



Limerick
Social Service
Council

Comhairle Sheirbhís Sóisialta Luimnigh

Limerick Social Service Centre

annual report 2008













promoting dignity and growth of all people

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Vatican Council II





General Manager's Report	iv
Individual Service reports:	1
 Community Sisters	2
 Counselling Service	4
 Crèche	6
 Family Advocacy Service	8
 Family Welfare Conference	10
 Parent Support Programme Limerick	12
 Prenatal Accommodation - Sonas	14
 Postnatal Accommodation - Altamira Apartments	16
 Pre-school Service	18
 Services for Older People	20
Networks/Links	22
Groups using the Limerick Social Service Centre	23

general manager's report



It gives me great pleasure to present to you the 2008 Annual Report of Limerick Social Service Council.

The Limerick Social Service Council in 2008 was faced with ever changing challenges due, in the main, to the changed economic circumstances that the country now finds itself in.

In December we launched our Research Report "Identifying the Needs of Communities in Limerick" This research was instigated as part of our 5 year Strategic Plan and is an important effort to ensure future services by the Limerick Social Service Council are planned with relevant information and data. It will also help in pointing the Council in the direction of improvements to existing services. This research is welcomed by the Limerick Social Service Council as it helps us to better understand the individuals, families and communities that we serve. Furthermore it will ensure that resources can be more effectively channelled to those who need them most.

During 2008 our Services continued to grow. Over the summer, in conjunction with the HSE, we launched our Family Welfare Conferencing Service, which is a follow on from the launch of the our Family Advocacy Service in 2007. Extra staff have also been recruited for the Counselling Service and the Parent Support Programme as we continue to deal with increased demand for these services. In addition, the Crèche was successful in its application for funding under the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme 2008-2010. In September 2008 the Council took over control of the Pre School Service that was operated by Mary Costello for a long number of years. We are delighted that Mary has now joined our staff and continues in her role as Pre School Tutor.

As a society we are in uncharted waters that will present us with many challenges for the foreseeable future. Consequently many people whom have recently been made unemployed are finding it difficult to cope. We in the Limerick Social Service Council wish to play our part in supporting those who are most in need in our community in the year ahead.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the efforts of all our staff and Volunteers, whose dedication and loyalty to the Centre plays a significant part in our continued success. Moreover, I would like to thank our Executive Council who have worked tirelessly to ensure the that Limerick Social Service Council is an efficient and effective organisation delivering value for money and serving the communities of both Limerick City and County.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Ryan".

Brian Ryan
General Manager



promoting dignity and growth of all people





Community Sisters	2
Counselling Service	4
Crèche	6
Family Advocacy Service	8
Family Welfare Conference	10
Parent Support Programme Limerick	12
Prenatal Accommodation - Sonas	14
Postnatal Accommodation - Altamira Apartments	16
Pre-school Service	18
Services for Older People	20

Community Sisters

Enhancing lives through love, compassion and respect

What we do

The Sisters working in the community aim to enhance the lives of those to whom they minister, especially those who are experiencing hardship and difficulties. They offer particular support and encouragement to older people in the local community and organise appropriate responses to their needs. They also encourage the involvement of volunteers in the different areas of their work. They aim:

- To treat people with love, compassion and respect so that all may enjoy a better quality of life
- To work for a more just and fair society where human rights are respected and the environment is protected
- To encourage the facilitation of personal development and a positive attitude in each area
- To liaise with voluntary and statutory groups in order to support the development and integration of services within each area
- To link with the Regeneration Process in the relevant areas.

Eight Community Sisters offer support services to meet the needs of families in eight parishes in Limerick City. The sisters live in the areas in which they work, and are helped by local volunteers. One person from the Social Service Centre acts as Co-ordinator of this service. The Sisters have three meetings a year in order to share experiences and to receive input on the various relevant services in the city.

Services are provided in the following parishes;

- St. Mary's Parish, King's Island
- Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Rosbrien
- Holy Family Parish, Southill
- St. Munchin's Parish, Ballynanty
- St. John's Parish
- Corpus Christi Parish, Moyross
- Queen of Peace Parish, Janesboro
- St. Michael's Parish.

A snapshot of 2008

During the year Sr. Frances Curran replaced Sr. Monica Sexton in St. John's Parish. We thank Monica for her generous service over many years.

During the year the following services were offered:

- Clubs for senior citizens where they receive hot meals and have regular outings
- Visitation of homes, hospitals and nursing homes
- Distribution and delivery of hot dinners for elderly in their homes
- Bereavement support and Rainbows Programmes for bereaved children
- Linking with schools for parenting programmes
- Therapeutic Art for children whose parents are in prison
- Advocacy on behalf of needy families
- Work with asylum seekers and immigrants
- Distribution of food and fuel vouchers to the needy.



Barriers to meeting needs were identified as:

- Limited number of people willing to become involved in community development
- In some areas absence of a central building for social and community events
- Poor management of finances
- Fear and anxiety among the elderly and those who live alone.

