

## NEWS

### A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland

As part of a series of roundtable discussions on the proposed Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) hosted an event on 24 September for Non-Government Organisations at Stormont Hotel.

The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) is currently preparing its response to the NIHRC recommendations on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland made in December 2008 ([www.nihrc.org](http://www.nihrc.org)).

It is anticipated that the NIO response will be opened for public consultation between October and December this year.

### Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative (LASI)

LASI has moved to bigger and brighter new office premises that will allow them to provide a long-needed community resource space for lesbian and bisexual women in Belfast.

Feel free drop in for a cuppa and a tour of their new offices at 9-13 Waring Street, 2nd Floor Belfast BT1 2DX

T: 028 9024 9452

E: [info@lasionline.org](mailto:info@lasionline.org)

W: [www.lasionline.org](http://www.lasionline.org)

## A Warm Welcome to our New Members

### Full Member: Women 2gather, East Belfast.

The group meets on a Friday morning to help women with mental health problems. They offer support, companionship and courses. If you would like more information please contact Cathy at [women2gather@hotmail.com](mailto:women2gather@hotmail.com).

### Associate Member: Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB).

RNIB organize and deliver confidence building and personal development courses, IT training, and volunteer placements to blind and visually impaired women. For further information email [Annmarie.houston@mib.org.uk](mailto:Annmarie.houston@mib.org.uk).

### Associate Member: Community Relations Forum, Newtownabbey.

The CRF has been established in the Baron Hall, Newtownabbey. They work with all people throughout the Borough and beyond, on issues of good relations. They will soon be running a programme for women on history and culture.

### Associate Member: Children in Northern Ireland.

CiNI is the regional umbrella organisation for the children's sector in NI. It aims to enhance the lives of all children in Northern Ireland by promoting the work of the children's sector and maximizing positive outcomes for children, young people and their families. For more information go to [www.ci-ni.org.uk](http://www.ci-ni.org.uk).

### Associate Member: PlayBoard NI.

PlayBoard NI campaign, raise awareness and develop partnerships in order to promote the child's right to play and the holistic benefits thereof. They aspire to put children and young people's play related issues onto the agendas of policymakers and resource providers. If you'd like to know more about PlayBoard NI visit their website at [www.playboard.org](http://www.playboard.org).

Women's Support Network is funded by the Department for Social Development, through VCU (Voluntary & Community Unit)



Women's Support Network are proud to hold the IIP Award, recognising our commitment to training and development.



### Join Us

As a membership organisation, the Women's Support Network is committed to supporting the development of women's organisations, enable collective action and positively impact on policy and decision making processes.

We can provide your organisation with the following services:

- Information to support your group
- Networking opportunities and events
  - Outreach Support
  - Advice and signposting
- Policy consultations and campaigning
- Promotion of the Women's Sector

For further information on how to become a member or subscriber please visit our website at [www.wsn.org.uk](http://www.wsn.org.uk).

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October 2009

# Women's Support Network News



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Newsletters Work!  
E-news Works!  
Action Works!  
We Work!

Welcome to our new, and we hope you agree, improved Women's Support Network Newsletter!

This edition is packed full of information, news and updates which we hope you will find useful. We will continue to keep you up to speed on the issues that matter.

If there is anything you would like us to cover feel free to get in touch. We're always happy to hear from you.

Best Wishes

Women's Support Network Team

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**Downtown Women's Building**

**Floor 2**

**109-113 Royal Avenue**

**Belfast**

**BT1 1FF**

**T: 028 9023 6923**

**E: [info@wsn.org.uk](mailto:info@wsn.org.uk)**

**W: [www.wsn.org.uk](http://www.wsn.org.uk)**

**Inland Revenue Charity no:**

**XR40415**

## Gender Equality Strategy

The Gender Equality Strategy 2006-2016 provides a framework for action to promote equality for women and men in Northern Ireland. A copy of the strategy can be found on the OFMDFM website: [www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk](http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk).

The strategy is supported by Departmental Action Plans, which outline what each department plans to do in order to address gender inequality in their own particular area of work.

These action plans have been developed in consultation with a group of community representatives set up by the OFMDFM Gender & Sexual Orientation Equality Unit (the Unit), known as the Gender Advisory Panel (The Panel). A list of the representatives of the Panel can be found on the WSN web site [www.wsn.org.uk](http://www.wsn.org.uk).

