

Women's Support Network News

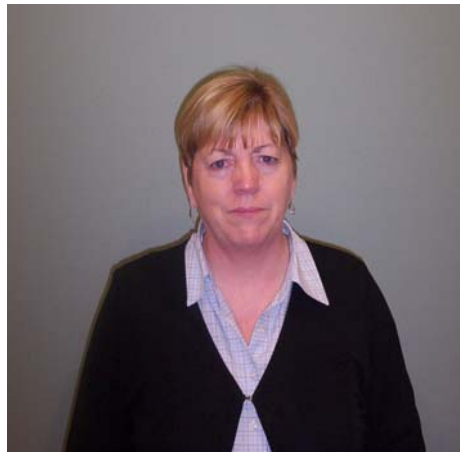
WSN

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A Welcome to our New Director

Patricia Haren took up the post of Director of the Women's Support Network on Monday 4th October 2004.

Patricia was previously employed as Project Director for over 4 years with the Bytes Project, which operates 10 ICT drop-in centres for unemployed 16-25 year olds. On taking up her appointment Patricia said "I am looking forward to working in the Women's Sector and to meeting the local women's groups. Organisations working in the voluntary and community sector are facing challenging times due to changes in funding, public administration etc and I hope that the Women's Support Network will play its part in lobbying for changes



which enhance the role of the WSN member groups and the Women's sector in general".

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Headlines this Autumn

- PEACE II extension measures reduced
- Publication of the Task Force Report
- Single Equality Bill
- Lack of adequate funding for Childcare causing major concern
- The Assembly up and running or not?

CONGRATULATIONS!!

To Ballybeen Women's Centre on its 20th Birthday. This was celebrated at Stormont on October 6th 2004 with Iris Robinson as guest speaker.

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Global Feminism Conference

In preparation for the Global Feminism Conference a series of pre-conference workshops were held in three of the Women's Centres and Women's TEC. Further details are available on page 3. To mark International Human Rights Day, Women into Politics supported by Women's Support Network organised a Conference on Globalisation and the challenges facing women. Dedicated to Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese pro-democracy leader and Nobel Prize winner. Key themes of the conference were issues that define our world, impact on our lives and pose challenges to women both in a local and global context.



Keynote Address

Anna Roberts of the Burma Campaign

Anna has worked in the campaigns department of Amnesty International UK for 7 years, principally on Urgent Action campaigns to encourage members to write letters on urgent cases dealing with issues such as disappearances, torture and the death penalty. In 2000 she started working as Campaigns Officer on the Burma Campaign. The campaign aims to increase economic pressure on the regime in Burma by discouraging investment and tourism at the same time, lobbying the UK government and the European Union to increase political pressure on the regime.



International Speakers

Women in a Globalised Economy

Speaker Nina Lopez

Born and raised in Argentina, Ms Lopez is joint international coordinator of the Global Women's Strike with particular responsibility for the Latin America network. She is a founder of Legal Action for Women, an anti-sexist anti-racist legal service started in 1982 by the International Prostitutes Collective. Nina is also a spokeswoman for the English Collective of Prostitutes, a self-help organisation of prostitute women and supporters. Since 2002, she has been working with the grassroots in Venezuela, especially with the Women's Development Bank (Banmujer) and the users of its micro credit.



Peace-building Women Warriors

Speaker Horia Mosadiq

Horia Mosadiq is a women's rights activist and the first Amnesty International member in Afghanistan to run Amnesty's Kabul office. She is currently the Deputy Director and Communication Manager for the Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium Afghanistan (HRRAC) and assistant for the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission Transitional Justice Section.



Problems without borders

Speaker Thokozani Khupe

Since 2000 Thokozani Khupe has been a Member of Parliament for Makokoba Constituency, a high population density area in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city. She has vast experience in trade unionism having been an active member prior to the formation of the MDC. Within the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions Khupe was elected Secretary to the Women's Advisory Council a position she held between 1989 and 1992.



Challenges and New Opportunities for Women's Movements and Grass Roots Activism Speaker: Dr Jane Pillinger

Formerly the head of trade union education and research at Northern College in the UK, Jane lives in Dublin and works as an independent researcher and policy advisor at the national, European and international levels on issues concerning gender equality, employment and social policy.





Local Speakers at the Global Feminism Conference

The crisis in democracies and its impact on women's lives in Northern Ireland

Speakers Gillian Gibson & Eleanor Jordan

Gillian Gibson

Manager of Footprints Women's Centre, Poleglass, Belfast since 1993, Gillian Gibson has worked in the community sector for almost 20 years. Footprints now employs over 37 staff and has created 46 childcare places per day for women from the local community.