Family Support Service Statistics for 2008:

Service	Average No. per week
Attendance at clubs for elderly	133
Attendance at dinners	176
Attendance at parent support groups	20
Meals provided for home delivery	254
Home and Hospital visits	120
Bereavement Visits	33
Attendance at Therapeutic Art	12

Highlights of the year

- There was an increase in the number of Clubs providing meals for the senior citizens. These Clubs are helping to combat isolation and enabling older people to socialise and take part in activities outside the home. This service also enables family members or carers to avail of respite each week
- Involvement in the Community Companionship Programme, where volunteers and leaders work together to help people regain confidence in themselves and more respect for others. This Programme is linked to the Regeneration Programme in Moyross
- Senior Citizens from Queen of Peace Parish were invited to the Club in Ballynanty for a meal and entertainment. It was a great opportunity for each group to meet new people.

Work Plan for 2009

- Continue to be creative in relation to the Clubs for senior citizens
- Do more work around advocacy for needy families/individuals
- Continue to engage with the communities in the Regeneration Areas.



Counselling Service

A confidential, respectful space for people to explore their life issues

What we do

The Counselling Service aspires to support individuals, couples and families in the Limerick City and County area. The Service provides a confidential, respectful space for people to explore their life issues and offers a holistic approach to counselling by acknowledging that people have physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual needs.

The Counselling Service is directed primarily towards people who, due to various circumstances (financial and otherwise), are unable to access other counselling opportunities. Where appropriate, referrals to other services are made.

A snapshot of 2008

- 11 Counsellors worked with 317 people in Counselling in 2008
- A total of 2,691 Counselling sessions were provided.

The life difficulties that people presented with were varied but could be categorised thematically as:

Presenting Problems	No. of Sessions Female Clients	No. of Sessions Male Clients	Total
Relationship Issues	702	73	775
Relationship/Couples Issues	279	34	313
Bereavement	259	177	436
Depression	170	134	304
Anxiety/Stress	226	70	296
Life Crises	207	107	314
Self-Esteem Issues	102	-	102
Abuse (varied forms)	145	6	151
Total	2090	601	2691

Of those availing of Counselling services, all were adults: 22% were male and 78% were female.

In the majority of situations clients came to the Counselling Service through self-referral. A number of other agencies also made referrals e.g. GP's in the City and County, HSE personnel, Brainwave, Doras Luimní, the Bedford Row Family Project, Sonas and Altamira Support Services.

In addition to the Limerick Social Service Centre, at Henry Street, people availed of the Counselling Service off-site, at various venues. These included Newcastle West, Abbeyfeale, Rathkeale, Kilmallock and Kilfinane.

In 2008 a total of 165 new referrals were made to the Counselling Service.

There were 80 new referrals in the City and 85 new referrals in the County.



Highlights of the year

- The physical environment of the Counselling venues in both the City and County were upgraded
- Counsellors continued to develop a strong team spirit and to share learning and information at Group Supervision
- A New Counselling Centre was established in Kilfinane.

Work plan for 2009

- The Counselling team will hold meetings at six week intervals to share information
- The Counselling team will avail of two days training around the issue of sexual abuse
- Information management will be given further attention
- The policies and procedures of the Counselling Service will be reviewed to ensure best practice
- Design and distribution of new Counselling brochures
- Research the possibility of extending the Outreach Service in the county.



Crèche

Quality, affordable, developmental childcare

What we do

Limerick Social Services Centre Crèche aims to provide a quality, affordable, developmental childcare service in the inner city area for children aged three months to three years. We advocate working in partnership with parents, recognising them as the primary carers of their children.

The Crèche is approved to cater for 30 children within the approved age grouping. Staffing levels are 2:6 adults to babies and 6:24 adults to toddlers, supplemented in each area by Childcare assistants from the sponsored Community Employment Scheme. Entry to the Crèche is by application, with priority given to those;

- In receipt of a Social Welfare payment
- Referred by representatives of HSE West and other agencies e.g. Focus Ireland
- Parenting alone
- Wishing to access education or training
- In full or part time employment.

The Crèche aims to:

- Continue to meet standards required to deliver a quality, regulated childcare service
- Provide personalised, responsive care by engaging staff with qualifications and relevant experience in childcare
- Provide a supportive and professional work environment for staff
- Work in partnership with parents
- Meet the needs of parents in service provision
- Engage in ongoing service evaluation
- Continue to provide affordable childcare to the most vulnerable in the community.

A snapshot of 2008

Staff: Current staffing levels are six full-time and one part-time staff.
Qualifications for staff range from F.E.T.A.C. Levels 5 to 7, B.A in Early Childhood Care and Education and Diploma in Supervisory Management.