The Action Plans are now in final draft form, and the Panel has had the chance to review them.

On 11th September, the Unit informed the Panel that the OFMDFM Assembly Committee wanted to meet on 23<sup>rd</sup> September to discuss the draft Action Plans, and to obtain their overall views on how the Gender Equality Strategy was progressing. On the day of the meeting, Panel representatives were joined for lunch by Junior Minister, Robin Newton.

The Panel was disappointed that the OFMDFM Committee were restricting the number of Panel Members to four so after a discussion, it was agreed that five Panel representatives would be put forward — four from the women's sector and one from the men's sector: Annie Campbell (Women's Aid Federation), Patricia Haren (Women's Support Network), Bronagh Hinds (Women's National Commission), Margaret Ward (Women's Resource and Development Agency), and Michael Lynch (Men's Action Network).

A briefing paper with the main points was drawn up and circulated to the Panel for comments. You can obtain a copy of this paper at [www.wsn.org.uk](http://www.wsn.org.uk).

Unfortunately Annie was unable to attend on the day so the remaining four went on to meet the OFMDFM Committee.

Two OFMDFM officials, Eileen Sung and Gerry Mulligan, introduced the Panel and set the scene. Our representatives had 30 minutes to present their briefing paper and take questions from the Committee. After which, Eileen and Gerry returned to the Committee to answer questions and clarify the points raised.

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## WSN ON... CHILDCARE

EYSA – The Early Years Strategic Alliance was established by Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) and the Women's Support Network (WSN), to promote joint-working with and between representatives from key organisations in the child care and women's sector. The Alliance meets quarterly with venues rotating between WSN and CiNI. Its main focus is to review the 'Early Years Manifesto', which was developed by the Alliance and launched by the Education Minister. EYSA also plays a role in lobbying government on issues relating to childcare, such as advocating for a Childcare and Early Years Strategy for Northern Ireland.

The most recent EYSA meeting was hosted by CiNI on 23 September. The focus of the meeting was the progress of the Childcare and Early Years Strategies and other lobbying issues, including producing briefings for MLAs on childcare, and requesting meetings with relevant civil servants and politicians. The Women's Support Network aims to provide EYSA updates on our website on an ongoing basis, and will post EYSA minutes when they become available.

If you are interested in joining the Alliance, contact Outreach Officer, Caroline McCord at WSN, T: 028 9023 6923 or [outreach@wsn.org.uk](mailto:outreach@wsn.org.uk)



Kilcooley Women's Centre was formed in 1995 when five women and a tutor decided to set up a group whose aim was to promote and establish an education programme for women.

Today this group has an average of 250 women in educational classes and around 100 participating in the healthy living project.

Their mission statement is

### 'Creating a Caring and Learning Community'

Kilcooley Women's Centre offers a wide range of training and education courses for women. New courses starting for 2009 include GCSE English, Sociology, Maths, AS Level Sociology, ECDL, CLAIT, Introduction to IT, Womens Studies, C.V. Building, Nutrition, Weight Club, and

## Member Spotlight on...



Glass Painting.

They also offer Conflict Resolution and Peace and Reconciliation Training.

This year has seen the start of a new era for the group as they are now able to offer accredited courses in their own right.

The group has achieved accreditation status from AQA, CCEA, OCR, OCN and BCS.

This will ensure that the courses on offer can be tailored to the needs of learners.

The Centre has charitable status, and is funded through Department of Social Development, TWN, Peace 3, European Social Fund, the Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund, Lloyds TSB, Bombardier, Proteus

and the Christian Brothers, to help women with their training costs.

The Women's Centre was formed by local women, for local women— whilst we turn no woman away, Kilcooley Women remain our first priority.

For further information:

Kilcooley Women's Group  
Kilcooley Primary School  
Ganaway Avenue  
Bangor, BT19 1QS  
T: 028 9147 8292

W: [kilcooleywomenscentre.org.uk](http://kilcooleywomenscentre.org.uk)

The "Advancement of Women Programme" project is part funded by the European Social Fund



## Women and Pensions

The state pension age for women, currently 60, will be gradually moved upwards over the next decade to bring it in line with the pension age for men, which is currently 65.

