

National Women's Council of Ireland E-newsletter
Comhairle Naisiunta na mBan in Eirinn Nuachtlitir Leightreonach

November 2006

1. NWC POLICY NEWS	2
Pre- Budget 2007 Submission.....	2
A Guide to Effective Lobbying for Women's Groups in Ireland launched.....	2
Equal At Work Conference 'Working to unite the Community sector & the trade union movement'.....	3
2. HEALTH.....	3
Publication & Launch of NWC Report Women's Health in Ireland: Meeting International Standards by Minister for Health & Children Mary Harney TD.....	3
Amnesty launch lobbying network.....	3
New Website: Mental Health Coalition Website.....	3
Irish Breast Cancer Charter.....	3
3. EDUCATION.....	3
ZEST 4 Programme 2006 – April 2007.....	3
Funding Opportunity	3
4. EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE RULING ON LENGTH OF SERVICE AND PAY.....	3
5. ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY UNDER THE EQUAL STATUS ACTS	3
Advocacy for Equality Legislation by Niall Crowley, CEO, Equality Authority.....	3
6. NEWS FROM MEMBERS:.....	3
Ruhama offers information sessions to service providers and groups.....	3
Aontas Adult Learners' Festival.....	3
Women's Aid 16 Days of Action.....	3
Labour Women: Information Day Older People's rights and entitlements.....	3
One Family to launch Human Rights and One-Parent Families Booklet.....	3
Women's Human Rights Alliance.....	3
7. NWC NEWS	3
NWC Members Meeting November 23rd 2006.....	3
"Towards Election 2007 –Developing the Women's Manifesto".....	3
An evening talk with Mary Akrami.....	3
S.A.F.E. (Support for Afghan Further Education).....	3
"Pathways to Power: Women influencing decision-making in Blanchardstown ".....	3

1. NWCi POLICY NEWS

Pre- Budget 2007 Submission

The NWCi launched our Pre-Budget Submission on 13th September. The NWCi is prioritising five areas for Budget 2007

- Economic Independence for Women which includes recommendations on increasing social welfare payments, increasing women's access to social welfare payments in their own right, providing credits for care work, increasing access to full contributory pensions for older women and supporting parents on social welfare.
- Childcare – Maternity Benefit, Paid Parental Leave, Paternity Leave, free universal pre-school education and after school childcare.
- Women's Participation in Decision Making – funding the National Women's Strategy, core funding for women's community based organisations, promoting women's participation in political decision-making.
- Women's Health and Well Being – Budget line for an updated women's health policy Extending coverage for medical cards, introducing a cost of disability payment and funding for community organisations providing health services.
- Violence Against Women – Increased funding for services and dedicated budget lines in the relevant government departments.

For the full Pre-Budget Submission go to <http://www.nwci.ie>

The NWCi will be lobbying politicians for the month of November to implement these recommendations, which would make a real positive difference to women's lives. We are particularly focussing on the Minister for Social and Family Affairs Seamus Brennan, T.D. so as to finally bring about the changes we have campaigning for as part of our Women's Model for Social Welfare Reform Campaign.

A Guide to Effective Lobbying for Women's Groups in Ireland launched

On September 13th the NWCI launched our publication, 'A guide to effective lobbying for women's groups. The document aims to assist women's groups in developing effective campaigns and lobbying strategies to bring about positive change for women. It was produced with funding from the Combat Poverty Agency to act as a tool for women's groups to support their work.

The document is divided into 6 stages.

Stage 1. Lobbying and the potential for women's groups – which describes lobbying and the potential that exists or women's groups to achieve change through participation in the decision making process.

Stage 2. Describes how policy is made and the different groups involved in the policy making process.

Stage 3. Getting started on you lobbying campaign describes the steps involved in initiating a campaign .

Stage 4. Sets out guidelines for planning and building a campaign strategy.

Stage 5. Describes how to the effectively lobby right people the right way.

Stage 6. Developing your media strategy – gives tips on ways to attract media attention through developing press releases, holding press conferences and carrying out interviews. .

There is also a tools and resources section with useful information on such things as points to remember when writing to a politician, how to draft a submission, getting the most from meetings with decision makers, drafting parliamentary questions, the legislative process and useful contacts and phone numbers.

