

Women's Support Network News

WSN

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Funding still top of the agenda

It might be hard to believe but it is a year since the women's sector took to the streets during the 'Women's Sector March'. On the 23rd February 2005 over 200 representatives of the women's sector marched to the headquarters of the Department of Social Development, to hand over a letter of protest to the head of the DSD. This letter highlighted the funding crisis within the women's sector and called for specific actions to address this namely the extension of Executive Programme Funds for a further year and the establishment of a department/lead role for the women's sector to be implemented as a priority matter.

As you will know from the updates in past WSN newsletters, the Women's sector were successful in their lobby for the extension of emergency funding.



Initially this was for a six-month period that was then extended until the end of March 2006. DSD have also been appointed as the lead department for the women's sector and have been acting as secretariat for the inter-departmental review group whose report on 'Women's organisations providing support and services to disadvantaged areas' has recently been made available to the Women's sector. WSN are currently engaged in a process of consultation with our member groups on the contents of this report (see policy page 7 for further information on this.)

This report concentrates on five key
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Headlines this Spring

- Funding news
- International Women's Day—8th March events
- Gender Equality Strategy update

New WRDA website

Congrats to WRDA on the launch of their revamped website – you can visit it at www.wrda.net



WEAVE move back

WEAVE (Intercomm) have moved back to their newly renovated premises at:
290-292 Antrim Road
Belfast
BT15 5AA

Downtown Women's Building
Women's Support Network
2nd Floor
109-113 Royal Avenue
Belfast
BT1 1FF

Phone: 028 9023 6923/028 9024 4397
Fax: 028 9031 0307

Email: info@womenssupportnetwork.org
Website: www.womenssupportnetwork.org

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areas, namely; Infrastructure, Community Development, Education, Childcare and Advice. There are points to be welcomed in the report, but not all of these five key areas have a clearly identified funding 'home' and there are concerns that those identified will not be ready to pick up the costs at the end of the 31st March when the current emergency funding ends.

Therefore despite the fact that there have been many positive developments in the last year, there are also fears that despite the developments in the past twelve months we are literally in exactly the same position that we were at this time last year. Maybe we need another 'campaign'?

Funding info

Big Lottery's Fund

Northern Ireland will benefit from a £90 million investment from the Big Lottery Fund over the next few years. In January 2006 the Lottery announced plans to develop a number of new programmes in the autumn of 2006.

Areas of funding will include community learning and well-being, healthier and safer communities and longer term support for the voluntary and community sector. The Big Lottery Fund also plans to put more money into Awards for All - the small grants programme in Northern Ireland. For further details of the Big Lottery Fund programmes and grant awards visit their website on www.biglotteryfund.org.uk.



£500,000 for voluntary advice services

Minister David Hanson (DSD) has announced a £500,000 fund, from DSD's Community Support Programme, for voluntary sector advice services. The DSD Press Release announcing this funding states that the money will go directly to local advice centres to make it easier and faster for local people to get help when they need it. It will also be used for the development of advice networks, longer opening hours and better use of technology. The funding will be delivered via district councils through the Department's Community Support Programme. This announcement coincides with the launch of a new government consultation document called A Strategy for Supporting Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community, which seeks the public's views on the delivery of voluntary advice services. The proposed Strategy aims to reduce duplication of services and encourage a spirit of co-operation amongst providers. Copies of the Strategy are available at www.dsdni.gov.uk or from the Voluntary and Community Unit on tel 028 9082 9428, email vcu@dsdni.gov.uk. The consultation will end on 7 April 2006.

