

Aims and Objectives

- ❖ to highlight family needs and issues as they arise, to provide an appropriate response to needs and issues, including a range of drop-in services and activities and where appropriate, to facilitate other local or national family support groups consistent with our objectives;
- ❖ to provide immediate access to family related information in an informal, non-directional and confidential environment, to provide public access to family related resource and information material in appropriate formats, and to provide this service widely in Sligo and surrounding areas;
- ❖ to provide immediate support and guidance in relation to family issues, with onward referral where appropriate to statutory and voluntary agencies and to develop responses to such other family issues as may arise from time to time;
- ❖ to contribute, in consultation with other groups as appropriate, to the implementation of the North Western Health Board's comprehensive child-care and family support programme.

Mission Statement

The Sligo Family Centre seeks to serve all families without discrimination, in a warm, caring and open environment.

We continually strive to identify ongoing and changing needs and to respond to them in a positive fashion.

We aim to provide support, information and development courses of the highest standard to families in the Sligo area.

History of the Sligo Family Centre

In December 1989, the UN General Assembly unanimously declared 1994 as International Year of the Family. This was to have huge implications for families in Sligo in the following years.

In September 1993, a committee of concerned individuals from the Sligo area was established to prepare for the International Year of the Family and to co-ordinate activities for the year with the overall aim of having a service/centre that would be of benefit to families in the area in the coming years.

The committee devised the idea of a Family Centre where people could receive information on all issues relating to families in a warm and friendly environment. The group located premises in Stephen Street in Jan 1995 and their first idea was to set up a Toy Library modelled on Toy Libraries already established in New Zealand and Canada. The Toy Library would operate on the same lines as a book library. It would also be a means for parents and carers to meet and share experiences with others in a similar position as themselves as well as get information while their child was occupied. The Toy Library was opened in January 1995 in Stephen Street and staffed by a FAS funded Community Employment scheme of five participants and a supervisor. It is still active today.

In the following years the FAS scheme expanded to seven as the workload of the Centre developed. The parent and toddler group was formed. This too is still in existence to this day and it has been a great resource for parents – particularly parents new to the area to meet with others and make friends. Many of the friendships made then still continue to this day.

In 1998, the Centre received funding from the Peace and Reconciliation Fund to recruit a Development Worker and an Administrator. As the workload was expanding, a larger building was required and in 1999 the Centre moved to the Presbyterian Hall and the Caretakers house beside it. This was to be a very temporary move as by now the FAS scheme had expanded to eleven participants with a proposed expansion of the scheme to fifteen. In 2000, the building at 49 the Mall was finally sourced and this is where the Centre is at present.

In December 2000 the Sligo Family Centre received the AIB's Millennium Award of £25,000 for "Touching the Lives of Irish People" in recognition of the Centre's work to date and to help support them into the future. Much of this money was used to renovate the present building to make it into the welcoming, friendly and safe place it is today.

In March 2003, the Sligo Family Centre received funding from the Department of Social and Family Affairs through the Family Support Agency to employ a co-ordinator and administrator and provide core funding for the next three years. The Sligo Family Centre is now part of the national Community Development Support Programme (CDSP) which has up to 280 other community groups in the state. These include 150 Community Development Projects, 50 Core Funded Programmes and 80 Family Resource Centres. The overall aim of the CDSP is to address poverty and isolation using the principles of community development.

Today the Centre employs a full-time Co-ordinator, a fulltime Deputy Co-ordinator /FAS supervisor, a part-time Administrator and eleven Community Employment workers.

Other funders of the Centre over the years include the North Western Health Board, the VEC, National Lottery, Sligo LEADER Partnership, Sligo Corporation as well as various donations from local organisations and individuals.

