

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

Issued by: CYPSP Southern Outcomes Group

March 2012

Introduction

- 1.1. The Women's Support Network (WSN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation issued by CYPSP Southern 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 Health & Wellbeing

We are pleased an overarching theme of health and wellbeing has been given importance in the initial priorities. However, we are somewhat disappointed that the specific terms of **early intervention and prevention** have not been mentioned. A RLS Research Paper⁴ 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:

- 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

⁴ RLS (2011) Preventative Spending NIAR 19-11

- 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.

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WSN would therefore recommend, given the current fiscal situation, early intervention and prevention needs to be included within this section.

3.2. Living in Safety with Stability

We are confused with the narrative under this heading. Our definition of living in safety and stability means being protected from harm and neglect, for children to be provided with the skills and knowledge to protect themselves against abuse, neglect, discrimination, harassment, exploitation or prejudice.

WSN would recommend revisiting this heading to ensure clarity.

3.3. Enjoying Learning and Achieving

Given the recent report by the Department of Education examining areas such as quality of education, numbers who attend and school

⁵ Ibid, Pg 14

finances, we are pleased that an initial priority to work together to enhances the achievement of all children has been included.

The role of parents and carers is also vital in the early education of children. Women are often the primary caregivers. A recent research briefing published by the Department of Education⁶ highlights that lower maternal education is associated with children's lower attainment levels in subjects such as English and Maths and that these effects continue across primary school years. This research contrasts with lower paternal education which is also associated with lower attainment in English and Maths but the effects of these fade over primary school years.⁷ In Northern Ireland 24%⁸ of adults are in the low skills category of literacy and numeracy. Continued resources to support parents will greatly assist in helping them further their education, this will greatly enhance how they interact with their children.

Women's Centres also offer education and training to women and their families. Indeed, through funding from the Big Lottery, the Live and Learn Project has resulted in a total of 4,386 individual women engaged on the programmes.

WSN therefore urges the Sothern Outcomes Group to emphasis the important role of women in supporting early education of the child and women as well as recognising the important effects of maternal educational attainment in the priorities.

⁶ Department of Education “*Effective Pre- School Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) Pre School Experience and Key Stage 2 Performance in English and Mathematics*”, Pg 2, available on www.deni.gov.uk

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⁸ <http://www.nationalliteracytrust.net/Database/stats/adultstats.html#NI>

4.0 Conclusion

WSN acknowledges the Southern Outcomes Group efforts in producing a Priorities Action Plan for the Southern 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:

Ellen Finlay - Policy and Research Co-ordinator

Tel: 028 90236923 Email: policy@wsn.org.uk

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
	<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