plan 2007 - 2013 and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 - 2016 where the Government has expressed its commitment to considering these proposals with a view to improving supports to Lone Parents.

This work has also been undertaken within the context of An Straitéis, the Donegal County Development Boards 10 year strategy for the social, cultural and economic development of the county. This strategy has identified social inclusion as a key priority given the high level of deprivation recorded in the county and the particular problems presented by the highly dispersed settlement pattern in the county. An Straitéis provides for a vision of “a community where those who are socially excluded, or at risk of experiencing social exclusion, have equality of opportunity, participation and outcomes”.

Addressing social exclusion and promoting gender equality also assists with the implementation of the EU Lisbon agenda.

[1.3] Lone Parents Trends and Profiles

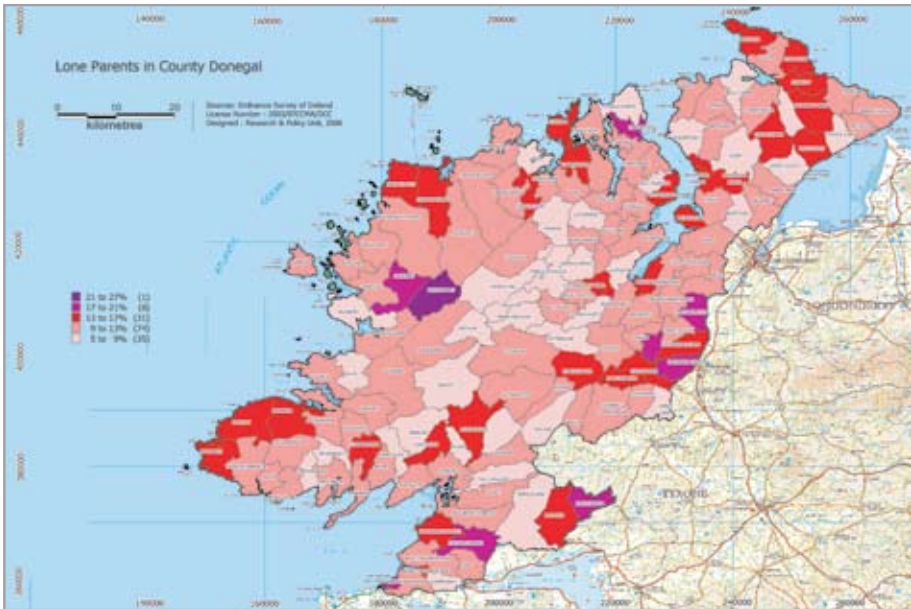
The number of lone parent families in Ireland increased by 23% in the period 2002 to 2006. In 2006 there was 189,213 one parent families in Ireland, representing 18% of all families in Ireland, up from 153,863 in 2002. The 2006 figure represents an increase of 53% from the 1996 figure of 123,090. The 2006 Census also showed that 86% of one parent families are headed by lone mothers and 14% are headed by lone fathers. 58% of one parent families have one child, 26% have two children and 16% have three or more children.

In Co. Donegal there was an increase of 18% in the number of lone parent households in the period 2002 to 2006. In 2002 there were 5,266 lone parent households in the county and this increased to 6,233 in 2006 representing 12% of

the total number of households in the county. The Census does not provide a figure for the number of lone parent families¹ at county level, but nationally Census data shows that over 10% of all one parent families live in multi-family households, for example, they live with their own parents.

Donegal is predominantly a rural County with only seven towns in the county with a population in excess of 1,500 namely Letterkenny, Buncrana and Ballybofey/Stranorlar, Ballyshannon, Donegal Town, Bundoran and Carndonagh. Fig. 1.1 sets out the distribution of lone parents in the County on District Electoral Division basis highlighting the highly dispersed settlement patterns of lone parents in Donegal.

Fig 1.1: Distribution of Lone Parents in County Donegal based on 2002 Census



Source: Research and Policy Unit, Donegal County Council (2002 Census Data)

¹ A family is defined as either a husband and wife or cohabiting couple; a husband and wife and cohabiting couple with one or more children (usually resident, never married, of any age); or one parent with one or more children. A household is defined as a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address with common housekeeping arrangements.

² 2002 Census Data, CSO

In 2002, County Donegal had the highest level of unemployment in Ireland at 15.6% which was considerably higher than the national average of 8.8%.²

Lone Parents and Social Welfare Payments

In 2003, there were 79,296 recipients of One Parent Family payments in the country with 5028 of these recipients in Co. Donegal. These One Parent Family payments accounted for 11% of total payments in Donegal for this period. The breakdown of these payments was as follows: Lone Parents Allowance – 79% (3988 recipients) Deserted Wife’s Benefit – 19% (951 recipients) and Supplementary Welfare Allowance – 2% (89) recipients¹.

Lone Parents and Poverty

Reports published by the National Economic and Social Forum² have consistently shown the increasing risk of poverty for lone parent households, particularly those headed by women. Referring to “Policies and Priorities: Findings from Womens Sector Research North and South” the Poverty Profile for County Donegal³ states that households that are headed by women are at a higher risk of poverty than those headed by a man or couples and that 70% of lone parents fall below the 60% poverty line, the majority of whom are women.

Table 1.1: Poverty Rates for Overall Population and Lone Parents 2004

	Population %	Lone Parents %
Consistent Poverty Rate	6.8	31.1
Risk of Poverty Rate (60% median income)	19.4	48.3

Source CSO: EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions, December 2005

The findings of the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions set out in Table 1.1 reinforce the fact that both the rate of consistent poverty and the risk of poverty rate are substantially higher for lone parents than for the overall population.

Lone Parents and Social Welfare Payments

Of the 1976 households on the Local Authority 2005 Housing Needs Assessment in Donegal, 769 were lone parent households representing 39% of the total number of households on the waiting lists. Of these lone parent households 94% were headed by women and the vast majority of these households (79%) were currently accommodated in private rented accommodation. 73.5% of lone parent households on the waiting list in Co. Donegal had one child, 19.5% had two children with 7% having three or more children. 98% of lone parents on the waiting list were between the ages of 18- 50 years, while 63% were between the ages of 18 – 30 years. Of the total number of lone parents on the waiting list in Donegal, 20.5% are employed either full time, part time or are self employed, while 77% are unemployed and in receipt of social/community welfare benefit or Lone Parent Support. 87% of these lone parent households have an income of €15,000 or less and this is significant when one considers that the average disposable household income per person in Co. Donegal in 2004 was €16,008, which was in itself substantially less than the national average of €18,788.

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98% of lone parents on the waiting list were between the ages of 18- 50 years, while 63% were between the ages of 18 – 30 years.

³ Poverty Profile on County Donegal, 2004, Research and Policy Unit, Donegal County Council.

⁴ The National Economic and Social Forums Report on Lone Parents, October 2001

[1.4] Current Supports for Lone Parents

Table 1.2 below provides a summary of the range of supports available for lone parents directly from Government Departments and agencies.

