

## FAMILY SUPPORT GUIDANCE NOTE

### INTRODUCTION

***‘Family support is both a style of work and a set of activities that reinforce positive informal social networks through integrated programmes. These programmes combine statutory, voluntary/ community and private services and are generally provided to families within their own homes and communities. The primary focus of these services is on early intervention aiming to promote and protect the health and well-being and rights of all children, young people and their families. At the same time particular attention is given to those who are vulnerable or at risk’.***

(Dolan, Canavan and Pinkerton, 2006, Family Support as Reflective Practice).

The Governments commitment to Family Support has been re-enforced through legislation and policy development since the 1990’s. The introduction of the Childcare Act 1991 placed a statutory responsibility on the Health Boards (which is now transferred to the HSE) to identify and promote the welfare of children who do not attain sufficient care and attention. This legislation clearly states that the needs of the child are paramount and where possible the care of the child is best delivered within the family.

The report on the Commission on the Family (1998) advocated the need to strengthen the coping ability of families by targeting the support to those families that encounter adversity. The Commission’s vision of family support is preventative in nature, based on community development principles with an explicit focus on disadvantaged communities.

***‘Family support is empowering of individuals, builds on family strengths, enhances self esteem and engenders a sense of being able to influence ones life’s, has significant potential as a primary preventive strategy for all families facing the ordinary challenges of day to day living and has particular relevance to communities that are coping in a stressful environment’*** (Commission on the Family 1998).

The Family Support Act 2001 introduced the Family Support Agency (FSA) whose functions are defined as providing a family mediation service, to promote the provision of marriage and relationship counseling and to develop and support family and community service resource centres.

Family Support is about assisting families – and not just those in crisis - to improve and maintain a positive and healthy home environment. Family support is about prevention and early intervention. Family support programmes and activities aim to develop individuals and family skills to cope with all situations.

## **FAMILY SUPPORT AND RAPID**

RAPID offers a valuable inter agency vehicle for coordinating and implementing family support services in disadvantaged communities. The RAPID programme and its implementation structures present opportunities to work in a targeted way with all families (not just those in crisis) where there are high levels of disadvantage.

Family support projects incorporate a wide range of interventions, including pre-school services, parental education, development, support services, home visiting and educational youth services. While most family support services are state funded many are delivered through the community and voluntary sector. The Family Support Act 2001 has reinforced this method of service delivery.

Each RAPID area should define a clear local response to family support needs. Such a response should be evidence based and clearly build upon the existing understanding of local needs and of the services available to meet those needs. In developing this response, the Area Implementation Team should address the following questions:

- What are the most important needs in the local area?
- What resources are currently available to meet these needs?
- What responses need to be developed and who should lead on these responses?
- What is the timeframe for implementation?
- What outcomes and indicators should be expected and used?
- How will the work be reviewed and evaluated?

## **RESULTS AND INDICATORS**

The following are the outcome and indicators suggested by the RAPID National Working Group on Family Support. These should be used to inform the Family Support Strategy at local level. Each area should consider which of these indicators are appropriate to their area. To do this, an area should consider which indicators will best tell them whether or not they have achieved progress in meeting the keys gaps they have defined. Should an area not utilize all of the following indicators, or utilizes additional indicators; please provide an explanation within the plan.

SUB-THEME	RESULT	INDICATOR
Stable and supportive families	Build family strength and resilience  Supports to vulnerable families	Number of parents completing parenting courses. Number of families involved in Family Resource Centres  Number of families engaged in Springboard/ Number of families being supported in their tenancies. Number of Proposals submitted under Activation and Family Services Programme
Healthy infants, children, youth and adults	Health promotion and education classes	Number and type of classes targeting families: Level of participation in classes Numbers involved in community based projects
School readiness	Intensive, comprehensive pre-school care and provision  Parental involvement in child education	Number of children attending pre-school  Number of parents involved in pre-school provision Number of parents involved in childhood classes
Positive socialization and contribution to the community	Well developed family resource centers, community development projects and youth services in the area	Number of community based projects in the area Number of people involved in the projects

### RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN 2008

The core resources made available to RAPID areas by the state are those presented through the budgets of the local State Agencies and the Departments involved in service delivery. All State agencies should be working to prioritise the allocation of resources to RAPID areas, through the provision of workers, inputs into planning processes and the delivery of projects. The members of the Family Support Sub Group should clearly define, on behalf of the range of agencies involved, what the resources are and what flexibility is available to allow these resources to be better used or targeted at issues concerned by the group to be a key concern.