We hope you find the publication useful.

To download a free copy of the publication go to <http://www.nwci.ie>

Equal At Work Conference 'Working to unite the Community sector & the trade union movement'

**On Tuesday 21st November from 9.30am – 1pm; at Liberty Hall,
Eden Quay, Dublin1**

Presentations from:

David Connolly, Chair Community Sector/Trade Union Campaign Group; and from workers in the community sector on priority employment issues in the sector, including pay, pensions, training and also on challenges on how to organise the sector.

Responses from:

David Begg, General Secretary, ICTU, Jack O'Connor, General President, SIPTU, Shay Cody, Deputy General Secretary, IMPACT

Chair: Grainne Healy, Equal at Work Project

Why this conference?

As a result of negotiations in the recent Social Partnership talks (Towards 2016) the Department of Finance has agreed to discuss pay and conditions of the community sector with the unions. Up to now the Government has refused to take responsibility for employment issues in the community sector.

To Book a place (and light lunch): Craigie Communications Tel: 01 4100990; Email: vcraigie@eircom.net. Organised by: Equal At Work, DEP, 7 North Great George's St., Dublin 1. 01 878 8900'

2.HEALTH

Publication & Launch of NWCi Report Women's Health in Ireland: Meeting International Standards by Minister for Health & Children Mary Harney TD

The NWCi Report 'Women's Health in Ireland: Meeting International Standards' was published in September 2006. The report presents the NWCi policy position on women's health in Ireland in the context of International Standards and the impact of inequality on women's health. The purpose of the report is to influence policy and to this end NWCi make specific recommendations and put forward a framework from which a model for women's health policy and services could be developed.

The Minister for Health & Children, Mary Harney TD, launched the report on September 26th 2006 in the Mansion House, Dublin. Guest Speakers included Professor Cecily Kelleher, Head of the School of

Public Health & Science at UCD and Chair of the Women's Health Council (WHC) and Dr. Marie Hainsworth, Member of the NWCI, WHC and European Women's Lobby (EWL) Boards.

NWCI were pleased with the Ministers positive response to the report particularly her recognition of the negative impacts on women's health caused by women's continued inequality as well as women's over representation in poorly paid employment, the risk of gender based violence, women's reliance on public transport and regional inequalities in relation to access to health services.

Minister Harney acknowledged that there is a need for more gender based strategies and gender proofing of policies and she agreed that without focused gender policy initiatives there would be no action on women's health. She highlighted the need for action-based targets and timeframes. The Minister concluded her speech by saying that she was looking forward to future cooperation and meaningful dialogue with NWCI and she hoped to see progress in the area of women's health without delay.

The report is available from NWCI, contact Michelle Scanlon, NWCI Information Officer or you can download it from the NWCI website (www.nwci.ie).

Amnesty launch lobbying network

(www.amnesty.ie)

On Oct. 10th World Mental Health Day, Amnesty launched a lobbying network to campaign for implementation of the Government's mental health policy and promotion of rights for people experiencing mental health problems. Amnesty is asking individuals to get involved in this campaign. A lobbying action pack is available contact Karen Balfe, Tel: 01 677 6361 e-mail mentalhealth@amnesty.ie

New Website: Mental Health Coalition Website

<http://www.imhc.ie/>

The Mental Health Coalition seeks to improve the lives of people with mental health difficulties by advocating for people's rights to the highest attainable standard of mental health and mental healthcare. The website has an actions centre where people can raise their voices through e-mail messages directly to local TDs.

Irish Breast Cancer Charter

As part of the Irish Breast Cancer Campaign Europa Donna Ireland has launched the Irish Breast Cancer Charter. The charter lists 23 points

detailing the rights of every women with an actual/potential diagnosis of breast cancer.

