

**PARENTS**

**ADVICE**

**CENTRE**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2004 - 2005**

# **PARENTS ADVICE CENTRE**

## **VISION**

PAC'S vision of the future is one where parenting is highly valued and family members receive the support and resources they need to provide a happy and safe environment in which children and young people can achieve their potential.

## **MISSION**

PAC's mission is to support families

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## CHAIRPERSON BOARD OF TRUSTEES



Parents Advice Centre's (PAC's) vision of the future is one where parenting is highly valued and family members receive the support and resources they need to provide a safe and happy environment in which children and young people can achieve their potential. To make that vision a reality Parents Advice Centre provides a range of regional support services. They consist of:

- Freephone Helpline and appointments for any family member with relationship, behavioural or emotional difficulties.
- Parenting programmes for groups of parents across all communities.
- The Parenting Forum NI: a membership forum that acts as a voice for parents, lobbies on parenting issues and consults with parents on policy and practice. It is currently working nationally to develop occupational standards for parenting programmes.
- The Men's Project which initiates and facilitates activity focusing on men's issues including work with fathers, men's health, gender equality, research, training and events
- Alternatives to physical punishment – a partnership with Save the Children which provides training in alternatives to physical punishment to those who work with children so that children and young people can be safe and protected.

This year has been extremely productive in terms of service provision with an ever-growing demand for services. Unfortunately it has been one of extreme financial restraint. At a time when our sister organisation Parentline Plus, in England, received a grant of £4.963 million to develop their database, to increase the number of calls, to continue running the email service and to offer 2000 more ringback counselling sessions a year, we, in Northern Ireland, have been unable to renew two vacancies due to retracted funding.

The Board of Trustees would like to pay tribute to the staff and volunteers who have demonstrated their commitment to keeping the services to families going while making cost savings, giving up office space and maximising in every way possible their contribution to PAC. Volunteers are the core of PAC, and without them it would not be possible to provide the one to one advice service to families. Their contribution is priceless, and is valued by the staff and the Board of Trustees, but most of all by those who seek their support. It has been a difficult year for staff who have been distracted from their main aim of supporting parents to seeking to generate sufficient funds to keep the service afloat. The Board of Trustees would like to record their thanks for the manner in which all of the staff have supported our Chief Executive, Pip Jaffa, who has worked tirelessly to achieve sufficient funding.

We are, however, hopeful for the future and are grateful for the funding we have been awarded this year as we acknowledge that it is not only the voluntary sector who have been feeling the draught. We would particularly thank DHSSPS and the four Health Boards, The Big Lottery Fund, the EU Fund for Peace and Reconciliation, the Community Volunteering Scheme, Save the Children, Children in Need, Lloyds

TSB, the Children's Fund, Dean's Christmas Sit Out, the Honourable the Irish Society, and Gamcare.

In the government's response to the Investing Together report of the TASK Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector, 2.2 states, 'The Government recognises the significant role of the voluntary and community organisations in society and believes that they have a key role to play in the delivery of public service. We will encourage and support more effective and wider ranging involvement of voluntary and community organisations in the delivery of public service in Northern Ireland where they can add value to those services'.

We, in Parents Advice Centre, look forward to this promise becoming a reality.

At the conference held to mark 25 years of Parents Advice Centre, the Minister Angela Smith said, "I am delighted to recognise the invaluable role that Parents Advice Centre has made over the last 25 years in helping generations of parents fulfil their unique role". She reaffirmed the Department's commitment to listen to the needs of parents in the developing of a Family and Parenting strategy and said, "The strategy will ensure that parents will have access to appropriate help at an early stage. We want to ensure that parents are fully equipped in order to have the best possible impact on our children, who are the next generation of parents".

As Chair of the Board of Trustees it has been a privilege to work with the Board who have given freely of their time and skills to steer the organisation through the last year. We, as a Board, are confident that Parents Advice Centre has the staff and volunteers who have the skills and commitment to meet the challenges of the next year and that the work of PAC will attract the funding it deserves in the future.