Table 1.2: Current Provision for Lone Parents

Benefit/Scheme	Details	Expenditure (end 2005) €million
Primary Benefits		
One Parent Family Payment and Child Dependent Allowance	Benefits 80,000 lone parents, with over 129,000 children (estimated). This includes Child Dependent Allowance, an additional payment made to social welfare recipients in respect of eligible child dependents.	770
Family Income Supplement	Tax-free payment to married and unmarried employees with children, working a minimum of 19 hours per week 9,000 lone parents are in receipt (end 2004).	39
Child Benefit	A CB is a standard payment regardless of parental status, there are no special arrangements for one-parent families.	220
Secondary Benefits		
Rent Supplement/ Rental Assistance	13,088 OFP recipients are in receipt of Rent Supplement (April, 2005). New rental assistance arrangements are being implemented to assist those who have been 18 months or more on Rent Supplement. Lone parents account for 27% of the 30,000 currently in the target group for this initiative.	110
Taxation	A one-parent family tax credit can be claimed (€1,580) addition to the personal tax credit. Also, lone parents benefit from a higher standard cut-off point (€33,400 per annum).	100
Schemes		
Community Employment Scheme	Designed to help people who are long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people get back to work. 26% of the almost 22,000 currently participating are lone parents.	76
Jobs Initiative	Full-time employment is provided in the social economy for those over 35 years who fulfill certain criteria. 23% of the 1,897 participants at the end of June 2005 were lone parents.	9

Table 1.2: Current Provision for Lone Parents cont.

Social Economy Programme	Supports the development of social economy enterprises and provides sustainable jobs for the long-term unemployed. €35million overall. Lone parents account for 22% of the 1,992 participants.	8
Back to Work Allowance	Assists long term unemployed and lone parents to return to the labourforce. There are 1,254 OFP recipients participating in this scheme (January 2005).	
Back to Education Allowance	The numbers of lone parents on this allowance has increased from 626 in the 2002/03 academic year to 1,309 in 2005/06.	9
Teen Parent Support Programme	Tackles the vulnerability of families headed by teen parents. To date 1,125 teen parents have been referred to the Programme	0.75
Total Expenditure (approx.)		1.35billion

Source: Government Discussion Paper - Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents 2006

Other Supports Available at Local Level

In addition to the above there is a wide range of groups and organisations in County Donegal that provide a variety of supports to lone parents. These organisations include statutory agencies such as County Donegal VEC, FÁS and the HSE; local development organisations such as Donegal Local Development Co., Inishowen Partnership Co. and Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta (MFG) Teo.; and organisations working in the community and voluntary sector including Community Development Projects and Family Resource Centres in various parts of the county. In addition, Donegal County Childcare Committee is working to develop the Childcare Sector in the County and to ensuring that all families have access to early years and childcare services. Whilst it is acknowledged that these services are available, there is no one central pool of information relating to the availability of supports and services to lone parents in the county.

Concluding Comment

With a view to gaining a greater understanding of the needs of lone parents in Co. Donegal this research focused on engaging with a small focus group of lone parents using a participative research methodology to highlight the personal and organisational factors that either enhance or prohibit a lone parent in taking up and remaining in employment. In addition a questionnaire was also sent to partner organisations on the County Development Board to highlight work life balance options again that would permit lone parents taking up and remaining in employment while also allowing them to benefit from on the job learning. This report presents the approach and methodology used in selecting focus groups of lone parents from different sized urban and rural areas together with the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 2

Approach & Methodology

[2.1] Selecting a Sample

To develop a project that would ensure maximum value for money it was agreed that samples of lone parents should be selected from the most geographical 'areas of need' or the Electoral Divisions, which had the highest concentrations or percentages of lone parents in the county. Within County Donegal there are 149 Electoral Divisions and these vary greatly in both size and in population densities. Due to limited funding it was evident that the focus of the analysis should concentrate on Electoral Divisions, which have a minimum urban concentration i.e. a cluster of at least 50 or more households. It was also agreed that the sample selected should be based around small urban, medium urban and large urban settlements as the needs of lone parents could differ depending on where they resided and this was an attempt to isolate and identify these differences.

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Within County Donegal there are 149 Electoral Divisions and these vary greatly in both size and in population densities.

⁶ It was noted that each Electoral Division can vary greatly in size and in population density. While some Electoral Divisions have urban settlements consisting of 50 or more households and some do not.

[2.2] Geographical areas of need

The process used to select a number of 'geographical areas of need' for participation in the lone parent consultations involved the compilation of data on a number of key indicators across all of the 149 Electoral Divisions⁶ in County Donegal. These indicators included:

1. Population Density Per Sq Km (See Table 2.1 in Appendix);
2. Total households (See Table 2.2 in Appendix);
3. Lone parents with all children as a % of all households (See Table 2.3 in Appendix);
4. Lone parents with all children less than 15 years of age as a % of all households (See Table 2.4 in Appendix);
5. Lone parents with at least one child less than 15 years of age as a % of all households. (See Table 2.5 in Appendix);
6. All lone parents with all children (See Table 2.6 in Appendix);
7. All lone parents with all children less than 15 years of age (See Table 2.7 in Appendix);
8. All lone parents with one child less than 15 years of age (See Table 2.8 in Appendix);

All of these indicators and their associated Electoral Divisions were then ranked from highest occurrence of each indicator to the lowest occurrence of each indicator and this greatly assisted with identifying the top 'geographical areas of greatest need'.

[2.3] Identifying population centres and catchment areas to gain maximum impact

The average population density for County Donegal in 2002 was 28 persons per square kilometer, therefore only the Electoral Divisions above this average was chosen to participate in the study. See Table 2.1 in Appendix.

The next step in determining the larger population centres was extracting Electoral Divisions with the highest concentrations of households in County Donegal and the top 10 Electoral Divisions in this respect are presented in Table 2.1 in Appendix.

For the purposes of this study urban areas or towns are classified according to three types:

- ♦ Small urban areas with populations between 150 – 500 people
- ♦ Medium urban areas with populations between 500 – 1500
- ♦ Large urban areas with populations between 1500 – 5000+

Any population less than 150 can be regarded as rural. Applying this town classification to the top ten Electoral Divisions with highest number of households reveals that:

- ♦ Merville has a medium urban centre (Merville)
- ♦ Crossroads has medium urban centre (Falcarragh)
- ♦ Ballyshannon has a large urban centre (Ballyshannon)
- ♦ Annagry - has 3 small urban centres (Loughanure, Ranafast, Annagry)
- ♦ Castlewray – is a rural area
- ♦ Magheraclogher – has a medium urban centre (Bunbeg)
- ♦ Letterkenny Urban – a large urban centre (Letterkenny)
- ♦ Buncrana – a large urban centre (Buncrana)
- ♦ Donegal – a large urban centre (Donegal Town)
- ♦ Stranorlar – a large urban centre (Stranorlar)
- ♦ Letterkenny Rural – a large urban centre (Letterkenny)

[2.4] Lone parents with at least one child under the age of 15 years

When considering the variables in terms of gathering the most representative sample of the population for the consultations it was decided to select the sample from Electoral Divisions which had the highest concentration of lone parents with at least one child under 15 years of age as a % of all households. These are detailed in Table 2.5 in Appendix. The reasons for choosing this indicator was that it had the potential to capture populations of lone parents from a diverse age range; a factor, which would lend itself well to ensuring widespread participation at the consultation stage.

Again applying the urban classification to the Electoral Divisions with the highest concentration of lone parents with at least one child under the age of 15 years of age as a percentage of all households it is evident that

- ♦ Ballyar – is a rural area
- ♦ Killygordon – is a small urban
- ♦ Letterkenny Urban – is a large urban
- ♦ Ballyshannon Urban – is a large urban
- ♦ St. Johnston – is a small urban
- ♦ Doocharry – is a rural area
- ♦ Clonleigh South – is a medium urban
- ♦ Castlefinnv – is a medium urban
- ♦ Letterkenny Rural – is a large urban
- ♦ Raphoe – is a medium urban
- ♦ Bundoran Urban – is a large urban.