For copies of the charter contact Europa Donna Ireland Tel: 01 4960198 e-mail: edi@iol.ie (<http://www.europadonnaireland.ie/>)

3. EDUCATION

ZEST 4 Programme 2006 – April 2007

A final round of funding from ZONTA International has enabled NWCI to fund three projects. The ZEST programme targets women, particularly those living in disadvantaged communities and resources initiatives that support women's empowerment and capacity building through women's community based education. Projects funded under ZEST 4 are:

The Irish Deaf Women's Group who are running innovative education courses for deaf women throughout Ireland; St. Michael's Estate Family Resource Centre, Inchicore who are providing needs based education for migrant African women from the local community and WAVES Support Service for Women, Sligo who are providing education courses as part of their programme for women survivors of Domestic Violence.

Funding Opportunity

Applications are now invited from community organisations to participate in the Back To Education Initiative, Community Strand (Part Time Programme) 2007

Deadline for submission of completed applications is Friday 8th December 2006.

For application guidelines go to

http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/btei_guidelines_strand_community.doc

For BTEI Community Strand Application Form go to

http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/btei_strand_community.doc

For further information contact the Further Education Development Unit, Department of Education & Science. 12 Talbot St. Dublin 1. Tel: 01 878 7144

4. EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE RULING ON LENGTH OF SERVICE AND PAY

The European Court of Justice has ruled that length of service is an acceptable basis on which to decide how much an employee should be paid; and that experience was an appropriate and legitimate factor in deciding salaries. It said that, where pay was based on length of service, there was no need for an employer to justify a person's salary unless he or she could provide evidence "capable of raising serious doubts in that regard".

This is a retrograde step in that the Court accepted the argument that length of service criteria for determining pay should require justification only when the employee can prove that it is disproportionate. The Court made no reference to a 1997 EU Directive that places the obligation on employers to prove that they are not discriminating in cases where there are gender pay differences.

The ruling was made in the case of Bernadette Cadman, a principal Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector in the UK. [Article 141](#) of the EC Treaty stipulates: "each member state shall ensure that the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value is applied". However, male colleagues Bernadette Cadman, although on the same professional grade as her, were paid up to 9,000 pounds sterling (around 13,300 euro) a year more than she was.

Cadman works as a health inspector for the [UK Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE), which is, ironically, in charge of promoting [gender equality](#) in the workplace within the UK. The HSE applies a system of pay increases that rewards length of service. In the case of Cadman, the HSE justified her lower wages because of the time she had taken off to raise her children had not contributed to her professional experience.

Back in 2001, Cadman sued the HSE before an UK employment tribunal, which in first instance ruled in her favour. The HSE appealed against the ruling, however. The Employment Appeal Tribunal was along the same lines as the 1989 [Danfoss case](#). In that case, the court judged that, as a general rule, no special justification is required where unequal payment results from different lengths of service being taken into account.

In 2003, Cadman appealed against the decision of the Employment Appeal Tribunal to the UK Court of Appeal, and also got support from the UK [Equal Opportunities Commission](#). The Court of Appeal found that the use of length of service as a determinant of pay has a disproportionate impact on women, because they have on average shorter service time than men. It confirmed that length of service as a

determinant of pay plays an important part in the gap between female and male workers.

As this gap continues to exist, the Court of Appeal asked the European Court of Justice whether its case law from the Danfoss case is still valid in that 'the employer does not have to provide special justification for recourse to the criterion of length of service'. The Court of Appeal referred her case to the European Court of Justice for a ruling because of doubts over its implication.

In giving its ruling, the European court defended pay schemes based on length of service. It said that since experience "enables the worker to perform his duties better", the employer did not have to justify paying longer-serving male workers more than their female counterparts for doing the same job " unless the worker provides evidence capable of raising serious doubts in that regard". It added that there was "no need to show that an individual worker has acquired experience during the relevant period which has enabled him to perform his duties better".

The Court of Justice [ruled](#) that, as a general rule, employers can use service time to determine their employee's payment level without any further justification, because "recourse to the criterion of the length of service is appropriate to attain the legitimate objective of rewarding experience acquired which enables the worker to perform his duties better".

However, a payment scheme based on service time is not necessarily in contradiction to the principle of equal payment for men and women. If a worker raises doubts as to length of service time being a valid criterion for determining workers' experience and professional skills, the employer must justify why he thinks it is valid. But the obligation is on the employee to do this.

Ms Cadman's case will now be referred back to the UK Court of Appeal and then to the employment tribunal, where she could win a salary rise and six years' backdated pay.

