



# Women's Support Network News

WSN

Volume 3 Issue 3

April 2005

## A Breathing space?

The recent statement by Minister John Spellar to allocate a 1.1 million, six-month emergency fund for women's organisations has largely been welcomed by the women's sector (see page 2 for the statement in full).

These emergency monies will ensure that the valuable work of the women's sector will be able to continue over the next six months. Alongside the setting up of this fund Minister John Spellar also announced the setting up of a review group to examine the future of the women's sector beyond the six-month period.

This review will be lead by DSD/VCU, but will also include representatives from other key departments, for example, DEL (Dept for Employment & Learning and DHSSPS (Dept of Health, Social Services & Public Safety). This review group will also include key



representatives from the women's sector.

Patricia Haren, Director of the Women's Support Network will represent the women's centres/groups and organisations in the greater Belfast area, Anne O'Reilly, Director of the WRDA will represent women's centres/ groups and organisations in the rural areas and Margaret Logue the Co-ordinator of Derry Women's Centre will represent women's centres/ groups and organisations in the North/West region.

Therefore this review group will include all of the key stakeholders. WSN anticipate that this review group will initiate the longer-term process of setting up an integrated and—

*continued on page 2*

### Inside this issue:

Cover Story	1
1.1 million for Women's sector	
Headlines this Spring	1
Cover story cont'd	2
Outreach and Development News WSN AGM	3
WSN IWD event	4
Policy Groupings	5
<b>Policy Issues</b>	<b>6/9</b>
Water Reform	
Healthier Future	
Investment Strategy	
Gender Matters	
Forthcoming policy work	
International newsbites	10
WSN Job Opportunity	
New website launched	

### Other headlines this Spring

- 1.1 Million emergency fund welcomed
- WSN's GES response synopsis
- WSN AGM 10th May 2005

## Welcome

Women's Support Network would like to welcome three new groups as members of the Network. These include:

- Clan Mor Women's Group
- Rasharkin Women's Group
- Ballymena Community Forum

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## A breathing space? - continued from Page 1

inter-departmental approach to begin examining how the relevant government departments could mainstream and core fund the work of women's centres/ groups and organisations. DSD have also set up an administration group, made up of the same review group representatives and Eleanor Jordan (Windsor Women's Centre), May De Silva (Women into Politics) and Anne McVicker (Women's Tec). The main aim of the administration group is to deal with the practical process of getting monies out to groups and getting them out on time.

In order to be inclusive each review representative, in Belfast, Derry and Rural, has set up an advisory group on behalf of the women's centres, groups and organisations. The aim of this advisory group is to enable individual centres, groups and organisations to feed into the review and administration process and receive update from the review group. The first meeting of this advisory group, facilitated by WSN, was held on Friday 8th April. Over 20 groups were represented. This meeting was also attended by Tom Kiernan, Head of the Community Capacity Building Team in VCU/DSD. Tom highlighted the strength of lobbying from the Women's Sector and he said that it was acknowledged (within DSD) that the women's sector was 'advanced, organised and had engaged in varied forms of participative and focused lobbying which highlighted the importance and value of the work being done by the women's sector across Northern Ireland'. 'It was this', he said, 'that convinced Minister John Spellar of the need to address the funding of the women's sector in a more strategic way as he didn't want to lose the 'fabric' of the women's sector'.

There is no doubt that the timeframe for this is very ambitious, and that there are difficulties for groups whose funding finished prior to the end of March 2005. However, as Patricia Haren, WSN Director commented 'This is an vital window of opportunity, it is the start of a journey to meaningful engagement with government departments to develop the future infrastructure and resourcing of the women's sector'. This is also in accord with the government's ambition stated within 'Positive Steps', Minister Spellar's response to the Taskforce report, where it is noted that 'The voluntary and community sector makes a significant contribution to life in Northern Ireland and is a key social partner working with the Government to deliver social, economic, cultural and environmental change' (Positive Steps 1.1). This report also notes the need for government '...to help ensure the sector is better placed to cope with social and economic change and imminent changes to the funding environment' (Positive Steps 1.3). Women's Support Network therefore view the announcement of the emergency monies and the tandem review process as a very welcome, first 'positive step'.