Parental profile: Current parental profile is as follows:

Parent's status	No.
Second level education	1
Third level training	5
Return to education	4
Full-time employment	11
Part-time employment	0
Integration (asylum seekers/refugees)	1
Respite care	3



- Finance:** The introduction of the government Subvention Scheme has impacted on the service. The direct correlation between the number of children attending, fees paid and staff salaries has created a climate of uncertainty in terms of the sustainability of the service and subsequent job security.
- Expansion:** A Pre School service operates now between 9am and 1pm. While this is a most welcome expansion to the service it is hoped that in the future we will be able to offer a full day care service to meet the needs of parents currently using our service who are in full time employment and/or education.
- Community Employment Scheme:** Through the provision of a FÁS-sponsored Community Employment Scheme, employment and training opportunities continue to be provided within the Crèche for the long term unemployed or early school leavers. Participants are facilitated to develop their employment-related skills through the provision of quality work experience coupled with access to accredited training opportunities and network links.
- Monitoring:** The revised monitoring system introduced by the Pre School Inspectorate provides an in depth look at the care and safety of children in Childcare Services. Meeting these required standards remains the main objective of the staff and management within the service.

Highlights of the year

- Progression of three Community Employment staff to employment
- Successful application for the renewal of sponsored Community Employment Scheme
- Staffing levels changed due to two of our full time staff members becoming mothers themselves. As a service, the Crèche was able to accommodate these staff in their changing roles by providing part time employment. This enabled the service to retain valued staff members and to provide consistency of care for children
- Retention of all staff members.

Work plan for 2009

- Monitor the impact of the government's Childcare Subvention Scheme on service provision and staffing levels (through the provision of feedback to relevant agencies, attendance at information forums, etc.)
- Continue, through the sponsorship of the Community Employment Scheme, to provide training and work experience placements in order to provide progression and enhanced job opportunities for participants.



Family Advocacy Service

Supporting families with children in care

What we do

The Service was set up to support families with children in care in 1991. Initially it was the Family Rights Group. It was felt that that this title may have been misleading and that a change of name was necessary. During 2007, following discussions and consultation with other interested agencies it was agreed to change the name to Family Advocacy Service. In addition policies and procedures were reviewed and evaluated.

The Family Advocacy Service aims to:

- To promote the rights of families whose children are in care or who may be going into care
- To input into policy and practice regarding children in care and their families
- To encourage the development of support services and other preventative services for families
- To facilitate parents in understanding the difficulties that need to be addressed in order for positive changes to be made in relation to their child's care plans
- To empower parents to participate fully in Child Care Reviews and Case Conferences and to ensure that they have been consulted on their child's care plans.

Information shared with the Advocacy Workers by parents and family members is confidential unless the worker believes that such information constitutes a substantial risk to a family member or other person, in which case the worker will pass on the relevant information to the appropriate authority.

Principles underlying the service:

- Involvement of parents and families with the service is voluntary
- Empowering families to arrive at their own realistic solutions to challenging situations
- Respecting privacy and confidentiality, as appropriate - Advocacy only takes place at the request of the parent or family member
- The work is parent centered - the Advocacy Worker seeks no records or background information from any source prior to meeting the parent.

The service is funded by HSE but works independently.

A snapshot of 2008

Publication: An updated information booklet for families with children in care was launched in April. This work was completed in conjunction with the Advocacy Workers in Clare and North Tipperary. Parents also had an important input into the production of the Booklet. The launch was a great success and was attended by fifteen parents of children in care from the three areas of Limerick, Clare and North Tipperary. These parents spoke of the feelings they experienced as a result of their children being in care. The launch was attended by in excess of 80 people from a wide range of sectors within the HSE and also from a variety of statutory and voluntary agencies with the Service regularly liaises. The booklet was officially launched by Kevin O'Farrell (Child Care Manager, Limerick).

Our new Information Leaflet which includes a Referral Form has also been widely distributed to relevant HSE personnel, and other agencies such as Citizen Information Centres, Family Resource Centres on a nationwide basis, as well as to individual parents.

Many of our new referrals have resulted from the two new publications. It is hoped that the production of our booklet and leaflet will provide essential information about the Advocacy Service for the many parents and families who are still unaware of our Service.

Parents: During 2008 parents continued to make contact with us. The main work has been with individual parents and couples who continued to avail of one-to-one support. Since January, the Family Advocacy Service has actively worked with 27 parents and/or family members who have children in care. This number is inclusive of 18 new referrals.



There were eight monthly Parents' Support Group meetings which were attended by an average of six parents. These meetings were of great support to parents, offering them an opportunity to share concerns and insights.

During the year the Advocacy services in Clare, North Tipperary and Limerick had initial discussions with parents in these areas in relation to the establishment of a forum to address their shared concerns/needs. Following a number of meetings, it was decided to make a proposal to the HSE in relation to addressing the concerns/needs of parents in relation to their children in care. A meeting took place in July between a HSE manager, Advocacy Workers and representative parents from the three areas. In autumn 2008 a proposal was submitted to the HSE in relation to the establishment of a forum for parents who have children in care. This proposal will offer a representative group of parents a series of meetings with an independent facilitator, resulting in the opportunity for parents to present their issues to representatives of the HSE. Such a service would be a very positive and timely intervention given the great interest and momentum created following the publication and launch of the information booklet during the year.

