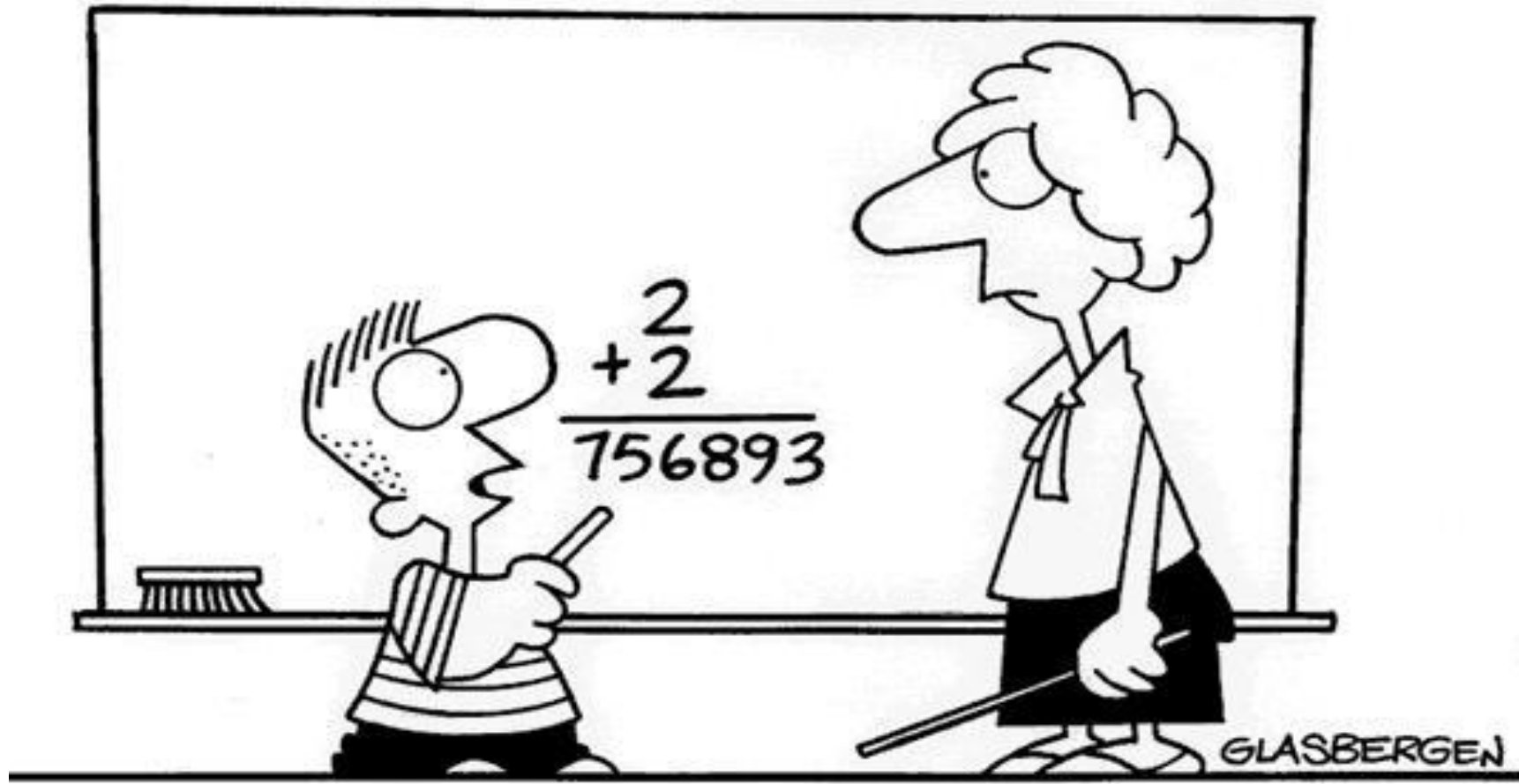


A Wide Angle Approach to Improving Family Life

The Value of an Irish Family Life Education Framework

Dr Colm O' Doherty, Institute of Technology Tralee

