

A Response to: Community Safety Strategy

Issued by the Department of Justice

April 2011

Introduction

- 1.1. The Women's Support Network (WSN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.
- 1.2. The Women's Support Network (WSN), established in 1989, is a regional organisation that works across all areas of Northern Ireland. It includes in its membership community based women's centres, groups and organisations, with a concentration in disadvantaged areas. WSN is a charitable and feminist organisation, which adopts a community development approach. We provide a range of support and services to 62 community based women's centres, projects and infrastructure groups and 22 associate members drawn from across the community and voluntary sector who support women, families and communities. (see Appendix 1).
- 1.3. Our members provide a wide range of women-centred front line services across Northern Ireland, including:
 - Specialist Advice
 - Childcare and Family Support
 - Counselling, Support and Advocacy
 - Complementary Therapies
 - Training & Education
 - Health & Wellbeing Programmes
 - Personal Development & Employment Support
 - Volunteering, Leadership & Empowerment
- 1.4. WSN aims to achieve social, political and economic justice through the promotion of the autonomous organisation of women. The Network aims to strengthen the collective voice of women's groups and to promote and develop networking opportunities, to enable collective action and to impact upon policy and decision making processes. WSN provides an accessible, feminist, relevant and high quality support service and resource for its member groups. The Network is also an important information resource on issues relevant to community based women's organisations and for other infrastructure groups, nationally and internationally.

- 1.5. Over the past 30+ years, the community based women's sector has developed a range of front-line services such as childcare, support, advice, and education & training services in response to the needs they identified at a grass roots level. Women's groups continue to meet the particular needs of women and their children living in areas considered to be some of most affected by the conflict, and recognised as some of the most disadvantaged areas across Northern Ireland today.
- 1.6. Network members are actively engaged with their local communities, cross-community initiatives and regional structures throughout Northern Ireland.

2. Comments

The Women's Support Network held focus groups and consulted members via questionnaires to garner their views on building a safer, shared and confident community. Below we have highlighted the issues raised.

General:

In any policy which has an impact on a community, it is vitally important that the community should be an active participant in the planning and delivery and not the usual 'passive' presence in terms of being 'consulted'. We strongly recommend that before establishing the new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, that local people are actively involved in setting the priorities and that there is a gender balance on any Partnership established considering women are underrepresented in many aspects of life. For example, the number of women in public appointment roles in Northern Ireland was only 449 compared with men at 880¹ and in a recent report by Lord Davies only 12.5% of members of corporate boards of FTSE 100 companies are women.²

¹ Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report 2009/2010

² Women on Boards, Lord Davies Review, February 2011

Early Intervention

Participants believed the answer to safe and confident communities lies in early intervention work. And that any community safety strategy should be hybrid in nature i.e. it will deliver simultaneously in relation to both the welfare of a community as well as crime control.

Participants highlighted the important role of the community based women's sector in early intervention work; some stating that supporting programmes that build confident mothers will in turn produce confident, happy and secure children and families. It was strongly felt that more funding was needed for parenting classes, confidence building work and detached youth workers to establish a 'youth buddy system'.³ Continued support is needed for the work of the community based women's sector in early years/childcare provision. This important work plays a major role in childhood development which provides an excellent start in life.

This intervention strategy would give a multi-dimensional approach to responding to the needs and risks faced by women, children and young people. This system would positively influence individual children's behaviours and prevent them from experiencing a range of damaging impacts.

Linkages:

For such a strategy to work there needs to be a link between all government departments as well as other agencies. Participants highlighted their concern over government departments' lack of partnership working. For instance there needs to be well established links to provide services structured for out of school activities and learning, holiday and weekend activities for children and families and home supporting packages such as those offered by Sure Start and the community based women's sector. These will help build safer and confident communities by allowing young people and their parents to engage in constructive activities, gain new skills, increase their confidence, and raise educational achievements and to reduce negative behaviour.

³ Buddy system is where a young person becomes a mentor for another young person see: <http://www.childtrends.org/lifecourse/programs/thebuddysystem.htm> accessed 08/04/11

The participants strongly advocate for policy initiatives that are focused on the welfare of children and their families and WSN fully support this.

Delivering in Partnership:

Ensuring a multi-agency presence in communities, working with local people to deliver local solutions with a problem-solving approach could have such a positive impact. WSN strongly support this method of working.