Referrals: In the first half of 2008 there were 16 new referrals which was a significant number indicative of interest in the service, subsequent to the launch of the Information booklet and distribution of the leaflet. There were 2 new referrals in the latter half of the year; during this period of time work with existing clients was ongoing.

Staffing: In September, the Co-coordinator of the Family Advocacy Service moved to the post of Family Welfare Conference Coordinator, based in the Limerick Social Service Centre. A new Co-coordinator with a wide range of relevant experience was recruited on a part-time basis and joined the Service in December.

Highlights of the year

- The launch of the updated Information booklet. The Information Booklet continues to be widely requested and distributed to agencies
- The input by parents and Family Advocacy Workers into Foster Care training in March was very well received
- A summer day trip for parents to Ballybunion in July, which was a great success
- The decision by HSE to agree to the proposal to establish a feedback forum for parents of children in care.

Work Plan for 2009

- Work on the Forum for Parents, to provide feedback to the HSE
- Devise a system to monitor more comprehensively the referrals to the Service. This will provide information on areas of need not being addressed and local areas not availing of the Service
- Work closely on an ongoing basis with Social Workers and other relevant services involved in the lives of the parents
- Parents continue to make contact with us from other parts of the country through phone, text or e-mail, where there is no support Service. Some parents keep in regular contact over a long period. This vital outreach support for parents will remain an ongoing part of the Service's work plan
- Continuation of the monthly support group and the welcoming of new members
- Invite relevant service providers, in accordance with parent's wishes, to come to the support group
- The ongoing development of an effective advocacy service for parents who have children in the care of the HSE.



Family Welfare Conferences

What we do

A Family Welfare Conference is a family meeting whereby families make a plan that will keep children safe and well cared for. It allows family members, close friends or other people important to the child or young person a chance to get together to sort out any problems and make a family plan. It is an opportunity for the family to give their views about what is best for the child. The welfare of the child is more important than anything else.

A Family Welfare Conference is a voluntary process unless it is convened under the Children Act (2001). Under this Act, the HSE must arrange to convene a Family Welfare Conference where it is considered that the behaviour of a young person poses a serious risk to his/her safety and welfare and that it may be necessary in the young person's interests to place him/her in a Special Care Unit.

A snapshot of 2008

This Service is a new service within Limerick Social Service Centre. It was introduced in September 2008 and a Coordinator was appointed on a part time basis.

To date, the referrals have come only from the HSE. At such conferences, the role of the HSE is to provide information to the family who are then given private time so that they can formulate a plan for the child / young person. The role of the Coordinator is to meet all family members and the services involved with the child / young person, to listen to their views and to help the family prepare for the meeting.

Work Plan for 2009

- To co-ordinate and convene Family Welfare Conferences as new referrals from the HSE arise
- To meet with the HSE Social Work Team Leaders to give information on the Family Welfare Conference Service
- To create greater awareness of the Family Welfare Conference Service by meeting with various agencies who may be a source of referrals, for example schools
- To finalise the printing of explanatory leaflets that have been prepared in conjunction with other coordinators within the HSE West.



Parent Support Programme Limerick

Enabling parents to enjoy and participate more fully in their child's development

What we do

The Parent Support Programme Limerick is a structured programme aimed at enabling parents to enjoy and participate more fully in their child's development, and supporting them in their role by encouragement, sharing experiences and information with other parents. This mission statement anchors the programme in the belief that through encouragement and positive affirmation all parents will become more pro-active in their children's development.

The Parent Support Programme Limerick's activities are administered through three individual programmes: Community Mothers, the Teen Parent Support Programme, and the Lifelong Parenting Information and Support Programme.

Community Mothers: A Community Mother is an experienced mother who is trained to visit the parents of new babies in their own homes. The Community Mother shares information on many issues, including feeding, teething, talking and listening to your child and how to enjoy your child more. The Community Mother will have good knowledge of activities and services in the area. The programme will be adapted to suit the needs of the parents. The visits are usually monthly for the first year of the child's life, or more often if requested. Occasionally Community Mothers visit the parents of older children. There is no charge for this service.

The Teen Parent Support Programme: This is a programme for young people who are pregnant or are parents. It offers support and information before and after the birth of the baby, including group peer support, one-to-one support, grinds and childcare support in school. The programme will support the young person to remain in education through pregnancy and after the birth, and provides information on relevant services and entitlements. Support is also available to the young person's partner and members of their extended family. Grandparents and extended family members are also offered information and support as part of the programme.

Lifelong Parenting Information and Support Programme: Where possible, the programme provides parents with information and support on all issues relevant to parenting. Information and support may be provided over the phone, one-to-one or in groups. Breastfeeding information and support is included.

A snapshot of 2008

2008 proved to be another busy and challenging year for the Parent Support Programme Limerick. A total of 702 families from Limerick City and County received direct support from programme staff.

