A Response to: People at Risk Draft Strategy

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Introduction

    1.1 The Women's Support Network (WSN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

    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).

    1.3 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 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.

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

2. General Comments

2.1 The Women's Support Network (WSN), as an organisation representing women's centres, projects and infrastructure groups drawn from across the Northern Irish community, welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) Draft "People at Risk" Strategy 2012-2015.

2.2 The WSN commends the NIFRS commitment to protecting the population of Northern Ireland from the dangers attributed to fire and rescuing them in times of danger. We welcome any Strategy whose aim is to better communicate with the public and to protect those at risk.

3. Specific Comments

3.1 Identifying People at risk

3.1.1 The WSN agrees that, in order to help those at risk, it is necessary, at the outset, to identify who they are and where they are located. The suggestion to establish and maintain links with those that deliver care services to people at risk and other government/voluntary agencies is, in theory, a good idea. However, it has been the experience of WSN that, frequently, the most disadvantaged groups or people most at risk, are not automatically involved with government agencies or have contact with care services. Thus, we believe that Women's Centres, in this instance, could play a very important role as they are ideally placed to reach people deemed to be at risk and have extensive experience of working with grass roots marginalised women. We recognise that becoming more involved in the community

and reaching those that might potentially be at risk can be challenging and complex, but we would highlight the successful work of Women's Centres in this regard and their extensive experience also of dealing with people living detached from others and the local community and therefore, may not have access to information that could save lives in the case of accidental fire.

3.2 Current Control Measures

3.2.1 The current control measures appear to be quite comprehensive. However, a Home Fire Safety Check does not fulfil the requirement of a Fire Risk Assessment under the Fire and Rescue Services (NI) Order 2006. Though a Fire Risk Assessment is only required in cases where there is a non-domestic premises and thus, is the responsibility of the owner of the property, the failure to provide it as part of the current measures to reduce accidental fire may mean that persons deemed at risk (like those that have a disability or mental illness) may still be affected, if the owner has not commissioned an assessment. Therefore, at the very least, there must be a concerted effort made to ensure that all commercial, public and residential buildings have, as the legislation requires, commissioned an assessment to be undertaken by the fire service. This could be done possibly through the use of some specific annual check system. If such a system is already in place the WSN would welcome more information on this.

3.2.2 Currently, the NIFRS offer to deliver talks and advice to interested groups 'on request'. In order from this opportunity to be realised by groups that look after the needs of people at risk and cut off from wider society, the NIFRS needs to increase its attempts to advertise this service. Using the Women's Centres and indeed other relevant groups will allow word to spread more easily and give people a real chance to avail of a service that will potentially save lives.

3.2.3 The document states that the service utilises TV radio and outdoor publicity to promote the fire safety message. The NIFRS could also consider running more campaigns, working with local groups and putting more emphasis on the use of social media. Opportunities to run open days in a Woman's Centre, for example, should not be underestimated. It is vital to try and reach women in Northern Irish society as they, as primary caregivers, are the most likely to be working closely or

looking after those that the fire department would deem 'at risk'. Currently, 60% of carers are women and thus, in attempting to spread the dangers of fire, alerting women, especially those from disadvantaged areas should be one of the main approaches undertaken by the NIFRS.

3.3 Interagency Collaboration

3.3.1 Inter-professional and inter-agency collaboration can be an effective way to drive up the standard of care especially when dealing with people at risk. The demographic shift as older people live longer means there is increasing demand for services. Collaboration can help to address this cost and resource burden. However, the learning processes that might form a prerequisite to effective inter-agency collaboration remain under-explored. There has been a tendency to under-acknowledge inter-agency working as a site of tensions and contradictions, rather than an ideal model of service delivery. Adopting clear rules, good decision making processes and realistic expectations of an agency employee are crucial factors when it comes to sustaining an effective inter-agency collaboration (Darlington, Feeney & Rixon, 2005b; Head, 2008). Furthermore, the importance of sharing ideas (Earles et al., 2005), reviewing joint goals, plans or approaches is highlighted in conjunction with the agency taking responsibility cannot be underestimated. It is also necessary to ensure that, if the NIFRS did choose to collaborate with a Health Trust for example, staff changes or turnover, policy reform or budgetary constraints are dealt with in a way that does not threaten the collaborative nature of the work being undertaken (Han, Carnochan & Austin, 2007; Head, 2008; Spath et al. 2008). What must be acknowledged is the reality that collaborative planning takes **resources and time** as the potential collaborating organizations have to learn about and establish trust and a relationship with one another. In addition, every agency must feel they are gaining something worthwhile from the process. The NIFRS must take due cognizance of the need when working in partnership to choose a clear realistic strategy that reflects its priorities but also those of the collaborating agency, key policy makers and the public. Collaborative partnerships must also have a shared vision that reflects better outcomes for the people they serve.

3.3.2 It is also important to consider the need to Implement appropriate computer technology and internet usage to facilitate, resource sharing, resource and agency knowledge, interagency communication and referral (Katz & Hetherington, 2006; Laming, 2009). It is essential that technical difficulties do not impede collaboration.

3.4 Co-ordination and Consistency

The WSN welcomes the proposal to appoint a Safety Partnership Co-ordinator.

3.5 Evaluation

The WSN would ask for more clarification on what methods will be used to properly evaluate or measure the outcomes in order that a culture of continuous improvement underpins this strategy. The NIFRS must decide on a specific form of evaluation whether it be formative, process or impact.

4. Conclusion

4.1 The WSN welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation document. Whilst welcoming this document and agreeing in essence with the aims, we have offered some constructive recommendations as to how it could be improved. We are happy to further discuss this response if required.

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MEMBERSHIP 2012

	Member Group
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
	Associate Members
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