

A Response to: Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership Northern Outcomes  
Group

Issued by: CYPSP Northern Outcomes Group

March 2012

## Introduction

- 1.1. The Women's Support Network (WSN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation issued by CYPSP Northern Outcomes Group.
- 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 63 community based women's centres, projects and infrastructure groups and 26 associate members drawn from across the community and voluntary sector who support women, families and communities. (see Appendix 1).
- 1.2. 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
- 1.3. 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.

- 1.4. 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.
  
- 1.5. Network members are actively engaged with their local communities, cross-community initiatives and regional structures throughout Northern Ireland.

## **2.0 Comments**

- 2.1 As an Network organisation representing 85 community based women's centres, projects and infrastructure groups drawn from across the community and voluntary sector who support women, families and communities, WSN welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.
- 2.2 Overall, the Women's Support Network (WSN) sees this consultation as an important step in a commitment to early education and care. It is a commendable attempt to ensure good quality standards and a co-ordinated approach to the best outcomes for the needs of children, young people and their families.

WSN wishes to highlight the important role of community based women's centres, early years and childcare provision. Women's Centres are well established organisations situated within areas of social and economic disadvantage in Northern Ireland. A recent report by WCRP highlighted a range of early years and childcare provision in the women's centres including free childcare places for women accessing education and training, after schools provision, places for social services referrals, Sure Start childcare, respite childcare and summer scheme childcare.<sup>1</sup> In 2009, there were 1364 individual children registered for childcare provision within the thirteen WCRP women's centres, 4914 childcare places and 9828 hours provided on a weekly basis. The majority of the thirteen women's centres support children in the age range of 0-4 years.<sup>2</sup>

Strong evidence exists to support our view that the first years of a child's life are critical in developing relationships and laying the foundations for positive physical and emotional development.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> WCRP (2010) Childcare Mapping and Research Report, Pg 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Pg 14

<sup>3</sup> Save the Children, Bringing Families and Schools Together: Giving poor Children the best start, Save the Children briefing September 2011

### **3.0 Initial Priorities**

WSN welcomes the initial priorities outlined within Chapter 4. We will discuss each of these in turn.

### **3.1 Sustainability and Funding**

Notwithstanding the current financial difficulties, WSN welcomes the commitment of the Northern Outcomes Group to develop a long term funding strategy. We would like this further developed to include government departments. Working across numerous government departments is difficult, therefore direction from the Children & Young People's Partnership will be crucial to ensure any resources are maximised to allow for the best outcomes for children and young people.

### **3.2 Early Intervention**

WSN is pleased that Early Intervention and Prevention is a key priority for the Northern Outcomes Group. There is a growing and economic case in support of such an approach.

A RLS Research Paper<sup>4</sup> which, reflecting on the Scottish Finance Committee Inquiry into Preventative Spending, notes that while Northern Ireland is one of the most economically deprived regions of the UK, each year Government spends a significant amount of money treating the outcomes associated with deprivation rather than on preventative solutions aimed at breaking the cycle.

Indeed, the WSN membership which includes Women's Centres, women's groups and organisations, provide a wide range of early intervention and prevention services which support the health and wellbeing of women, children and families. For example many of our membership deliver:

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<sup>4</sup> RLS (2011) Preventative Spending NIAR 19-11

- Confidence building, education, training and health and well-being.
- Benefits' advice, information and support
- Debt advice, information and support
- A friendly, safe and confidential environment
- Tailored individual education and training courses
- High quality, accessible and affordable childcare
- Multi-cultural support programme
- Community development work
- Trauma & Confidential Counselling
- Complementary Therapies
- Mental Health Awareness Programme
- Support programmes for the elderly aimed at breaking down isolation and exclusion
- Lobbying and Campaigning
- Networking and working in partnership with other women's groups and networks
- Representing the needs of local women on local forums and partnership boards.