The revised age depends on your date of birth. If you were born before 6 April 1950, then you will still be able to get your state pension at 60.

If you were born between 6 April 1950 and 5 April 1955, your

state pension will be paid to you at a set date, which will be somewhere between your 60th and 65th birthday.

If you were born on or after 6 April 1955 your state pension age will be the same as that for a man.

State pension ages for both men and women will then move on one year per decade between 2024 and 2046, so that by 2046 the

state pension age for men and women will be 68.

Entitlement to the basic state pension depends on, amongst other things, the amount of full rate national insurance (NI) contributions you have paid over the course of your working life.

These changes will be of particular benefit to women when they come into force on 6 April 2010.

### Pension Questions & Answers:

**I am divorced and under my state pension age. Will my ex-husband's national insurance record help me? Will this still be the case if I re-marry before my state pension age?**

For the purpose of claiming a state pension you can have your former spouse's record of national insurance contributions substituted for your own.

None of this applies if you remarry before you reach your state pension age. Instead you will, if necessary, be able to claim 60% of your new husband's basic state pension when he reaches his state pension age.

**I am single, over 60 and only have a small pension. Is there a top-up pension I can claim?**

Pensions Credit is a means tested benefit, that can be claimed by people aged 60 or above living in Great Britain. Pension Credit guarantees recipients in this age bracket an income of at least:

- £130.00 a week if you are single
- £198.45 a week if you have a partner

Also, if you or your partner are 65 or over you may be rewarded for saving for your retirement, up to:

- £20.40 if you are single
- £27.30 a week if you have a partner

## EYE ON IT— Health in Pregnancy Grant

**REMEMBER**—if you're a mum-to-be you may be able to get a one-off, tax-free payment called the **Health in Pregnancy Grant**.

The money is to help you with costs in the run up to your baby's birth.



### How to claim

You can only get a claim form from your midwife or your doctor, if that is who you see for your ante-natal appointments. They will:

- usually give you the claim form at your next ante-natal appointment after your 25th week of pregnancy;
- need to complete, sign and date their part of the claim form before giving it to you.

Once your midwife or doctor has completed their part of the claim form, you fill in the rest and send it in the envelope provided to:

HM Revenue & Customs  
Health in Pregnancy Grant  
Comben House  
Farriers Way  
Liverpool  
L75 1AX

## Women and Public Appointments

The Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie (MLA), has announced the appointment of six Commissioners to the new **Charity Commission for Northern Ireland**.

Two of which are women:



Patricia Sloan  
Deputy Chief Charity Commissioner

Ms Patricia Sloan is currently National Head of BBC Children in Need in NI and was previously Chief Executive of the NI Human Rights Commission. She serves as a board member of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.



Ms Angila Chada  
Charity Commissioner

Ms Chada is an Executive Director of Springboard and Board Member of Intercomm. She serves as a member of Belfast City Councils Migrant Forum, Ethnic Minorities Forum and Good Relations Partnership.

## Member News/Events



### EAS: Employability & Skills Project

The Employability & Skills project is run by the RNIB across all four of our sites in Northern Ireland. It is partly funded by the European Social Fund, Department of Education & Learning, and the Disablement Advisory Service. We are currently in the second year of a three year project & last year saw over 70 participants take advantage of the courses we offer. As the winter approaches, perhaps EAS has something to offer you?

EAS is aimed at blind or visually impaired individuals who are of working age but currently unemployed. The project is designed to assist in the development of the skills necessary to gain employment or a place in further education.

The project is composed of three elements -

### Confidence Building IT Training Work Placement

Participants can elect to complete one element, any combination of two elements, or all three.

For further information or advice on these programmes, please contact the following

**Ryan Bowes—**  
RNIB  
40 Linenhall Street  
Belfast  
T: 028 9032 9373

**Annamarie Houston -**  
RNIB  
9 Magazine Street  
Derry  
T: 028 7136 6060

**This project is part financed by the European Social Fund and the Department for Employment and Learning**

## ATLAS WOMEN'S CENTRE NEWS



*Any excuse for the Lisburn women to have a party!*

On September 24<sup>th</sup> staff, directors, volunteers and course participants raised a glass to Arthur and 30 other women. The celebration was not only for Arthur's birthday but to mark the achievement of many women who attend ATLAS Women's Centre.