Sharing Caring Work

Paid parental leave

We need a system in Ireland of paid parental leave that will enable a greater sharing of care work between women and men. Currently, at 14 weeks of unpaid leave, Ireland has one of the worst entitlements in Europe and only 20% of parents have taken this leave since it was introduced. The NWCI has campaigned for 26 weeks of paid parental leave to be introduced on an incremental basis, as part of our Accessible Childcare Model.

5.ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY UNDER THE EQUAL STATUS ACTS

Advocacy for Equality Legislation by Niall Crowley, CEO, Equality Authority

The Equal Status Acts apply to the provision of goods and services. Specific provisions are made in relation to educational establishments and in relation to access to and disposal of accommodation. The Acts cover the public and the private sectors. There are separate provisions on registered clubs – that is clubs that hold a licence to sell alcohol. The Acts cover the nine grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion and membership of the Traveller community.

The Equal Status Acts marked a significant new departure in Irish equality legislation. The Acts expanded the prohibition on discrimination beyond the workplace and a focus on employees into the wider field of goods and services and a focus on customers. As a new area of legislation, it has taken time for organisations to gear up to their responsibilities and for the groups covered by the legislation to make full use of its capacity to address their experiences of discrimination and to achieve change in their situations of inequality.

The Equal Status Acts prohibit discrimination, sexual harassment and harassment, and victimisation. The Acts require the provision of special treatment or facilities for people with disabilities where without these it would be unduly difficult or impossible for them to access the services unless this would cost more than a normal cost. Positive action is allowed to cater for the special needs of people or to promote equality of opportunity for people who are disadvantaged. The Acts contain a number of exemptions. These include that any action required under statutory provision is not covered by the Acts.

The gender ground has been emerging slowly in the casefiles under the Equal Status Acts. In the 2005 Equality Authority Annual Report casefiles under the Equal Status Acts on the gender ground accounted for 10% (36 out of 358) out of the total number of casefiles under the Acts. There were higher numbers of casefiles under the Acts on the Traveller, disability and race grounds. The allegations of discrimination on the gender ground covered discriminatory clubs, primary education and public sector services in particular. This does not reflect the broad spread of issues evident in casefiles under other grounds.

This contrasts with the impact of the equality legislation on the gender ground in the workplace. In the 2005 Equality Authority Annual

Report the gender ground accounted for 19% (70 out of 359) of casefiles under the Employment Equality Acts. This was the second highest ground after the race ground and covered a broad range of issues including access to employment, access to promotion, dismissal, equal pay, sexual harassment and working conditions.

It is important that women have access to advocacy supports in relation to the Equal Status Acts. Such advocacy supports include:-

- The provision of information on the legislation
- The provision of advice and support in taking cases under the Acts.
- Contributing to a culture of compliance with the legislation among service providers.

The Equality Authority makes an important contribution in this regard. However, it is important to have a wider range of such advocacy supports. Trade Unions make important contributions in this regard in the workplace. Community organisations have a key contribution to make in this regard for the Equal Status Acts.

2007 is the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. The European Commission have identified rights as an important focus for the year and the provision of information on equality legislation as a key objective for the Year. Hopefully, the Year can provide the impetus for the emergence of a wider range of advocacy supports for women in relation to the Equal Status Acts and that women's organisations might be able to contribute to this valuable role.

6.NEWS FROM MEMBERS:

Ruhama offers information sessions to service providers and groups

Ruhama, an organisation that has been working with women in prostitution since 1989 is offering awareness raising inputs to particular service providers and groups. The requirement is that they work with a target group that may be involved in or vulnerable to prostitution and that are based within the greater Dublin area.

Ruhama published research in 2005 that identified the factors and individual challenges affecting women and the supports that help them exit prostitution. From this we developed information sessions which are designed to raise awareness among those services likely to encounter women involved in prostitution, regarding the complexity of the prostitution issue, social, psychological, legal and financial to name just some. These sessions can be a one off or involve two or

three inputs. Links to Ruhama's services to women in prostitution can then be established where necessary. (See www.ruhama.ie for more information on our work).