International Fund for Ireland

On the 18th January the International Fund for Ireland launched of a new strategy concentrating on community integration, housing and education. A plan for the next five years - entitled 'Sharing this Space' will see a total of £25m injected into reconciliation and community initiatives in the North and along the Border this year. About £4m was earmarked for spending on programmes for children "at risk of disaffection and alienation from mainstream education", while another £9m will be spent on a programme of economic reconciliation on communities either side of the Border. For further information visit the IFI website at www.internationalfundforireland.com or telephone 028 9076 8832

Peace III

It has recently been announced that a total of €200m will be allocated for the Third PEACE programme for the period 2007-2012 under the European territorial cooperation objective (PEACE III). Following the announcement, NICVA is organising three seminars, in conjunction with North-West Community Network and Lisburn Community Network in the Belfast, Derry and Lisburn. The purpose of these sessions is to find out what it is the voluntary and community sector wants and expects from PEACE III

LISBURN, 7 March, 7.00pm-9.00pm, Beechlawn Hotel, Dunmurray

BELFAST, 8 March, 10.00am-12.30pm, NICVA

DERRY, 14 March, 10.00am-12.30pm, The Junction

For further information contact Cathy Breslin at NICVA, Tel 028 9087 7777 or email cathy.breslin@nicva.org by Friday 3 March 2006.



Outreach & Development News

Collating Information

WSN are currently collating statistics on childcare and education. These are two key services provided by women's centres, groups and organisations in local communities. Women gain access to training and education opportunities within and through their local women's centre. For many this avenue is the only one that enables them to access these training & education programmes and courses while providing for individual needs such as learner support and childcare provision. The gathering of this information will help WSN and its member groups to chart the scope of their work as well as provide up to date statistics for any future lobbying on these co-joined issues.

B.A.G.

The Belfast Advisory Group are continuing to meet on a regular basis to enable groups to receive regular updates around the emergency funding situation and

to discuss any issues affecting them. The next meeting will be on Thursday 2nd March in WSN. The purpose of this meeting will be to plan a lobbying strategy on the funding situation of groups with particular emphasis on childcare and education.

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, contact Siobh  n on 9023 6923 or alternatively you can email to outreach@womenssupportnetwork.org

Childcare Update

DSD Review

Section 5.34 of the DSD-led review group report on '*Women's Organisations providing support and services to disadvantaged areas*' examines childcare as one of the five key areas of the work of the women's sector. It had been thought that DHSSPS would be a 'natural' home to resource, or at least to signpost childcare provision. However the Childcare section of the report has proved disappointing in this regard, whilst the DHSSPS recognise the 'important contribution childcare makes particularly in disadvantaged areas,' they don't see any long term scope to address the gap in funding, due to resource constraints.

There is a feeling therefore that DHSSPS need to review their budgets to particularly target disadvantaged areas as this is where the greatest need is, where life changes for children can have a major positive impact on their lives, future education and employment opportunities. At our last meeting with Minister Hanson (DSD) he suggested that it was possible to set up a meeting with Angela Smith (Minister for DE, DEL and DETI).

It is important that we begin to look at a longer term strategy particularly around the funding of childcare and education places. WSN are currently collating and compiling statistics on education and childcare

places provided within and by the women's sector organisations. Through this exercise WSN hope to be able to demonstrate clearly the level of services and also importantly what the potential loss of services in these areas might mean. Of the figures that we have collated so far we can indicate that over two thousand training and childcare places could be lost to women each year.

These losses will affect the lives of women, children and their families in communities which are already recognised as being disadvantaged.

Children & young People's Budget

The announcement of a ring-fenced budget of  50 million over the next two years for Children and Young People in the government's latest Priorities and Budgets was welcome. A formal announcement on the lead body and funding streams to apply to this fund are being eagerly anticipated, an announcement was expected before now but a recent government statement in response to a Parliamentary question would only grant that a statement is imminent.

We do know that the budget has increased from  50 million to  61.7 million and that the fund will be inter-departmental although it appears that the Department of Education are shaping up to be the lead department.

International Women's Day - 8th March 2006

About International Women's Day (IWD)

Around the world, International Women's Day (IWD) marks a celebration of the economic, social, cultural and political achievements for and of women.

