

Newsletter

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WRDA News Update

Community Facilitator's Graduate

The WRDA is delighted to report that on Friday 20th October 2006, thirteen Community Facilitators graduated from the 2005/2006 programme and were presented with their certificates, by WRDA Director Dr. Margaret Ward. The event was followed by a celebratory lunch at a local restaurant. In her congratulations Margaret said, *'Our Community Facilitators form the core of the work of the WRDA, they are at the heart of what we do in terms of reaching out to women across Northern Ireland, through our health programmes, our policy work and, soon, in our work on Good Relations. I am very pleased to welcome our new group of facilitators into the WRDA.'*



(Pictured L-R with 'Graduates' Margaret Ward WRDA Director & Liz Curran WRDA Operations Manager)

The Community Facilitators completed the programme in August 2006 after an intensive training programme, which combined fourteen weeks training with first hand facilitation and training delivery out in the community. They achieved an NVQ Level 3 in Direct Training & Support, which is a well respected qualification. While participants came from various backgrounds and locations, all had a strong desire to gain facilitation skills, and make a difference on a practical level to their local communities.

A number of the women are now working within various different communities as Community Facilitators, on a self-employed and a voluntary basis. Some have also embarked on further education and training. One of the Community Facilitators, Ann Marie White commented ***"the programme allowed me to explore what being a woman in my local community meant, and what I could give back to my community to empower other women."***

The WRDA wish our new Community Facilitators every success in the future, and we would encourage all our Community Facilitators to keep in touch and let us know what you are up to. Please email any updates to mf.mcareavey@wrda.net

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Community Facilitator 2006/2007 Programme Begins

Tuesday 7th November 2006 saw the commencement of this year's Community Facilitator Programme. The WRDA have recruited sixteen local women with aim of enabling them to develop facilitation skills and gain an NVQ Level 3 in Direct Training & Support.

This year's cohort comes from Counties Antrim and Down, geographically spreading the net wider. Furthermore, as with previous years, the WRDA has endeavoured to be as inclusive as possible. Operations Manager, Liz Curran commented that *"the programme enables participants to develop practical facilitation tools and build upon the vast amount of skills and abilities which they already possess"*.

There will be two further Community Facilitator Programmes due to commence in March 2007, in County Fermanagh and in the Newry and Mourne area. We would encourage anyone in these areas who are interested in the programme to contact us as soon as possible, as recruitment is starting in the New Year. For all enquiries please contact Mary Frances McAreavey on 028 9023 0212 or via email mf.mcareavey@wrda.net

Breast & Cervical Screening Awareness Programme

The 'Breast and Cervical Screening Awareness' Programme was created to tackle the worryingly low uptake of breast and cervical screening invitations by women living in disadvantaged areas of Belfast.

The programme aims to combine the resources of the community development sector with the health sector in order to increase uptake of screening services. Course materials were designed in conjunction with health professionals and the programme is based on the principles of peer learning.

Piloting of the programme has highlighted that peer education is effective in communicating the importance of breast and cervical screening to women and increasing participant's uptake of screening. The programme achieves added value in reaching a wider audience through

word-of-mouth information from participants to their families, friends and colleagues.

This interactive programme is effective not only with women living in areas of social need, but also with women who have learning disabilities and mental health problems. Research by the Disability Rights Commission suggests that less than one in five women with a learning disability have cervical screening.

If you would like further information or would like to discuss the 'Breast and Cervical Screening Awareness' Programme, please contact Mary Frances McAreavey either via telephone 9023 0212 or email mf.mcareavey@wrda.net

The WRDA Community Facilitator Programme is funded by the Big Lottery Fund.



This programme is part financed by the European Social Fund under the Northern Ireland Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity Measure 2.8.



Women's Centres Regional Partnership

The Department of Social Development under its infrastructural programme has funded a Women's Centres Regional Infrastructure Partnership until 31 March 2009. This links women's centres in the Greater Belfast area, through the Women's Support Network, with the North West women's centres, through a new post of Outreach Development Worker, based in Derry Women's Centre, and the three centres of Chrysalis (Craigavon); First Steps (Dungannon) and Magherafelt Women's Centre, through WRDA and the NI Rural Women's Network. We are currently in the process of recruiting a co-ordinator for the Partnership. This is an exciting opportunity which we hope will lead to a more sustainable future for a significant section of the women's sector. In the coming weeks we will be developing the work of the Partnership and communicating with all groups involved.



More women in politics – making a difference

The Secretary of State, Peter Hain, initiated a very interesting and important conference in Hillsborough on 13 November. It was called '*Encouraging women into political and public life*' and it gave women politicians from all political parties the opportunity to share their experiences of political life and what motivated them to take up politics as a career. Many were graduates of the DemocraShe programme, spearheaded by Bronagh Hinds, which provides training for women politicians. Speakers were asked to consider whether they supported positive action measures which would help to improve the gender balance in all political parties. Sinn Fein and the SDLP were in favour, those from Ulster Unionists, Alliance and the DUP were against - although it was notable that some members of their parties were in favour of positive action when they spoke from the floor during the afternoon, after having heard from speakers from the Welsh and Scottish devolved institutions.