Programme statistics:

- 1) The Community Mothers visited 424 families in 2008. At the end of 2008 there were 10 Community Mothers visiting families in Limerick City and County, 4 Employed Community Mothers and 6 Volunteer Community Mothers.
- 2) A total of 187 young people engaged with the Teen Parents Support Programme Limerick in 2008, 63 for the first time in 2008 with 124 young people who were already in contact with the programme in 2006/2007 continuing to receive information and/or support.
- 3) The Lifelong Parenting Information and Support Programme has continued to expand with personnel continuing to respond to requests for broader parenting information and support. One-to-One Parenting Support was provided to 83 families in 2008. The programme directly provided 8 Parenting Courses to parents in Limerick City and County.

Drop-in visits: There were a total of 580 recorded drop-in visits to the offices of the Parent Support Programme Limerick in 2008. During these visits a number of issues and crisis were dealt with including parenting, relationships, finance and budgeting, accommodation, childcare, crisis pregnancy, domestic violence, mental health, addiction, welfare rights and entitlements, Asylum Seekers, multi-cultural issues etc.

Referrals: Referrals to the Parent Support Programme Limerick continue to come from a variety of sources including Public Health Nurses, GPs, Community Welfare Officers, Social Workers (Maternity and Regional Hospitals, Child Protection, Fostering, Aftercare), Child Psychiatric Services, Home School Liaison Officers, etc.



Networking and Promotion:

Throughout the year many new contacts were made with a number of agencies and key personnel in both statutory and non-governmental agencies, which have proved to be invaluable contacts and supports for programme staff, volunteers and families who have engaged with the Parent Support Programme Limerick. Much work was carried out in the on-going promotion of the programme to families and agencies throughout Limerick City and County.

Highlights of the year

- The awarding of additional funding to the programme by the Health Service Executive West which facilitated the increase in hours of the Co-coordinator of the Community Mothers Programme and the employment of Part-Time Project Worker for the Teen Parents Support Programme Limerick in November 2008
- The establishment and facilitation of the City Slickers group, a Personal Development and Parenting Programme for eleven young parents aged between 17 and 22 years. This was made possible through funding provided by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency. A Parenting Course, designed and delivered exclusively to fathers was piloted in April 2008
- A new Parent and Toddler Group was established in Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish, Limerick. This was a joint initiative between Limerick City Community Co-coordinators and the Home School Liaison Teacher for the area. Programme staff continued to work with five other Parent and Baby/Toddler Groups throughout the City and County
- The successful nomination of the Programme Manager of the Parent Support Programme Limerick to the National Council of Treoir has allowed for the programme and its service users to have representation at national level. The Incredible Years Parent Training Programme has gone from strength to strength with two successful programmes being delivered to parents in Ballynanty/Moyross and Our Lady of Lourdes Parishes of Limerick. A support group to facilitate parents to meet and share experiences has since been established for the parents who attended the Ballynanty/Moyross Group. Regular attendance at facilitators support group meetings and planning and evaluation meetings have been of great benefit to the facilitators and their work
- Work with Foreign National families has continued with the Community Mothers Programme visiting families in Sarsfield Inn (Limerick) a new reception centre for Asylum Seekers. Meetings were held with the Manager of this Centre around the needs of these families and what supports the Parent Support Programme Limerick could provide to address these needs. In conjunction with DORAS Luimní a Parents Support Group was established for the residents of Sarsfield Inn. These families are encountering a number of obstacles in their transition to life in Ireland particularly in relation to their English Language Skills, Welfare Rights and Entitlements, Employment, Accommodation, Childcare and the Habitual Residence Condition.

Work plan for 2009

- Liaise with Parent Support Programme HSE West regarding the provision of parenting support and increased resources being made available to programme
- Recruit Volunteer Community Mothers including those from the accession states and/or the re-establishment of a Parent and Baby/Toddler Group for immigrant families living in Limerick City
- Establish a Support Group for Parents in Limerick City who are parenting alone
- Provision of parenting facilitation training
- Establish and support more Parent and Baby/Toddler Groups in Limerick City and County to address the increased demand for such support
- Facilitate and Evaluate the City Slickers Group (second round of funding)
- Provide training regarding welfare rights and entitlements
- Provide training for Community Mothers in regard to breastfeeding support
- Provide mediation training for staff of the Teen Parent Support Programme.

Prenatal Accommodation - Sonas

Offering prenatal support and accommodation

What we do

Sonas aims to provide accommodation for women who need support during pregnancy outside their homes, in an atmosphere that is welcoming, respectful, safe, encouraging, supportive and confidential.

Sonas aims to respond to the needs of women who require support and accommodation during pregnancy, through;

- The provision of a secure space where women are free to reflect on issues that need to be addressed, while availing of appropriate counseling services
- Ensuring that women are facilitated to avail of appropriate services, including clinics / doctors appointments
- Referral to Social Work Department, Regional Maternity Hospital
- Referral to the Adoption Department of the Health Service Executive when requested
- Facilitating women in planning accommodation on departure from Sonas; and offering an outreach service to enable a smooth move to independent living.