Dr Ashling Jackson, Athlone Institute of Technology



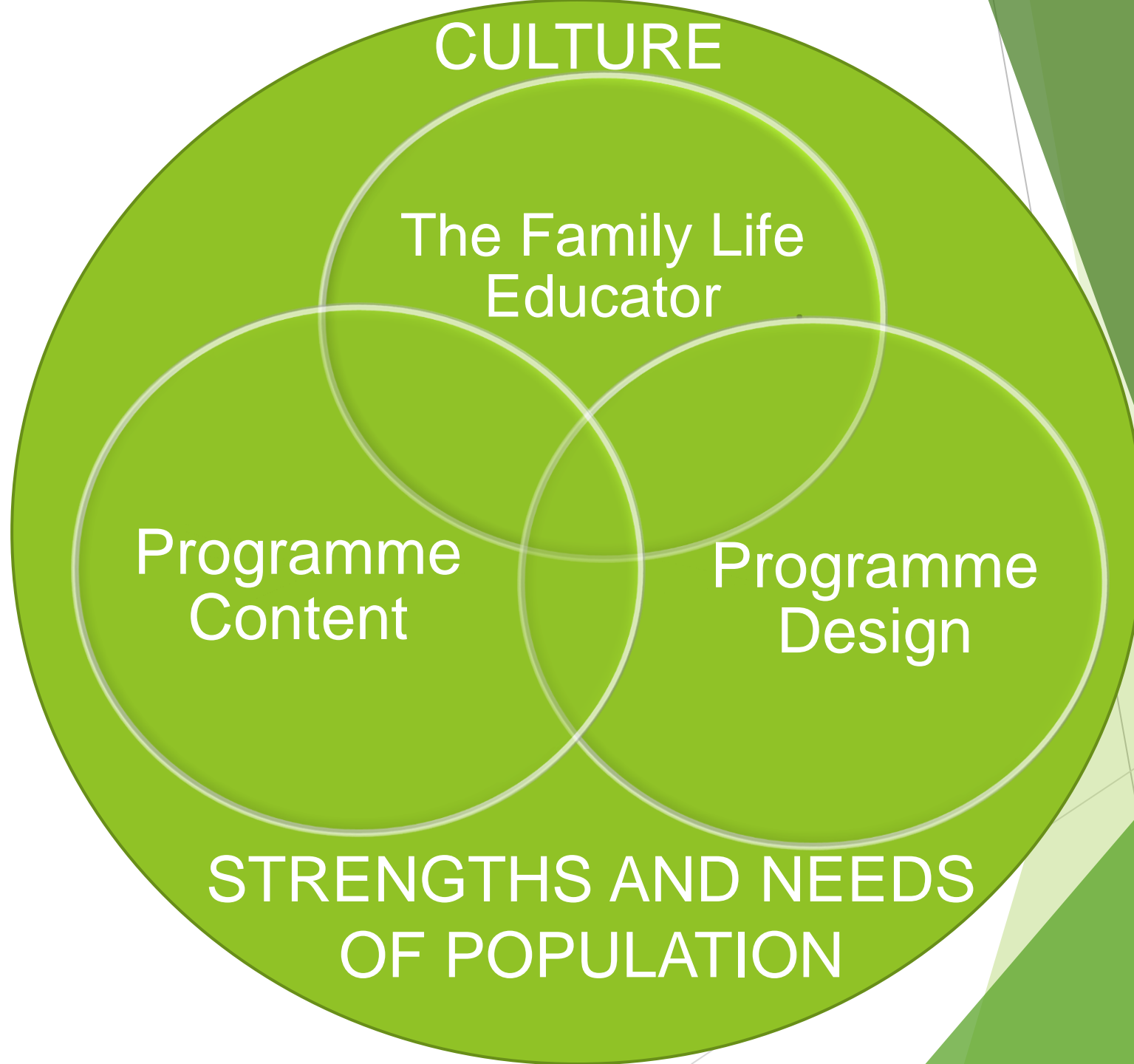
**“In an increasingly complex world,
sometimes old questions require new answers.”**