Women now make up 40% of MSPs in Scotland and exactly 50% of Welsh AMs. Wales has the only parliament in the world with equal numbers of women and men. Gwenda Thomas, Assembly Member for Wales described some of the policies initiated in Wales:

- The first to appoint a Children's Commissioner
- An Office for Older People established
- 'Communities First' policy targets resources to deprived communities
- Free breakfasts for all pupils in primary schools
- Free swimming for all children in school holidays
- School Councils in all schools, enabling children to understand about equality
- 'Funky Dragon', a young people's Assembly to feed policy issues into the Assembly

- Free childcare for all 2 year olds
- Family friendly hours in the Assembly and complete accessibility for all
- Equality of Opportunity Committee with external expertise to advise politicians

As Gwenda concluded, it is an exciting time in Welsh politics but how long did women have to wait – and how long should women in Northern Ireland have to wait?

Johann Lamont, Deputy Minister for Communities in the Scottish Parliament was equally inspiring. Women fought hard to be in the parliament from the beginning, realising that if they were not there then, they would not get in later. They lobbied for parties to initiate positive action measures to achieve that. Having more women in political life has changed how people think about politics. No one used to think of issues like violence against women as political, now there is a 'new language of politics' in Scottish life, They still have to overcome media prejudice in reporting – the difference between a 'stroppy' woman and a 'strong man' - and adverse comments on their appearance, but Johann stated very firmly that women were working hard to achieve a future society and were holding onto their vision of what politics should be about. She gave the example of women's refuges providing help to women coping with domestic violence and said 'people know what the solutions are, and we need to make our policies reflect this. We would not be able to do this if we had not had positive action.' When delegations in her department are organised or come to her, she always checks their gender balance.

If our Assembly does get back, we have a long way to go before our political debates begin to consider the issues raised by the Welsh and Scottish speakers. A full report of the day will be published by OFMDFM. A follow-up should target our male politicians.

Thirty Years of Sex Equality Legislation

WRDA Director Margaret Ward was one of the speakers at the annual conference of the Equality Commission, on the theme of 'Sex Equality – 30 years on'. The Sex Discrimination Order of 1976.

Margaret looked back over the 30 years since women in Northern Ireland campaigned to have the Sex Discrimination Act apply to women here as well as in Britain. The Act came into effect in December 1976 and made significant changes to women's lives. For the first time it was illegal to discriminate on the grounds of sex:

- in offering employment and the terms offered
- in providing accommodation, credit or a mortgage
- against entry to universities and medical schools
- on entry into apprenticeships and training schemes.

There were of course many areas of life that remained unaffected by the SDA. Single sex schools, firms with less than five employees, or occupations where sex was stated to be a 'genuine occupational qualification' were all outside the Act. Nevertheless, it has had a big impact on women's lives and was the foundation for continuing reform.

However, the gender pay gap still exists, women are still concentrated in part-time, poorly paid jobs, we do not have full control over our fertility as abortion law reform has not extended to Northern Ireland, violence against women remains a potential threat for all women and public and political life is still overwhelmingly male.

We have come a long way since 1976, when a woman could not even enter into a hire purchase agreement for a washing machine without her husband's signature – but we have a long road to travel before we live in a society that truly reflects the values and aspirations of women. The next step must be a Gender Equality Strategy which recognises why women are unequal and which proposes positive action measures, with targets and indicators of progress, so that real changes can be made. (Margaret's speech can be downloaded from our website: www.wrda.net)

Women and the 'Grass Ceiling'

The WRDA report *The Grass Ceiling: audit of women in Rural Areas in the North of Ireland*, written for us by Marie Crawley, has been flying out of our office, such is the demand. In addition, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development requested a pdf file of the report, to enable them to put it on their internal mailing system so that all members of staff could access it.

When launching *The Grass Ceiling* at the WRDA AGM on 27 September, Director Margaret Ward said, 'For the first time, we have an accurate picture of the realities of rural women's lives, one which will provide an important benchmark for the future'.

Free Copies of the report can be obtained from WRDA. Send an A4 size stamped addressed envelope with £1.09

Good Relations work begins!

WRDA has contracted Trademark to work with us in the development of a resource pack on 'Good Relations' which will be ready for piloting by the end of March 2007. This is a new direction for WRDA and we hope that this venture will enable women in the community to develop an understanding of such difficult issues as prejudice, discrimination, diversity, while also gaining the confidence to engage others in considering how these issues have impacted on ourselves and our society. Our future work will build on this foundation so that the women's sector and grass roots women will have the knowledge, confidence and capacity to engage effectively with the 'A Shared Future' agenda of government.

**Merry Christmas from everyone
at WRDA!**

