

## **'Supporting the work of conferences' National Presidents Day**

### **Heading ' Facts are Friendly'; Information Booklet for Conferences**

#### ***Introduction***

My name is Clíodhna Sheridan and like yourselves I am a SVP volunteer, I work with the FTGU team. The title of this presentation is supporting the work of conferences' Who here is aware of From the Ground Up and the work they do? . Hands Up.

You are already dealing effectively with problems on a daily basis, and have been for years. I will just say a few words about From the Ground Up.. FTGU is all about you the person working on the ground, its about your experience and relationship with the person in need. The FTGU provides an avenue of communication for conferences throughout Ireland, the team gathers and gives feedback to conference members on a wide range of issues. Every two months we make contact by phone with 80 volunteers and we have 200 e mail contacts. From the information gathered we get an up to the minute reflection of what's happening on the ground. I hoped you have all checked out our stand during lunch, if not plenty of time later.

#### ***Current Situation***

**From the Ground Up is in contact with conferences in all counties, so whether your from Donegal, Darndale or Dundrum we are all experiencing similar challenges. Some conferences report increased numbers of people calling on their resources, even those who report that the number of those seeking help has not increased, they are still helping the same people, those who never benefited from the Celtic Tiger. Most conferences agree that they are facing complex multi layered problems. Many conferences feel that they will get busier in the future. I will discuss a few common issues, see if any of them are familiar to you. The " Facts are Friendly Booklet offers guidance on lots of issues, but I will draw your attention to some common issues to give you a flavor of the content.**

#### ***Common Issues dealt with in 'Facts are Friendly'***

##### **Much of our work revolves around**

Helping Families keep food on the table,

Keep their homes warm, basically keep the wolf from the door. Many conferences negotiate with the various agencies to help sort out bills.

The booklet gives an outline of agreements reached with various agencies and SVP. Ideas for dealing with arrears are outlined. The contact details of the person in

charge of a particular area is provided. So you can check the particular name and telephone number of the person responsible for a certain area. i. e Galway Carlow area. If you want to check ways of saving money on fuel and tips for keeping warm its there.

### **Education**

**Educational costs are always an issue, we want children to fit in, they need to have** suitable uniform and books for return to school. Details of back to school grants with income thresholds are available.

Access Psychological Assessments, for a child that is having great difficulty in school and really suffering A mother getting complaints about child's behaviour/ quality of learning, her head may be bent listening to complaints. Up to 70% of schools are covered under the NEPS scheme, so there is a good chance the family you are dealing with is entitled to an assessment. Details of how to access an assessment are outlined.

Encouraging and supporting those who are trying to make their way out of poverty through 3<sup>rd</sup> level education is always a priority for conferences. We all realize that education offers a pathway out of poverty, the commitment by conferences can be long and expensive, it can be a big strain on resources. Details are provided on 3<sup>rd</sup> level rights and entitlements to grants

### **Mounting Debt**

Significant debt, Mortgage Arrears and difficulties paying high rents are common. We all agree Basic Human need to feel secure and have a roof over your head, but the level of debt faced by families is higher than ever before, and its beyond the scope of most conferences.

The best practice for dealing with Mortgage arrears is outlined. Advice about setting up meetings with MABS, local CWO and the lender are discussed. All this can support the borrower in dealing effectively with the institution. In many circumstances its recommended for the person in need to act quickly and start with the MABS helpline.

### **Entitlements**

It is difficult to keep up to date with Social Welfare entitlements and rates, the rate for lone parent with one child, versus the rate for a couple with children,

Family Income Supplements, income thresholds for back to school grants. We really want to encourage people to claim their entitlements. This will leave our conferences with more choice on how to spend its money

Who can benefit from exceptional needs payments and for what. It can be difficult to find out what CWO's pay out on, and how the appeals process works. Various entitlements are outlined and there is details on how the €70 million paid out on exceptional and urgent needs payments has been spent in the past. There is also details of how to appeal a negative decision by the Community Welfare Officer.

### **Medical Cards and Hospital Travel**

We can often find it hard to believe that a person dependent on Social Welfare is not entitled to a Medical card. Medical costs are so high, Doctor visits can be €55. There are often long waiting lists for medical procedures, Dental Work is exorbitantly priced, Access to public transport to attend hospitals can be pitiful particularly for those living in rural Ireland. We might just wonder can a particular family get a get a Doctor only Medical Card. The entitlement details for medical cards is outlined.

So I am sure some of these examples ring a bell with you, again I would like to reiterate that the issues I have mentioned are just a small sample of what is covered in 'Facts are Friendly' Information booklet.

### *'Facts are Friendly'*

### **Why use the booklet**

The Booklet 'Facts are Friendly' provides easy access to information, on a range of issues. Many more than I have mentioned.

It may save you time, its handy, filled with relevant information, structured under topics with the contact details of various organisations that may be helpful.

It is a good resource for guidance on entitlements. rights and information on the most common issues dealt with by conferences.

Use with conference members to increase communication and discussion on your own conference procedures in certain areas. I am sure you will all agree that good communication forms the basis of good relationships.

Above all it will enable you to offer practical support to the person in need. The Practical information and guidance you provide will help the person in need find their way forward. The book **offers guidance not gospel**, you still have to use your experience and wisdom , each person is unique and their situation is different.

## **Conclusion**

**We really hope you find the booklet useful, I urge you to browse through the booklet, check the content, discuss the information with conference members, use the information in a practical way to support the person in need to get their head around the red tape, feel hopeful and achieve self sufficiency.**

**There is space, a few pages at the back of the book to insert your own contacts and updated information.**

**We can all learn from each others experiences. Should you wish to contact any member of the FTGU team we will be delighted to hear of your challenges or innovative ways of dealing with common issues. We have a stand outside or you can speak to us around the conference.**

**The good news is there is on for everyone in the audience. They are at the back of the room and at the FTGU desk.**

**Thank you for your attention.**