After considering the overall concentrations of lone parents in terms of geographical location and then the variable of lone parents with at least one child under the age of 15 years as % of all households it provides a range of Electoral Divisions from across which it is possible to select high concentrations of lone parents in small urban, medium urban and large urban centres.

[2.5] Electoral areas for participation in the consultations

From the analysis three Electoral Divisions were chosen for participation in the consultations - these are the Electoral Divisions of St.Johnston; Rathmullan and Letterkenny Urban.

St.Johnston has a population density of 48 persons per square kilometre and contains a Small Urban Centre. Table 2.5 in Appendix reveals that 8.7% of all households in St Johnston are headed by a lone parent who has at least one child under 15 years of age. Locating a consultation in St.Johnston will also potentially allow the study to capture views from lone parents living in a cross-border area. St.Johnston has a very active community/voluntary sector for lone parents.

Rathmullan has a population density of 46 persons per square kilometre and contains a Medium Urban Centre. It fell into the top 20 concentrations of all households headed by a lone parent with at least one child under 15 years of aged (6.2%). Holding a consultation in Rathmullan allowed the facilitator to gather information from a medium urban centre, which is geographically distanced from the other consultation sites and thereby potentially informative in terms of different needs.

Letterkenny Urban is a Large Urban Centre with a population density of 582 persons per square kilometre. Table 2.5 in Appendix reveals that 8.0% of all households are headed by a lone parents with at least one child under 15 years. It is anticipated that the information gathered from the consultations here will be different again, in that, it will highlight the different needs of lone parents in a large urban context and potentially incorporate information from a mix of different nationalities of lone parents.

Chapter 3 Characteristics of participants in lone parent consultations

[3.0] Introduction

As outlined in the methodology in Chapter 2, a total of 3 Electoral Divisions were identified as having above average concentration of lone parents with at least one child under the age of 15 years of age and above average population densities. These Electoral Divisions also contained varying sized population concentrations. Subsequent to this consultations were organised in 3 different centres, specifically in the Electoral Division of Letterkenny Urban⁷, St Johnston⁸ and Rathmullen⁹. A total of 16 female lone parents, participated in these consultations and their characteristics are outline in this Chapter.

[3.1] Characteristics of the sample

3.1.1 Age & nationality

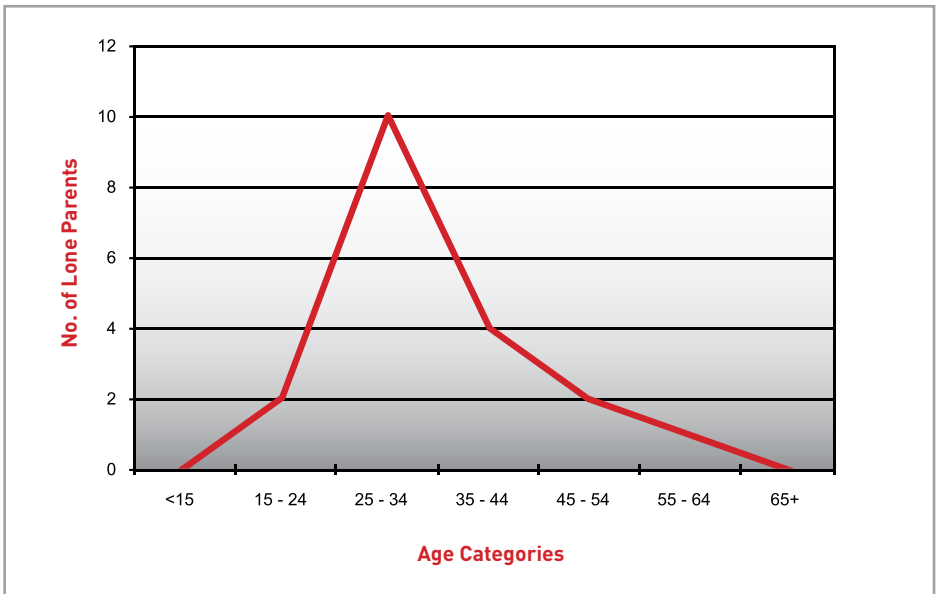
16 of the Lone Parents captured in the consultations highlighted that there were born in County Donegal. The majority of lone parents (12) who participated in this consultation were aged less than 34 years of age. In addition, 4 participants were aged between 35-44 years of age, 2 participants were aged 45- 54 years and 1 was aged between 55 to 62 years. So the consultations were successful in attaining views across a wide age spectrum.

⁷19th and 25th October, 2006

⁸18th and 23rd October, 2006

⁹18th October 2006

Fig 3.1: Age Distribution of Lone Parents

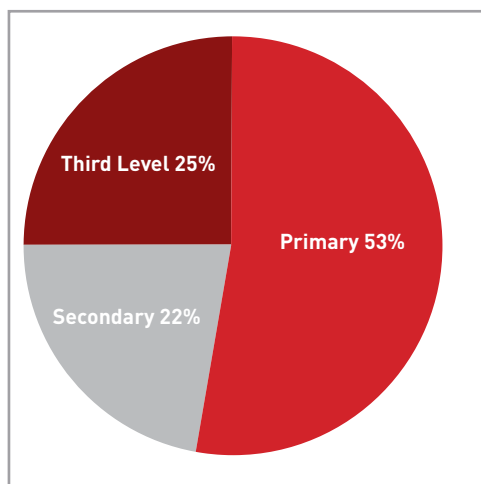


3.1.2 Educational attainment

All of the 19 participants had completed primary school of which 8 had completed secondary education and 9 had completed third level education and two were non started. The highest level of education completed varied and the sample had completed a wide range of courses including:

- ♦ Various certificates including FETAC, Communications, Disability Studies, City & Guilds 1st & 2nd year chef, JEB Teachers Diploma in IT, First Aid, Computer App, Manual Handling, Primary Cert, Human Rights, Sign Language, Special Needs, Team Building, First Aid, Childcare, NVQ, Youth work, Child protection, PLC Computers and Business, NVQ Level 3, FETAC Level 5, Retail Management.
- ♦ 2 Lone Parents had completed degrees - BA Community Development and a BSc Chemistry
- ♦ A number had completed qualifications in German, Conflict Resolution and Mediator type training, Human Rights Training, Masters, IATI & JEB
- ♦ The lone parents had also highlighted that they had completed training in Community development skills, capacity building, first aid, equality, drugs awareness, FETAC Levels special needs assistant training, community employment, Human Rights, FECTAC Caring for the Disabled, Hairdressing, Community learning, ECDL, SAGE, manual book keeping, receptionist and customer care, house care, manual handling, fire and safety.

Fig 3.2: Level of Education Completed by the Lone Parent



3.1.3 Number of dependents

The school age of any child brings with it different parenting responsibilities and therefore different needs. Table 3.1 examines the age distribution of the Lone Parents dependents and reveals that 17 of the participants had children under the age of 18 years, 7 of which were of pre school age and 13 were of primary school age. 2 Lone Parents had children over 18 years of age both of which were in Third Level Education.

Table 3.1: School age of dependents

Dependents < 18 Years of Age	Number
Yes	17
No	6
School Age of the Children	
Pre-school age	7
Primary or secondary	13
3rd Level	2

3.1.4 Relationship Status

Table 3.2 below reveals that the majority of Lone Parents were single, 6 were in a relationship, 4 were divorced or separated and 1 was married.