Today the Centre's work includes

- Managing a CE Scheme
- Toy Library
- Information service
- Parenting Courses
- Parent And Toddler Group
- Children's Play, Art and Music workshops
- Lone parents group
- Respite Care
- Facilitated supervised access visits
- Stress Management courses
- Pre-tenancy courses
- Art workshop for people with disabilities
- Creative summer camps for 4-6 year olds
- Linking with and inclusion of local ethnic groups
- Representing the Centre and family issues on various committees
- Awareness raising of family issues through brochures, newsletters and the media
- Provision of facilities for various groups to meet

Management Committee

Noreen Hickey	Chairperson
Benny Swinburne	Vice Chairperson
Paddy Berwick	Treasurer
Kathleen Feehily	Secretary
Mollie Lee	Committee Member
Dympna McNulty	Committee Member
Anna O'Brien	Committee Member
Teresa O'Dwyer	Committee Member
Ursula O'Shea	Committee Member
Sheila Scanlon	Committee member
Jim Sheridan	Committee Member
Rebecca Treanor	Committee Member
Jane Tooney	Committee Member
Sally Ward	Committee Member

Full – time Staff

Elizabeth King	Co-ordinator
Bridie Walsh	Deputy co-ordinator/FAS supervisor

Community Employment scheme (2003)

John Adams	Caretaker
Martin Davey	Caretaker (Sligo County Childcare Committee)
Ann Feeney	Childcare
Teresa Ferry	FAS Administrator
Josephine Fitzpatrick	Childcare
Mary Forde	Childcare
Michelle Granville	Childcare
Regina Kelly	Receptionist (Sligo County Childcare Committee)
Christina McKeown	Receptionist (Sligo County Childcare Committee) to July 2003
Elizabeth Maguire	Receptionist
Claire Morley	Information Officer
Margaret O'Rourke	Receptionist (Sligo County Childcare Committee) to August 2004
Rosaleen Scott	Childcare

Students on Placement

Christine Mahon	Ursuline College, Transition Year
Kathleen Ward	Mercy College, Sligo Leaving Certificate Applied

A look at the year gone by

Funding

In January 2003 FAS agreed to fund another year of the Community Employment Scheme and the Centre was set for another year of activities

After more than two years of planning and negotiation the Sligo Family Centre finally received funding from the Department of Social and Family Affairs through the Family Support Agency in March of this year. This involved many hours of meetings by both the management committee and the Holywell Trust Support Agency to put together a business plan for the Centre. The Holywell Trust Support Agency is the support service for the North West region. This funding is to employ a Co-Ordinator and a Part-Time administrator until Dec 2005. The funding included a Start Up grant of €10,000.

The Sligo Regional office of the Department of Social and Family Affairs gave us funding for a Lone Parent Programme. This started in January 2004 and will run to April 2004.

We received funding from the Department of Rural and Gaeltacht affairs to run programmes in 2004.

In addition to providing funding for the rent of the premises, the North Western Health Board gave us funding to go towards equipment.

The VEC provided 40 hours of training towards our training programmes and workshops.

We also raised money through our annual flag day and received donations from the Rosses Point Golf Club and other smaller donations from individuals for which we were very grateful.

Recruitment of new staff

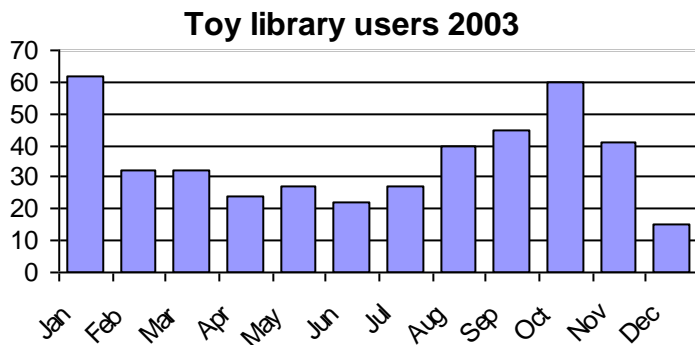
In January 2003, having successfully applied for another year of funding from FAS for the Community Employment scheme, we appointed new members of staff. These included Josephine Fitzpatrick (childcare), Claire Morley (information), Michelle Granville (childcare), Catherine McKeown (receptionist), Teresa Ferry (accounts), Martin Davey (caretaker) and Regina Kelly (receptionist). Interviews for these positions were held from January to March, in June to replace a CE worker who had left and in October to replace our caretaker.