For more information please contact Kay Bailey at Ruhama.
Ruhama, Senior House, All Hallows College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.
01-8360292 or email development@ruhama.ie

Aontas Adult Learners' Festival

AONTAS, The National Association of Adult Education, is organising its inaugural Adult Learners' Festival in January 2007. The theme of this festival will be 'Equal Learning Opportunities For All'.

The aim of the Festival is to promote and celebrate adult learning and the achievements of adult learners, and to raise the profile of adult and community education in general.

The festival will take place nationwide over the course of one week from January 22nd - 26th. It will feature a range of events at regional and local level and a number of high-profile events at national level including the STAR (showcasing teamwork, awarding recognition) awards and a policy-focussed event.

We would ask members of the National Women's Council who are involved in adult and community learning, its provision or promotion, to get involved in the festival. AONTAS believes in the value of women's community education and endeavours to highlight and promote work done at local level. The festival provides an opportunity for women's groups to showcase their work, to highlight the learning achievements of women and to encourage other women to become involved. It also serves as a mechanism to introduce or reinforce the work done by women's groups to local councillors and politicians, which will in turn act to kick-start lobbying campaigns for the forthcoming general election and ensure that women's issues are placed firmly on the political agenda.

To join in the celebrations and be a part of the nationwide adult learners festival or to nominate a group for the STAR awards please contact AONTAS. In the coming months we will be providing groups with posters, a list of how you might mark the event and contact details of local festival co-ordinators. Together let's make this a successful event that highlights the learning of all adult learners in Ireland.

If you would like to be part of the Adult Learners' Festival or would like further information please contact us on 01 4068220 or email mail@aontas.com. To find out more about the work of AONTAS please see our website: www.aontas.com

Women's Aid 16 Days of Action

This year marks the 16th year of the global 16 Days of Action Opposing Violence against Women: From November 25 until December 10.

Women's Aid has released its 16 Days of Action Opposing Violence Against Women Bumper Information Pack for 2006. This pack is designed as a means of exchange of ideas for action, it includes a calendar of events for 2006 and details of past actions in Ireland. This year we have included a series of 'Reflections' quotes from activists involved around the country that show the impact and meaning of the campaign. The pack has been mailed to over 500 organisations and individuals around the country.

The information pack is free to download at <http://www.womensaid.ie/pages/what/campaigning/1606.pdf>.

Also, this year Women's Aid has inaugurated a special 16 Days website. The website is up and running now. The site is designed to be an ongoing way of gathering information on what is happening running up to and during the 16 days this year. Anyone interested in the campaign should visit www.ireland16days.blogspot.com for regular updates and information. Women's Aid encourages groups active during the campaign to use the site to advertise their events and any comments and ideas are welcome.

Women's Aid will be staging a public action outside Dáil Eireann on the eve of the campaign, Friday 24th November. Details will be available closer to the time.

For more information contact Christina Sherlock at christina.sherlock@womensaid.ie or on 01-8684721.

Labour Women: Information Day Older People's rights and entitlements

'Older People's Rights & Entitlements' Information Day in Palmerstown :

Labour Women and Senator Joanna Tuffy will be hosting an Information Day 'Older People's Rights & Entitlements' on Fri 17th November 10.30am in Palmerstown (venue to be confirmed) . Carers, nursing home fees, home help, and home care packages are some of the issues we will provide information on. For more information contact Kirsi Hanifin 01-6784700 / 087-6258043 or Kirsi.hanifin@labour.ie. Everyone welcome!

One Family to launch Human Rights and One-Parent Families Booklet

One Family invites you to the launch of Human Rights and One-Parent Families. The booklet provides an introduction to human rights and how they can be used to advance the rights of one-parent families in Ireland, with a foreword by Mary Robinson
Dr Maurice Manning, Irish Human Rights Commission will launch the publication on Wednesday 8 November 2006 at 4.00pm in The Oak Room, Mansion House Dawson Street Dublin 2

RSVP: info@onefamily.ie or 01 662 9212 by Friday 3 November 2006

Women's Human Rights Alliance

The full report from the "Taking CEDAW Seriously" seminar which took place in March is now available on the WHRA website along with photographs from the conference. Log onto <http://www.whra.ie> to download a copy. Details of the parallel sessions focusing on the following perspectives Monitoring implementation of CEDAW, Using CEDAW as a legal tool to eliminate discrimination, and Working from a feminist perspective and making CEDAW relevant at the local level are also available online.