Table 3.2: Relationship status of Lone Parents

Relationship Status	Number
Single	8
In a relationship	6
Widow/widower	0
Divorced or separated	4
Married	1

3.1.5 Employment

Table 3.3. below highlights the employment status of the lone parents and reveals that the majority of participants were employed (13), some of these employed were also students and looked after their home and family. The table also shows that one of the participants was unemployed having lost or given up their regular job. It is important to note that a Lone Parent could select into one or more categories.

Table 3.3: Employment status of Lone Parents, 2006

Employment	Number
Employed	13
Looking for 1st job	0
Student	6
Looking after home or family	10
Retired	0
Unemployed (lost or given up regular job)	1
Unable to work (due to sickness or illness)	0

3.1.6 Summary of characteristics of the participants

The majority of the participants in this survey (12) were under the age of 34 years of age and 2 of which were under the age of 24. Most of the lone parents that participated in the consultations had young families. Participant's education levels were broadly similar to educational attainment in the county. The majority of lone parents were single but 6 were currently in a relationship. Most of the participants were in employment.



Chapter 4

Accessing & Remaining in Employment

[4.1] Introduction

The aim of this project was firstly to select a sample of lone parents that will allow the identification of the needs of lone parents in Co. Donegal. (See chapter 2). Secondly, to determine the characteristics of the sample selected i.e. their age and nationality, the number of dependents, their level of educational attainment, their relationship status and employment history etc. The purpose of which was to determine how good the sample selected is and how representative it is of the needs of all lone parents in Co. Donegal (See chapter 3). Thirdly it set out to gather behavioural type information for example when the sample of lone parents last worked, what do they do for childcare, what kind of formal training they have engaged in etc..

Fourthly, it set out to gather information on the different attitudes, opinions and beliefs of the participants i.e. what factors have or have not facilitated them to balance their work and parenting responsibilities. It specifically addresses questions like what personal factors made it difficult or facilitated lone parents participation in employment opportunities? What procedures or policies in the work place have either prohibited or enhanced their ability to participate in work or balance their work and parenting responsibilities? What private supports have helped? The latter two aims form the focus of this chapter.

[4.2] Accessing employment opportunities

Part of the consultations involved the participants filling in worksheets designed to ascertain the factors, which in their opinion or experience, have impacted negatively on lone parents accessing employment opportunities and the results are summarised in sections 4.2.1 below.

4.2.1 Factors impeding Lone Parents from accessing employment

A broad range of factors impeding lone parents from accessing employment was identified by the respondents throughout the various workshops and these are categorised as follows:

♦ Childcare

Childcare was the single most important factor impeding lone parents from accessing employment. Issues such as the cost of childcare, availability of childcare places other than playschools and the availability of after school / homework clubs were identified by all participants.

♦ Parenting responsibilities

A number of the participants referred to the responsibilities of parenting alone as being an inhibitor to accessing employment. Issues such as balancing work and home life, managing time, stress and facilitating children's extra curricular activities were identified by the participants.

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Childcare was the single most important factor impeding lone parents from accessing employment.

♦ Type of Employment

The type of employment available was also described as making it difficult for lone parents to take up employment. Some participants referred to employers being inflexible to the needs of lone parents, wages being low and not enough to cover the cost of childcare, the quality of work available in their area was perceived to be poor, low paid with unsociable hours. Participants also referred to the lack of skills and education as impacting negatively on accessing employment opportunities.

♦ Transport

Poor bus service was cited as a factor making it difficult for lone parents to take up employment. This was particularly relevant in medium and small urban areas where it was felt that there were few job opportunities available locally and it would be necessary to travel to larger towns to access employment.

♦ Financial Implications

Many participants referred to low wages, the cost of childcare and the risk of losing benefits as being deterrents in taking up employment.

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Participants also referred to the lack of skills and education as impacting negatively on accessing employment opportunities.

4.2.1 Factors assisting lone parents in accessing & remaining in employment

The lone parent participants were asked to specify factors that had a positive impact on them or encouraged them to access employment opportunities and these are depicted in figure 4.1 on next page.

Support from friends

The most important factor in Lone Parents (14) accessing employment was the support they received from their friends, which could be in terms of encouragement and motivation to try for a job or with regards to their assistance with childcare responsibilities to enable them to remain in their job.

Meeting new people

13 of the Lone Parent participants saw work or employment opportunities as a social opportunity for them to meet new people, highlighting the isolation felt by many of those parenting alone.

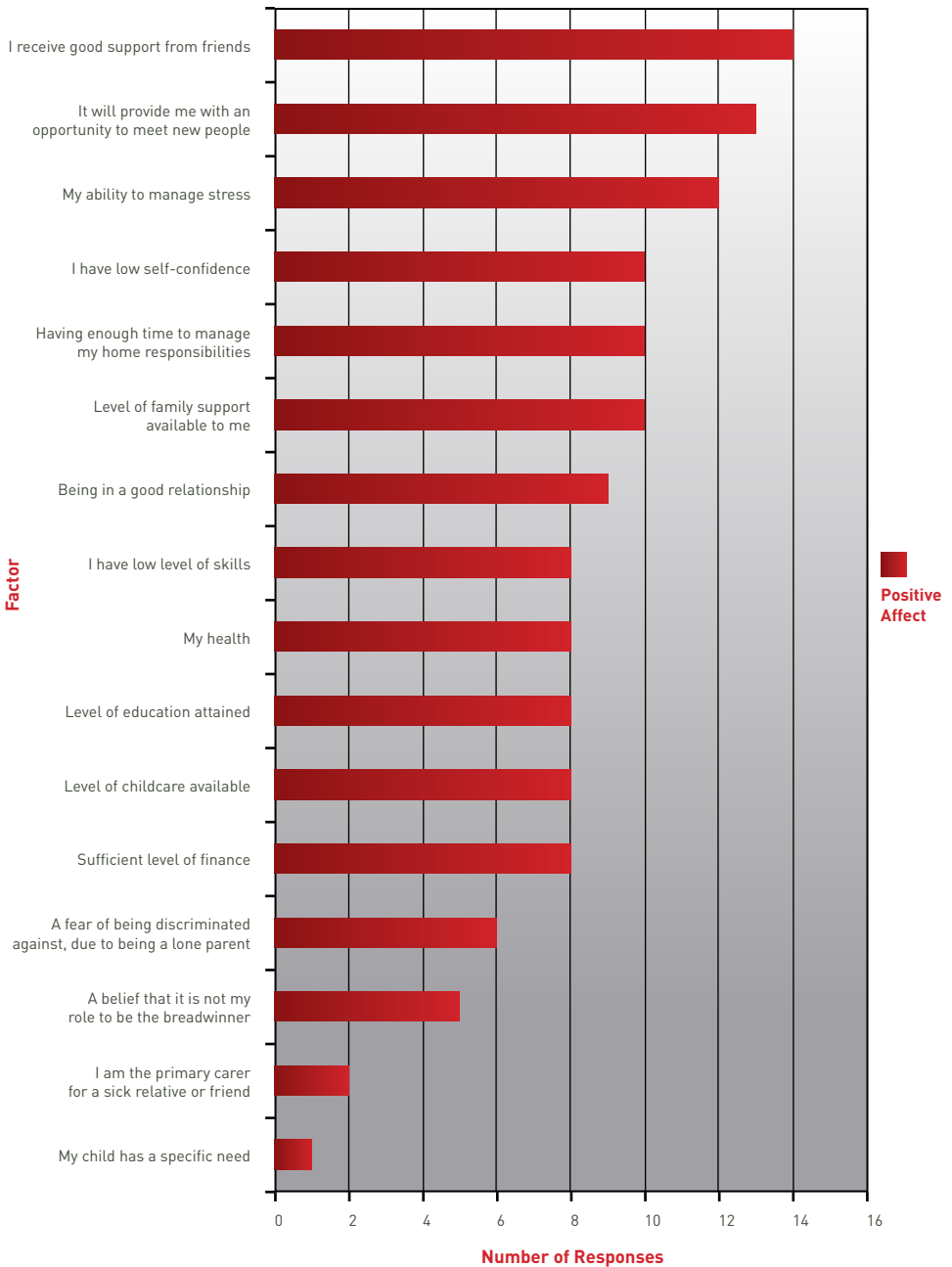
Ability to cope with stress

A number of Lone Parents (12) highlighted their ability to manage stress as a positive factor in accessing employment opportunities, in that it would allow them to manage parenting and the different challenges faced in a busy work environment.

