



# Women's Support Network News

WSN

Volume 2 Issue 2  
February 2005

## Funding crossroads

The 'F' word is never far from our lips in the Women's Sector, and now is no exception. I am referring of course to FUNDING, or to be more accurate, the lack of funding. Much of the funding for women's organisations is coming to an end in the next few months. We are still awaiting the Taskforce report-back on the future funding of the community and voluntary sector almost a year after the consultation ended, and given the delays in the processing of Belfast Regeneration Office (BRO) Neighbourhood Renewal applications and a lack of other funding opportunities - things are looking bleak for many of our member groups.



Eleanor Jordan, Job—share Co-ordinator of Windsor Women's Centre, commented 'the long term effects of this under-resourcing (or even non-resourcing) will have implications across, and beyond, the community and voluntary sector, reducing locally accessible and high quality services for women and their families in many of the recognised and documented areas of greatest need'.

All of the key women's centres such as Falls, Shankill, Footprints, Windsor, Ballybeen and Greenway and women's organisations such as Women's Tec are also affected by this funding crisis. Although this is by no means an exhaustive list.

Mary O'Rawe, Co-ordinator of Ardoyne Women's Group is concerned for the future of the group and the other two part-time staff members, who haven't seen a salary cheque this side of Christmas, she said ...

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### Other headlines this Spring

- PEACE II extension update
- International Women's Day
- Gender Equality Strategy - 'Gender Matters'

## Congratulations

Atlas Women's Centre held their Open Day and AGM in their new premises of 81 Sloane Street, Lisburn on Tuesday 8th February. The day was well attended by representatives of various organisations, The Lord Mayor and Mayoress of the City and a number of local councillors.

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... 'The staff and myself have demonstrated great loyalty to Ardoyne Women's Group, we know the need for our group to continue operating in the North Belfast area and we are continuing to work here without a salary in the hope that we will hear from our potential funder soon'.

Rosanna Holmes, Chair of the Management Board of Women's News fears the closure of the Women's News offices at the end of March 05 '... after 21 years of publishing Ireland's only feminist magazine, we are seriously faced with the reality of having to close up shop'. All four core staff could be out of work by the end of next month.

Belfast Women's Training Services (BWTS) is closing down after 12 years of operation with the loss of four part-time and four full-time staff. This is a major blow to the women's community-based education sector with a loss of 200 training places per year. Since 1993 over 2000 women have completed training courses and personal development programmes through BWTS. Pauline Cunningham, Chair of the Management Board of Belfast Women's Training Services, stated that 'The BWTS closure will be a major loss of holistic, accessible training for women, however the legacy of BWTS is that over 2000 women have embarked upon their journey through BWTS, and these women will continue to progress and move on'.

Atlas Women's Centre in Lisburn, which has just celebrated it's 10th Anniversary, is also facing closure at the end of March. The creche at Atlas Women's Centre serves over 30 families a week, with some 100 students a week attending the courses which range from computing to flower arranging, sign language to first aid. Stephen Reid, the general manager has said 'We are in a desperate situation and it is breaking my heart. If we are not here what is going to happen to those mothers, the children and the elderly? Who will be there for them?'

WSN continues to work with our member groups to lobby funding agencies and government departments on their behalf. We have been doing this through letters of support for member groups, letters of enquiry to funders, face-to-face meetings with funders, funding agencies and government departments. WSN is also playing a key role in helping to organise the 'Funding crisis in the Women's sector March' on Wednesday 23rd February 2005 when representatives from the whole of the women's sector will march from the UTV building on the Ormeau Road to the headquarters of the Department of Social Development in the new Gasworks building, to hand over a letter of protest to John McGrath the Deputy Secretary of DSD (see page 5 for further details on this). WSN will continue to support our members, in whatever way possible, throughout this crisis period.



# Outreach & Development News

## Outreach Visits

Since the beginning of the year WSN have made a number of visits to our member groups, including ATLAS Women's Centre in Lisburn and Ardoyne Women's Group. These meetings provide support to groups, especially those in funding crisis. We will continue to support our member groups by visiting them, being a voice at the other end of the phone and actively lobbying on their behalf.