A snapshot of 2008

Profile: 715 bed nights were availed of during 2008. In total, 10 women availed of accommodation. The age profile was as follows:

Age of women	No. of women
17	2
20-23	5
24+	3

- 2 residents continued to work during pregnancy, and 4 continued to attend third level education (one woman was facilitated by her college to complete her work placement in advance of the birth of her baby over weekends)
- 9 women gave birth to their babies, and one is due to have her baby in February
- 2 women moved to Altamira, the Limerick Social Service Centre's postnatal accommodation service for mothers and their babies. 2 mothers moved to a high level support service outside Limerick following the birth of their babies; 1 returned to Altamira after a short period and the second girl has now been offered a place. One young mother moved to foster care with her baby and one mother returned to Sonas with her baby on Christmas Eve.

Referrals: Women were referred to Sonas from agencies including, HSE, Cura, Adapt House, and 50% came through Social Worker referrals.

Needs: The needs of residents varied in the level of support required. Residents with personal needs were offered appropriate support in availing of ongoing additional services with the HSE and other agencies. The Community Welfare Department of the HSE continued to offer the necessary financial support to all our residents.

In responding to the needs of residents Sonas worked closely with other relevant agencies to ensure appropriate support, including Social Workers, Social Work Team Leaders, and Legal Advice where necessary.

Cultural diversity: 5 residents were non-Irish citizens; they were from Africa and Poland. These women were befriended and assisted in overcoming many barriers such as:

- Access to financial support
- Language barriers
- Access to appropriate legal advice and support
- Difficulties in forward planning for themselves and their babies due to insecurity in relation to financial support after the birth of their babies.



In responding to the specific needs of non Irish citizens Sonas networks with other support Agencies, both statutory and Voluntary, enabling the provision of a wide range of supports, including advocacy and referral to appropriate Legal Aid.

The residents who leave Sonas are always welcome back to visit with their babies; this is a positive experience for residents to meet with women who have moved on successfully with their lives. It is also good for residents to be aware of the challenges ahead and the range of support services available to those with a young mother with a baby. Sonas works closely with the Community Mother's Programme and with the Centre's Crèche.

Highlights of the year

- The on going return visits of former residents with their babies
- In the Autumn of 2008 it was decided that our Outreach Service would be offered by the staff of Sonas on a trial basis
- For the new mothers who were planning to move to postnatal accommodation following the birth of their babies it was agreed to offer them the opportunity to return to Sonas with their babies for the first few months on a trial basis.

Work plan for 2009

- The ongoing financial and other issues for women who are not Irish citizens continue to be an area requiring advocacy for these mothers and their babies. Sonas plans to continue to address this area together with other relevant agencies
- There are specific issues following the birth of babies in relation to access to lone parent allowances; this is a real barrier for mothers in planning ahead for the future for themselves and their babies, and is an area of work that Sonas will address.



Postnatal Accommodation - Altamira Apartments

Supportive postnatal accommodation for first time mothers parenting alone

What we do

Altamira Apartments (Thomondgate) aim to offer a supportive, postnatal service to first time mothers and their babies by providing quality transitional accommodation at low cost. The provision of accommodation is combined with an integrated, limited level of support.

Altamira aims to

- Enable first time mothers to become confident and competent parents by promoting models of good practice
- Assist mothers in availing of opportunities to become financially independent
- Promote and develop links with existing community resources
- Provide ongoing practical assistance, information, advice and support to former residents.

Altamira consists of ten self-contained apartments, suitable for mothers with one child up to the age of two years. Each apartment has one bedroom, a kitchen / living room and a bathroom with shower. They are all equipped with furnishings and cable television. There is a communal laundry area, and sitting room with internet access. Altamira also has a sessional crèche, which enables mothers to take some time out, while their baby is cared for close by.

A snap shot of 2008

Profile: 1661 bed nights were availed of in 2008. A summary of the main work of Altamira in 2008 is best served by looking at two main areas of work: Residential profiles and outreach work.

Residents

During 2008 11 mothers availed of the service at Altamira. 5 were with the service since 2007 and 6 new mothers moved in during 2008. During the year 6 mothers completed their stay at Altamira, and moved out. 4 moved into private rented accommodation, 1 moved to another country with her child's father, and 1 moved onto a higher support service.

Referrals to Altamira came through 4 channels:

- 3 mothers came to Altamira through social work involvement
- 4 from Sonas, having lived there while pregnant
- 3 from Adapt services
- 1 self referral.

The country of origin for residents, similar to recent year patterns, was diverse:

Country	No. of residents
Poland	5
Ireland	4
Latvia	2



Similarly, the age profile of residents for 2008 was varied:

Age category	No. of residents
16 – 22 years	3
23 - 25	4
26 - 33	3

Outreach

Following on from a placement at Altamira each mother is offered the Outreach Service. This enables her to move into a new community with the reassurance that she will be supported. Outreach covers a number of areas, and is tailored to meet individual, specific needs. The Outreach worker enables the mother and child to become familiar with relevant, beneficial services in their new community. Outreach enables the mother to avail of all entitlements, with guidance around community welfare issues. For some mothers it is very reassuring to have somebody familiar to meet with, once they move on from Altamira.