Family Life Education

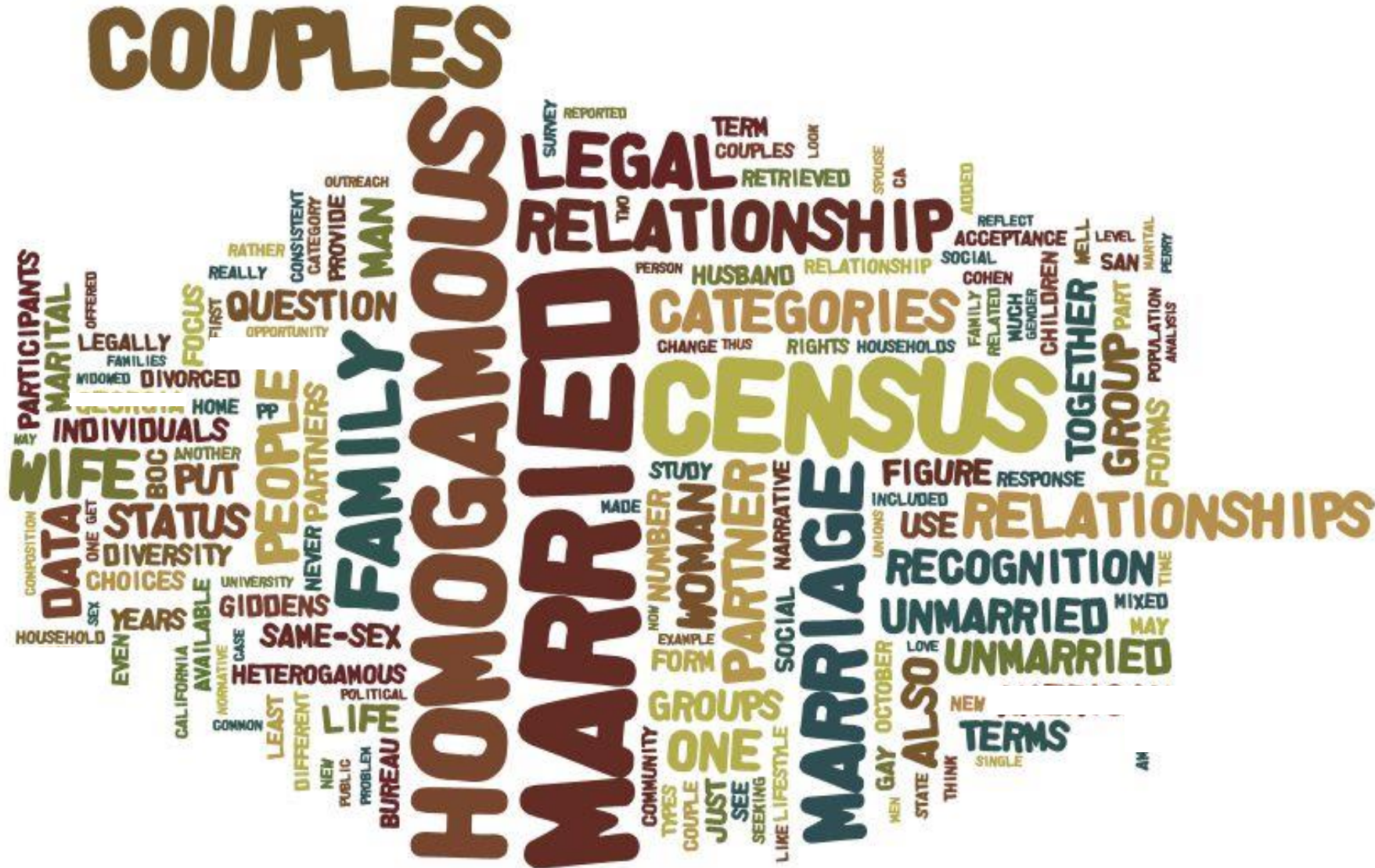
- ▶ Family Life Education (FLE) incorporates a preventative, educational and collaborative approach to empower families and individuals to address and resolve family issues (Darling, Cassidy and Powell, 2014).
- ▶ Multi-disciplinary area of study and multi-professional in its practice (Arcus, Schvanefeldt and Moss, 1993).
- ▶ Emphasis on educational outreach activities (Robila and Taylor, 2018).

Framework for Best Practices in FLE

(Ballard and
Taylor, 2012).



What is Family?



'I understand family as consisting of people who love and care for one another'

(Carrington, 1999: 5).

People do family (Carrington, 1999).



Concept of *'family well-being'*

(Fahey, Keilthy and Polek, 2012).

