

Contract Families

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Contract Families is an interagency initiative by the Brothers of Charity Services Galway and Ability West, with the Brothers of Charity Services as lead agency. This emerged from a two year pilot project funded (€500,000) by Pobal through the Department of Justice and Law Reform. The pilot project ended in June 2009. However, despite funding challenges, both agencies are committed to maintaining and developing this model of service.

Contract Families is a development of the Home Sharing Scheme which has been in existence since 1985. The difference between Home Sharing and Contract Families is the nature of the Contract. Home Sharing is primarily a volunteer scheme where families are paid expenses and this is something they do as part of their ordinary lives. Contract Families on the other hand, involves committing to 16 nights per month on average to caring for people generally with higher needs than traditionally have availed of Home Sharing. This in effect means a lifestyle change for these families. They also have to be available in emergencies and they have less choice in who comes to stay. For this, they are paid a retainer on a monthly basis which is based on the Rent a Room Scheme for tax purposes and they are also paid expenses. There are two levels of expenses determined by the dependency level of their guest. The dependency level is based on the NIDD. At the end of the scheme there were five Contract Families providing respite for 39 guests.

An advantage of Pobal funding was that it not only enabled piloting of this scheme but it also funded an evaluation. The evaluation was launched in December 2009 in NUI Galway. The outcome of the evaluation is that Contract Families is a Person Centred, Community Based and Value for Money Model of Service which we advocate should be developed and expanded nationally. Also, for the first time to our knowledge, the evaluation entailed a comparative costing between Contract Families and traditional residential respite.

We are glad to have the opportunity to present the scheme to the members of the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies for the above reasons. We hope to have a Contract Family participate in the presentation and if possible guest and natural family input.