The Early Years Strategic Alliance (EYSA) is jointly chaired by the Women's Support Network and Children in Northern Ireland. Our work within EYSA is to ensure that all children have equal opportunity to benefit from early years, childcare and family support services.

The Early Years Strategic Alliance (EYSA), which brings together organisations from across the children's and women's sector in Northern Ireland that work with, and for, children in their early years and their families, launched its new Manifesto at the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings in November 2011. EYSA is jointly chaired by the Women's Support Network and Children in Northern Ireland.

EYSA recently launched a Manifesto which outlines eight key themes that need to be addressed in order to improve young children's futures.

The theme of ***integration and collaboration in early childhood***

**education and care services** was the over-arching objective and provides the foundation upon which all of the Manifesto issues can be addressed by all those working to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Other themes in the Manifesto include:

- a rights based approach to early childhood;
- equal access to early years, childcare and family support services for all children;
- early intervention and prevention in all early years services;
- quality affordable childcare;
- promoting young children's right to play;
- ending child poverty; and
- early years funding.

We strongly advocate for the Northern Outcomes Group to work in partnership with the widest range of sectors and in particular the women's sector to progressively build on the supports that children and families require in areas of disadvantage.

WSN are encouraged to note that much of the work to promote and embed early intervention and prevention is now being lead by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. We are also pleased that the Partnership commits to bringing an increased focus on early intervention and taken the view that early intervention must be a joint Government priority.

### **3.3. Ensuring easy access to information about existing family support services**

Often the array of family support services is difficult for families to navigate. We welcome the commitment from the Northern Outcomes Board to develop and share knowledge of what services are available. WSN would like to see the excellent services provided within Women's Centres included in this. Also, to utilise the Women's Centres in the

dissemination of information to ensure those women and children who are experiencing exclusion do not face additional barriers to accessing support.

Women's Centres place a high priority on early intervention as they believe the first years of a child's life are critical in developing relationships and laying the foundations for physical, cognitive and emotional development. The WCRP report, *Childcare Mapping*<sup>5</sup> evidence shows the important role women's centres play in early intervention and family support services. Listed below are positive outcomes children experience in a Women's Centre:

- Enhanced children's development & learning
- Addressing child poverty
- Improving social confidence
- Improving physical and mental health
- Increased social integration

This clearly illustrates that women's centres make a valuable contribution to early intervention and family support services and provide high quality childcare for women and children living in disadvantaged communities.

### **3.4. Building on Models of Good Practice**

WSN fully support this priority. We would urge the Northern Outcomes Group to consider using the community based women's sector as a model of good practice. For example, Footprints Women's Centre continues to inform government policy on diet and nutrition. They have won several awards for their health inequalities programmes delivered within the Colin area. They offer a diverse range of programmes to educate and promote skills that will improve parenting and health awareness. **In fact the 13 women's centres based in Northern Ireland are excellent models of good practice in relation to many aspects that**

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<sup>5</sup> *Childcare Mapping & Research Report 2010* – Women's Centres Regional Partnership

help women and families such as, childcare support, education and training, specialist advice provision, counselling, volunteering and local leadership to name but a few.

The women's centres are:

Waterside Women's Centre, The Women's Centre Derry, Strathfoyle Women's Centre, Atlas Women's Centre, Ballybeen Women's Centre, Falls Women's Centre, Footprints Women's Centre, Greenway Women's Centre, Windsor Women's Centre, Shankill Women's Centre, First Steps Women's Centre, Magherafelt Women's Centre and Chrysalis Women's Centre.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

WSN acknowledges the Northern Outcomes Group efforts in producing a Priorities Action Plan for the Northern Area. We have made a few suggestions on how this could be improved. If you have any queries please get in touch.

**For further information, contact:**

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## MEMBERSHIP 2012

	<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	North Belfast Womens Initiative & Support Project
	<b><u>Associate Members</u></b>
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
22.	Women's Project Ashton Centre
23.	Women on Track
24.	Matt Talbot Women's Group
25.	Ulster People's College
26.	Council for the Homeless NI