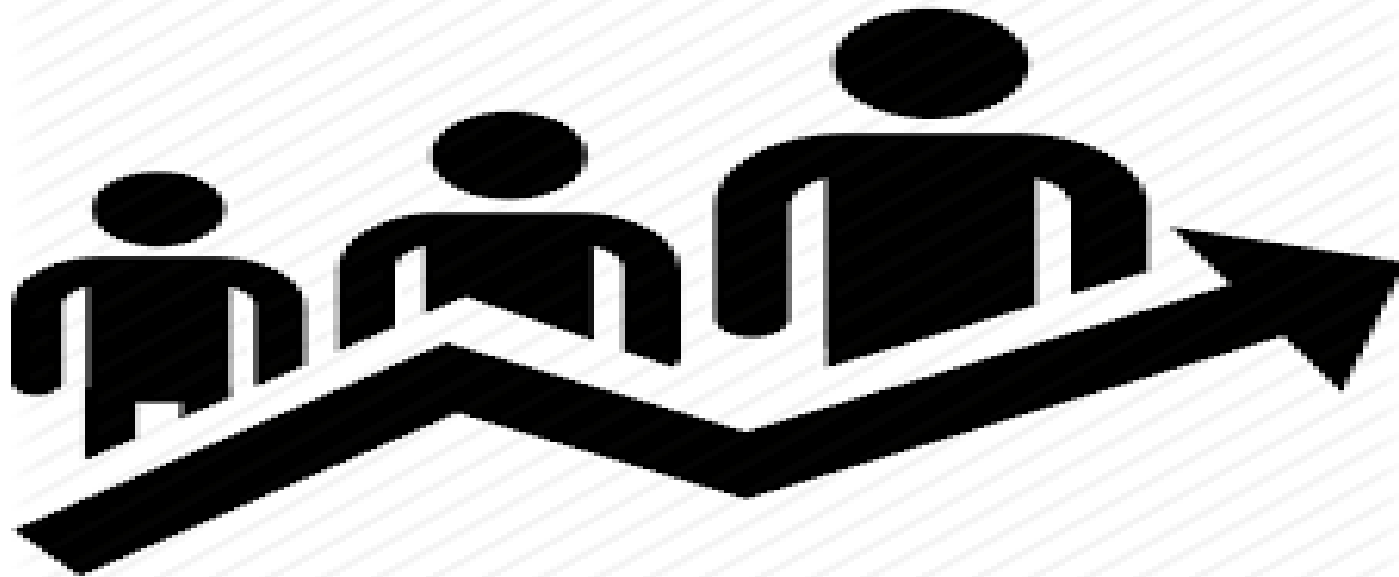


Contemporary Irish Family Life

- ▶ The most recent census data (2016) show that Ireland's population stood at 4,761,865 in April 2016 (Central Statistics Office, 2017).



► The total number of families, in Ireland, has increased by 3.3% to 1,218,370 since the previous census in 2011 (Central Statistics Office, 2017).



Number of Children

- ▶ The total number of children in families shows a modest 3% increase and now stands at 1,682,600.
- ▶ A long-running decrease in the number of children per family has levelled off. The average number of children in each family is 1.38, the same as in 2011. In 2006 it was 1.41.

(Central Statistics Office, 2017)

The Most Common Family Types in Ireland (1)

- ▶ The most common family type: wife, husband and children, accounts for 52.8% of all families in Ireland.
- ▶ 29.2% are married couples without children.

(Central Statistics Office, 2017)

The Most Common Family Types in Ireland (2)

► Among families with children, cohabiting couples show an increase of 25.4% from 2011 to 2016.

(Central Statistics Office, 2017)



The Most Common Family Types in Ireland (3)

- ▶ 18% of all families are headed by one parent and the vast majority of these are (86.4%) are one parent mothers.
- ▶ Census 2016 recorded 6034 same-sex couples of which 3442 were male couples and 2592 were female.

(Central Statistics Office, 2017)



The Family in Ireland - Historical Factors 1920 - 1940

- ▶ The Irish State from its foundation in 1921 was economically conservative and strongly promoted a certain model of family life which reinforced Catholic social teachings.
- ▶ There was no money to spend on social services and no political will to do so.