If you would like further information on this process, please contact Women's Support Network.

### **The 1.1 million Announcement**

The Minister for Social Development, John Spellar MP, has announced short-term funding of £1.1 million to support a number of women's organisations who are facing financial difficulties. The funding will enable the groups to continue to provide key services such as childcare, training and education over the next six months period whilst alternative longer-term funding from a variety of government departments and agencies is considered. The Minister said:

"I am aware that many women's organisations would have faced a financial crisis, if this relief was not provided. Therefore, I decided to provide this immediate support for the women's sector which has and continues to make a major contribution towards peace building and social cohesion in socially disadvantaged communities.

"This will allow them to continue to provide valuable services on which many people in their communities depend. But I am aware that this action will only provide a short-term solution. I am establishing a review group to consider the longer-term funding for women's sector. This group will be led by DSD and will involve representatives from key funding departments and agencies and representatives from the women's sector. The review group will report to me and recommend actions within the six month period of this programme."

*Tuesday 16th March 2005 DSD*



## Outreach & Development News

### Supporting member groups

During the past few months much of outreach and support to member groups has been in collating information in relation to the current funding situation.

Information was gathered in from all member groups to be given to Michael Mates, Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. He had agreed to examine this material with a view to raising the issue at Parliament. WSN, in partnership with Women into Politics then sent this information to all MLAs, MPs & MEPs as part of our combined lobbying strategy.

After the 1.1 million announcement WSN collected all the figures and needs from the Belfast based women's centres/groups and organisations and collated the information from across Northern Ireland to help streamline the administration through DSD/VCU.

### Greater Belfast Community Network—Childcare Lobby Working Group

The Childcare Lobby Working Group was formed through the Greater Belfast Community Network (GBCN). It is a consortium of representatives from the childcare, women's and community/voluntary sector in the Greater Belfast area, actively lobbying for strong representation and resourcing for the broad childcare sector.

WSN are involved because all of the women's centres and many of the women's organisations we work with

are providing childcare in some of the recognised and documented areas of greatest need, addressing a range of issues such as educational disadvantage and lack of mainstream service provision. This valuable work is being undermined as the childcare sector is currently supported by a piece-meal funding programme that is often under resourced and in crisis.

To raise awareness about this, and to put these issues on the agenda, the Childcare Lobby Working Group are working towards hosting and setting up a childcare conference at the end of June. The aim of this Conference is to examine current childcare provision and legislation alongside the future needs and long-term sustainability of the childcare sector. WSN will ensure that the Women's Sector will be kept fully informed about this issue.

### Newsletter / Information

The Newsletter is a way for WSN to keep our members apprised of the work we are doing on their behalf. It can also be used by member groups for sharing information with other groups or for promoting events within local centres. WSN encourages member groups to use this service.

*For further info on visits, events or the newsletter contact Siobh  n on 9023 6923 or alternatively you can email to [outreach@womenssupportnetwork.org](mailto:outreach@womenssupportnetwork.org)*

## WSN Annual General Meeting & Report Launch

Women's Support Network are hosting their Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 10th May 2005. This will be followed by the launch of the Conference Report on Global Feminism following on from the conference we hosted, in partnership with Women into Politics, in December 2004.

Day: Tuesday 10th May 2005

Time: 11.00 - 11.45 Annual General Meeting

11.45 - 12.00 Break

12.00 - 12.30 Report Launch, followed by Lunch

Venue: WSN, First Floor Conference Room, 109—113 Royal Avenue, Belfast.

Kate McCullough (Chair of the Management Board of NIWEP) will Chair the event.

# WSN's International Women's Day

## WSN's International Women's Day Event Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> March at The Edge

This Networking Lunch was a combination of a WSN Membership Morning and a celebration for International Women's Day, and it provided an informal networking opportunity for WSN member groups. Over sixty women were in attendance on the day.