## Member's Events

As you may know the Member's mornings kicked off again in December. Our IWD event on 8th March will combine a membership function with a celebration in the form of a 'Networking lunch'. Membership mornings will be held once a quarter and WSN hope that they will provide a forum for **ALL** WSN members to share and exchange information, make new

contacts or even meet with old friends. Alongside this networking opportunity, member groups can also impact directly on the work of the Network, helping WSN to meet member's needs.

## Newsletter / Information

The Newsletters 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 [outreach@womenssupportnetwork.org](mailto:outreach@womenssupportnetwork.org)

## Members Seminar Day

As we reported in our last issue, the Member's Day Seminar held on December 15<sup>th</sup> was a very enjoyable and informative day, with 12 member groups in attendance. The group agreed on the following objectives for these Member's Days:-

- 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

WSN hope that these Member's Days will become a regular feature in your calendar. The next Member's Day will be combined with a 'Networking Lunch' to celebrate International Women's Day on the 8th March. (as detailed below).

Day: Tuesday 8th March 2005

Time: 12.00pm - 2.00pm

Venue: The Edge, Mays Meadow, Laganbank Road, Belfast.

Format: 12.00 - 12.30 Welcome Reception

12.30 - 12.55 Address by Mrytle Hill (Director of the Centre for Women's Studies at QUB)

12.55 - 2.00 Lunch

The Beijing Quilt will also be on show at the event. The patches of this quilt were created by women's groups in Northern Ireland 10 years ago and the quilt is on display as we commemorate Beijing +10.

# Global Feminism Conference



Global Feminism Panel of Speakers at the Grosvenor Hall



Conference Participants

## Global Feminism Conference

To mark International Human Rights Day on the 10th December, Women into Politics supported by Women's Support Network organised a Conference on Globalisation and the challenges facing women. The day was 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. Speakers included Anna Roberts of the Burma Campaign, Nina Lopez of the Global Women's Strike, Horia Mosadiq of Amnesty International, Thokozani Khupe, Member of Parliament for Makokoba Constituency, Zimbabwe, Dr Jane Pillinger independent researcher and policy advisor on issues concerning gender equality, employment and social policy, Gillian Gibson Director of Footprints Women's Centre and Eleanor Jordan Joint Co-ordinator of Widsor Women's Centre.



Conference Chair  
Margaret Ward



Learning the African National Anthem

The conference was well attended with 106 women registering for the full day event. The conference was a combination of speakers, question & answer sessions and workshops, highlights included conference delegates learning the African National Anthem.

A full conference report will be jointly produced by Women into Politics and Women's Support Network and will be available later in the Spring.

## Funding Issues

### PEACE II Extension Update

A consultation on the extension to PEACE II, facilitated by the SEUPB took place in September 2004. As you know WSN responded to this consultation on behalf of our member groups. This was subsequently approved by both the British and Irish Governments. Consequently the European Council agreed in October to continue its funding for peace and reconciliation work in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties for a further two years. Despite opposition from a few countries, the European Parliament passed the extension in early January.

So where - after jumping through all these hoops - are we left now? Currently the agreement is that €108 million will be committed to Northern Ireland and the Border Counties for Peace and Reconciliation work for a further two years. However the European Commission had agreed to a €120 million extension so there are to be discussions concerning this extra €12 million. This will be difficult to get hold of as funding for the new programme has to be found from existing budgets and it is technically not designated to this extension.

So although there is going to be an extension to the Peace II Programme, it is by no means cut and dried. This is further complicated by the current restructuring of the Local Strategy Partnerships (LSPs) who are in consultation with Minister Ian Pearson over the future roles they

have to play. In its most basic context, depending on the options presented by Minister Pearson to the LSPs it appears the amount of funding available would make it very difficult for some LSPs to exist in their current form.

Given the options available to them and because they differ greatly it seems that a consensus which satisfies all will be impossible to find. With ongoing discussions, the Minister still receiving views from LSPs and the Monitoring Committee meeting over the additional €12 million, there will almost certainly be a delay in when the actual available funding will hit the ground. We do know that the new Programme will have twelve measures and that the programme (including the extension) will finish in two years.

Concerning developments regarding the twelve measures, the childcare element is definitely being included in the restored women's measure (Measure 1.5.) as confirmed by Minister Pearson. Ongoing discussions regarding Measure 2.5 involve the inclusion of a pre-school childcare element.

