

A Response to: "Starting the Discussion"- Pre Consultation on a Child Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland

Issued by: Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

September 2010

Introduction

- 1.1. The Women's Support Network (WSN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this pre consultation discussion paper issued by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.
- 1.2. The Women's Support Network (WSN), established in 1989, is an infrastructural umbrella organisation, which provides support services to, and represents, 63 community based Women's Centres, women's groups and projects, and women's infrastructure groups and 21 associated members across Northern Ireland (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 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 the 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.
- 1.7. WSN welcomes the opportunity to engage with OFMDFM on this pre consultation paper which will inform a future Child Poverty Strategy. WSN agrees with the Department that "it is vital that opportunities for improved inter agency and cross departmental working are exploited." Improved inter-agency and cross departmental working is essential to tackle this issue, given that statistics show that 44,000 children are experiencing severe child poverty.¹
- 1.8. WSN urges the department to ensure that a future child poverty strategy recognises the role of organisations within the voluntary and community sector in working with government departments to meet their objectives in tackling child poverty. For example a number of community based women's organisations provide services to children and families in disadvantaged areas. Services include childcare provision, education and training, family support, health promotion and advice services.
- 1.9. WSN welcomes references in the pre-discussion paper to relevant provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Whilst welcoming these references in the pre-discussion paper, WSN recommends that these principles are fully embedded in a Child Poverty Strategy. WSN also draws the department's attention to Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which provides for non-discrimination in the enjoyment of CRC rights. WSN also stress the

¹ NICCY (2010) Policy Briefing: Child Poverty, 1/2010, available at http://www.niccy.org/uploaded_docs/Making%20it%20Right/Poverty%20policy.pdf

need to promote equality of opportunity between the sexes as important for the elimination of child poverty. In particular WSN note that the 2001 census indicated that the vast majority of lone parents were women,² while more than a quarter of women but only 5% of men were “looking after the home or family” in 2001.³

1.10. WSN welcomes the building blocks identified by DWP which have been included in this discussion paper. We are particularly encouraged that childcare has been identified within the framework for tackling child poverty. WSN notes that the pre-discussion paper makes no reference to recent work on an economic appraisal on options for a Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland or indeed how this strategy would link with the forthcoming childcare strategy.

1.11. The lack of accessible and affordable childcare is a barrier for parents entering the labour market.⁴ A report by the Women’s Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP) identified lack of appropriate childcare as the single biggest barrier to women’s participation in education, training and work, as well as public and political life.⁵ The report made a number of recommendations including the development of an integrated childcare strategy for Northern Ireland and increased provision of local, high quality, affordable and flexible childcare.⁶ The Law Centre NI has also cited childcare as a barrier to employment stating that “any child poverty strategy needs to make progress in this area if the route to work is to be a meaningful route out of poverty.”⁷ The Law Centre NI also raised concerns during the Committee stages of the Welfare Reform Bill regarding obligations for lone parents with children aged seven or over to look for employment from 2010, given

² Equality Commission of Northern Ireland (2006) *Census 2001: Men and Women in Northern Ireland* available at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/MenandWomen06.pdf>.

³ Ibid, p 24.

⁴ NICCY (2010) Policy Briefing: Child Poverty, 1/2010, available at http://www.niccy.org/uploaded_docs/Making%20it%20Right/Poverty%20policy.pdf.

⁵ H McLaughlin (2009) *Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities: Barriers to Participation*, Report written on behalf of WCRP, pg 37.

⁶ Ibid, pages 60-61.

⁷ Law Centre NI Working Together To Reduce Child Poverty Seminar: The Child Poverty Act 2010, May 2010

that there is no childcare strategy or childcare infrastructure in place in NI.⁸

1.12. WSN wishes to highlight the important role of community based childcare provision particularly in the women's based community based sector which can make a major contribution in meeting the department's objectives in the eradication of child poverty by enabling women from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter education, training and employment. In order to ensure a child poverty strategy is fit for purpose, WSN recommends the department recognises the important role of community based organisations in a future Child Poverty strategy.

1.13. Furthermore, WSN urges the department to set out how it will work with other departments to ensure that adequate resources are made available to sustain existing childcare provision and how it will seek resources for additional childcare places which may be required to enable parents to enter/re-enter the labour market.

Conclusion

WSN welcomes the opportunity to respond to this pre 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:

Fiona O'Connell- Policy and Research Co-ordinator

Tel: 028 90236923

Email: policy@wsn.org.uk

⁸ Committee for Social Development *Official Report (Welfare Reform Bill)*, 13 May 2010, available at <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/committees2009/SocialDevelopment/100513Welfare%20Reform%20Bill.pdf>, last accessed 23 July 2010, pg 19.

MEMBERSHIP 2010

	<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