**Valerie McGuffin**  
**Chairperson**  
**Board of Trustees**

*"When we first opened 10 years ago we took calls from parents concerned about children's tantrums, unco-operative teenagers or drug abuse fears. There were also calls about the stress and strain of separation and divorce and the effect on children. The majority of our calls are still about these issues. In addition, we also hear from parents concerned about bullying, self-harm, sexual promiscuity and teenage pregnancy. To all our callers we offer help and support either on the phone, by appointment or by dropping into the centre"*

*Volunteer, Dungannon*

## CHIEF EXECUTIVE



Parenting has now gained a prominent position in the public debate. PAC has championed the needs of parents while the press continue to blame parents and criticise their child-rearing skills. Parents Advice Centre, as a service provider, lobbyist and influencer has worked even harder in the last twelve months to be a key contributor in the area of family support.

It is crucial that we have representation on fora which shape policy and drive service provision. To this end we have liaised at many levels with the process of developing policies including the Children and Young People's Strategy (OFMDFM) and the Family Support Strategy. PAC is also represented on the NGO Forum, Child Care Partnerships, Paulo, Anti Bullying Forum, Parent Support Group (Larne), and Employers For Childcare.

Influencing strategic thinking based on our knowledge and understanding of parents' needs and wishes comes high on our list of priorities. In order to be precise about our own objectives and key themes we needed to overhaul our Strategic Plan for the next three years. Following internal consultation we have produced a vibrant plan for PAC's development over the next three years. One of the main objectives is to have greater synergy between the work of the helpline and the projects. The benefits gained from combined working can be very significant indeed.

This year PAC continued to be actively involved in the CAU! Alliance whose twin aims are to campaign for legal reform of physical punishment and positive parenting. The issue is contentious and the lack of public support is a hugely challenging factor for the campaign. Nevertheless, PAC is resolute in its efforts to participate fully in this work, holding strongly to the belief that children deserve equal protection to adults and that education in alternatives to physical punishment should be widely available to all.

We have seen a backward step for children and young people this year with the introduction of Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). PAC cannot support this punitive and unfair system. However much ASBOs are presented as a measure to rid society of teenagers' misbehaviour in communities, they will not stem the tide of problems on our streets. We hold the view that the reasons behind the behavioural difficulties played out on our streets, which undoubtedly are concerning, should be our prime target for services. Until we collectively tackle the source we will continue to make young people scapegoats for ills that are not of their making. Parents need help and support at the earliest stage. Through our work with individual parents and in groups, we can see very clearly that parents want to do the best for their children and express feelings of guilt and frustration that their approach has not worked. Helping parents to use other methods and seeing positive results restores parents' self esteem, breathing new life into the parent-child relationship.

The introduction of the Freephone has been a great success with a steady rise in the number of callers accessing it. It is to be hoped that this usage will continue to increase, making access to PAC more available and inclusive. PAC has been

involved with the development of mediation services this year with representation on the newly formed NI Mediation Service. With so many calls relating to the effect of separation and divorce we are keen to link with mediation and contact centres, and other allied services to extend our understanding and to share our experiences.

During the next twelve months we will focus more on this area of work, particularly in respect of the discussions and strategic development of alternative dispute resolution. Daily we see the effect on children and young people of the adversarial nature of the court process. The climate for change is conducive, with the key stakeholders much more open to the idea of introducing less formal measures, for parents to agree arrangements for children following couple breakdown. We are currently in discussion with QUB to try to secure funding to research the effect on children and young people immediately following a couple breakdown.

The work associated with operating the DHSSPS Human Organs Helpline came to an end this year. To mark the events, two memorials - a stained glass window in the City Hall, Belfast and a sculpture in Ballyoan Cemetery, Derry - were unveiled. Through discussions at meetings, support groups and their work on the memorials, many relatives seem to have gained greater peace of mind and found the capacity to let go some of their anger and distress.

PAC invited Dr Sebastian Kraemer, a well-known child and adolescent psychiatrist, to give a public talk in January. He returned by popular demand following his success as a keynote speaker at our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference. Although running such events needs a lot of organisation, it is an activity that PAC wishes to continue so that we can bring more knowledge about parenting issues to the public arena.