Building up confidence levels

Some Lone Parents (10) saw work as a way to build up their levels of self-confidence, which is often low due to the isolation experienced by parenting alone. Lone Parents stated that having a good level of family support available to them or by being in a good stable relationship had a positive affect on them accessing employment opportunities.

Fig 4.1: Factors that have a Positive Affect on Lone Parents Accessing Employment



[4.3] Procedures, policies and supports impacting on the employment opportunities for lone parents

In the workshops the participants were asked to highlight positive (+) and negative factors (-) impacting on their ability to take up and to remaining in employment and these are summarised below.

4.3.1 Procedures and policies impacting on ability to take up and remain in employment

Participants identified the retention of Social Welfare payments and benefits as important factors in enabling lone parents to take up and remain in employment. This included local authority housing, rent allowance, medical card, Family Income Support payment and Back to School Clothing allowance. The procedures and policies operated by employers were also identified as impacting participants in taking up and remaining in employment, including the need for flexibility when children are sick.

4.3.2 Other supports impacting on ability to take up and remain in employment

Participants identified a range of education and training supports and agencies that have positively impacted on their ability to take up and remain in employment including FÁS Community Employment Scheme, Back to Work Programme, Back to Education Programme, VETOS, Donegal VEC and Donegal County Enterprise Board. Recognition was also given to the role of community-based projects such as Family Resource Centres and Community Development Projects in providing specific training and development programmes such as interview skills training and IT skills training.

[4.3] Balancing work and parenting responsibilities

4.4.1 Important factors in balancing work and parenting responsibilities

The respondents were also required to complete a worksheet on the factors, which have been beneficial in lone parents balancing work and their parenting responsibilities and the results are contained in Figure 4.2 on facing page.

An Acceptable Wage

For the participants having access to a wage that will allow them to have an acceptable standard of living was the single most important factor in determining whether the lone parent choose to access a particular type of employment or not.

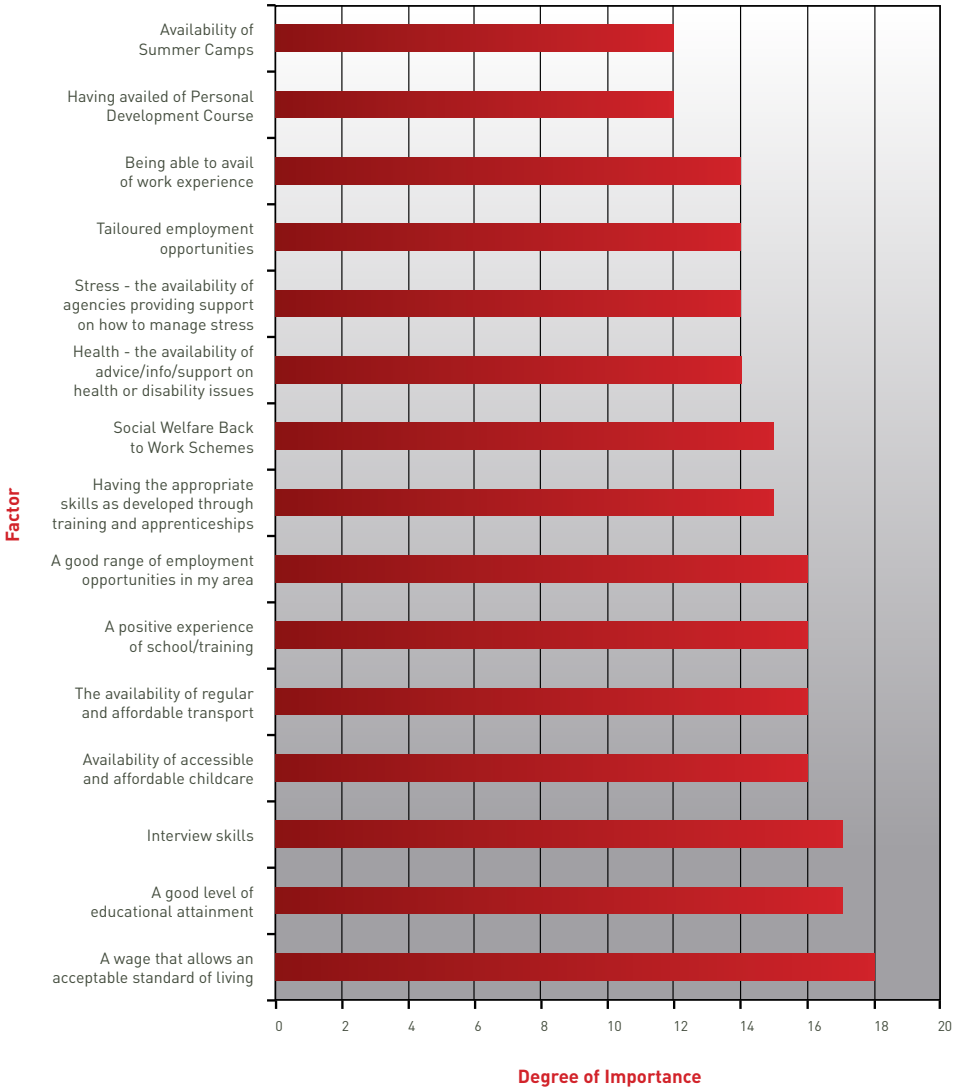
Educational Attainment & Interview Skills

The respondents regarded good levels of educational attainment and good interview skills as second in importance, both of which increased their levels of confidence and ability to succeed and remain in employment.

Childcare Facilities/ Rural Transport/ Employment Opportunities

A number of factors were ranked as third in level of importance in balancing work and parenting responsibilities and these were the availability of accessible and affordable childcare, as highlighted in 4.2.1 above, the lack of such facilities are a major impediment to lone parents in their endeavours to access and remain in work. The available of good regular and affordable rural transport was also regarded as important in accessing employment opportunities and in a county the size of Co. Donegal this is hardly surprising. This factor was particularly evident in the workshops held outside of the main urban centre of Letterkenny i.e. in the medium urban centre of Rathmullen and the small urban centre of St Johnston. The respondents also regarded a 'persons positive experience of schooling' as important in accessing employment opportunities. Finally the level and range of employment opportunities open to lone parents were regarded as an important factor in accessing employment.

Fig 4.2: Important Factors in Balancing Work and Parenting Responsibilities



State Intervention

The Department of Social Welfare 'Back to Work' Scheme and having the appropriate level of skills developed through various apprenticeships like FÁS etc. were regarded as fourth in terms of importance of lone parents accessing employment and job opportunities.