In March 2003 the management committee set about appointing a Co-ordinator for the Centre. This involved setting up the recruitment process, writing up contracts, job specifications and person specifications, advertising, short listing, interviewing and negotiating conditions with the successful candidate. Again this was done with the assistance of Holywell Trust. Elizabeth King was appointed Co-Ordinator and commenced work on the 1st September 2003.

Work began on recruiting a part-time Administrator in October and again the same recruitment process was undertaken. Imelda Carr was appointed and she commenced work at the Centre in February 2004.

The Centre was again successful in securing FAS funding under the Community Employment Scheme 2004 and staff for positions in childcare, information and clerical/receptionist and a caretaker was recruited.

Parents and young children together



Toy Library

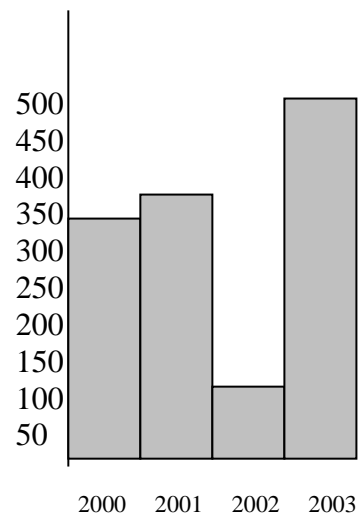
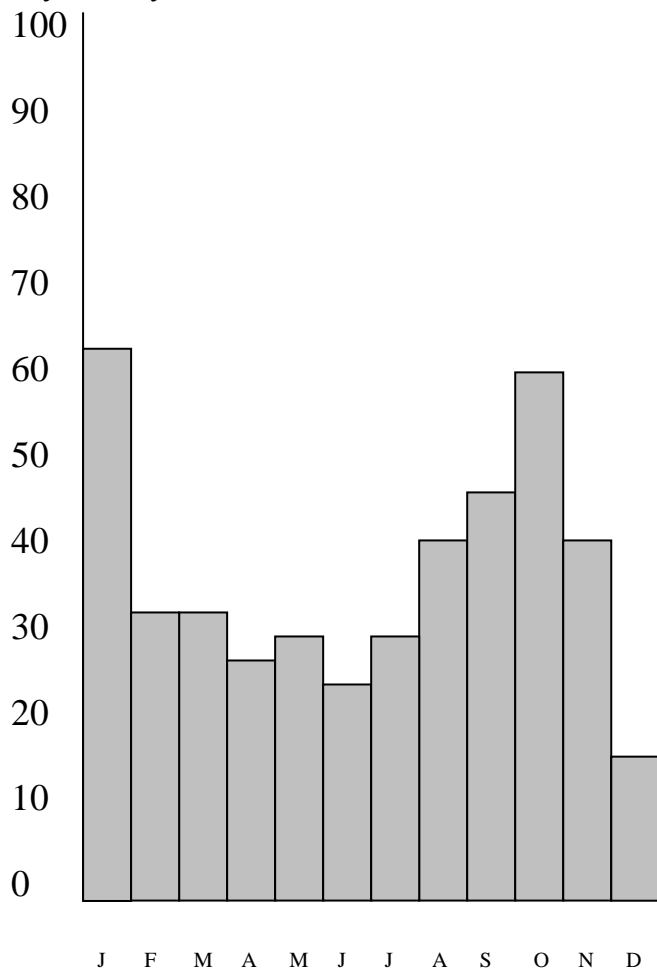


Table I indicates the number of parents and children using the toy library in 2003

Table II indicates the use of the Toy Library over the past number of years

The number using the Toy Library in 2003 was well up on last year and it appears that January and October were the most popular months. We had donations of new toys and were given funding towards the purchase of new toys from the Family Centre fund (mainly from the Flag Day). This made the Library more attractive to families to use the facilities. In addition, we did extra advertising on the service and we feel this greatly increased our numbers.

