

## A Response to: Concordat for Relationships with Voluntary and Community Sector

Issued by the Department for Social Development

February 2011

## **Introduction**

- 1.1. The Women's Support Network (WSN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation issued by the Department for Social Development.
- 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 62 community based women's centres, projects and infrastructure groups and 22 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. Comments**

- 2.1. WSN wishes to raise concern about the length of the consultation period. This period is totally inadequate for interested parties to respond and give due consideration to the proposals within the document.
- 2.2. We welcome comments by the department to 'recognise the nature, diversity and value the contribution which the Voluntary and Community sector makes to the social, economic, environmental, political and cultural life of Northern Ireland.'
- 2.3. WSN is disappointed that there has been no inclusion of action plans to illustrate how the Concordat will be implemented throughout government.
- 2.4. WSN fully support the shared values that underpin the relationship between government and the voluntary and community sector however, we would like to see the inclusion of Human Rights as a

shared value. The Voluntary and Community Sector have contributed to promoting a sense of community and encouraged respect for each other both as individuals and as members of a community.

- 2.5. WSN endorses the establishment of action plans with SMART objectives but would highlight the need to have an individual action plan for each commitment to ensure successful delivery.
- 2.6. A method of facilitating cross-departmental working to ensure the mainstreaming of the principles within the Concordat is essential to the success of this document. Perhaps the Department can advise how it will ensure the buy-in of the Executive, all departments and other public bodies including local councils, education boards and health trusts.
- 2.7. It is vital that regular reports are made on the progress of implementation of the Concordat for example the annual report to the Executive. WSN would welcome the inclusion of a reporting mechanism and appropriate timescales. This would ensure the Concordat is taken seriously.
- 2.8. Point 7 of the Commitment Programme makes reference to non-compliance of the Concordat. WSN recommends that this should read: 'To explore and develop processes whereby Concordat non-compliance can be addressed **by both parties.**'
- 2.9. The language used within the Concordat is weighted heavy on the side of the Voluntary and Community Sector. We would therefore recommend Commitment 3.7 reads: 'To work together to remove duplication of services, systems or overheads where this exists **within and between both government and the voluntary and community sector.**'
- 2.10. We welcome the introduction of Commitment 3.10 but would emphasise the importance of the Voluntary and Community sector in having an influence on both the co-design and co-delivery of policy as well as influencing and examining policy impact. The involvement of the VCS at the beginning would prove vital to ensuring that policy is fit for purpose.

2.11. WSN membership provides services which are of a sensitive nature i.e. advice services to women who have been abused. Therefore it is vital that government respects the confidentiality of some areas of work within the VCS. We would like to see the inclusion of a shared principle recognising the need to respect the confidentiality of sensitive information and services.

## **Conclusion**

WSN welcomes the opportunity to respond to this 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.

The Women's Support Network fully endorses the response made to this consultation by the Joint Forum Panel.

## **For further Information, contact:**

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## MEMBERSHIP 2011

	<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
	<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