These factors were reinforced as the most important factors in balancing work and parenting responsibilities in further consultations with participants. One participant described the balancing of work and parenting responsibilities as a 'catch 22' situation.

[4.5] Conclusions

This chapter detailed the factors that have a negative and positive affect on lone parents accessing and remaining in employment from both a personal and organisational perspective. It also detailed the factors that enable lone parents to balance their work and parenting responsibilities and these included an acceptable wage, good levels of educational attainment and interview skills, existence of childcare facilities, good and regular rural transport and the availability of employment opportunities in their area and state interventions like 'Back to Work Schemes' and FÁS Apprenticeships.

“

One participant described the balancing of work and parenting responsibilities as a 'catch 22' situation.

Chapter 5 Finding Employment in the Future

[5.1] Introduction

The final aim of this project was to determine the possibility of a number of lone parents accessing employment opportunities. To this end the lone parents were asked to specify the type of occupations that they would like to access in the future and the types of skills that they would need to access such opportunities. In addition, a second questionnaire was sent to all of the participating agencies on Donegal County Development Board, to determine if they were willing to support such a placement and the types of supports, policies and procedures in their organisation that would facilitate such a placement. The CDB agencies were also asked to detail the types of learning/development that lone parents could avail of through their organisation.

[5.2] Future employment

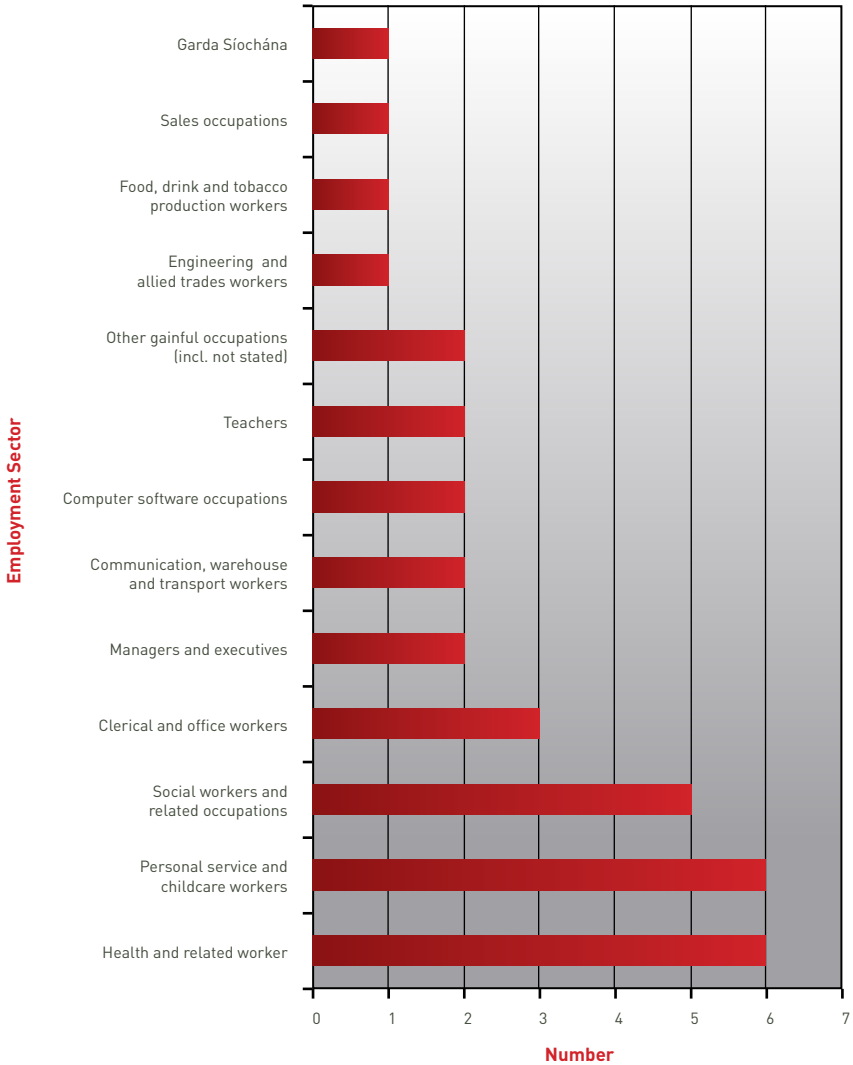
5.2.1 Future employment needs

Each participant was asked to identify what area they would like to work in the future and the most popular areas identified were health and related work, personal service and childcare and social work and related occupations. A number of participants also expressed an interest in clerical and office work. Figure 5.1 sets out the areas of work that the participants expressed an interest in.

5.2.2 Future skills to meet employment needs

Participants were asked to identify the type of skills that they felt they would required to avail of potential employment opportunities and responses ranged significantly from embarking on a Masters degree to obtaining general administrative skills. The comment box No.1 provides a flavour of the type of comments received.

Fig 5.1: What area would you like to work in in the future?



“ Computer skills

“ Office skills and computer skills

“ I have FETAC Level 5 in Childcare, to do childcare you need some sort of certificate (Personal Service and Childcare workers)

“ Future education on top of what I have done. I would like to do courses if they come up. (Communication, warehouse and transport workers, Computer software occupations, Social workers and related occupations)

“ General administrative skills ie: computer skills etc (Clerical and office workers, Health and related workers)

“ Have the skills but would consider doing a Masters in this area (Adult Education/ Training)

“ A Degree in Social work/ Community Studies

“ First aid, lift and handling (Health and related workers, Social workers and related occupations, Personal service and childcare workers)

“ More retail training (Sales occupations)

“ Fitness, Communication skills (Personal service and childcare workers, Garda Siochana)

“ Caring for people with disabilities (Health and related workers, engineering and allied trades workers)

“ Communication, report writing, policy analysis, conflict resolution, critical awareness, social studies - sociology’

[5.3] Surveying Donegal County Development Board member organisations

In parallel to this research with lone parents, the member organisations of Donegal County Development Board were surveyed with a view to establishing the employment policies and practices in their respective organisations. Each organisation was also asked to indicate their willingness to support a work placement by a lone parent. Out of a total of 34 member organisations, 11 responded.

5.3.1 Work life balance options available in CDB organisation

Table 5.1 sets out the type of Work Life Balance options available and shows that options such as maternity leave, sick leave, study leave and training professional development are available in each of the organisations surveyed. In addition the following options are available in 10 of the 11 organisations surveyed; unpaid personal leave, time off in lieu, staff appraisals and personal development. The options available in only a few organisations included compressed working week, team organised rotas/self rostering, public transport, breastfeeding support group, and antenatal support group.

Table 5.1: The Availability of Work Life Balance Options, 2006

Type of Work Life Balance Options	Available within CDB Organisation (Yes)
Other	0
Team organised rotas/self rostering	1
Antenatal support group	1
Compressed working week	2
Breastfeeding support group	2
Public Transport	3
Working from home in normal working hours	4
Staggered start and finish times	5
Proximity to or existence of a creche to/in your organisation	5
Existence of a social club with special rates	6
Term time leave	7
Staff supports	7
Career break	8
Flexible working arrangements	8
Induction Training	8
Staff Counselling	8
Carers leave	9
Staff information/Welfare services	9
Work place health promotion	9
Unpaid personal leave	10
Time off in lieu	10
Staff appraisals	10
Personal Development	10
Work place equality promotion	10
Parental leave	11
Study leave	11
Maternity leave	11
Sick leave	11
Training professional development	11

5.3.2 CDB organisations that are willing to support a work placement

Of the CDB Organisations surveyed, 6 stated that they would be willing to support a work placement by a lone parent. In relation to the type of activities and opportunities for learning that a lone person could avail of by participating in a work placement in one of these organisations, the survey found that the type of work placement available from

each of these organisations was primarily administrative type work. The opportunities for learning ranged from team building, to the design, delivery and management of programmes, to funding structures and peace building work, to general office skills. The specific opportunities for learning are detailed in Comment Box 2.