Eleanor Jordan

Job-share Co-ordinator of Windsor Women's Centre, Broadway, Belfast. Ms Jordan has been involved in Community Work with young people and women -in England and Northern Ireland for most of her adult life. In 1989 She started the Windsor Women's Centre in the Village area of south Belfast, the first purpose built Women's Centre in Northern Ireland which provides education, childcare and advice,



Outreach & Development News

Pre-Global Conference Workshops

A series of workshops took place in a variety of venues throughout the Belfast area in late November and early December with a range of issues discussed at each. Organised as a prequel to the Global Feminism conference the workshops were very well attended.

'Women Leading Communities' held at **Womens Tec** on November 22nd 2004. Feedback from this group:- they enjoyed the topic especially the global aspect. The feedback was positive, they thought this was a good introduction to this subject.

'Issues across Borders' held at the **Walkway Women's Centre** on November 25th 2004. Feedback from the group was that this was a first introduction to a very interesting and

positive area of work and they felt they could continue discussing this subject in the future.

'Peace Building Women Warriors' held at **Windsor Women's Centre** on November 26th 2004. Feedback from the group focused on the fact that the women were very familiar with the subject and they felt they would welcome more in-depth discussion in the future.

'Creating a Fair and Equal World' Held at **Falls Women's Centre** on December 2nd. As this group consisted of experienced community workers, they had an in depth awareness of the issues being discussed.

Members Seminar Day

In order to gain the views of its members, WSN with the support of facilitators from Community Change, held a Members Seminar Day on 15th December 2004. A total of 12 member groups attended. It was a very enjoyable and informative day and the group agreed on the following objectives:-

- To gather the views of members on how WSN can support them over the next 12 months.
- Identify main issues for members of the WSN
- Highlight ways of maximising resources in the women's sector

Actions from this seminar include:-

- That Community Change facilitators will type the notes from the workshops to be forwarded to Patricia Haren by Friday 17th Dec for circulation to the members who can add their comments or add items to the list of outputs. These views of members will be presented to the WSN Management Committee in the middle of January 2005
- The organisation of further Member Days as it was felt that the seminar format was a good way of assembling member viewpoints and providing direction to WSN for future work.

Policy Issues

Gender Strategy

Ministers recently announced the publication of the consultation document **“Genders Matters—a gender equality strategy for Northern Ireland”**. This sets out proposals for the development of a new cross-departmental strategic framework to tackle gender inequalities and promote gender equality in Northern Ireland.

The Women's Support Network will work on a joint

consultation process on the Gender Equality Strategy with the Women's Resource and Development Agency who are currently planning and co-ordinating consultations NI wide and welcome the opportunity to organise Belfast based consultations with WSN through the Belfast Women's Centres and other member groups. Patricia Haren will meet with Anne O'Reilly the Director of WRDA in early January to discuss the way forward.

If you require a copy of the document **“Genders Matters—a gender equality strategy for Northern Ireland”** it is available at www.genderequalityni.gov.uk. Alternatively contact the Gender Equality Unit on 028 90(5) 23422 or email them at admin.gender@ofmdfmi.gov.uk. Textphone +44 (0) 28 9052 2526.

Single Equality Bill

The Women's Support Network recently responded to the OFMDFM Consultation Paper, A Single Equality Bill for Northern Ireland. The following is an extract from our response:

We believe that a Single Equality Act (SEA) has the potential not only to harmonise equality law but to extend the scope of equality legislation. We believe that the existence of a variety of legislation aimed at redressing inequalities in a wide range of areas such as:

- sex
- race
- sexual orientation
- marital status
- religious belief
- political opinion
- disability

has led to confusion and unnecessary complexity.

It is the view of the WSN that a single law can address the interests of everyone and will provide a framework to achieve equality for all. We would add, however, that in order to achieve a true equality that recognises the multiple disadvantages suffered by many within our society, much more than a commitment to prohibit discrimination and promote equality of opportunity is necessary. We believe that there is a continuum that ranges from equality of access to equality of condition, as the following illustrates:

- equality of access
- equality of participation
- equality of outcome
- equality of condition.

The WSN believe that the purpose of legislation must be to achieve an equality of outcome so that we may eventually arrive at equality of condition. For example, barriers that prevent women from participation in work and public life, such as:

- inflexible working patterns
- lack of childcare
- the tax-benefit system

must be examined with the aim of achieving not only equality of opportunity but an equality of outcome. In itself, anti-discrimination legislation will not result in equality for women. For this, affirmative/positive action will be necessary.