It is a sad reflection of the current status quo that our energies are distracted from important tasks of development of services by the exigencies of finances. However, I do feel a slight optimism that the voice of reason may be heeded by those who allocate funding. Perhaps they will not act immediately, but be persuaded by the weight of evidence that funding prevention focused work is a priority if there is to be long-term gain for children. We have been under more pressure than ever to generate income and overwhelmed by the exacting task of monitoring funding streams. It seems ironic that a service that has a proven track record for delivering a value for money service is distracted from its key tasks to raise finance to preserve its very existence. The uptake of our work with parents reinforces the fact that parents need immediate support, they need parenting courses, they need a voice and to be consulted, they need equity and fairness, and policy makers need to listen and respond. So we will continue to build on existing services and endeavour to do so to the highest possible standards. This work could not be carried out unless we had a dedicated team. Particularly throughout the last year, when we have had financial pressures, the team have shone in their true colours showing their strong and unwavering focus to make children and young peoples' lives better by supporting the family effectively.

**Pip Jaffa OBE**  
**Chief Executive**

## **AROUND THE BRANCHES**



### **NVQs**

This year saw the introduction of NVQ Level II Advice and Guidance and NVQ III Assessor Award. As with most innovations, it was a lot of hard work and we were delighted when 14 Volunteers and 5 Staff Supervisors achieved their awards.

The Derry Branch obviously enjoyed the work so much that from September 2004 they have enrolled 3 Volunteers in Level III Advice and Guidance, 2 Volunteers in Level III Counselling, and 1 Volunteer in the Progression Award. We wish them well in their studies.

### **ADMIN TRAINING**

Training in the administration side of PAC was varied. At present, Trisha McQueen and Gemma Connor are undertaking a Microsoft Office User Specialist (MOUS) course. Gemma also obtained CiPD Certificate in Training Practice. This will benefit Gemma's work as Parenting Forum NI Administrator as she will be able to facilitate consultations. Staff and some of the volunteers also attended First Aid courses so that each office has qualified First Aiders. Three members of staff - Sheila Cherry, Trisha McQueen and Angela Holland - attended a training course in "Organising Successful Events". Trisha also managed to attend "Young Women Talk Participation and Power"!

### **PUBLICITY**

Volunteers were out and about promoting PAC through their attendance at events ranging from one-day conferences to exhibitions. Numerous stands were erected at Shopping Centres, Health Promotion Conferences and various locations throughout Northern Ireland. Ballymena tried a new approach and held an information morning and lunch in the branch for professional and voluntary workers. This proved an excellent way to inform others about our work and led to closer links with statutory and voluntary agencies.

### **FUNKY FARM**

As part of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations, staff and volunteers along with their families, enjoyed an evening of fun and games at Streamvale Open Farm. From Treasure Hunts for all members of the family, to the BBQ and Barn Dance, the whole evening was one of friendship, fun and unforgettable memories – how could we ever forget the Belfast Staff's rendition of The Blues Brothers?

## **25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE**

The conference was held on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2004. The content of the day's programme was carefully designed to allow for some reflection on the issues that were brought to PAC 25 years ago, and what are the major influences on a child's life today. The conference was opened by Angela Smith, MP. Speakers were Dr John Pinkerton, Dr Sebastian Kraemar, Kate Harper, Nicola Drennan from the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister and Teresa Devlin from the Children's Commissioner's Office. Drama from [Youth@ChildrensLawCentre](#) and real life experiences of parenting, as told by two young parents who attended a PAC Parenting Course, gave very telling perspectives on family life and being a parent. "Question Time" rounded off the day's proceedings with all speakers responding to questions and comments prompted by the presentations.

## **DUNGANNON – 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY AND AWARD**

In November 2004, Dungannon celebrated their 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. After a training session, it was on to lunch at the Viscount. As always, Dungannon was alert to the promotion side of the event and photographs appeared with a write up in the local newspapers. As part of the celebrations for the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and to note the Year of the Volunteer, Dungannon Branch was nominated for an award from the Dungannon Council. Against stiff opposition from 160 other nominations, they were delighted to win the award.