Parent and Toddler Group

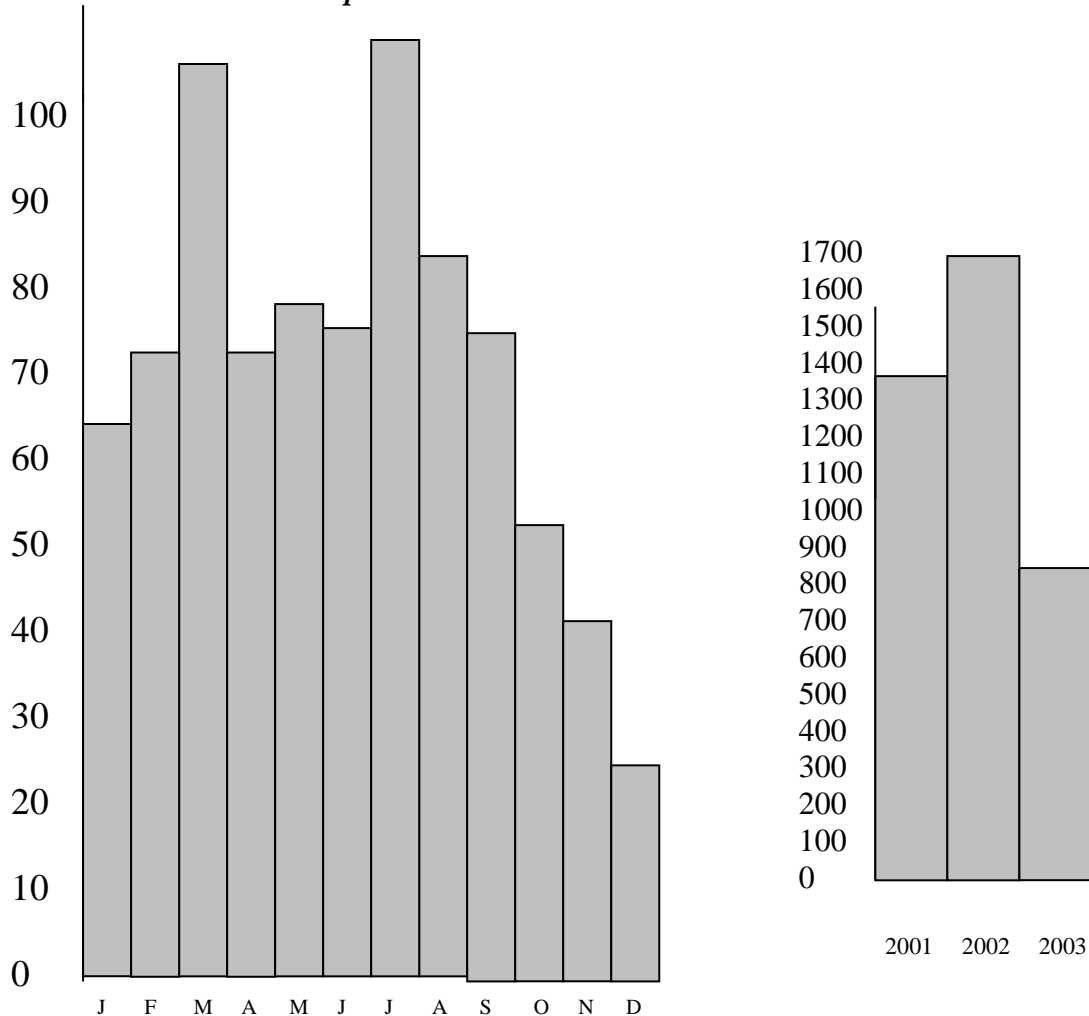


Table III indicates the numbers of parents and children attending the Parent & Toddler over the year 2003.