So once the Intermediary Funding Bodies have tendered to deliver the money, signed the contracts, agreed and drawn up the criteria, it could be mid to late summer at the earliest before funding from this extension is actually available to apply for.

(Adapted from NICVA GT)

### **Funding Crisis in the Women's Sector March**

On Wednesday 23rd February 2005, representatives of the women's sector will march to the headquarters of the Department of Social Development, to hand over a letter of protest to the head of the DSD. This letter will focus on highlighting the crisis and calling for actions to address this.

#### **The Problem**

A previous letter to Ian Pearson (NIO Minister) asking for the extension of the Executive Programmes funds was met with the advice that the sector 'take advantage of new funding streams such as those recommended by the Taskforce' and 'other funding announcements made in the Priorities and Budget'. However, these sources are not yet available, no final decisions have been made with regard to the Taskforce, monies from the Peace II extension are not expected to hit the ground until mid/late summer and there has been little (positive) processing of Neighbourhood Renewal applications. What will happen to the sector in the meantime? The answer is that groups will close, and indeed are already beginning to do so.

#### **Actions**

- Call for immediate Taskforce decision with actions and timescales
- Extension of Executive Programme Funds for a further year and an immediate announcement on this
- Proper implementation of current funding schemes such as Neighbourhood Renewal
- The establishment of a department/lead role for the women's sector to be implemented as a priority matter.

## Policy Issues

### Draft Skills Strategy

The Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) have issued a draft Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland, which aims to ensure that the investment in learning and vocational training is consistent with the needs of the NI labour market. It also aims to change the existing provision to ensure that the knowledge-based economy is delivered. This change is consistent with a broad policy drive to increase the value of jobs in N I and to sustain recent economic performance.

The consultation period has been extended from the end of January until the 28th of February. Copies of the WSN response will be available from WSN from March 2005.

### Water Reform in Northern Ireland

WSN attended a Public Debate chaired by Noel Thompson in Belfast City Council on 2nd February 2005 on the topic of Water Reform in Northern Ireland. The Panel of Speakers included Alan Walker from the General Consumer Council, Bumper Graham from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Manus Maguire from the Anti-Water Charges Coalition, Mike Smyth from the University of Ulster and David Sterling from the DRD Water Reform Unit who was standing in in the absence of Minister John Spellar who had been invited, but declined to attend. MLAs from Alliance, DUP, Sinn Fein, SDLP, UUP and UK Unionist also addressed the group.

What was clear from the event was that although people understood the need for reform of the water system, the introduction of Water Charges and the move to Water Privatisation was not supported. The key concern was the creation of 'water poverty' and opposition to the current proposals was strong and was backed by support from all of the political parties.

WSN will be responding to the EQIA on the current Water Reform proposals and will keep you informed of any development in future issues of the WSN Newsletter.

### Accessible Transport Strategy

The Accessible Transport Strategy is a consultation paper published by the Regional Planning & Transportation Division of the Department for Regional Development. It aims to reduce the barriers that inhibit older people and people with disabilities from making full use of the transportation system in Northern Ireland.

#### Response synopsis

WSN would have liked to have seen included in the analysis more of the issues that had been raised in the initial consultation, so that there would have been greater recognition of gender issues related to accessibility of public transport. While we realise that the strategy is concerned specifically with older people and people with disabilities, we feel that wider issues of accessibility related to the general population as well as issues more directly relevant to women could have been considered. For example, although the lack of sufficient space for wheelchair users was mentioned, there was no mention of the difficulties faced by parents with buggies in accessing public transport.

### Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

In WSN's response to the Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2005 we focussed on key areas such as Housing, Brownfield developments, Houses in multiple occupation, Townscape character, traffic & Parking, Interface areas, The Green Belt and Inclusion issues.

Copies of our full responses can be obtained by contacting the WSN office.

## Policy Issues

### Gender Matters

In our December Newsletter we informed you of the OFMDFM "**Genders Matters—a gender equality strategy for Northern Ireland**" Consultation. This consultation ends on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2005. It is vital that the Women's sector responds to this document, which sets out proposals for the development of a new cross-departmental strategic framework to tackle gender inequalities and promote gender equality in Northern Ireland.