## **NEW VOLUNTEERS**

As with all organisations, people come and go. Yet we are fortunate in PAC to retain a core of dedicated volunteers without whom we could not operate. We welcome our new volunteers to each of the branches and look forward to getting to know them better.

## **BULLYING TOOLKIT FOR PARENTS**

PAC, after consultation with parents and with support from the Department of Education (NI), produced a booklet, "Bullying - A Toolkit for Parents". 50,000 copies were printed and the publication was launched on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2003. The launch publicity generated requests for booklets from families and organisations throughout Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. We also had a request from New South Wales, Australia. In 2004/05 a mailshot was sent to all Northern Ireland schools and colleges offering them the opportunity to use the booklet to complement their own strategies on bullying. There was an excellent response and, to date, 43,000 copies have been distributed.

## **REGIONAL TRAINING MANAGER**



### **Preparation Training**

The Parent Support & Guidance Course, PAC's accredited preparation training for new volunteers, underwent its five-year review, as required by the accrediting body, NI Open College Network. The programme objectives and structure were updated, and administrative and quality assurance procedures revised to meet new NIOCN requirements. Volunteers completing the revised programme will now achieve 6 credits at level 2. In the year to March 2005, 24 new volunteers had undertaken the accredited programme.

### **NVQs**

A pilot programme to provide NVQ accreditation in Advice and Guidance Level II came to a successful completion. 14 volunteers completed their awards during the year – an excellent completion rate of nearly 80%! None of this would have been possible without the hard work and commitment of the five Supervisors who provided them with support and assessment while undertaking their own Level III awards to become recognised NVQ assessors. Congratulations to Alice, Marie, Loraine, Dana and Ellen and their equally dedicated volunteers.

### **In-service training**

A total of 21 in-service training days were held in the four branches during the year. Topics covered included refresher training on basic counselling skills, the impact of teenage drug-use on families and getting the most from group supervision. Attendance was varied and it has become clear that some evening training will need to be provided to accommodate our evening volunteers in Derry and Ballymena.

A small number of volunteers and Supervisors were also selected to attend a series of seminars on 'Young People and Self-esteem' run by the Health Promotion Agency. In addition, 8 experienced volunteers were selected to undertake a new 3-day Group Supervisor training course developed and delivered especially for PAC.

### **Support Groups**

A structured six-week support group for parents of gay, lesbian and bisexual children, was delivered in April/May. The 10-week group support programme for the Relatives' Reference Group was run in Derry, Dungannon and twice in Belfast for a total of 22 participants.

**Grainne Maginnis**  
**Regional Training Manager**



The Alternatives to Physical Punishment Training has continued successfully over the past twelve months since the last report. It was reported then that the trainer had moved from a part-time basis to almost full time and that the timescale of the project had been extended to March 2005.

In late December 2004 it was decided by PAC and Save the Children to further extend the project and it will now run until March 2006.

The training has been delivered in every county in Northern Ireland, with several hundred participants now having completed the full training. The training package was designed to be adaptable to suit the requirements of all childcare professionals in all childcare sectors. Participants' job roles and responsibilities have been extremely diverse. An interim evaluation carried out by an external consultant in the Summer of 2004 showed that the vast majority of the participants reported to have benefited from their participation.

Our strategy for the final, extended twelve months, is to intensify the work in one particular board area to maximise the effectiveness of the project. An approach to the NHSSB was welcomed and work has now commenced in this particular area.

### **Sandra Couser** **Trainer for Trainers**

#### *Quotes from callers to the Helpline:*

*"I am so grateful for the help and support I received when I needed it".*

*"Your Helpline Worker has been so helpful and easy to talk to, he has changed my life".*

*"I got my family life back together again, I worked on – never giving up hope".*

*"I've learnt I have done the best I could and have no need to feel guilty".*

*"My daughter gets a lot of help and guidance from her Helpline Worker".*

*"I'm so glad I called. It has helped me so much just to have someone listen. Thank you".*

## THE MEN'S PROJECT



The aim of The Men's Project (TMP) is to increase awareness of the issues facing men and boys in the north of Ireland and to promote their social inclusion. During the past year our work has included:

