

Welcome to the first edition of our Newsletter

The Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP) is a newly emerging partnership of four lead regional women's organisations linking with fourteen frontline women's organisations across Northern Ireland. This new partnership has emerged from the report of the Review Group on women's organisations providing support and services to disadvantaged areas.

The four key lead partners of the Partnership are the Women's Resource and Development Agency, Women's Support Network, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network and The Women's Centre, Derry. The fourteen Women's Centres are spread across Northern Ireland with seven from the Greater Belfast and Lisburn area, four in the North West and three in Dungannon, Magherafelt and Craigavon. Together the WCRP will seek to develop and strengthen a regional infrastructure which will support community based women's organisations across Northern Ireland.

The Partnership encourages collaborative and strategic work on key areas such as training, education, advice and childcare by identifying needs and gaps in services, conducting and sharing evidence based research, promoting good practice and quality standards, and advocating for the sustainability of frontline services.

The WCRP tackles women's inequality and supports Women's Centres in marginalised and disadvantaged communities by working for policy change. The principles of interdependency, cooperation, participation and transparency are at the heart of the Partnership's work.

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WCRP Highlights

LAUNCH OF PROSPECTUS

SEPT 07

The WCRP network meeting held in Shankill Women's Centre on 18th of September provided an opportunity for all of the groups to share information on their recent work and developments. At this meeting the first community based Women's Training prospectus was launched. This prospectus details the range of courses, education programmes and learning opportunities that are available throughout the 18 organisations profiled in the document. This is the first time that the women's organisations



Launch of the Women's Training Prospectus in Shankill Women's Centre

have jointly published a prospectus and we would hope that in future years this will grow and develop to include other women's community education providers.

If you would like a free copy of the Prospectus please contact Tiziana at WRCR (Tel: 9023 0212 or email: info@wcrp.org.uk), Siobhán or Kirsty at Women's Support Network (Tel: 9 0 23 6 9 2 3 or email: info@womenssupportnetwork.org) or Maureen at the Women's Centre, Derry (Tel: 71267672 or email: maureen.fox@womencentre.co.uk)

LAUNCH OF EDUCATION REPORT AT STORMONT

FEB 08

The Women's Centres' Community Based Education report was launched on 20th February, 2008 at the Long Gallery, Stormont. This report reflects months of collaboration between the community based women's centres, the Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP) and Women's Support Network (WSN) who compiled the report. The launch was hosted by Anna Lo, MLA and Member of the Assembly Committee for Employment and Learning. Attendees included representatives from political, government, statutory, women's sector and voluntary sector stakeholders.



L-r Siobhan Doherty (NIRWN), Margaret Logue (Derry Women's Centre), Anna Lo (MLA), Patricia Haren (WSN) and Margaret Ward (WRDA) at the launch of the Education Report in Stormont

The report details how women's community education provision is a key component of Northern Ireland's active and vibrant community learning sector. The local accessibility and diverse range of programmes reach the most disadvantaged communities and provide women, who may have had a prior

negative experience of education, a route back into learning. This report further details this vital work and provides an opportunity to hear from the beneficiaries in their own words through personal accounts and case studies.

Anna Lo, described Women's Centres roles in their community as essential and significant. 'The women's community based education sector,' she said, 'is equipping women with skills, knowledge and confidence to become active citizens and motivated employees in Northern Ireland. The women's centres greatly contribute to the elimination of the current barriers to education and training for women, especially in areas of disadvantage.'

Patricia Haren, current Chair of the WCRP and Director of WSN, stated "The women's community-based education sector with its knowledge of women's needs addresses inactivity and long term poverty, enables women to access more education, enhances the quality of life of individual women, and in turn, of their families and their communities. The report provides clear evidence for the on-going need for this service and for the vital support services such as childcare, without which many women could not access these training & education opportunities." Patricia called for more support and discussion with Government Departments such as the Department of Employment and Learning and Further Education Colleges to address issues around resources and sustainability.

Guest speakers included Tanya Hughes who provided her perspectives of community based education from her experience managing Ballybeen Women's Centre. One of the most poignant moments was hearing from Ann Briggs, who shared her passion for Windsor Women's Centre on her journey from student to worker.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their contributions to this report. If you or your organisation would like to receive a copy of the report please contact WSN. We have a limited number of hard copies available, as well as CD copies.