A group of women organised the entire event, which consisted of a three course meal, quizzes, a sing-along, spot prizes and dancing.

What a great way to build confidence, learn new skills and meet people.

## Women in Public Life

Women are significantly under-represented across many areas of decision-making in political and civic life in Northern Ireland.

We currently have 18 out of 108 MLA's, 126 out of 520 local government councillors, and three out of 18 MP's who are female. 33% of people currently appointed to public bodies are women. In June of this year, two out of three MEP's elected were female.

WIP is the only NGO in Northern Ireland whose main strategic focus is to progress

more women into decision making in public and political life.

Our work is based on long-term outcomes. We deliver political leadership skills training to grassroots women across NI, promote non-sectarian political dialogue, and engage with political parties to address flaws within their recruitment and selection processes.

We are also working in partnership with NILGA on a Mentoring and Shadowing scheme for



political activists, signed up to by all political parties.

WIP have a variety of programmes to enable women to strengthen their decision-making skills, which are accredited by ILM (Institute of Leadership and Management).

For further information please contact Isobel Loughran (Training & Education Co-ordinator) or Nuala McCusker (Administrator) on T: 028 9024 3363. And please visit our website: [www.womenintopolitics.eu](http://www.womenintopolitics.eu)

## The Women's National Commission—Women in Public Life Guide

The Women's National Commission (WNC) is the only official, national body working on women's equality.

The WNC plays a major role in bringing the voice of women to government, particularly those women who

may not be represented by mainstream organisations. can become active in public life and why women's representation is so vitally important.

The WNC have now published a hard copy of the **Women in Public Life Guide**.

This publication explains how women

A copy of the Guide can be accessed here:

[http://www.thewnc.org.uk/publications/cat\\_view/126-women-in-public-life.html](http://www.thewnc.org.uk/publications/cat_view/126-women-in-public-life.html)

## Women and Public Appointments

The Equality Commission has announced that the Northern Ireland Office has appointed four new Commissioners, two of which are women:

**Anna Carragher** has had a successful media career since 1970, most recently as Head of Programmes for BBC Northern Ireland and BBC Northern Ireland Controller until 2006. She is the current Chair of the Grand Opera House, Belfast, and a member of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

**Lyn McBriar** is a self-employed Human Resources consultant, specialising in leadership, development and organisational change. She was formerly Regional Head of Human Resources (Northern Ireland and Isle of Man) with Marks & Spencer, where she led the human resources function during a period of significant corporate growth. She has held a variety of managerial positions in consultancy and in the private sector.

## Falls Women's Centre Advice Column

The Falls Women's Centre Advice & Advocacy Department has been providing counselling and advice services to women for over twenty-five years. We offer advice on a range of areas including DLA Appeals, Working Family Tax Credits, Benefits Analysis, Housing, and Unemployment and Employment issues. The Centre also works closely with women immigrants in relation to settling them within our community and on citizenship issues.

One of the major concerns that has arisen due to the current financial climate is women seeking help with house repossession. This is a new area and we have trained staff in order to gain the necessary skills and experience to assist women in this difficult situation. We also support women through debt management procedures and signpost them to the relevant support agencies. The ethos of the Falls Women's Advice provision is to continue supporting women from short to long term, particularly through difficult situations. Our specialist advice is specifically designed to cater for women and their families.

Falls Women's Centre will be providing an ongoing advice column for the WSN Newsletter. We hope you find it interesting and beneficial. If you require help or advice contact us on  
T: 028 9032 7672



## Women's Centre's Regional Partnership Prospectus Launch



Pictured from Left to Right:

**Andrea Patterson (DSD)**  
**Patricia Haren (Director WSN & Board Member WCRP)**  
**Russell McCaughey (DSD)**  
**Margaret Logue (Director Women's Centre, Derry & Chair WCRP).**

The WCRP partners (Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network, The Women's Centre Derry, Women's Support Network, Women's Resource and Development Agency), 13 Women's Centres and Foyle Women's Information Network, launched the innovative and new **Women's Community Based Training and Education Prospectus for 2009-2010** in Belfast's Clifton House on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> August.

WSN coordinated the development of the prospectus and with over 400 classes and courses on offer, the Women's Centres and other projects aim to improve the lives of local women and their families.