Highlights of the year

- Due to seven mothers having little or no English we introduced a weekly class, where they could learn English as a foreign language
- Three families from Adapt refuge were offered placements at Altamira
- Three years funding was secured from the Crisis Pregnancy Agency to run an annual parenting course and sexual health relationship course with full attendance from mothers past and present
- The renovation of apartments and the general upgrade of the building has commenced. A new staff area has been identified and this work will be completed in 2009
- V.E.C classes are continuing in fitness and health, beauty and self care, and English as a foreign language.

Work Plan for 2009

- To promote Altamira through advertising (i.e. ensure that the updated brochures are distributed to social work offices, health centres, citizen information centres, medical practices etc. throughout Limerick City and County)
- Review and update the current referral and application forms
- Update current policies and procedures
- Undertake an analysis of the outreach system to establish patterns of need and tailor the Service accordingly
- Review Altamira's in-house crèche facility, and upgrade equipment and furnishings
- Review all V.E.C classes, to ensure optimum benefit for residents.



Pre-school Service

Developing Pre-school as an integral part of childcare provision

What we do

The Pre-School Service was founded in 1970. It aims to provide accessible, affordable pre-school services for children aged between 3 and 5 years in disadvantaged areas of Limerick City and County as part of the LSSC early intervention family support programme.

The pre-school Service targets areas of greatest need, based on the principle that education is a key in breaking the cycle of deprivation, and that appropriate early intervention should be available to young people who are at risk of educational failure for reasons of socio-economic disadvantage.

Over the last 38 years the Pre-school Service has developed from the provision of pre-schools to a range of services and activities:

- Advisory / Developmental support to eleven community pre-school management committees
- City Centre Crèche
- Advisory / Developmental / support service to two community-based crèches
- Information service to providers and general public
- Administration and in-service training.

Pre-school Service provided for children aged from 3 to 5 years:

Location	Number of sessions
Moyross	2 sessions
Ballynanty	2 sessions
St. Mary's	1 session
St. Senan's	1 session
St. John's Parish	3 sessions
Southill	2 sessions
Kileely	1 session
Kilmallock	2 sessions
St. Patrick's	1 session
Newcastlewest	1 session

A snapshot of 2008

Up to June 2008 the Pre-School Service continued to provide support and assistance to each of the eleven pre-school management committees. That support included:

- The Pre-school Advisor, in her role as LSSC representative, attended the monthly meetings of the management committees and supported them in the development of their policies and procedures
- Assistance with the recruitment of staff
- Induction training for staff, where required
- Advice regarding submissions to POBAL and quarterly reporting of accounts
- Facilitating the networking of the eleven management committees
- Continuing the provision of in-service training for all thirty two pre-school staff in Language Development up to the 4th March 2008
- The provision of substitution for absent pre-school staff, as required.



From July 2008 LSSC, as planned, withdrew the support from the pre-school committees.

LSSC took the decision to operate a pre-school so as to extend the service to children attending the LSSC Crèche. Agreement was reached where LSSC took over the management of the privately run pre-school in the centre and the provider came on board as a staff member. This enabled LSSC to offer a wrap-around service to any client wishing to avail of the prenatal service in Sonas, the post natal service in Altamira Apartments, the Crèche and Pre-school Service.

The pre-school has a capacity for 16 children. The Service opened in September 2008 and by December 2008, 15 children were enrolled: 8 Irish, 1 Albanian, 2 Nepalese and 4 Nigerian children constitute the current enrollment.

Highlights of the year

- The in-service training for pre-school staff was completed in March. Feedback from the pre-schools was very positive
- As trainer in the Keeping Safe Programme, the Pre-school Advisor facilitated two training sessions , one in- house in June and one in St. Munchin's Centre Kileely in November
- The opening of the Pre-school under LSSC management in September enhances the service provided to both children and parents.

Work plan for 2009

LSSC endeavour to further develop the pre-school and ensure that it is an integral part of a quality caring childcare service.



Services for Older People

Developing a new and positive vision of ageing in Ireland

What we do

The mission statement of Services for Older People challenges society to adopt an inclusive, caring positive attitude to all older people. Many years ago Limerick Social Service Council pioneered wide-ranging voluntary services to individuals and groups of older people. It has always endeavoured to respond creatively and imaginatively to gaps, deficiencies and current problems through its pool of volunteers at parish and outreach level. In partnership with other groups and agencies, older people are encouraged to value themselves as resources to each other, to family and neighbourhood.

The Service advocates positive ageing by:

- Challenging negative attitudes to ageing and older people
- Promoting greater participation by older people in society

This work is based on research findings which conclude that:

- People can live longer if they resist negative stereotyping
- People need to participate in activities of a meaningful and absorbing nature as they age
- On-going participation in arts programmes not only promotes good mental health but also ensures better physical health.

Services for Older People start from the premise that quality of life is not just a matter of the circumstances in which older people find themselves, but it is also about making sense of one's life and finding meaning and purpose.