Patricia welcomes everyone to the event

After an initial mingling period, the guests heard an address by Dr. Myrtle Hill (Director of the Centre for Women's Studies at QUB). Myrtle gave us a whistle stop tour of a century of women's activism, against the backdrop of political and social change. She also examined the legacy of women's work in the family, community and wider society in Northern Ireland, and while alluding to the current funding climate and difficulties for many women's groups, she focused on the positive outcome of the work of women and women's organisations.

She concluded by congratulating all the groups and representatives for the work they have done thus far and wished them success in the future. Many of the guests felt that Myrtle struck just the right chord, while mentioning the realities of current difficulties; she concentrated on the successes of the work of the women's sector, which was the appropriate celebratory note for International Women's Day.



Myrtle Hill gives her address

After the address Siobhán spoke to the members and asked them to complete suggestion cards for topics for the remaining two members' days in 2005, she also encouraged all members to attend and contribute on these members' mornings. Perhaps unsurprisingly the two most popular topics were sustainability of the women's sector and increased opportunities for women.



Lunch was then provided, accompanied by cream buns! Everyone had a good day. It was a good opportunity for WSN to catch up with existing members, but we also attracted some new faces – Clan Mor Women's Group attended, and have since become members of WSN.

Over 60 women attended the WSN event The Beijing Quilt was also on show during the event. Women's groups/organisations in Northern Ireland created the patches of this quilt 10 years ago and the quilt was on display to commemorate Beijing +10.



## Policy groupings

### The Ad-Hoc Women's Policy Group

The Ad-Hoc Women's Policy Group was formed in early 2002 as a support group for those within the women's voluntary sector involved in considering policy issues relevant to women on the island of Ireland. The group has since expanded to include representatives of many other organisations such as Women's Support Network, WRDA, Women into Politics, ECNI and fpaNI, as well as academics involved in gender research. It also has a north-south dimension, with the inclusion of WEFT (Women Educating for Transformation) and the National Women's Council of Ireland amongst its membership.

The group acted as a consultative body for the Gender Equality Unit of the Office of First and Deputy First Minister in its pre-consultation meetings for 'Gender Matters'.

Before the November 2003 elections the Ad-Hoc Policy Group worked in partnership with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in producing a Women's Manifesto highlighting a set of demands around key equality issues that women hoped a new Assembly would consider. This was endorsed by a wide range of women's groups, trade unions and other organisations and candidates from all political parties.

The Ad-hoc Women's Policy Group have been central in the organisation of the Women's Equality seminar on 28 April.

### Seminar: Women's Equality: International Standards – Local Strategies

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) and the Ad Hoc Women's Policy Group including Women's Support Network, Women into Politics and the WRDA, are hosting the above conference. It will take place on:

Date: Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2005

Time: 10am—4pm

Venue: NICVA

Lunch will be provided  
Travel & Care cost will be subsidised

This seminar will examine local strategies (North and South), 'Gender Matters' and the National Women's Strategy against international benchmarks such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action.

Participants will be invited to explore international agreements and to discuss how the national strategies are meeting these international commitments.

The seminar will comprise presentations, panel discussion and question & answer sessions.

We hope you will be able to join us at the seminar. Please contact Michael Connolly at the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to register for the seminar on [mconnolly@equalityni.org](mailto:mconnolly@equalityni.org) or by telephoning 028 90500571.

## Women's Policy Forum (NICVA)

The Women's Policy Forum was formed in December 2004. Its aim is 'To enhance the capacity of the women's sector to make policy responses and participate in policy development.'

Membership is drawn from a wide range of women's organisations, including women's centres, rural women's networks and infrastructure organisations, and any group in the voluntary and community sector with a remit in women's policy can join. The Forum will meet 3-4 times per year, and will endeavour to meet in a range of venues. Meetings will be held in the morning to facilitate childcare arrangements.

**The next meeting of the Women's Policy Forum is on the 4th May at Ballybot House in Newry**

For further information, contact Zoë Anderson at NICVA on 9087 7777 or [zoe.anderson@nicva.org](mailto:zoe.anderson@nicva.org)

## WSN Policy work in February/March

### Water Reform in Northern Ireland

In response to the Integrated Impact Assessment, WSN argued that access to clean water should be a fundamental human right. Older women, those performing caring roles, families with young children and large families are all particularly affected by the proposed charges on water and we believe that the proposals will have an adverse impact on these groups.