The first IWD was held on 19 March 1911 in Germany, Austria, Denmark and other European countries. Now IWD is always celebrated on 8 March and it is an occasion marked by women around the world. This date is also commemorated at the United Nations and is designated in many countries as a national holiday. Women in many countries, often divided by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic and political differences, come together to celebrate this important date that represents equality, justice, peace and development. International Women's Day is the story of ordinary women as makers of history; it is rooted in the struggle of women seeking to participate equally in society and affords the opportunity to reflect on progress made, to celebrate the courage and achievements of women and to continue the campaign for equality and justice.

There are a number of events in NI to celebrate IWD including -

IWD Feast

Multicultural Women's Group Lunch 11.30 -2.30pm
Film screening – Iron Jawed Angels – a film about American Women Suffragettes 11am–2pm
Wood Sculpture Exhibition – Theresa McGinley
Bread and Roses Bookmark for each visitor on the day.

The Women's Centre
Beibhinn House
5 Guildhall Street
Derry City
Tel: 028 7126 7672

All day Exhibition of Artwork

Foyle Women's Information Network
Derry
Tel: 028 7126 6291
Fax: 028 7126 6291

Windsor's Women Centre's Health Fayre

in Partnership with South Belfast-Highway to Health. Activities include:

- Health checks for women
- Multicultural buffet
- Complementary therapies

Transport from 8 different pick up points in South Belfast to the Olympia Leisure Centre.

Contact: 9023 5451

RCN IWD Event

Rural Community Network (NI) are hosting an International Women's Day Event

Wednesday 8th March 2006

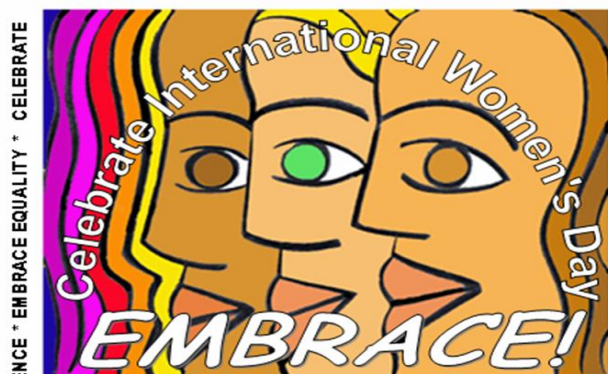
Venue: Dunadry Hotel

Time: 10 am - 3 pm

The theme is – 'Celebrating Women: Strangers or Citizens, barriers to Citizenship'

Key note speakers include Nuala O'Loane, Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Pauline Keegan, Director of Rural Development, DARD as Chairperson.

OUR LIVES * EMBRACE UNITY * CELEBRATE OUR HISTORY



Women's Night

Entertainment

8th March 2006

8pm, White's Tavern, Belfast

Entertainment:

Indian Dancers, Zimbabwean Singer,
Traditional- Cara McCann, 60s & 70s
Disco and more.....

Admission £2

EMBRACE EQUALITY * CELEBRATE DIFFERENCE * EMBRACE EQUALITY * CELEBRATE
* EMBRACE WOMANHOOD * CELEBRATE DIVERSITY * EMBRACE MULTICULTURALISM * CELEBRATE SISTERHOOD * EMBRACE EMPOWERMENT *

International Women's Day - 8th March 2006

Women into Politics (WiP) are hosting an International Women's Conference on the theme of New Perspectives.

This will take place on 7 March 2006 at Lagan Valley Island, Lisburn from 9.30am to 4.30pm. It offers participants the opportunity to meet some remarkable women from Ireland, the UK and around the world, such as guest speaker Julia Kimbell, who will share her experiences as a deaf-blind woman, and Bennie Attoh, Dundalk Democrat Columnist & Independent election candidate in Dundalk Urban Council and County Louth, who will present an 'African Experience' in Ireland. Tanya Hughes from Ballybeen Women's Centre and Majella Murphy from South Armagh Rural Women's Network will give a local perspective.