7. NWCI NEWS

NWCI Members Meeting November 23rd 2006

“ Towards Election 2007 –Developing the Women’s Manifesto”

**Thursday November 23rd 2006 (10.00am – 3pm)
Tullamore Court Hotel, Tullamore, Co. Offaly**

Come to this members meeting to;

- **Discuss women’s priorities for the next election**
- **Input into the NWCI Women’s Manifesto**
- **Listen to the views of women’s groups**

Agenda

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 10.00 – 10.30 | Registration Tea and Coffee |
| 10.30 – 10.45 | Welcome and Introductions – Therese |
| Murphy (NWCI Chair) | |
| 10.45 – 11.15 | “Priorities for the General Election” inputs |
| from: | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Network of Women’s Refuges & Support Services• ICA Athlone |
| 11.15 – 11.45 | Presentation on the draft NWCI Election Manifesto -- Joanna Mc Minn (NWCI Director) |
| 11.45 – 12.00 | Using the manifesto at local level – Valerie O Carroll (Clondalkin Women’s Network) |
| 12.00 – 1.00 | Workshops (to discuss and feed into the manifesto and put forward suggestions as to how it may be used to best effect) |
| 1.00pm | Lunch |
| 2.00 – 3.00 | Feedback from Workshops and discussion |
| 3.00pm | Close |

An evening talk with Mary Akrami

The NWCi hosted a networking and information event for Mary Akrami an Afghan women's activist on the evening of Tuesday October 24th 2006. Approx. 35 people attended. Participants at the event expressed interest in supporting the work, which Mary is involved in and the NWCi will keep those who attended updated on her work.

Brief outline of the situation for women in Afghanistan:

Afghanistan is a country of approximately 23 million, which, after three years of severe drought, 23 years of war and devastation and five years under the Taliban authorities, has been left as one of the poorest countries in the world. Afghanistan has the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world. Even before the Taliban came to power, Afghanistan had high maternal and child mortality rates and a very low literacy rate for women. But women participated economically, socially and politically in the life of their societies. Women helped to draft the 1964 Constitution. In the 1970s, there were at least three women legislators in the Parliament. Up to the early 1990s, women were teachers, government workers and medical doctors. They worked as professors, lawyers, judges, journalists, writers and poets.¹

After the Taliban's rise to power, women and girls were systematically discriminated against and marginalized, and their human rights were violated. This resulted in the deteriorating economic and social conditions of women and girls in all areas of the country, in particular in areas under Taliban control. Women and girls continued to be severely restricted in their access to education, health care facilities and employment. During the Taliban's rule, only about 3 per cent of girls received some form of primary education. The ban on women's employment also affected boys' education, as the majority of teachers had been women. Poor health conditions and malnutrition made pregnancy and childbirth exceptionally dangerous for Afghan women.²

The Taliban's policies also severely limited women's freedom of movement. Women could travel only when accompanied by a male

¹ Report of the Secretary-General. "Discrimination Against Women and Girls in Afghanistan." (<http://www.un.org/events/women/2002/sit.htm>)

² Report of the Secretary-General. "Discrimination Against Women and Girls in Afghanistan." (<http://www.un.org/events/women/2002/sit.htm>)

relative, which put a particular strain on female-headed households and widows. In May 2001, a decree was issued by the Taliban, banning women from driving cars, which further limited their activities. The resulting seclusion of women to the home constituted a form of solitary confinement and also created obstacles to women meeting with each other. Women were harassed and beaten by the Taliban if their public appearance was perceived to be in contradiction with Taliban edicts. Women's removal from the public space also meant that women could not play any role in the political process and were excluded from all forms of formal or informal governance. Afghan women suffered domestic and other types of violence for the past 25 years, not just under the Taliban regime.³

Introducing Mary Akrami:

Mary Akrami is the first woman from Afghanistan to come speak publicly in Ireland. She has done impressive and courageous work for the advancement of women in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban. Born in Kabul, she set off her career by working as an administrative assistant. She left her city just before the Taliban took control. Many other women, just like her fled to Peshawar in Pakistan. With no job, no income and no hope, they began gradually to build their lives. They decided to work to improve women situation in Afghanistan and so, under Akrami's initiative, they began working to find jobs for refugee women. With the donations of sympathetic groups and other NGOs, they managed to expand their work slowly. As time went by, with the help of Norwegian aid and Care International, the effort resulted in the formation of Afghan Women Skills Development Centre (AWSDC).