The Family in Ireland - Historical Factors

1920 -1940

- ▶ The principle of 'subsidiarity' which underpinned Catholic social teaching required minimum intervention into family life and that families deal with their own problems.
- ▶ Under article 41 of the Irish Constitution (1937), the family is recognised as the natural primary and fundamental unit of society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights.
- ▶ The 1937 Constitution favoured the rights of parents over the rights of children.

The Family in Ireland - Historical Factors 1940 -1970

- ▶ A universal allowance paid to families for the third and subsequent children was introduced in 1944.
- ▶ The 1953 Health Act introduced means tested free healthcare services for children up to the age of six.
- ▶ A gradual expansion in social reform during the 1960s was principally manifested in the introduction of free post-primary level education in 1967.

The Family in Ireland - Historical Factors

1970 -1990

- ▶ Modest improvements in the Irish economy increased the resources available to the State for promoting social progress in the 1970s.
- ▶ The social shortcomings of Irish society were challenged in the 1970s by membership of the EC, the women's movement, social reformers and workers' representatives.
- ▶ Irish social policy played catch up with the modernising social changes which had swept across post-war Europe/the US.

The Family in Ireland - Historical Factors 1970 -1990 (continued)

- ▶ The State over-borrowed during the 1970s to sustain government spending and its capacity to offer solutions to problems of large-scale unemployment, poverty and immigration was compromised by a growing national debt.
- ▶ The deterioration in Irish public finances shaped all policymaking across health, education and welfare in the 1980s.
- ▶ The ascendancy of the New Right, following the general election of 1987, facilitated economic and social policies which favoured tax cuts, privatisation and public service cut-backs.

The Family in Ireland - Historical Factors

1990 - 2008

- ▶ During the 1990s, an enormous advance in economic circumstances combined with attitudinal changes around access to contraception, abortion information, co-habitation and equality legislation transformed Irish society.
- ▶ Child abuse scandals contributed to a loss of faith in the twin pillars of Irish society, the Church and family.
- ▶ The 1991 Child Care Act replaced the 1908 Children Act.
- ▶ Investment in social and public services increased significantly.

The Family in Ireland - Historical Factors

2008 - 2018

- ▶ The state's expansionist social provision agenda was derailed by the economic crisis in 2008.
- ▶ Austerity measures were introduced following an IMF/ EU bailout which resulted in cutbacks to all social/health services.
- ▶ These austerity measures have become embedded in the political system.
- ▶ Health, education, housing and transport systems are down to the bones and the outlook is bleak.

The Quality of Family Life

- ▶ In twenty-first-century Ireland, the comings and goings of parent-child relationships must be considered, against the push and pull of the broader context of social and economic change.



Family Well-being

- ▶ Family well-being does not occur in a vacuum.



Achieving Family Well-being

- ▶ Well-being is constrained and facilitated by the social structures within which family life is lived.
- ▶ Family well-being is brought about when the basic physical and social needs, which all families across the world more or less share, are met.

Different Kinds of Family Needs

- ▶ Family members have 'thin' needs, which require satisfaction in order to survive and 'thick' needs, which when met, enable a person to have a sense of purpose, feel able to achieve important goals, participate in society and make a contribution to the community.