Table IV reveals the numbers attending over the past three years.

The numbers attending the Parent and Toddler sessions was down some what on other years. It was felt that this may be due to other Parent and Toddler groups active in Sligo. It is great to see that parents in Sligo now have a choice of venues / groups to take their children.

Music workshop

Anna Houston, a former CE worker with the Centre, facilitated this workshop every Monday morning which was extremely popular. Anna did stories, songs and rhymes while teaching the children rhythm on their own home made instruments. This was attended by 10 parents and 11 children for a period of 6 weeks.

Baby Massage

This was done as an outreach workshop in the Red Cottage with Laura Bell, the facilitator. The babies were visibly more relaxed following their massage and the mothers particularly enjoyed the head and neck massage which Laura demonstrated they could do on each other. In total 6 mothers and 6 babies attended.

Play workshop

We ran two six-week play workshops one in the spring and one in the autumn. Both parents and children aged 18 months - 4 year learned a great deal about the importance of play using play dough, table top toys, paints, sand and water. The story telling session was a particular favourite. This was attended by a total of 20 parents and 23 children. Michelle Lindsay was the facilitator.

Children

Art workshop

The Art Workshop has been one of the most popular workshops held at the Centre this year. The Centre has been running Art workshop for 4-6 and 6-8 year olds every Saturday morning for the past year. In total 5 six week sessions accounting for 52 children were held.

Outreach Art Workshop.

This took place in co-operation with the library in Tubbercurry. Fifteen children aged 4-5 attended this class.

Summer Camp

50 children attended this year's summer camp in June and July. We had five weeks of activities targeting children aged 4 and 6. Activities included outdoor play, painting, games, play dough, face painting, arts and crafts. It was the same number of children as attended in 2002.

Parents

Lone Parent Programme

In September 2003, the Sligo FRC approached Mary Phair, from the Sligo Regional office of the Department of Social and Family Affairs seeking funding to run a Lone Parent programme to address issues of isolation among lone parents in the Sligo area. We submitted an application form and sought a budget for €5,120.00 to cover the costs. We received the funding at the end of November and planning and recruitment for the programme began in earnest. The programme recruited 17 participants and started on 19th January 2004

Older members of the community

Active Retirement Art Classes

The Centre facilitated the active retirement classes on Mondays and Wednesday afternoons throughout the year. In total the Monday classes ran for 22 weeks with 6-8 people attending regularly and the Wednesday classes ran for 12 weeks with approximately 8 people taking part each week.

Over 55s information sessions

The over 55s information sessions included: *Pensions, Rights and Entitlements* (Fintan Hansen, the Dept of Social and Family Affairs) and *Wills and the Power of Attorney* (Tom Martyn, solicitor). We also held two sessions on healthy lifestyles given by Antoinette O' Reilly from the *Go For Life* team which is part of the NWHB Health Promotion Unit. In total 12 people attended the sessions.

Positive Ageing Week

The Sligo FRC was one of many community groups throughout the country to celebrate Positive Ageing Week (28th September – 3rd October). We held a coffee morning on the Thursday morning with freshly baked scones, cakes and buns. There was also an information table with information ranging from entitlements to housing issues to health concerns. Over 30 people attended.