We do not believe that the proposed relief of 25% will be sufficient. 64% of all households in NI have an income below the average and the bulk of the £300 million raised by the new water charge will be paid by those on low incomes. While there is an assumption that the discount of 25% will be enough to avoid hardship no evidence is presented to support this assumption. If 25% of £320 is deducted, this sum is only £80. This means that £240 must still be paid, which is a large sum for those on benefits.

If there is to be a standing charge of 35% of the total supply, with a cap of £750 to ensure the most expensive properties are not too heavily charged, then the policy will favour those at the higher income levels.

### A Healthier Future

This is a strategy by the Department of Health that aims to make all of us healthier, through life style changes and also by moving away from a model of medical and hospital-based care to one that is more community-based, with health centres having staff working specifically to help people live at home, even if they have serious health problems. Within this overall strategy there will be an important role for the community and in which the women's sector can play an important part in delivering this policy. In our response we welcomed the emphasis on preventative health care, the integration of health and personal social services and the acknowledgement of the importance of the voluntary/community sector in helping to deliver

key sections of the strategy.

We examined various areas including:

Smoking, Sport, Housing, Sex Education, Poverty Issues, Inclusion and involving people in communities. In addition WSN called for:

- the establishment of locally-based well-woman centres to provide an integrated service for women of all ages, with child-care provision included
- the raising of caring allowances
- specialised support for breast-feeding mothers and greater investment in midwife-led maternity units

### Draft Investment Strategy 2005—2015

This OFMDFM Investment Strategy aims to improve our infrastructure - roads, transport, housing, water etc., to make up for years of under- investment. There are good aspects to this, but the strategy appears to rely heavily on private finance and to favour private interests over the public good.

The WSN response called for a commitment to social justice and a move away from a reliance on NI as a low-wage economy. We have various concerns with the Strategy, including:

- The use of private finance and Public Private partnerships
- The emphasis remains on extending the road network rather than improving railways
- We asked for clarification around the promise that everyone will have access to decent affordable housing.
- Water – we believe that water services should remain in social ownership as a not-for-profit concern.
- There is little acknowledgement of the role that could be played by the voluntary and community sector

WSN urged that the ISNI should be subjected to an equality impact assessment so that its economic, social and environmental benefits can be evaluated and adverse impacts minimised.



## WSN Policy work in February/March

### Gender Matters

WSN made it plain in its response that we did not believe that 'Gender Matters' reflected the needs of women. Nor did we believe that it has the potential to develop a strategy to achieve the empowerment of women. The only strategy that could make real change was one that focused directly on women – including older women, minority ethnic women, Traveller women, lesbian women, disabled women and women of different religious and political beliefs and class background. It would also need clear targets and indicators and with sufficient resources to make a difference to women's lives. We based the response on an overview of views expressed during the consultation process.

#### Key action areas

The action areas had to be placed in the context of New TSN and the reality of living in situations of multiple deprivation. A robust anti-poverty strategy had to be incorporated.

#### Employment / gender pay gap / entrepreneurship

The reality of low pay and the double burden of home and work experienced by many women must be recognised. Much more consideration needed to be given to issues concerning flexibility in work. Tax credits, the problems of low pay and the poverty gap, the loss of benefits if working, were vital issues. The term 'economically inactive' was rejected as a patriarchal concept that supported attitudes that prioritised the male breadwinner and the subordinate housewife.

#### Childcare/eldercare/caring role

Everyone felt that society placed little value on the caring role and placed little value on carers themselves. Lone parents urge the government to consult with them when they develop policy.

### Pensions

While OFMDFM do not have the power to change policy over pensions, much of the problem lies with women's economic dependency on men.

#### Education/lifelong learning

The continued discrepancy in wages paid to men and women show that all occupations are not open equally. Girls needed to have equal access to all parts of the school curriculum and professional training needed to have the flexibility that would allow for family life and career advancement. Core funding for education classes in women's centres is needed.