In association with Limerick City Sports Partnership, Age and Opportunity Ireland and HSE Mid West, members of local Active Age Groups participated in a series of PALS (Physical Activity Leaders) workshops. They consisted of exercises to suit all abilities and the people who took part are now trained to go back to their own groups and deliver these sessions to others and encourage them to get more active. The motto is **"Get Motivated. Get Up. Get Out. Get Moving"**. Older people are also involved in walking clubs, pitch and putt, skittles, bowling and golf. Other groups were successful in obtaining funding to pursue Tai Chi, aqua aerobics, dance, music and movement.

A Snapshot of 2008

In 2008, a total of 164 people got in contact with the Service and there were 73 other enquiries about it.

Sources of Referral:

Self referral	76
Family Members	18
Neighbours	14
Clubs/Associations	11
Agencies	8
Public Health Nurses	2
Chaplains	2
Others	33

Contacts: The main reasons for contact were recorded as being; Loneliness and alienation; Security information; Health and social needs; Loss and bereavement; Education and leisure options; and Frailty and decline.



Group visits	85
Nursing home visits	15
Hospital/hospice visits	10
Home visits	35
Day Care Visits	31

Key on-going activities:

Community education and informal learning; Sport and dance; Bealtaine festival-month long arts festival; Cultural events and visits to libraries and art centres; Group meetings; Information and resource material and placements for students; and Sourcing and matching volunteers to need.

The Senior Helpline: The 10th Anniversary Conference of the Senior Helpline at Salthill Hotel, Galway in November was attended by Limerick delegates. It was launched by President Mary McAleese. It is a National low-call service provided by trained older volunteers. It operates throughout Ireland on a 24-hour basis.

Limerick Show 2008: One representative from Active Retirement Groups formed part of the overall team of organisers and liaised with all art/craft groups in city and environs.

Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN): The Annual Report was prepared and presented at the AGM in December 2008. This is a city wide network comprising community, voluntary groups and statutory agencies involved in the organisation and delivery of community education in Limerick. LSSC represents Active Age Groups on the Network and members sourced 19 day time classes of their choice. Limerick City V.E.C facilitated this popular uptake and approved and funded 660 teaching hours from September 2008 to June 2009.

Highlights of the year

- The power of the vote- the impact of older people to bring about social change e.g. the medical card controversy – to lobby for a ‘rights-based’ approach
- Sports, leisure activities and demonstrations
- Bealtaine’s various exhibitions and events launched by Limerick artist Anne Fitzgerald at Dooradoyle library
- The publication of Seán De Bhulbh’s Irish book and its launch at the University of Limerick
- Na Gaelgóirí attending the Oireachtas in Cork
- Study of the History of Icons, culminating in a guided tour of the Icon Chapel in Glenstal with art classes and tutors
- Collection of entertaining stories in Irish from the internet
- Group reminiscence on “Favourite Poems I learned at School”
- During the Summer several groups availed of visits to the Park Retirement Village, Castletroy. Guided tours of apartments/houses and facilities were arranged with refreshments provided by the staff of the Club House.





The LSSC links with many agencies at local, regional and national level. In 2008, these key contacts included:

- Adapt Services
- Age and Opportunity (Dublin)
- Barnardos Mid-West
- Centre for the Unemployed
- Clare Care
- Community Welfare Office
- Credit Unions
- CURA (regional and national)
- Doras Luimní
- FÁS
- Foster Carer's Association
- Government Departments, including the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Education and Science
- HSE West
- Limerick City Council
- Limerick Pastoral Centre
- Limerick Senior College
- Limerick Youth Service
- Limerick Institute of Technology
- Local Employment Service
- Local media
- Limerick Southside and Northside Regeneration Agencies
- MABS (Money and Budgeting Advice Service)
- Mary Immaculate College
- NCVA
- Older Women's Network
- POBAL
- PAUL Partnership
- Parish clergy
- The Family Support Agency
- Victim Support
- VTOS

Groups using the Limerick Social Service Centre



The life of the Social Service Centre continues after usual office hours due to the large number of voluntary groups who have access to the Centre. Every evening during the week, between four and six groups hold meetings at the Centre.

In excess of 30 Community and Voluntary Groups used the Social Service Centre for meetings during 2008. The majority of those were night meetings, with a few in the day.

Voluntary Groups using the LSSC for meetings in 2008:

- Aisiri
- Alcoholics Anonymous Groups
- Al-Anon Group
- ALJEFF
- Bruree House (for people with addiction problems and their families)
- Cancer Support
- Coeliac Society
- CURA
- Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage Office
- Emergency Reponse Group
- Gam-Anon
- Inner Wheel
- Irish Countrywoman's Association (I.C.A)
- Irish Pre-school Playgroup Association (I.P.P.A.)
- Miles (Men in Limerick Experiencing Separation)
- Narcotics Anonymous
- Older Persons Group
- Overeaters Anonymous
- Parent Support Group
- Retired Civil Servants
- Retired Gardaí
- Schizophrenia Ireland
- Women's Group

The Centre also rents out rooms to both voluntary and statutory organisations for services that are in line with LSSC objectives (HSE West Family Therapy, HSE West Aftercare, Brainwave).



Limerick
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