AWSDC was established in 1999 by Akrami and other committed Afghan women with the aim to reduce the sufferings of Afghan women and children through promotion of peace and initiation of rehabilitation and development programs. It is an organization with vocational skills and facilities for information provided through different workshops according to the needs of women and girls that reach isolated women and enable them to become self-sufficient and to improve their status within the family and the community.

In the past two years, the main activities that AWSDC engaged in ranged from organizing English and computer classes and short term training courses on different management topics such as mathematics, gender education, human rights and capacity building. AWSDC has also been involved in adult literacy since its foundation in 1999, has

³ Report of the Secretary-General. "Discrimination Against Women and Girls in Afghanistan." (<http://www.un.org/events/women/2002/sit.htm>)

provided income generation facilities to women and safe, secure place to women for living, and small loans for further business.

AWSDC vision:

With the support of donor agencies, AWSDC hopes to strengthen its present activities and expand its areas of operation. It envisions an Afghanistan in which all members – women, children, and men – participate equally. Moreover, it aspires to create an Afghan community which values, respects, and encourages the great capacities of women and their contributions to Afghan culture and society.

S.A.F.E. (SUPPORT FOR AFGHAN FURTHER EDUCATION)

YOU ARE INVITED TO A CHRISTMAS CARD & AFGHAN CRAFT SALE

At “Tara”, Ballyfad, Gorey, Co. Wexford.

In aid of:

The Shelter For Women and Children in Kabul

Run by AWSDC (the Afghan Women’s Skills Development Centre)

Director: Mary Akrami

Date: Saturday, November 4th

Time: From 11am to 5pm

Coffee/Tea

Part of the work of AWSDC is running a 'Shelter' in Kabul for women who have suffered rape and abuse, young women who have been forced into an early marriage or are trying to escape from being forced to marry and young children who have been victims of extreme violence. There are now 33 people in the Shelter—more than anticipated, but nobody can be turned away.

AWSDC and Mary Akrami is also involved in Women's Rights., Civil Society and Peacebuilding.

Mary Akrami was the very first Afghan woman to have an opportunity of speaking to people in Ireland about the work of AWSDC, about the situation of women in Afghanistan, and the general situation in Afghanistan.

She spoke to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs on Tuesday 24th October, the first Afghan woman to enter the hallowed precincts of Dail Eireann!

On 11th October she attended ENNA (European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan) meetings in Brussels, and was the first Afghan woman to attend their meetings. On 12th October Mary Akrami was part of a round table discussion in the European Parliament, (Afghanistan-5 years on), and was the only Afghan woman present.

“Pathways to Power: Women influencing decision-making in Blanchardstown “

Launch of research report **“Pathways to Power: Women influencing decision-making in Blanchardstown “** by Maureen Bassett and Mary Quinlan

Friday Nov 24th 2006 10 am to 2 pm including light lunch

Venue: Draiocht Theatre Blanchardstown Centre. Dublin 15.

Draiocht is fully accessible.

This report presents the outcomes of the research carried out by Mary Quinlan and Maureen Bassett for Involve. The aim of the Involve project is to address the gender imbalance that continues to be a feature of Irish society, by supporting an increasing number of local women to participate in decision-making in Blanchardstown.

Conference aim:

This conference will assist both policy makers and also members of the community sector to prepare for the potential scenario in the near future, where all public authorities in the Republic will be required by legislation, as in Northern Ireland, to pro-actively promote equality, including equality between women and men. This research report will be a tool for both policy makers and the community sector to assist the development of meaningful participative policy making.

Inputs : from researchers, speakers, and creative input from women doing leadership training using creative arts methodologies. For more info see brochure [http:// www.involve.ie](http://www.involve.ie)