Comment Box No 2: Opportunities for Learning offered by CDB Agencies

“ *Improve their understanding of social inclusion and methods of delivery, programme design and management. They would receive advice, guidance and work in a supportive environment in a friendly setting’*
Inishowen Partnership Co.

“ *The placement could avail of all opportunities available to any standard placement*
LYIT

“ *Opportunities to learn about funding structures and peace building*
Border Action

“ *To work in a call centre or to engage in development work*
IBEC

“ *They will gain exposure to a busy office environment*
County Childcare Committee

“ *It depends on the aspirations of the learner*
IDA Ireland

“ *Gaining office skills and experience would be very beneficial*
Donegal County Council

“ *‘All employees have access to courses organised by the Learning and Development Unit. A Personal Development Planning System is being introduced. This is a development plan for employees which outlines their objectives within the job and maps out their career path, what skills they need to progress in their career*
HSE - Donegal County Services

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

[6.1] Conclusions

The overall objective of this research was to provide a more indepth look at the issues affecting lone parents in accessing employment in Co. Donegal. In order to achieve this overall objective this research had four aims:

- 1 To select a sample of lone parents that would allow the identification of the needs of lone parents in Co. Donegal.
- 2 To determine the characteristics of the sample selected with a view to determining how representative the sample is i.e. their age and nationality, the number of dependents, level of educational attainment, relationship status and employment history etc.
- 3 To gather behavioural type information for example when the sample of lone parents last worked, what do they do for childcare, what kind of formal training have they engaged in etc..
- 4 To gather information on the different attitudes, opinions and beliefs of the participants i.e. what factors have or have not facilitated them to balance their work and parenting responsibilities etc..

In conclusion, this research has found the following:

- ◆ Lone parents in Co. Donegal cannot be viewed as a homogenous group. This research has found that the needs of lone parents in Co. Donegal or in the state as a whole will vary depending on whether they live in an urban or rural area, on their age and the ages of their children, their level of educational attainment, their employment background, their relationship status and the dependency needs. Therefore, the provision of services and supports needs to take into account these varying needs.
- ◆ Factors impeding lone parents from accessing employment in Co. Donegal included the cost and availability of childcare including availability of after school services; responsibilities of parenting alone, the type of employment opportunities available in local area, the poor availability of regular and affordable public transport, low level of skills and education and the risk of losing income and secondary benefits in taking up low paid employment.
- ◆ These factors are magnified in rural areas given the limited availability of public transport and employment opportunities. Access to educational and training opportunities and childcare services is also more limited in a rural setting. Given the dispersed settlement patterns and the levels of deprivation recorded in Donegal these issues present very real challenges for lone parents in the county.
- ◆ In contrast the most important factors assisting lone parents in accessing and remaining in employment was the support from family and friends in terms of encouragement and motivation and in terms of assisting with childcare responsibilities to enable them to remain in employment.
- ◆ Factors that enable lone parents to balance their work and parenting responsibilities include an acceptable wage, good levels of educational attainment and interview skills, existence of childcare facilities, good and regular rural transport, the availability of employment opportunities in their area and state interventions like Back to Work schemes and FÁS apprenticeships.
- ◆ Whilst it is recognised that there is a multitude of organisations providing a range of supports and services that are of great assistance to enabling lone parents to avail of and remain in work opportunities at local level there is no one central location for the provision of this information in the county. This results in a low level of awareness among lone parents of the type of services available to them and also constrains any further research being undertaken into how the differing needs are being met.
- ◆ Donegal CDB welcomes the commitment by our six member organisations to facilitate work placements for lone parents.

[6.2] Recommendations

It is important to recognise and acknowledge the challenging role that lone parents have in terms of being both the primary care giver and breadwinner in the family and this was particularly evident in the lone parent responses as to the factors assisting them in taking up and remaining in employment and balancing work and parenting responsibilities. However, as referred to in chapter 1, evidence has consistently shown the increasing risk of poverty for lone parents households, particularly those headed by women and it is widely recognised that employment provides the best opportunity out of poverty.

Former Minister for Social Affairs, Mr. Seamus Brennan TD stated that:

“ Lone parents are a valuable resource. Behind the statistics are very real lives, day to day pressures, lives given to providing the best for children and lives searching for greater fulfilment. Lone parents have the added responsibility of providing care for their children as well as often being the sole breadwinner.”¹⁰

The sentiments expressed in this quotation above should form the basis upon which an integrated interagency approach is developed to support lone parents in Co. Donegal in accessing employment. It is further recommended that the lessons learned from the proposed pilot Youth Activation Programme being developed under the auspices of the County Development Board at local level inform the roll out of a similar activation that will be devised to address the challenges faced by lone parents accessing employment in Co. Donegal.

In this regard, it is recommended that an integrated interagency approach to the delivery of services and supports to lone parents is developed at local level that will enable lone parents to access good quality employment that will in turn facilitate financial independence and a good quality of life for all the family. It is important that this system is rolled out in such a way that takes into account the varied needs of lone parents in all areas of the county.

¹⁰ Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents, 2006

Appendix

Indicator Tables

Table 2.1: Population density [Sq Km], 2002

Electoral Division	Electoral Area	Pop 2002	Density (sq miles)	Density (sq km)
Cloghard	Stranorlar	624	75	29
Burt	Inishowen	1178	79	30
Carrickboy	Donegal	441	77	30
Carrowkeel	Milford	844	78	30
Creelough	Glenties	648	77	30
Gleneganon	Inishowen	606	77	30
Arran	Glenties	543	79	31
Gortahork	Glenties	1625	81	31
Inver	Donegal	745	80	31
Ards	Glenties	668	82	32
Birdstown	Inishowen	775	84	32
Corravaddy	Letterkenny	752	84	32
Inch Island	Inishowen	438	82	32
Culdaff	Inishowen	841	84	33
Ballyshannon Rur	Donegal	1272	87	34
Carrickart	Milford	828	88	34
Straid	Inishowen	1254	91	35
Meenaclady	Glenties	1298	92	36
Ballyliffin	Inishowen	1171	95	37
Dooish	Stranorlar	773	95	37
Killea	Inishowen	1190	97	37
Bundoran Rural	Donegal	814	97	38
Dunkineely	Donegal	801	98	38
Figart	Letterkenny	725	101	39
Newtowncunningham	Inishowen	769	100	39
Rosguill	Milford	812	100	39
Castleforward	Inishowen	913	104	40
Kilcar	Donegal	661	104	40
Carthage	Inishowen	1013	107	41
Knock	Stranorlar	998	106	41
Manorcunningham	Letterkenny	713	105	41
Carndonagh	Inishowen	1761	115	44
Fahan	Inishowen	1316	114	44
Kilderry	Inishowen	1367	115	44
Killygordan	Stranorlar	1018	119	46
Rathmullan	Milford	825	119	46
Clonleigh North	Letterkenny	1328	125	48
St Johnstown	Letterkenny	1128	125	48
Milford	Milford	1385	126	49
Rathmelton	Milford	1911	126	49