Welcoming people to the event **Margaret Logue, Chair of the WCRP** said: "The new prospectus highlights the range of programmes provided by the 27 women's organisations located in socially and

economically disadvantaged areas across Northern Ireland."

This year's Prospectus features a wide range of courses, from GCSE's and ICT, to Arts and Health, Aromatherapy, Stress Management and Plumbing.

And each provider featured within the Prospectus offers local women, families and communities the chance to develop skills, boost their self-esteem and improve their lifestyle.

The impact of training delivered to women in a Women's Centre was highlighted very clearly by women who have engaged in learning using this route. **Donna Pollin who attended Shankill Women's Centre, in Belfast**, said: "I could not have achieved the GCSE in IT had not been for the help and support I have obtained from Roberta and everyone at the Shankill Women's Centre."

**Vera Henderson from First Steps Women's Centre in Dungannon** added: "Try the Women Centres and once you have been on a training course and experience the friendliness of everyone, you will be hooked!"

**Andrea Patterson from DSD** commented: "The Department for Social Development commends the WCRP on this excellent publication with regional reach. The range of education and training provision catalogued demonstrates that women's organisations are really at the heart of local communities. They provide vital local services and the support required to make a real difference to women's lives, especially in disadvantaged communities. It is hoped that this publication will serve as a valuable sign-posting tool for women across Northern Ireland and encourage more women to take a step into the learning environment". Copies of the Prospectus can be obtained by contacting WSN on T: 028 9023 6923 or E: [info@wsn.org.uk](mailto:info@wsn.org.uk).

## Gender Equality Strategy

... continued from page 1

Some of the main issues the Panel highlighted were:

1. The lack of women in public and political life – this is very important at this time due to the Review of Public Administration. The Committee were given statistics on how few women there currently are on the Transition Committees at Local Council Level.
2. Aspects of the draft Departmental Action Plans were disappointing - DOE had no actions listed, for example.
3. The need to address childcare and life long learning needs as



equality issues in future action planning.

Concerns with how the Gender Equality Strategy is working in practice, particularly around the issue of "gender neutral" policy, which fails to address the real causes of disadvantage.

Panel representatives were asked a variety of questions regarding the cost of implementing the Strategy and how the Panel have found the Gender Equality Strategy processes.

A transcript of the meeting will be available on Hansard and OFMDFM officials will keep us informed as to follow up actions.

**Panel representatives took the opportunity at the end of the session to seek action and support from the OFMDFM Committee. These are listed below.**

- **We urge you to request clear evidence of gender equality impact assessment of the overall RPA strategy and implementation (in particular transition committees) as a matter of urgency.**
- **We encourage the Committee to recommend enhanced involvement of the Panel across Departments.**
- **We call on Committee to press for gender budgeting across government, including ring-fenced budgets for actions to tackle remaining gender barriers such as special men's or women's health programmes, employment policy initiatives, provision of childcare facilities, an extension of parental leave provisions.**
- **We urge the Committee to lend its continued support to policies to promote and support lifelong learning, which is of particular importance as we move through a period of sustained economic recession.**
- **We thank the Committee for their attention, and look forward to a response from the OFMDFM Committee and other Committees, and their views and advice on implementing Gender Equality Strategy, and on the Gender Equality Action Plans.**
- **The Gender Advisory Panel hopes that this will be the start of a continuing engagement with the OFMDFM Committee and with the Assembly, on these important issues of gender equality.**

## NEWS

The Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP) will soon launch the new report:

### "Barriers Facing Women in Disadvantaged Communities"

This comprehensive report has been commissioned by DSD, produced in partnership with the WCRP and written by Helen McLaughlin. It provides lengthy analysis and proposals for key actions which challenge all government departments to enact measures to improve opportunities for participation. It will be launched at NICVA on **Thursday 22 October from 10**

Speakers include government representatives and the voluntary sector. For an invitation and a full programme please visit [www.wcrp.org.uk](http://www.wcrp.org.uk)

### PLAYBOARD LAUNCH REPORT

PlayBoard, the lead agency for children and young people's play in Northern Ireland, launched the timely report, "School Age Childcare Matters!" on Thursday 1st October at Stormont and called on the government to urgently provide a Departmental lead and funding for school age childcare.

For copies of the report and press release visit [www.playboard.org](http://www.playboard.org).