

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

Issued by: CYPSP South Eastern Outcomes Group

March 2012

Introduction

- 1.1. The Women's Support Network (WSN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation issued by CYPSP South Eastern 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.¹ 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.²

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.³

¹ WCRP (2010) Childcare Mapping and Research Report, Pg 3.

² Ibid, Pg 14

³ 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 Enjoying, Learning and Achieving

WSN agree that improving the levels of engagement and what is offered to improve parenting skills is important.

However, it should be recognized that anecdotal evidence suggests that some mums to be and parents, especially young mums do not have the confidence to attend the parent classes that are not held in their own areas.

In a regional survey of Sure Start service users who had had a baby in the previous year and who were dependant on Income Support reported that only 30% of respondents attended any parenting classes, attendance in the Belfast area was just 15% of respondents. It was clear from the responses that those parents who did attend classes (particularly in the Western Trust area) did so at their local Sure Start Centre. WSN would therefore like the South Eastern Outcomes Group to reference both Sure Start programmes and the parenting programmes held within the community based women's sector as a base for targeted interventions which could and should be built upon. This would be preferable to the Family Nurse Partnership programme which has been mentioned as an example of 'an intensive preventive programme for vulnerable, first time young parents.' We are concerned that this type of programme is a very costly option and one which is unsustainable.

Due to the location of both Women's Centres and the Sure Start programmes, in areas of social and economic disadvantage, this would ensure those most in need of parenting classes are reached.

Parents need access to high quality, accessible, affordable and appropriate childcare services in order to be able to reconcile their caring and work/education demands⁴. High quality childcare services have important benefits for children, nurturing their social and emotional development.

It is well documented that there is a lack of childcare provision in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the childcare settings which do exist are unevenly distributed across the region. Rural areas have the lowest level of childcare provision. 71% of all childcare settings in Northern Ireland exist in the east of the region (within the Northern, South Eastern and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Areas). The remaining percentage of childcare settings are found within the, mostly rural, Southern and Western Health and Social Care Trust Areas.

In 2009 there were 1,364 individual children registered for childcare within Women's Centres.⁵ This equates to 9,828 hours of childcare provided weekly mainly for children age 0-4 years funded by the Department of Social Development through the Women's Centres Childcare Fund. We are therefore encouraged that the South Eastern Outcomes Group acknowledges that issues relating to available childcare provision are important.

3.2 Being Healthy

We are pleased that being health is a priority within the South Eastern Outcomes Group. However, there is already a level of awareness amongst first time mothers of the impacts alcohol and smoking can have on the foetus but there is very little awareness of the impact stress has on the developing foetus or that bonding and communication can start to develop at the beginning of a pregnancy.

⁴ For the purposes of this section childcare denotes the care of children that is provided through registered formal daycare services.

⁵ Women's Centres Regional Partnership (2010) Childcare Mapping and Research Report, 2010, WCRP

For example, research⁶ has shown that infants begin to develop communication skills very early in the pre-natal stage, parents interacting and communicating at this early stage can positively contribute to the development of the unborn child's development of speech, language and communication.

WSN would recommend that any targeted work should not just concentrate on smoking but a range of impacts effecting pregnancy. Community based Women's Centres and groups are ideally placed to play a key role in disseminating this type of information as many first time parents take part in health education programmes. We would therefore encourage the South Eastern Outcomes Group to work with the community based women's sector to ensure these messages are reaching the targeted audience.

WSN is pleased that Early Intervention and Prevention is also a key priority. There is a growing and economic case in support of such an approach.

A RLS Research Paper⁷ 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:

⁶ Graven, SN and Browne JV (2008) 'Auditory development in the foetus and infant' Newborn and Infant Nursing Reviews

⁷ 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.

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 Living in Safety and with Stability

We agree that additional information should be collated on domestic violence and working with Women's Aid and supporting projects will be beneficial to women. WSN wishes to highlight that in Northern Ireland, some women fleeing domestic violence situations and seeking legal remedies such as non molestation orders or occupation orders may have to meet financial eligibility criteria. However in England and

Wales, women in domestic violence situations may not have to meet financial eligibility criteria in seeking such remedies.⁸ WSN believes that women suffering from domestic violence should not have to incur financial costs in order to keep themselves safe. Women should not have to choose between the financial stability of her family and her safety and the safety of her family. We would recommend the Outcomes Group support Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland call for the amendment of current civil legal aid rules to ensure women in domestic violence situations have automatic right of access to justice.

We would also encourage the Outcomes Group to work with local women's centres within the South Eastern region in relation to domestic violence. Interviews held in 2011 with a number of centre managers⁹ indicated that violence against women is both serious and widespread. They talked about the role women's centres have in helping women who suffer domestic violence such as providing a safe space for them to talk and to get specialised support. In fact sometimes a women's centre can be the first point for women needing immediate help, one manager commented: 'Getting her and the children to safety was the most pressing need. I got my car, loaded it up with their belongings and got them out of there. They came to the centre to be safe before we were able to get them placed in the refuge.'

4.0 Conclusion

WSN acknowledges the Outcomes Group efforts in producing a Priorities Action Plan for the South Eastern Area. We have made a few suggestions on how this could be improved. We would welcome the addition of safeguarding a child's right to play. Throughout childhood play is at the heart of children's everyday lives and experiences. It is the cornerstone of learning for children and therefore needs recognition

⁸ Since April 2007, the Legal Services Commission in England and Wales has been able to waive eligibility limits for legal representation for victims of domestic violence, see http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/civil/family/domestic_abuse.asp#domestic

⁹ Interviews conducted in 2011 with centre managers regarding uniqueness of women only advice

and promotion. This will ensure that children's earliest years provide the opportunity for them to play, learn and develop the confidence and skills that will help them thrive and develop.

If you have any further 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 |

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| 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 |
| | <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 |
| 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 |