



PRESS RELEASE

Barriers to Women – They Still Exist!

Over 40 women, Civil Servants and Elected Representatives from across Northern Ireland came together today to launch the WCRP “Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities – Barriers to Participation”. The report, commissioned by the Department for Social Development, brought together research carried out into the barriers women who live in disadvantaged urban and rural communities face when they are trying to access public services, training, education and employment.

Speaking at the event, report author, Dr. Helen McLaughlin took each barrier and translated it into real life situations. She said, “Having reviewed a wide range of existing and recent research, the report gathers clear evidence supporting the statement that women do not have equal access to work, education and training, and public and political life. The report identifies specific barriers like lack of childcare, poverty, gendered career pathways, low level of skills, qualifications and confidence which have a disproportional impact onto the life of women. In the report it is evident that all barriers are amplified and become insurmountable if women are living in disadvantaged areas, or have a disability or are from an ethnic minority group.”

Dr. Margaret Ward of the Womens Centres Regional Partnership who chaired the event reflected that living in a disadvantaged community has multiple impacts on a woman’s ability to improve her quality of life. Poverty, cost of transport,

access to skills and education are all more difficult for women living in these communities across Northern Ireland. “Each barrier is integrally linked to the other: for example, low level of flexibility and choice in the workplace push women into low paid, part-time, low status jobs which embed women in poverty. In other words, the barriers identified in this report are structural.”

During the event, the Department for Social Development and OFMDFM representatives also recognised that joint action is required across many government departments if these barriers are to be addressed in a strategic and not piecemeal manner. The report addresses each Government Department with a set of specific and relevant recommendations to improve women’s lives. In the Ministerial Foreword of the report, Margaret Ritchie MLA wrote “This report calls for cross-cutting departmental commitments to tackle the barriers that lead to social exclusion and deprivations of women in disadvantaged communities. This collective approach, I believe, will improve the health and well being of our society and help build a fair and shared future for all.”

A panel of experts contributed to the discussion and brought a wealth of real life situations. Siobhan Doherty spoke about the experiences of women who attended a recent course to encourage women to take up public appointments offered by the Northern Ireland Rural Women’s Network. Not surprisingly Childcare came out as the primary barrier women face - the time travelled for a rural woman trying to obtain childcare, the costs involved, the lack of choice and availability were all aspects which made a differential impact into the life of rural women. Siobhan concluded that the report clearly outlined that living in a rural community can often exacerbate these barriers.

Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and indeed many congratulated WCRP on the production of a report that outlines recommendations to each Government department on how they can help put

measures in place to work with women to help overcome disadvantage. Copies of the report are available through the WCRP by e-mailing info@wcrp.org.uk.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- **Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP)** - The WCRP is a partnership of 4 lead women's organisations, the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN), The Women's Centre, Derry, Women's Resource and Development Agency, Women's Support Network and 13 Women's Centres across Northern Ireland.

The WCRP aims to enhance women's organisation fundamental role by strategically developing and supporting a strong, effective and long-term partnership amongst Women's centres and networks operating across Northern Ireland.

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