Measuring Success:

WSN have some concerns over the main dominant form of evidence that is used to assess performance in the field of community safety. The use of statistical crime data could be problematic as it is not the only indicator of community safety. We would like to see the use of evaluations of innovative strategies and initiatives being taking into account. For example, the community based women's sector is a driving force behind many innovative projects and programmes that deliver confident, shared and safer communities.⁴ They provide education, childcare and after school provision, working with women and families in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland. Further support from all government departments is needed for such projects within the community based women's sector that are targeted and tailored to local people.

Reassuring the Community:

Confidence in policing is lower within the 20% most deprived areas of Northern Ireland (73%)⁵. Similarly at a local level almost one-in-five adults (18%) rated the performance of their local police as 'poor' or 'very poor'.⁶ To meet the objectives set out within the strategy more work is needed to ensure that police engage with communities on a local level.

Communication:

Communicating and actively involving communities takes time. Moving forward at a quick pace often means communities are not being consulted or involved in the process properly. The following list highlights some

⁴ WSN for WCRP: Women's Centres' Community based education Jan 2008

⁵ Department of Justice: Perceptions of Policing 2009/10 – December 2010 Pg 5

⁶ Ibid

suggestions made on how to communicate more effectively with communities, this list is not exhaustive:

Method	Target Audience
Surveys – postal and online	All residents including young people
Public meetings, forums and focus groups	All
School councils	Young people / parents
Dedicated website	Allow young people to respond to consultations interactively
Newsletters/DVDs	All
Establishing youth councils/junior citizen initiatives	Young people / parents

The above suggestions could also help address the fear of crime generators and encourage positive engagement and ownership.

Conclusion:

WSN welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation document. Whilst welcoming this document, we have offered some constructive recommendations as to how it could be improved. We are happy to further discuss this response if required.

For further Information, contact:

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MEMBERSHIP 2011

	<u>Member Group</u>
1	All Ireland Mother's Union
2	An Munia Tober (Travellers)
3	Antrim & Ballymena Women's Aid
4	Ardmonagh Women's Group
5	Ardoyne Women's Group
6	ATLAS Women's Centre
7	Al Nisa Women's Group
8	Ballybeen Women's Centre
9	Ballymurphy Women's Group
10	Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid
11	Belvoir Women's Improvement Group
12	Carrickfergus Women's Forum
13	Carew II
14	Causeway Women's Aid
15	Chrysalis Women's Centre
16	Clan Mor Women's Group (Sure Start)
17	Derry Well Woman
18	Derry Women's Centre
19	Falls Women's Centre
20	First Steps Women's Group
21	Footprints Women's Centre
22	Foyle Women's Aid
23	Foyle Women's Information Network
24	Granaghant District Women's Group
25	Greenway Women's Centre
26	Kilcooley Women's Centre
27	Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative
28	Lesbian Line
29	Lenadoon Women's Group
30	Ligoneil Family Centre
31	Link Women's Group
32	Manor Women's Group
33	Markets Women's Group
34	NI Women's Aid Federation
35	NI Women's European Platform
36	Fermanagh Women's Network
37	Newry & Mourne Women
38	Newtownabbey Women's Group
39	Older Women's Network NI
40	Omagh Women's Aid
41	Rape Crisis Centre
42	Rasharkin Women's Group
43	Shankill Women's Centre
44	Strabane & Lifford Women's Centre
45	Strathfoyle Women's Centre
46	The Learning Lodge
47	Voices Women's Group

48	Waterside Women's Centre
49	Windsor Women's Centre
50	Women Connect Project
51	Women into Politics
52	Women's Information Group
53	Women's News
54	Women's TEC
55	Women 2 Gather
56	Women's Resource & Development Agency
57	WISPA (Women in Sport & Physical Activity)
58	Ardcarn Women's Group
59	OIYIN Women's Group
60	Mossley Women's Institute
61	Mount Vernon Women's Group
62	Coole New Opportunities
63	Foyle Women's Aid
	<u>Associate Members</u>
1.	Ballymena Community Forum
2.	CiNI
3.	Community Relations Forum
4.	East Belfast Community Partnership
5.	Employers for Childcare
6.	HIV Centre (Women's Support Group)
7.	Mencap
8.	National Women's Council of Ireland
9.	Playboard
10.	RNIB (Women's Group)
11.	Good Morning Newtownabbey
12.	Monkstown Community Association
13.	WAVE Trauma Centre
14.	WEA
15.	Parents Advice Centre
16.	Templemore Community Action Group
17.	Gingerbread
18.	Larne Community Development Project
19.	Community First Coaching
20.	Changing Faces
21.	Sands NI