WCRP – STAGE ONE BIG LOTTERY WINNERS

FEB 08

Big Lottery Fund officials have announced that the Women's Centres Regional Partnership was one of the 23 partnerships successfully selected for stage one of the £18 million Live and Learn programme.

"This is a great achievement for the newly emerging women's centres partnership, given the high competition among the 97 original submissions," said, Margaret Ward WRDA

director and partner in WCRP.

WCRP was also awarded a development grant to assist the partnership in preparing a five year business plan and detailed action plans for stage two of the selection process.

The Women's Centres Regional Partnership's bid targets more than 9,000 women in their local communities across Northern Ireland. The

project includes many innovative and creative learning programmes to increase opportunities for women and their families and promote well-being among Northern Ireland's most disadvantaged communities.

The WCRP welcomes this initial recognition of the Big Lottery Funds and with confidence, enters the second stage of the Live and Learn application process

CHILDCARE NEWS

The WCRP will be working to collate a Childcare report, similar to the recently launched Education report. Margaret Logue (WCRP Director) provided an overview of some of the key childcare statistics, highlighting the significance of the combined partnership. For example; WCRP members have: 109 Childcare workers, 1,046 Children registered and 4,344 childcare places each week across all the centres.

The next steps for the partnership are to complete further research and to develop a report which will showcase the work of the WCRP partners in the field of Childcare.

CFNI PROJECT

Women talking about the 'Troubles'

The WCRP was successful in getting funding from CFNI under the Peace II 2.4 measure for a project that involved women from ten different areas talking about their experiences of life in a society in conflict. Participants came together for a structured series of workshops which enabled them to reflect on how they and their communities were affected during 'the Troubles'; exploring the different roles women had and the importance of these roles; and finally, to enable participants to consider the issues that affected women during 'the Troubles' and whether these issues still affect women today. A report of the project will include a list of demands for change that will be brought to the attention of policy makers.

As well as workshops, five residentials took place which enabled groups to come together and explore their different experiences while also enjoying pamper sessions and general relaxation. The end of project conference will be held on June 5th at the Glenavon Hotel, Cookstown. There will be round table discussions to consider the draft report and also an opportunity to consider women's experience of conflict in a global context, with a concluding talk by Cynthia Cockburn, a renowned feminist writer who has researched women's global activism against war.

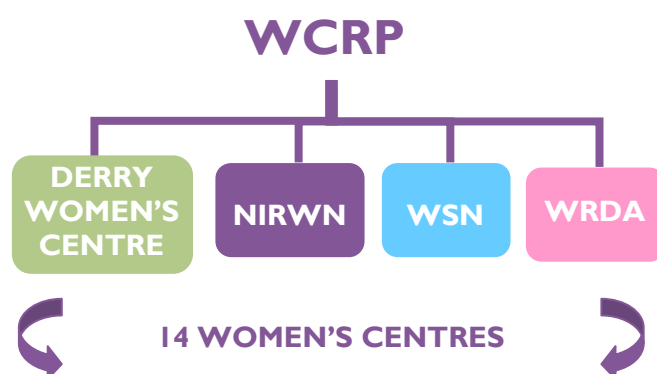
Groups taking part included Windsor Women's Centre, Greenway Women's Centre, Larne Women's Group, Corpus Christi, Relatives for Justice, Galbally Women's Group, Carrickfergus Women's Forum, Forkhill Women's Group and Derry Shared City Project.



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PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE



LEAD PARTNERS

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Women's Centres

There are fourteen Women's Centres throughout Northern Ireland, seven in the Belfast area, four in the North West and three in rural areas. You can contact your nearest centre by telephone, email or by dropping in.

Dorothy McSherry
Atlas Women's Centre

81 Sloan Street
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NETWORK MEETINGS

The last network meeting was held in Ballybeen Women's Centre on the 29th January 2008. It was an opportunity to preview The Women's Centres' Community Based Education report prior to the official launch (as featured in our cover story). It was also a chance to discuss the official WCRP Launch which will take place on the 16th April. Further details in our next issue.

WCRP is funded by the Department for Social Development



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