Workshops will include a session entitled 'How Not to Speak in Public', facilitated by leading voice coach Margaret McAliskey, and 'Today's Feminism', facilitated by Eileen Fegan, QUB lecturer, within the area of Legal Theory & Education, Gender & Human Rights.

For more information, please contact Women into Politics, Telephone 028 9024 3363 or email admin@womenintopolitics.org

BIFHE Women's Studies Department

Belfast Institute & Women's Studies Department are hosting day and evening events on Wednesday 8th March 2006, marking the 70th Anniversary of the Spanish Anti-Fascist War 1936-1939.

The Clarion Call; Women & the Spanish Civil War: A talk and photo/poster presentation will be given by Angela Jackson, in the Central Hall, Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education on Wednesday the 8th March 12.30pm to 15.30pm. (Refreshments at 12.30pm). Edwina Stewart will introduce Angela Jackson and question time/debate will be chaired by Myrtle Hill.

The BIFHE are hosting this event in the College Square East, as part of their Centenary celebrations. On show for the first time will be a

photographic exhibition contrasting women who attended the college in the early part of the 20th century with women who attend the college in the present day.

Social Event: 8th March: In the evening there will be IWD event held in the John Hewitt pub in Donegall Street 7.00pm -late. "Into the Fire" a film about American Women's involvement in the Spanish Civil War will be shown, followed by musicians/singers/poets, Geraldine Bradley, Paul Bradley; Sinead Morrissey, Victoria Gleason and others. All proceed from this event will go the International Brigades Commemoration Committee who intend to establish a memorial to those Belfast people who died fighting with the International Brigade in Spain.

All People Welcome.

For further details contact: Linda Walker by email walker@belfastinstitute.ac.uk or telephone 07751951785

Falls Women's Centre

Falls Women's Centre are hosting a multi-cultural event in their centre, to celebrate International Women's Day. They will also be organising a placard demonstration to raise awareness about domestic violence and violence against women from 12 - 1. (Contact 9032 7672)

NIHRC - Trafficking of Women in N. Ireland

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission invites you to a seminar and round table discussion (with wine and nibbles) in its offices at 3.00pm on International Women's Day, 8 March 2006.

The seminar will consider preliminary research on the nature of trafficking in Northern Ireland, its current policy context and tools that may help provide safety and support. Speakers will include Professor Monica McWilliams, Chief Commissioner, NIHRC; Patricia Campbell, Amnesty International and Rebecca Dudley, Education Worker, NIHRC.

As numbers are limited, please confirm attendance to Bernadette Rooney on tel: 028 9024 3987, email: bernadette.rooney@nihrc.org.

WSN Policy work January—March

Gender Equality Strategy Update

The Women's Support Network is represented on the Gender Advisory Panel (key stakeholders and representatives of women and men who reflect their multiple identities) which was established by the Gender Equality Unit to advise and assist the Unit in finalising the Strategy. The panel met in late December. Since then the draft Strategy has been drawn up and some government departments have completed draft action plans to progress the strategy.

We have been pursuing this work mostly through the women's ad hoc policy group. Generally, the view at this stage is that many representatives are unhappy with the process regarding consultation on the draft action plans and strategy. Overall the process has been incredibly rushed. Furthermore while we have yet to make a formal response to the draft action plans, we are concerned that they have been formulated by pulling together already existing actions that have a 'general' impact on gender, rather than devising actions employing a gender equality analysis. The Women's ad hoc policy group is due to meet later in February to consider the draft strategy and we hope to attend an advisory panel meeting early in March.

Supporting the Cost of Home-Based Childcare

(Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety)

WSN made a response to the above consultation document in early January 2006. This document proposes a new form of approved childcare, which would take place in the parent's home. This would assist parents who work outside of the traditional 'nine-five' Monday-Friday scenario and those with children with disabilities to receive financial systems with childcare costs as part of the Working Families Tax Credit and Disabled Persons Tax Credit.