- ❑ Providing a "signposting service" to 66 individuals looking for sources of help.
- ❑ Directing 253 external groups to appropriate resources, support, research and contacts in the field of men's work.
- ❑ Supporting the consolidation and development of network bodies such as The Male Link, Men's Health Forum in Ireland and the UK Fatherhood Forum.
- ❑ Working with the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey Team to design a "Men's Life and Times" research module, and producing/disseminating five statistical fact sheets titled "Men in Northern Ireland".
- ❑ Expanding our online directory of groups interested in men's work/issues.
- ❑ Responding to public consultations - both as an individual organisation and by facilitating collective responses (e.g. "Gender Matters").
- ❑ Producing and disseminating 1500 "Men's Life and Times" wall planners.
- ❑ Contributing to Advisory Groups such as the Regional Equality Liaison Panel (DHSSPS), Gender and Health Inequalities Research Project (Equality Commission NI), Young People and Mental Health Initiative (Health Promotion Agency).
- ❑ Facilitating training workshops for other agencies on working with fathers and engaging with men (e.g. CiNI, Home-Start NI, Department of Health and Children in Republic of Ireland).
- ❑ Coordinating regional awareness-raising events for Men's Health Week and Fathers' Day (June 2004).
- ❑ Supporting the development of new fathers' projects and men's groups.
- ❑ Organising conferences and seminars (e.g. "Fathers: The Good, The Bad and The Myths" and the All-Party Men's Health Day in Stormont).
- ❑ Establishing the Kick Start Project - providing long-term training and support to 20 organisations wishing to develop their work with fathers.
- ❑ Coordinating the establishment of the "Two of a Kind" initiative - the first formal dialogue between representatives of local women's work and men's work.
- ❑ Maintaining a high level of coverage for men's issues in the media.
- ❑ Providing regular updates on men's issues to key decision-makers.
- ❑ Maintaining and expanding the content of TMP's web site. This acts as a central information portal and showcase for local men's work ([www.mensproject.org](http://www.mensproject.org)).

**Colin Fowler**  
**Regional Manager**  
**The Men's Project**

## THE PARENTING FORUM NI



The Parenting Forum NI (PFNI) continually works to support parents in bringing up their children and promotes the well being of families to make society more family-friendly. It recognises the diversity of parenting and represents the needs and aspirations of all parents, and those working with parents, so that policy, practice and public opinion is influenced effectively.

Membership of the Forum has steadily increased during the year to over 800 (600 parents and 200 groups) to which PFNI provides support and information on the issues affecting parents. The PFNI currently deals with over 300 requests for information per year. As well as this, the PFNI offers training for professionals on Working in Partnership with Parents that has been delivered through Children in Northern Ireland, Sure Start projects and other interested groups.

The newsletter, full of information and facts, was published and distributed quarterly. In March 2005 we began to produce fact sheets for parents. The first - on the Child Trust Fund - was acclaimed as a useful and informative way to give parents information on an issue that will directly impact upon them but which was difficult to understand.

The Parenting Forum NI has a recognised track record of listening to and consulting with parents and working with professionals to create an infrastructure which values parents and the impact of parenting. During the year, the Forum carried out consultation with parents on behalf of Government and other bodies on School Suspension and Expulsion; Fit Futures - Healthy Eating and Exercise for Children and Young People, NICCY Shout Tell Us What You Think; R World 2 – Children's Strategy. In total 500 parents with 1100 children took part. Copies of all reports can be obtained from the website. The Forum follows up on all consultations and keeps parents informed on any decision-making or changes as a result of the consultations.

The PFNI also leads on the UK wide development of National Occupational Standards and National Quality Standards in parenting education and support. As a member of Paulo, the NI perspective was presented at all stages of development. Information on the Standards was presented at this year's conference in October and groups in Northern Ireland took part in field testing. The completed standards were presented to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in March for approval. The official launch will take place in October 2005. The Standards will be part of the Common Core suite that will be developed as phase two of this work.

