

My chat with Enda



Lone parent campaigner Andrea Galgey, who called Taoiseach Enda Kenny to re-iterate her disappointment and anger at the cut to the One Parent Family Payment.

A Tramore-based lone mother who has campaigned against the recent cut to the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) 'bit the bullet' on Thursday last and called Taoiseach Enda Kenny to vent her disappointment over a decision she labelled 'regressive and damaging'.

Andrea Galgey, the Waterford representative of the National One Parent Family Network, spoke to Mr Kenny after a 36-hour period in which she dealt with "countless stressed out and panicked parents" at the Intreo office on the Cork Road.

"Quite a few of those I spoke to were told that their money would be in the bank," she said. "But it wasn't. Other lone parents are now not getting any payment and were told by the Community Welfare Office that they were, in fact, entitled to nothing at all now given the OPFP cuts that have now kicked in.

"A lot of them won't get to see their Community Welfare Officer until today (Tuesday), five days after they'd usually have their payment - so they've had no money since then."

Ms Galgey added: "Sometimes, seeing really is believing and last Thursday, on the Cork Road, it was tough going; it wasn't nice to see people so upset, confused, worried and stressed. One woman broke down, it was all too much for her. And the people making these cuts, well it's not as if they're going to be in the Intreo office any time soon. If only they could see what I see and hear the stories I've heard since last Wednesday morning."

Prompted by this, Ms Galgey called the Taoiseach and was slightly surprised when he himself answered the call. "I told him that if he's any political sense that he'd do one of two things: either resign immediately or reverse these regressive and damaging cuts to lone parents.

"This will, as far as the National One Parent Family Network, is concerned, will be a red line issue come the general election, and affordable childcare has got to form part of any manifesto from a political party which may be interested in seeking our support."

Did she get any joy from her conversation with Enda Kenny? "Not really. He blundered and stuttered like he normally does...to bring in a cut like this against a group who can't, for example, mobilise like the Old Age Pensioners did over the Medical Card a few years back. It's an incredibly sly and sneaky cut against those who can't fight back and, historically, don't tend to fight back when it comes to elections."

Ms Galgey added: "Part of the problem is that there are a lot of people out there, who don't find themselves in the predicament that lone parents do, who believe that we deserve this cut - so the stereotyping and prejudice against lone parents has clearly worked very well.

"I've had parents in the last few days talking about wanting to put their children into care and even worse than that, saying they want to kill themselves because they think their children will be better off - this is how some parents are feeling at the moment, and how can this have been allowed to happen?"

According to Social Protection Minister Joan Burton: "A strong welfare system is essential as a safety net. In the teeth of Ireland's worst economic crisis, the Labour Party in government protected this safety net and, with the recovery under way, has started making targeted increases.

"All the increases are fully funded and sustainable, and are the work of a party serious about its responsibilities to our State and our people. It is not enough to have the system function as a strong safety net. It must also help people to get back on their feet, build financial independence over time and build better lives for themselves and their families. This is the purpose of the one-parent reforms."

Over 30,000 lone parents of children aged seven and over - lone mothers in the overwhelming majority of instances - lost their One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) in the wake of this cut.

Ms Galgey said that the National One Parent Family Network was planning "a different kind of protest this September...this cut cannot be allowed to stand."