We welcome the reference to the values of human rights and equality as enshrined in the Belfast Agreement and the commitment to build on existing legislation to promote equality of opportunity 'for the whole community'. As a women's organisation we are aware of the under-representation of women in public life and the consequences this has in terms of development of policy that is sensitive to the particular needs of women, particularly those women living in some of the more disadvantaged areas of the Greater Belfast area. It is important that the SEA complies with existing international laws and conventions such as the CEDAW (Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and that the various and diverse interests of women are fully represented in the extension of grounds as contained within the SEA.

Funding Issues

Peace II Extension

The Network has been keeping members informed about the proposals for the extension of the Peace II Programme and have sent out information so that member groups can contact MEPs, Minister Ian Pearson, the European Commission, SEUPB and anyone who can have an influence on the decision or raise awareness.

The proposals, as they stand, will have a negative impact on the women's sector in Northern Ireland. Measure 1.5 is to be removed. The women's training element is to be subsumed under a general skills measure (1.3) and the childcare element is deleted altogether. Likewise, the removal of the networking measure (4.1) will affect the Women's Support Network as we are currently funded under this measure. This comes at a time when funding to the women's sector from other sources has been reduced and the contribution of women to the process of peace building appears to have been ignored.

The proposals have been drafted by SEUPB and approved by the minister responsible - Ian Pearson. They are currently under discussion with the European Commission. If changes are to be made, they have to be in place by Christmas 2004.

The main arguments against this development are as follows:

- History has shown us that once women have been removed as a group in their own right, they and their needs tend to be forgotten.
- Women require specific support mechanisms, administered by people who understand the issues, separately from general provisions, to achieve equal outcomes.
- This is contrary to UK and Northern Ireland gender mainstreaming policies.
- This is contrary to EU gender mainstreaming policies and stipulations of the use of the Structural Funds, which require specific measures for women.
- This is contrary to international standards, such as UN Resolution 1325.
- The proposals ignore the role women as a group have played in peace initiatives in Northern Ireland.
- Women have been at the forefront of reconciliation initiatives on Northern Ireland, which is the main focus of the extension.

The proposals can be changed. This requires as many organisations as possible, if you have not already done so, whether supported under the Peace Programme or not, to highlight the impacts this will have on the women's sector in practical terms and to show how the women's sector has successfully supported peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Meetings continue to be held on this issue. Please contact TWN for dates and times.

The Investing Together Report

The Director, Patricia Haren, sits on the Joint Government and Voluntary Community Sector forum whose main aims are to review how Government and the Voluntary and Community sector can work together. The report entitled **Investigating Together Report of the Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector** was issued in October 2004. Each member of WSN should have received a copy of this report. If not additional copies can be obtained from Task Force Secretariat, 3rd Floor, Lighthouse Building, 1 Cromac Place, Gasworks Business Park, Ormeau Road, Belfast BT7 2JB or telephone 028 9082 9424, textphone 028 9082 9446 or email taskforce@vcuni.gov.uk. It is also available at: www.tasforcevcsni.gov.uk.

See a summary of the report on page six.

Summary of Investigating Together Report of the Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector

The Investing Together report made recommendations from Pathways for Change consultation to the Minister John Spellar. The report contains recommendations under five key themes;

- Funding Approaches
- Community Development
- Internal Governance, Management and Accountability
- Change Drivers
- Next Steps

The recommendations which could have the biggest impact on the voluntary sector include:

- Government should adopt a ten-year planning framework that supports a mixed economy of activities.
- Government Departments most closely associated with areas of significant development by the voluntary and community sector should lead crosscutting areas of work to achieve a coherent

cross-departmental approach that makes the best use of voluntary and community sector input.

- A Community Investment Fund of £25m per year should be established for the support of local community development activity.
- A coherent system for monitoring, evaluation and audit of statutory funding to the voluntary and community sector should be implemented across Government including an explicit good governance standard as a pre-condition for funding support.
- A 'kite marking' system for accounting systems of voluntary and community organisations should be introduced by Government.
- A Lead Funder approach should be introduced.
- A skills strategy for the voluntary and community sector should be developed.
- A Modernisation Fund valued at £5m, delivered over the next three years, should be established to enhance the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to deliver public services.

And Finally!

WSN would like to wish all their members and supporters

**A Merry Christmas
&
A Happy New Year**



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By post— insert postal details

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Name: _____

Address: _____

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