Information service

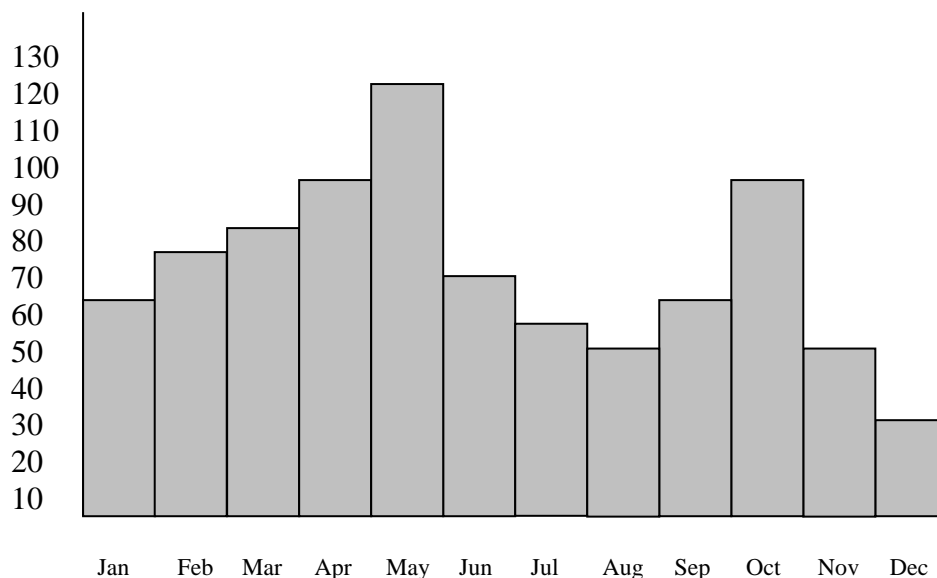


Table III indicates the number of phone calls we received looking for information on family related issues during 2003

In total we dealt with 846 information inquiries in 2003 which is approximately the same as previous years. The highest percentage of calls was in relation to the actual business of running the Centre (39.7%) followed by queries on workshops/courses (13.3%), staffing issues (8.5%), childcare (4.7%), parenting (3.4%) and counselling (3.4%).

Ethnic Minorities

The Sligo Family Centre is represented on the management committee of Diversity Sligo, the local support group for refugees and asylum seekers in the area and is involved in the management of the Sligo Traveller Support Group. We have had some success to date in involving some members of these communities in the programmes we run in the Centre.

Cross Border Initiatives

The Co-ordinator paid a visit to the Ashling Centre in Enniskillen and the ARC Healthy Living Centre, Irvinestown. The Ashling Centre provides a professional counselling service, personal development programmes, peer led drug awareness training, Rainbow club for the Active Elderly, a range of alternative therapies, secretarial back-up and room rental and conference centre. They also have a crèche with priority given to those using the Centre.

Much of the work of the ARC Centre is aimed at children aged 0 to 4 years and their parents with parenting courses, art, play and music workshops, breast feeding support groups, ante and post natal classes as well as healthy eating classes. They also run a Lifestart Programme, a crèche and have built a playground nearby. They also run a programme for heavy drinkers with over 70 clients attending. It was a good opportunity to share experiences and a learning experience for all. It was felt that the links created would be worked on in 2004.

Equipment purchased

We received funding from the Family Support Agency to purchase a photocopier, computer, printer, fax machine, desk, filing cabinet, tables for meeting room, plus new crockery for the kitchen.

Evaluation

Evaluation is an integral part of the work of the Sligo Family Resource Centre. All staff members and students on placement receive support and supervision during their period of employment at the Centre. In addition staff members leaving the Centre fill in an evaluation form and have an exit interview. All children and adults taking part in workshops / training programmes and all facilitators complete evaluation forms at the end of each training programme / workshop.

This informs the work of the Centre. It enables us to plan workshops / training programmes that are relevant and enables participants to have some say in what is included in the programmes.

Facilitating other Groups

The Sligo Family Centre facilitates other groups by renting them rooms at a reasonable rate. These groups meet on Monday nights, Tuesday nights (2 groups) and Saturday nights. We have also facilitated the Sligo County Childcare Committee who ran a training programme for 10 weeks on Thursday nights in the autumn and the NWHB for family group conferencing.