In responding to this consultation WSN reiterated the fact that access to affordable and high quality childcare remains a significant problem for many parents and particularly women (due to the prevailing view in society that they are the main carer for dependents). While we welcomed this

addition to the range of childcare options available we expressed concern that tax credits would not apply to relatives who were registered home childcarers. We believe that removing this restriction would encourage people in disadvantaged areas to undertake qualifications in childcare and become registered childminders which would in turn lead to an increase in the number of registered childminders, therefore alleviating problems around the general lack of flexible childcare, a particular barrier faced by women and parents in disadvantaged areas.

Priorities and Budget 2006-2008

WSN responded to this consultation in December 2005. This consultation is important as it sets out what government departments are going to prioritise over the next two years. Key aspects of the budget include: A rise in the regional rate of 19% in 2006 to help to meet the costs of the new priority funding packages which are:

- Children and Young People - £61 million
- Skills and Science - £35 million
- Environment and Energy - £10 million

In relation to the above priority funding packages we urged government to ensure that a co-ordinated and strategic approach be employed regarding the delivery of these funds, taking cognisance of the structural gender inequalities that exist with regard to women's access to training, education and employment and the barriers they face regarding economic participation, such as childcare.

We expressed our concern about a number of areas, particularly the dearth of content within the document relating to general equality and human rights issues. There was also little consideration given to the development/implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy. We further expressed the concern that the proposed substantial rise in taxation, i.e. rates and water charges, is not balanced with strategic policies such as the implementation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Northern Ireland Bill of Rights. This increase in taxation will have a negative and disproportionate impact on women generally in Northern Ireland, as women are much more likely to be economically inactive, in low paid and/or part-time work and the vast majority of lone parents are women.

WSN Policy work January–March

Women in Public Life

The Women's Support Network is undertaking research into how many of our members are represented on public bodies. A student from Queen's University, Eileen Rice, is undertaking research in this area for her undergraduate thesis and is assisting us with this project. We have sent out questionnaires to WSN members asking that the co-ordinators/managers, management committees and 5 users complete them.

We are interested in finding out how many women are involved in public life and also seeking information on the amount of 'voluntary' work women are engaged in through participation on management committees of local community organisations.

When we get the above information in, we will compile a report detailing the findings of the research. We also hope to identify any training or other needs that WSN members may have in this area. For those of you who have not already done so, please take the couple of minutes to complete the questionnaire and where possible send it via e-mail to members of your management committee. A large response to the survey will mean that our analysis and final report will be better informed.

Participating on Public Sector Boards

The Belfast Institute is pleased to offer a new programme entitled "Get On Board". This is an accredited programme designed to break down many of the barriers to public appointments in Northern Ireland. The main focus of this programme is to make the public appointments process more accessible to everyone in Northern Ireland. The course is aimed at individuals who are interested in, or are currently holding public appointments.

If you would like to apply for the course or register your interest, please contact Roisin Shaw on 028 9026 5471 or email rshaw@belfastinstitute.ac.uk.

Consultation on the Report of The Review Group on Women's Organisations Providing Support and Services to Disadvantaged Areas.

This review group on Women's Organisations Providing Support and Services to Disadvantaged Communities was established in April 2005 following a concerted lobbying campaign undertaken by the women's sector to highlight the potential loss of services in their local communities. Although, the Government Review Group (comprising of seven departments) produced the report in September 2005, it was received by the Women's sector in November 2005. A number of areas are considered in the report, namely:

- Infrastructure
- Community Development
- Education
- Childcare
- Advice

WSN are in the process of consulting on the content of the review document. We want to know your views, positive, critical or otherwise. If you have not received a copy of the report and questionnaire, please contact WSN and we can forward a copy. Following this consultation process we will produce a report detailing the views received and this will be forwarded to the Voluntary and Community Unit in the Department for Social Development.