Women's Support Network has been working in partnership with the Women's Resource and Development Agency on a joint consultation process to respond to 'Gender Matters'.

WSN organised meetings with member groups so that the WRDA's community facilitators could consult with active women's community groups across Belfast.

The purpose of these workshops was to help focus and articulate a response to 'Gender Matters' from a broad based women's sector as well as enabling individual responses from the Women's centres. Women's Support Network will also be responding to this consultation on behalf of all WSN member groups.

The workshops focussed on 17 key response areas, drawn from the consultation document

Workshops were held in Women's Tec, Windsor Women's Centre, Ballybeen Women's Centre, Footprints Women's Centre, Shankill Women's Centre, Greenway Women's Centre & Falls Women's Centre during February .

Some Key issues coming out of the workshops

- the 'vision' of equality does not include women in all their different and multiple identities

- Equality of opportunity is meaningless if people are not equal at the point of accessing the 'opportunity'.

WSN are currently compiling our response on behalf of our member groups and an overview of that response will be contained in our next Newsletter. If you wish to receive a full copy of our response, which will be available from March 2005, you can contact the WSN office.

If you require a copy of the document '**Genders Matters**' it is available at [www.genderequalityni.gov.uk](http://www.genderequalityni.gov.uk). Alternatively contact the Gender Equality Unit on 028 9052 3422.

## Women's Policy Forum (NICVA)

The Women's Policy Forum was formed in December 2004 and has met twice since then. Facilitated by NICVA, 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 most recent meeting was held in Training for Women Network on Wednesday 16 February, at which the main items were the Gender Equality Strategy and the current funding crisis.

Actions arising included the organisation of a protest on 23 February and the decision to submit an overarching Forum response to the Strategy.

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

WSN will keep you informed of the developments of this group in subsequent Newsletters.



The Training for Women Network (TWN) have released details of the 2005 Celebration of Excellence Awards.

These Awards aim to highlight best practice in training & development and also mark the successes of local organisations, recognising the benefits that well trained women bring to local economy & society.

There are twelve categories that organisations and individuals can apply for. These are:

- Personal and Development Award
- Women into the Arts Award
- Developing Entrepreneurs of the Future Award
- Women embracing ICT Award
- Empowering Women into Politics Award

- Peace and Reconciliation Award
- Developing Women in the Service Industry
- Non-traditional Areas Award
- Progressing Women in Business Award
- Innovative Award for Company Practices
- TWN Special Achievement Award
- TWN's Most Promising Achiever Award

Nominations should be submitted by **28th Feb.**

Winners will receive their award at a gala awards ceremony on April 22 at the Culloden Hotel, Belfast where Mo Mowlam will be the keynote speaker.

For further information contact Kellie-Ann Hunter tel 9031 9888 / email [kellie-ann@twnonline.com](mailto:kellie-ann@twnonline.com)

# International Women's Day Events

<b>Women's Support Network</b>	Networking Lunch and Keynote address in The Edge
<b>Windsor Women's Centre</b>	Alternative Health Day in the Olympia Leisure complex
<b>Foyle Women's Information Network</b>	Conference on "Role of Women In Peacebuilding" this will be held in the City Hotel Derry / Londonderry
<b>Newry &amp; Mourne Women Ltd</b>	3-day multi-cultural event inclusive of Young Women and incorporating Newry & Mourne's AGM
<b>Women's Information Group</b>	Information Day on Global Women in Farsett International
<b>Rural Community Network</b>	Exploring Diversity, Sharing Common Ground, Silverbirch Hotel, Omagh

## OFFICE EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE

**Available to women's centres, groups and organisations.**

Due to the very unfortunate closure of Belfast Women's Training Services (BWTS) at the end of March 2005 there is an amount of office furniture available to women's centres groups and organisations. Some of this furniture is only a few months old and in excellent condition. It includes -

- Desks (including corner desks and 3 drawer pedestals)
- Filing Cabinets
- Chairs (including swivel chairs)
- Conference Table
- Stationery Cupboards
- Telephones

If you are interested or require further information please contact Pauline at Footprints Women's Centre on **028 9092 3444** before Friday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2005