In addition to these resources, a set of national funding lines on Family Support issues will offer direct prioritisation to RAPID areas. These resources will, over the life of the programme change (and potentially expand). The current additional resources to be made include:

**Department of Social and Family Affairs: Employment Support Services:**

**Activation and Family Support Programme (AFSP)**

The DSFA commit to supporting family support projects identified by local AIT's, which meet the Activation and Family Support Programme criteria. Projects will be identified through the AIT structures and funding facilitated by the DSFA representative.

**Office of the Minister For Children**

**National Childcare Investment Programme**

**Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (2008-2010)**

The NCIP Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (2008-2010) is available under the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) to support community-based not for profit childcare services to enable them to provide quality childcare services at reduced rates to disadvantaged parents. The introduction of the new Scheme meets a commitment made at the launch of the NCIP in December 2005, to bring a new scheme into effect in 2008 when the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) staffing support grant scheme comes to an end. As part of the application process, promoters are requested to identify whether they are based in or serve a RAPID area. This is within their application form under "Location in area of designated disadvantage".

**Dormant Accounts Fund:**

In 2006 and 2007 funding was made available from the Dormant Accounts Fund to support priority projects in RAPID areas. It is anticipated that RAPID areas will again benefit from Dormant Accounts support in 2008, subject to government approval. EUR7.5m was allocated specifically to RAPID areas in 2007 and it is expected that a similar amount will be ring-fenced for use by RAPID AIT's in 2008. AIT's may find it appropriate to target some of these funds on actions eligible for Dormant Accounts funding within this (or other) strategic themes.

## LINKAGES WITH OTHER STRATEGIC THEMES

- 1. Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour:** There needs to be linkage with the Community Safety theme in order to ensure that vulnerable families which include any members involved in ASB are supported and encouraged to change their behaviour and thus limit risks such as losing tenancies. This is important in order to prevent homelessness and family breakdown that can result from ASB. It can also support families to develop and sustain positive lifestyles by responding to some of their unmet needs. The development of family intervention projects that challenge and support families to address the causes of their ASB are essential.
- 2. Health:** Some family support work with vulnerable families can involve child protection and child development issues, which are central to the work of the Health Services Executive. Also, the health status of families plays a large role in the ability of families to support and nurture its members, especially children, and hence, supports to improve the health status of families are essential to a family support strategy.
- 3. Education:** There is a key need to develop and formalise links with schools and to develop school based family support projects. A review of policy developments in Britain suggests that there is enormous potential for schools to deliver a range of services to children and families. Also, adult and community education plays a key role in the development of positive socialization and parenting skills.
- 4. Physical Environment:** The physical environment is very important to the development of strong, healthy families. Housing, the built and natural environment and the availability of accessible services and facilities in the locality are all essential elements in supporting families. The role of family support in regeneration initiatives has been clearly identified and this needs to be developed in a more integrated way in RAPID areas.
- 5. Employment and Training:** The economic status of all families has a direct impact on their coping abilities, to maintain a healthy home environment. Individuals with no training find it difficult to secure employment. Providing employment and training opportunities locally to RAPID residents will have a long term positive effect on their home and family environment.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF FAMILY SUPPORT STRATEGY

At national level, the HSE have committed to the rollout of the agency participation guidelines and have undertaken to complete a review of HSE representation on RAPID AIT's. A support and development mechanism for HSE RAPID AIT representatives is to be put in place. This will involve national quarterly meetings, development of consistent approaches to emerging issues etc. This will also involve local HSE Area RAPID meetings to facilitate the development of local mechanisms.

It is important that, in each area, a Family Support Sub Group of the AIT is established to focus on family support issues in their RAPID area and to develop a strategy /action plan by mid-May 2008 (refer to Generic Strategic Theme Guidelines for more information).

## **MEMBERSHIP**

It is recommended that the following agencies and groups be invited to participate in the Family Support Sub Group:

- Appropriate representation from the HSE, DSFA and Gardai
- A senior staff or Board member from local Family Resource Centre.
- A senior staff or Board member from local Community Development Project
- A service user/user from a family support service
- A community representative nominated from the RAPID Community Forum/ Structure

Leadership of the Family Support Sub Group should rest with the HSE or DSFA representative on the AIT.

## **SUBMISSION OF FAMILY SUPPORT STRATEGY**

The HSE/DSFA rep should forward the Family Support strategy and action plan, once endorsed by the AIT and SIM, to their NMC Representative following their own Departmental /Agencies protocols by **Friday, May 16<sup>th</sup> 2008**. The RAPID Co-ordinator should also forward a copy to Pobal for information.