Forthcoming Consultations

New Post-Primary Arrangements and Proposal for a draft Education (Northern Ireland) Order, Department of Education. **Closing Date – 7th March 2006**

Rural Strategy 2007 - 2013, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, **Closing Date – 7th April 2006**

Strategy for Supporting Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community, Department for Social Development. **Closing Date – 7th April 2006**

A New Deal for Welfare – Empowering People to Work
Department for Social Development. **Closing Date – 21st April 2006**

If you want copies of any WSN responses -call the office and Lynn can email/post you a copy. Alternatively you can view/download our policy/consultation responses on our website - www.womenssupportnetwork.org



NEWS

Barnardo's - Beyond the Shadows

Beyond the Shadows aims to fight against the sexual exploitation of children and young people, including abuse through prostitution, trafficking and abuse via the internet. This service has been developing since 2002. Its aims are:

Awareness raising: - with children/young people, their families/carers, agencies/staff working with children/young people, elected representatives and the general public.

Information gathering: - to identify and offer safety to children/young people under threat of exploitation through the gathering of information about them, those who are exploiting and abusing them, where it is occurring & what forms of abuse are taking place.

Prevention: - through education, the sharing of information and lobbying for changes to policy and legislation.

Protection: - to address which protective services are needed to support children and young people who are victims of exploitation in order that they can be given protection, support and exit strategies. To assist relevant statutory and voluntary agencies to exercise best practice & develop policy frameworks.

Barnardo's strives to achieve these aims through a multi-agency approach. Barnardo's aim to challenge many of the myths about the children and young people who are abused in this way. These include the myth that many of them are deserving of the plight. These children and young people rarely make an informed choice to do this. For most there will be factors stemming from early childhood, combined with unmet emotional, social or physical needs, which leave them open to exploitation by manipulative, predatory adults who are only too ready to take control of them.

Since the inception of the service it has become apparent that the problem is not easily visible; hence, little is known about the scale of the problem. One of the greatest difficulties is the hidden, clandestine nature of the activity, and it is difficult for any agency to gain much more than anecdotal information. Many believe that if the problem is not visible on our streets it is not happening; this must be challenged. For this reason a pro-active strategic response and a philosophy and practice of inter-agency working are required to protect our children and young people. We must actively seek out these children and young people while the police must actively investigate and prosecute those who abuse

and exploit them.

For further information contact:

Michelle Harris (Senior Practitioner)

Barnardo's Northern Ireland – Beyond the Shadows

Telephone: 028 90233 646

Email; michelle.harris@barnardos.org.uk.

Gender equality 'is decades away'

Women are still decades away from attaining the same status as men in public life according to the Equal Opportunities Commission.

In a report launched at the end of January, the Equal Opportunities Commission says the pace of change in politics is very slow, and that it will be 200 years before equality reaches Westminster. Women now make up nearly half the workforce, but the EOC research says only a minority attain senior positions in both the public and private sectors.

In large companies, the judiciary and the police force, only about 10% of senior roles are held by women, the EOC study says. And while 20% of MPs are women, the rate at which they are progressing in politics is slower than in other areas. The commission says it will take 200 years for women to gain equal power in politics, unless the main parties make more effort to redress the balance.

Commission chairwoman Jenny Watson said: "Thirty years on from the Sex Discrimination Act, it is time for us to face some stark facts. "Women will not make it to the top in significant numbers unless action is taken to remove the barriers that stand in their way, and Britain will continue to miss out on women's skills and talents for another generation."

But Iain McMillan, of the Confederation of British Industry, said the EOC were "going overboard". He further claimed - "It's not realistic to aim for having 50% of men and 50% of women in every workplace because of people's life choices. Some leadership roles in senior management require a lot of full-time dedication and simply won't accommodate work-shares or childcare breaks."

Other findings suggested it would take another 20 years before there was equality in the top management of the civil service and 40 years before women were treated equally at director level of FTSE 100 companies. It would also be a further 40 years until there was equality in the senior judiciary.

The research did point out that in some areas women were "reaching critical mass in some areas, including as heads of professional bodies (33%) and national arts organisations (33%)".

The commission has called for a legal requirement on employers to promote sex equality - and for more senior women to be allowed to work flexible hours.

Source BBC (Adapted)