Networking

National

- Members of Family Resource Centre National Forum
- Affiliated to Barnardos

Regional

- Members of Regional Forum for Family Resource Centres and Community Development Projects
- Represented on the North West Children's and Young People's Planning Committee

Local

- Sligo County Childcare Committee member (Bridie Walsh resigned her position on the Board in May 2003)
- Sligo County Childcare Committee management sub committee (Bridie Walsh until May 2003)
- Sligo County Childcare Committee Providers Forum: Teresa O Dwyer
- Sligo Traveller Support Group: Elizabeth King on the Management committee and Funding sub group
- Diversity Sligo: Elizabeth King on the steering group

Training

- Working with Media /Radio interviews (Bridie Walsh and Teresa O'Dwyer)
- Domestic Violence training facilitated by Women's Aid, in Ballymote (Elizabeth King)
- Corporate Compliance Training (Noreen Hickey and Ursula O' Shea)
- Brainwave the epilepsy association of Ireland information session (all staff)
- Training for Trainers Special Needs for Children (Bridie Walsh)
- Managing finances – FAS (Noreen Hickey, Bridie Walsh, Elizabeth King and Teresa Ferry)
- Equality Training (staff and committee members)
- Two day workshop in Dublin entitled Moving on Training for Trainers working with Lone Parents (Elizabeth King)
- Health and Safety (all Staff)
- NSSB Data Base Training (Claire Morley)
- Information Provision (Claire Morley)
- Service Provision (Claire Morley)
- Summer Camp Training (all staff)
- Personal Development (all staff)
- Food Preparation and cooking level II (Mary Forde)
- Food Preparation and cooking level III (Mary Forde)
- European Computer Driving Licence (Elizabeth Maguire)
- Social Studies (Rosaleen Scott)
- Childcare Level I (Ann Feeney and Josephine Fitzpatrick)
- Microsoft Access (Elizabeth Maguire)

- Caring for children FETAC Level II (Claire Morley, Ann Feeney and Michelle Granville)
- Children with Special Needs FETAC Level II (Rosaleen Scott)
- Word and Text Processing Level II (Regina Kelly)
- SAGE Accounts Basic (Teresa Ferry)
- Cookery Course (Mary Forde)
- Receptionist Skills (Margaret O' Rourke, Teresa Ferry, Claire Morley and Regina Kelly)

FAS Community Employment Staff Progression Routes

Dennis Broderick	Saehan Video Factory
Sinead Davey	NUI Galway, Social Studies
Mary Dunleavy	Mohane Nursing Home
Mary Forde	St John's Hospital
Wendy Harte	Sligo Social Services
Anna Houston	Sligo Academy of Music
Ruth Irvine	Tesco, Sligo
Christina McKeown	MBNA Credit Cards
Elizabeth Maguire	Sligo Careers Association Jobs Initiative
Anne Osborne	Self-Employed
Catherine Rooney	Northside CDP
Kathy Scanlon	Boot's Chemist, Sligo

Events attended

- Sligo County Childcare Committee Community Provider's Forum
- Launch of Lesbian Help-Line (Benwisken Centre)
- Social Services AGM
- Sligo Connections Cross border community Showcase 2003 (Sligo Park Hotel)
- Minister Coughlin's Seminar on Family (01 May 2003)
- "Women Together" in North Side Community Development Project
- Launch of C.R.I.B. (Choices Responsibilities, Ideas, Belonging)
- Leader Partnership Showcase 2003 (Sligo Park Hotel)
- Opening of Ballymote Family Resource Centre
- St Michaels Family Life Centre A.G.M.
- *St. Angela's*: open day for students (St Angela's College)
- The launch of the Parent's Forum Newsletter *Daisy Chain* (Sligo County Childcare Committee)
- The launch of the information packs "*Managing a community Childcare Service in Co. Sligo*" and an information pack for parents (Sligo County Childcare Committee).
- North West Regional Forum AGM (Holy Well Trust offices)
- Sligo Mediation Service Launch (Sligo)
- Press Photographers Exhibition
- Launch of IFPA Pregnancy Counselling Service

Events Held

- OWL Information Evening 19 March 2003
- International Family Day 15 May 2003 – bouncy castle
- Flag Day 27 June 2003
- Parent & Toddler Day Out Summer 2003
- Hospice Coffee morning September 2003
- PRSA Pensions Plans in-service for staff