'Thin' Needs and 'Thick' Needs

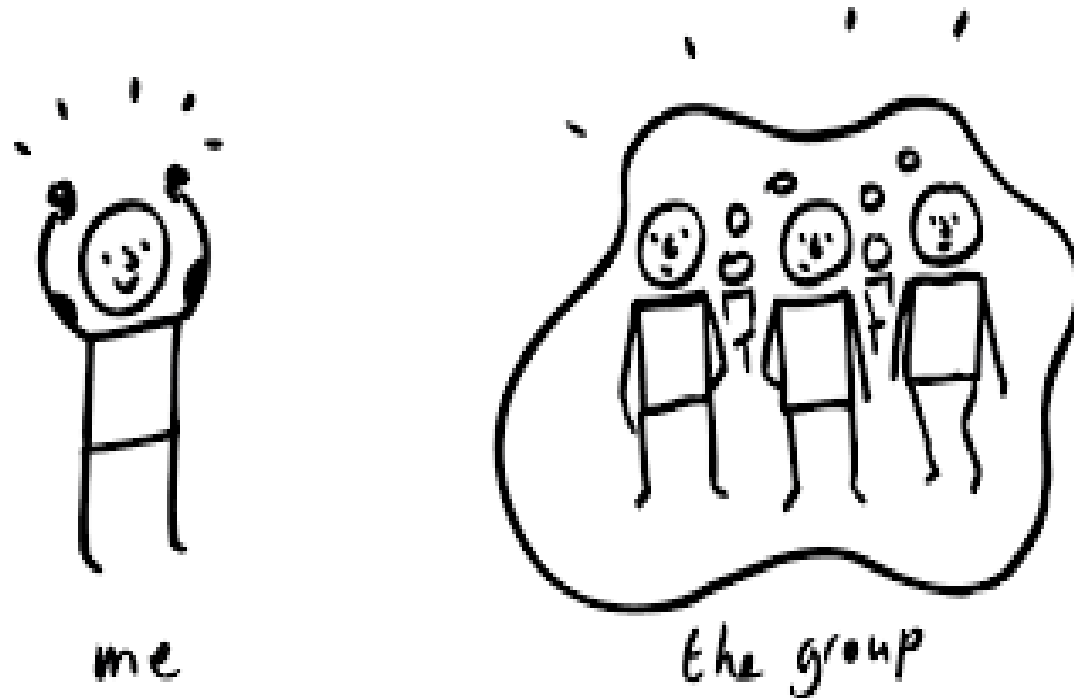
Thin Needs	Thick Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shelter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having a sense of purpose
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food/water	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling able to achieve important goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participating in society
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Non hazardous living environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having supportive personal relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Non hazardous work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Living in a strong and inclusive community
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial security	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having meaningful and rewarding work

Family and Society

- ▶ Broadly speaking, it is the relationship between families and society which determines how these needs are met.
- ▶ The market or economic structure is about the distribution of goods and services which meet largely material needs.
- ▶ The normative structure is the set of cultural (shared) rules, values and beliefs regulating the behaviour of family members and endorsing the traits of personhood which emerge.

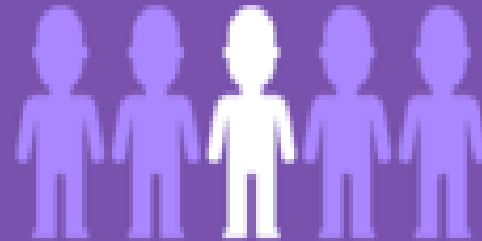
The Personhood Continuum

Personhood – what states want from their citizens. It exists along a continuum between individualisation and community.



Family Life in Ireland..

- ▶ should be encouraged and supported to nurture persons who are drawn to contribute to community, rather than solely the pursuit of their own individual futures.



However, inequality penetrates family life and increases status anxiety among adults, reduces solidarity and agreeableness, and leads to a greater tendency to 'self-enhancement', i.e. claiming that you are better than others. Children detect all these, become aware of status differences in wider society and so become affected by the unequal context in which they grow up (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2018).

STATUS AND INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR



A Personhood for the Common Good

There is a lack of ambition on the State's part in managing the economy for the benefit of all its citizens. This lack of ambition translates as a lack of commitment to the politics of the common good.

Imagine this....



Family Life Education

Empowering Personhood for the Common Good

- ▶ Civility, a decent way to deal with others, is a crucial attribute of prosocial personhood.
- ▶ The State has a role in legislating for civility and family life educators have a responsibility to promote the benefit of civility for family wellbeing.
- ▶ Family life education professionals can nurture civility on three levels.

Family Life Education

Three levels of positive engagement towards a family centred society

- ▶ Personal - counsellors and therapists can assist family members in acquisition of empathetic skills.
- ▶ Interpersonal - social workers, social care workers, youth workers help to promote the interpersonal economy.
- ▶ Environmental - the character of our environment (housing, amenities, play, space) influences family behaviour. Family support workers and community workers enable and empower families to engage in place shaping activities which promote wellbeing.

The 3 Pillars of a Family-Centred Society

- ▶ Equality in social relations.
- ▶ Economic security for families.
- ▶ Empowering family life education services dedicated to fostering altruistic personhood.