Electoral Division	Electoral Area	Pop 2002	Density (sq miles)	Density (sq km)
Convoy	Stranorlar	2093	127	50
Magheraboy	Letterkenny	1396	131	51
Tantallon	Donegal	1534	132	51
Dungloe	Glenties	1871	134	52
Rutland	Glenties	1465	135	52
Annagarry	Glenties	2234	137	53
Kilmacrennan	Milford	961	137	53
Castlefinn	Stranorlar	1322	140	54
Ballymacool	Letterkenny	1125	157	61
Gortnavern	Milford	978	199	77
Buncrana Rural	Inishowen	2365	203	79
Killybegs	Donegal	2428	210	81
Clonleigh South	Letterkenny	2004	223	86
Raphoe	Letterkenny	1329	246	95
Stranorlar	Stranorlar	4176	262	101
Donegal	Donegal	3724	309	119
Moville	Inishowen	2279	324	125
Castlewray	Letterkenny	2942	345	133
Bundoran Urban	Donegal	1678	1236	479
Letterkenny Urban	Letterkenny	2478	1225	582
Ballyshannon Urban	Donegal	2232	1864	629
Buncrana Urban	Inishowen	3420	2170	849
Letterkenny Rural	Letterkenny	9289	2515	882

Table 2.2: Total households, 2002

Group	ID %	Electoral Division	Total H.Hold	
IOWEN	33,089	Moville	760	
DG	33,032	Cross Roads	766	
DC	33,006	Ballyshannon Urban	788	
DG	33,039	Annagry	789	
DC	33,097	Castlewray	911	
DG	33,037	Magheraclogher	945	
DC	33,003	Letterkenny Urban	1,079	
IOWEN	33,001	Buncrana Urban	1,141	
DC	33,016	Donegal	1,208	
DC	33,147	Stranorlar	1,344	
DC	33,105	Letterkenny Rural	2,944	Highest variable
DCDG	33,108	Seacor	23	Lowest variable
		Co.Donegal	44,713	All Donegal

Table 2.3: Lone parents with all children as % of all households, 2002

Group	ID %	Electoral Division	Total	Lone Parents H.Holds all H.Holds	All Children
DCDG	33,031	Creeslough	236	16.5%	
DC	33,130	Castlefinn	421	16.9%	
DC	33,009	Cavan Garden	97	17.5%	
DCDG	33,118	Greenfort	125	17.6%	
DC	33,146	St Johnstown	346	17.9%	
DC	33,134	Clonleigh South	612	18.0%	
DC	33,145	Raphoe	455	18.5%	
DC	33,002	Bundoran Urban	560	18.8%	
DG	33,042	Crovehy	52	19.2%	
DC	33,019	Grousehall	29	20.7%	
DG	33,046	Doocharry	34	26.5%	Highest variable
DC	33,044	Crownarad	96	5.2%	Lowest variable
		Co.Donegal	44,713		All Donegal

Table 2.4: Lone parent with all children less than 15 years of age as % of all households, 2002

Group	ID	Electoral Division	Total H.Holds	Lone Parents all c < 15 % all H.Holds	
DC	33,125	Rathmullan	257	6.2%	
DC	33,146	St Johnstown	346	6.4%	
DC	33,147	Stranorlar	1,344	6.5%	
IOWEN	33,066	Ardmalin	229	6.6%	
DC	33,134	Clonleigh South	612	6.7%	
DC	33,003	Letterkenny Urban	1,079	6.9%	
DC	33,130	Castlefinn	421	7.4%	
DC	33,110	Ballyar	116	7.8%	
DC	33,145	Raphoe	455	7.9%	
DC	33,105	Letterkenny Rural	2,944	8.1%	
DC	33,002	Bundoran Urban	560	10.0%	Highest variable
DC	33,013	Bonnyglen	116	0.0%	Lowest variable
		Co.Donegal	44,713	4.0%	All Donegal

Table 2.5: Lone parents with 1 child less than 15 years of age as % of all households, 2002

Group	ID	Electoral Division	Total H.Holds	Lone Parents 1 Child < 15 % all H.Holds	
DC	33,110	Ballyarr	116	7.8%	
DC	33,141	Killygordan	339	8.0%	
DC	33,003	Letterkenny Urban	1,079	8.0%	
DC	33,006	Ballyshannon Urban	788	8.6%	
DC	33,146	St Johnstown	346	8.7%	
DG	33,046	Doocharry	34	8.8%	
DC	33,134	Clonleigh South	612	10.0%	
DC	33,130	Castlefinn	421	10.0%	
DC	33,105	Letterkenny Rural	2,944	10.5%	
DC	33,145	Raphoe	455	10.8%	
DC	33,002	Bundoran Urban	560	12.0%	Highest variable
DC	33,013	Bonnyglen	116	0.0%	Lowest variable
		Co.Donegal	44,713		All Donegal

Table 2.6: The number of lone parents with all children, 2002

Group	ID	Electoral Division	Total H.Holds	All Lone Parents All Children	
DG	33,032	Cross Roads	766	91	
IOWEN	33,069	Buncrana Rural	700	98	
DC	33,002	Bundoran Urban	560	105	
DC	33,134	Clonleigh South	612	110	
DC	33,016	Donegal	1,208	113	
DG	33,037	Magheraclogher	945	118	
DC	33,006	Ballyshannon Urban	788	122	
DC	33,003	Letterkenny Urban	1,079	147	
IOWEN	33,001	Buncrana Urban	1,141	173	
DC	33,147	Stranorlar	1,344	183	
DC	33,105	Letterkenny Rural	2,944	441	Highest variable
DCDG	33,108	Seacor	23	2	Lowest variable
		Co.Donegal	44,713	5,371	All Donegal

Table 2.7: All lone parents with all children less than 15 years of age, 2002

Group	ID %	Electoral Division	Total H.Holds	Lone Parents All Children < 15 years	
IOWEN	33,069	Buncrana Rural	700	36	
DC	33,145	Raphoe	455	36	
DG	33,037	Magheraclogher	945	39	
DC	33,097	Castlewray	911	40	
DC	33,134	Clonleigh South	612	41	
DC	33,006	Ballyshannon Urban	788	48	
DC	33,002	Bundoran Urban	560	56	
IOWEN	33,001	Buncrana Urban	1,141	68	
DC	33,003	Letterkenny Urban	1,079	74	
DC	33,147	Stranorlar	1,344	88	
DC	33,105	Letterkenny Rural	2,944	238	Highest variable
DC	33,013	Bonnyglen	116	0	Lowest variable
		Co.Donegal	44,713	1,794	All Donegal

Table 2.8: All lone parents with one child less than 15 years of age, 2002

Group	ID	Electoral Division	Total H.Holds	All Lone Parents 1 Child < 15 years	
DC	33,097	Castlewray	911	49	
DC	33,145	Raphoe	455	49	
IOWEN	33,069	Buncrana Rural	700	50	
DG	33,037	Magheraclogher	945	51	
DC	33,134	Clonleigh South	612	61	
DC	33,002	Bundoran Urban	560	67	
DC	33,006	Ballyshannon Urban	788	68	
IOWEN	33,001	Buncrana Urban	1,141	86	
DC	33,003	Letterkenny Urban	1,079	86	
DC	33,147	Stranorlar	1,344	104	
DC	33,105	Letterkenny Rural	2,944	309	Highest variable
DC	33,013	Bonnyglen	116	0	Lowest variable
		Co.Donegal	44,713	2,421	All Donegal

NOTES