The Parenting Forum has also been responsible for co-ordinating Parents' Week. Last year the theme for Parents' Week was 'Making Time for Families'. Over 150 events took place across NI with the emphasis on fun and facts. The Forum hosted a successful conference with 120 delegates as part of the launch and to celebrate the fifth birthday of the Forum.

**Alison Loughlin**  
**Regional Manager**  
**Parenting Forum NI**

This was a busy year of growth for the Parenting Project in a time of transition and lessening resources.

New exciting partnership programmes were established eg working with the Northern Board in Newtownabbey alongside parents looking at challenging behaviours. In Strabane, 24 parents went through a pilot Health Promoting Homes Initiative launched in the Western Board. This innovative six month programme involved different modules targeting emotional, physical and social wellbeing. Parents Advice Centre delivered the foundation six week self-esteem programme which launched the programme.

### **Parents Plus programmes**

Six of these programmes - covering parents with teenagers, parents of primary school age and parents wishing to build their confidence - ran in the Derry and Ballymena offices. Over 50 parents participated.

### **Working with schools**

Tailor-made courses ran for parents in a number of primary and nursery schools. Uptake was particularly high in St Mary's Primary in Bellaghy and Dunclug Nursery in Ballymena where more than 25 parents packed into sessions. A total of eight schools engaged the services of the Parenting Project in the BELB, WELB and NEELB areas.

### **Working in the Community:**

Parenting is never easy and this year the Parenting Project had wonderful opportunities to work with the Simon Community in Belfast, Women's Aid in Cookstown, and with a group of young mothers identified by the Leaving and Aftercare Team in Magherafelt.

Shorter interventions and collaboration took place with the MUMs programme in Derry Women's Centre and with Foyle NEWPIN.

### **Real Life Parenting**

A small group of young mothers received their accredited parenting certificates at the PAC 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Seminar in Templepatrick on May 11<sup>th</sup> 2004 after completing the six week OCN accredited Real Life Parenting course.

### **One-Off Talks**

There was a heavy demand for one-off talks about parenting support in schools, community groups and organisations throughout Northern Ireland. They included Northern Ireland Childminders' Association, Methodist Young Women's groups, foster carers and school and community organisations.

The Parenting Project workers continue to represent PAC and to highlight the pivotal role and needs of parents in critical arenas such as the Interagency Parents' Forum in Ballymena, and the Western Area Support Preventative group.

**Christine Carlin**  
**Parenting Project Worker**

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
2004 - 2005**



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Colin McKay (co-opted March 2005)

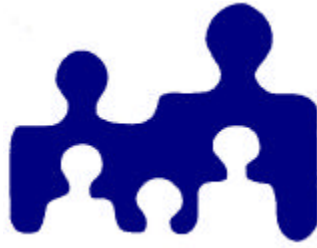
Raymond Pierce (co-opted June 2004)

**Branch Volunteer Representatives**

Ann Kirk (Ballymena)

Margaret Doherty (Derry)

Bronagh McNabb (Dungannon)



## Parents Advice Centre

Help and Support for Families

helpline freephone  
0808 8010 722

helpline email  
[parents@pachelp.org](mailto:parents@pachelp.org)

website  
[www.pachelp.org](http://www.pachelp.org)

Franklin House  
12 Brunswick Street  
Belfast  
BT2 7GE  
Office tel 028 9031 0891  
Fax 028 9031 2475  
Email [belfast@pachelp.org](mailto:belfast@pachelp.org)

65 Clarendon Street  
Derry  
BT48 7ER

Office tel 028 7137 2006  
Fax 028 7137 2824  
Email [derry@pachelp.org](mailto:derry@pachelp.org)

1-2 Feenys Lane  
Dungannon  
BT70 1TX

Office Tel 028 8775 3630  
Fax 028 8772 6782  
Email [dungannon@pachelp.org](mailto:dungannon@pachelp.org)

75 Wellington Street  
Ballymena  
BT43 6AD

Office tel 028 2565 0102  
Fax 028 2565 0102  
Email [derry@pachelp.org](mailto:derry@pachelp.org)

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Parents Advice Centre (NI) Ltd  
Registered in N Ireland No NI30087  
Registered Office: Franklin House, 12 Brunswick Street, Belfast, BT2 7GE