#### Housing/homelessness

Housing shortages was a big issue. It was hoped that a Bill of Rights would stress the importance of the right to a house and thereby encourage an increased provision of affordable housing and social housing.

#### Health and well being

The lack of any mention of reproductive health from the document is a crucial omission. We urge the establishment of well-woman centres and call on the government to allow women in Northern Ireland the same right to choose abortion as an option as women have in the rest of the UK. Young people must have better sex education in schools.

Anti-depressants and tranquillisers continue to be too readily prescribed to women, so that medical conditions can be misdiagnosed due to gender stereotyping. The therapeutic value of complementary medicine continues to be ignored, although our experience in providing many alternative therapies within our centres has demonstrated their value in alleviating stress and depression.

#### Well-being (including suicide)

Suicide is an entirely separate issue, which deserves its own policy response. The lack of mental health



## WSN Policy work in February/March

### GES continued from page 7

facilities for young people is scandalous. Greater resources are also needed to help those family members bereaved by suicide.

### **Family diversity and parenting issues**

As women make up the majority of lone parents in Northern Ireland there must be specific attention to the needs of lone parents. There must also be action from government, from schools and from employers to encourage men to be active parents taking an equal share of parenting responsibilities. We support the rights of gay people to enter into civil registration of their relationship and urge the government to extend this to heterosexual partners.

### **Crime and community safety**

We question the statistics given in 'Gender Matters'. In relation to crime it is stated that men suffer 60% of violent crime. This does not accord with the experience of women. We believe that gender-related violence should be categorised as crime.

### **Gender-related violence and abuse**

Domestic violence as well as rape should be considered as violent crime. Mental as well as physical abuse should be recognised. It should be easier to obtain exclusion orders against violent partners and these should be rigorously enforced. While government support for Women's Aid is acknowledged, there must be greater resources for women's organisations working in the area of gender-based violence.

### **Representation in public life and in senior decision-making roles**

Affordable child-care and flexible working patterns are key issues preventing women from taking part in public life. As men occupy the top level of organisations, they are unlikely to give up power, or to share power willingly, so there must be

positive action to ensure future gender parity. It is important that the strategy works to ensure that women are able to participate on equal terms with men at *all* levels of public and political life. 'Gender Matters' says nothing about enforcing measures to achieve change. We urge the implementation of affirmative action to achieve real change in outcome.

### **Conclusion - A Strategy for Women**

- We call on OFMDFM to reconsider their plan of action and develop a woman-focused strategy, including the multiple identities of women, based on the feedback from the consultation.
- We recommend that international standards on gender equality, CEDAW and the Beijing Platform of Action, form the framework for a plan of action to achieve equality for women. These should be expanded to include UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' in recognition of the important role played by women in conflict resolution and reconstruction.
- Gender mainstreaming can only be only one part of a strategy to promote gender equality. Targeting without mainstreaming will not be effective, but mainstreaming without targeting will maintain the status quo and leave inequalities unchallenged. Positive action measures to eliminate the historic discrimination suffered by women must form part of the strategy.
- We believe that the strategy as it stands is overly complicated and difficult to grasp. A simplified strategy, with clear targets and with resources specified to meet those targets, would have a better chance of capturing the imagination of women and would have more chance of being implemented and monitored.

***A full copy of this response, and all WSN consultation responses are available by contacting the WSN offices.***



## WSN Policy Issues—Up and coming

### **Feedback wanted!**

WSN would like to officially extend a welcome to Margaret Ward, who is currently working as a Policy Consultant for the Women's Support Network. Margaret would appreciate any input you may wish to have into the Network's consultation responses.

Below is a list of some of the consultations WSN will be responding to over the next couple of months. WSN actively seek your input into any of the issues, and if you would like to feed in your views, please call Margaret at the WSN office on 028 9023 6923, or you can email her on [policy@womenssupportnetwork.org](mailto:policy@womenssupportnetwork.org)

Also – if you want copies of any consultation responses, call the office and Margaret can email you an electronic version or post out a hard copy.