Towards an Integrated Family Life Education Sector

- Social networks self-help

- Schools, social work/care

Informal Sector

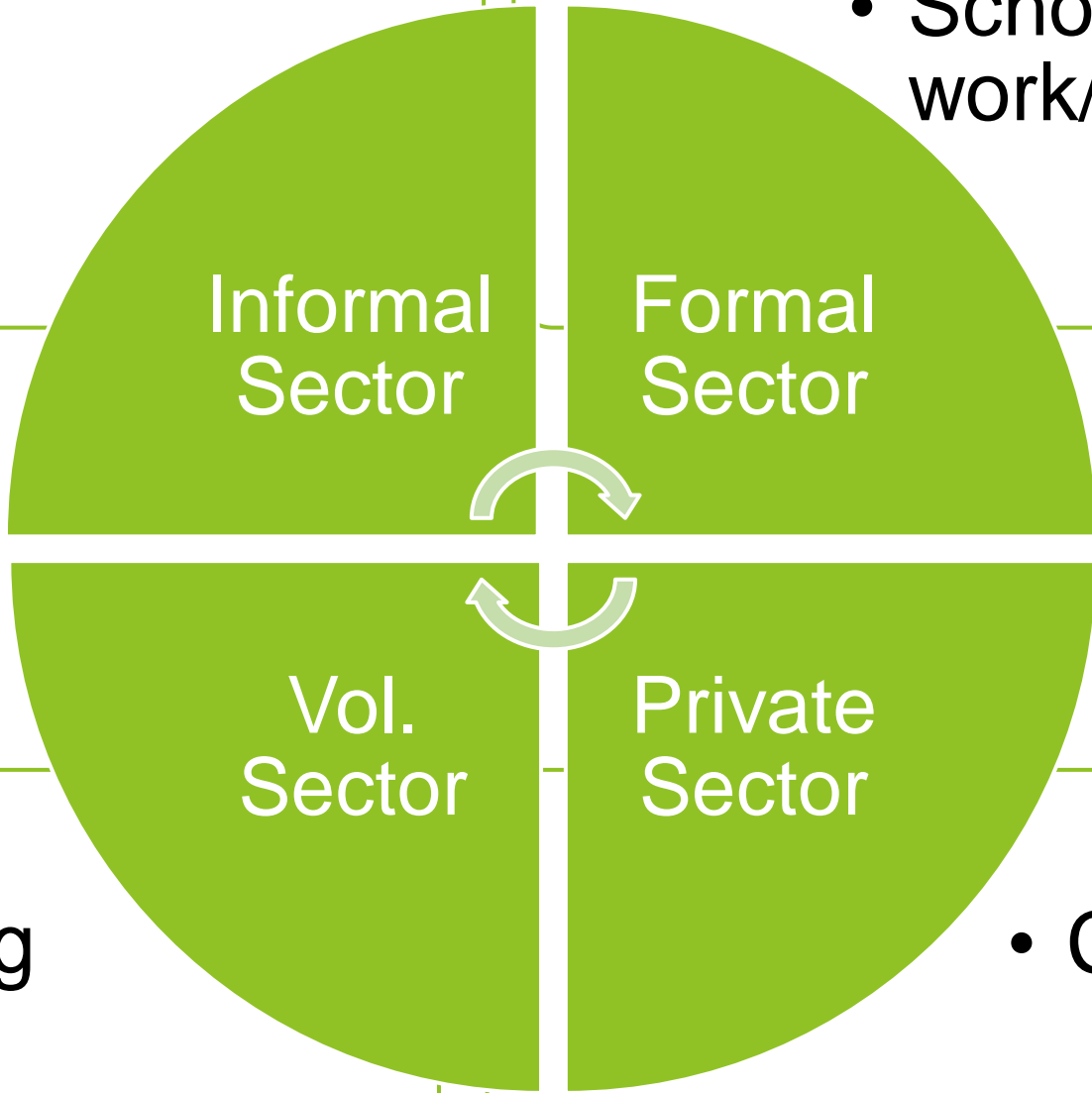
Formal Sector

Vol. Sector

Private Sector

- Parenting supports

- Counselling therapy



Unfurling the Umbrella-Under the Umbrella of Family Life Education

What is required is joined up ...

- ▶ government policies programmes: services (education, health, social welfare).
- ▶ voluntary and community supports, networks.
- ▶ civic virtue platforms promoting parenting that expresses, passionate care for fellow citizens and the pursuit of the common good.

Thank You!

ACTION.