### **Forthcoming Consultations/EQIAs**

#### **Draft Disability Discrimination Order (25 April)**

- concerned mainly with public transport and public bodies
- this also extends definitions of disability to include people suffering from a number of conditions (HIV, cancer, MS and mental illness).

#### **Together for Children – EHSSB (13 May)**

Policies for vulnerable children and young people and those in need of additional care.

#### **Charities Review (20 May)**

- Proposals to reform charity administration in NI, so that there would be compulsory registration
- the establishment of a Register of Charities and a Charity Commission for Northern Ireland
- the definition of charitable purpose would be extended to include the promotion of peace
- the promotion of good community relations.

#### **People and Place – Renewing Belfast City Centre (22 May)**

The aim of this strategy is to:

- create a vibrant competitive city as a centre for business, learning, culture, retail, leisure & living
- to enrich the City's retail opportunities
- improve connections for pedestrians within the City Centre
- enhance public spaces and street environments

#### **PSNI S75 Screening (30 May)**

Equality impacts of policies, particularly in the following areas:

- protection of children
- responding to incidents
- policing public events
- stop and search powers
- recruitment of PSNI and civilian staff
- work on crime prevention
- training and education for PSNI trainees.

#### **Work-Life Balance Priorities - Education and Library Boards (31 May)**

Updating and extending provision for flexible working; leave arrangements for exceptional circumstances; carer and parental leave; including civil partnerships within all provisions; ensuring staff of aware of the policies and monitoring uptake.



**New Marital Law in Spain**

A law is to be passed in Spain this month which will add a clause to the marriage contract at civil wedding ceremonies obliging men to 'share the domestic responsibilities and the care and attention of children and elderly family members'.

Margarita Uria, of the Spanish parliament says that 'this is a good way of reminding people what their duties are. It is something that feminists have been wanting for a long time.'

Currently, Spanish women spend 5 times longer on housework than their husbands. Something for us to think about if the Assembly returns!

**Creation of EU Gender Equality Unit**

The European Council has asked the Commission to establish an EU Gender Equality Unit which is due to be up and running by 2007 with a 52.5 million euro budget. The Institute aims to support the EU institutions and the member states in promoting equality between women and men and combating sex discrimination. The unit will provide a focus for the collection, analysis and dissemination of research and information needed by policy makers. It will have a documentation centre and a library which will be open to the public. It will also promote exchanges of information between policy makers, experts and other stakeholders through meetings, conferences and seminars. The Unit will have responsibility for developing tools to help ensure gender equality if integrated into all EU policies.

**WSN Job Opportunity**

Post: Part-time Administration Assistant  
Hours: 19 hrs per week  
(the hours could be flexible to suit, e.g. Monday – Thursday 9.30 – 1.30 & Friday 9.30 – 12.30)  
Salary: Hourly rate of £7.00  
Contract: This is a temporary contact and will be reviewed on a month-to-month basis  
Location: The post is based at the WSN office at 109-113 Royal Avenue, Belfast BT1 1FF  
Application forms can be obtained by writing to the above address or by telephoning 028 9023 6923.

**The closing date for application is  
Friday 29<sup>th</sup> April at 12 noon.**

**Newsletter**

If you require any further information about anything featured in the Newsletter, or if you would like to join our mailing list, or submit information for the Newsletter, please contact:

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**Launch of Communityni.org - Website for the Vol/Community Sector**

A new website for the community and voluntary sector in N.I. has just been launched. This website—www.communityni.org, aims to provide the most up to date and wide ranging information possible about Northern Ireland's voluntary and community sector to ensure that charities get their message out there. Developed by NICVA and funded by Invest NI, the site invites charitable organisations to publish their information - be it news, events, publications, campaigns or services - on this 'portal' website. This website has the makings of a useful reference tool about the sector. The Community NI team hope to see the site content grow quickly as voluntary and community organisations submit their information to make it a 'gateway to the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland'. You can submit information online by visiting the website.

Source: NICVA