

National Women's Council of Ireland E –Newsletter

Comhairle Naisiunta na mBan in Eirinn Nuachtlitir Leichtreonach

MARCH 2008

NWCI POLICY NEWS 3

NWCI Women's Health Roundtable Discussion.....3

Women and Disability – Building Solidarity and Inclusion NWCI February Members Meeting.....3

NWCI MEMBERS MEETING APRIL 12TH 2008 3

Social Welfare Reform Campaign.....3

THE NWCI AND THE MEDIA 3

Communications and Media Work for the Social Welfare Reform Campaign.....3

THE NWCI CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2008 3

NWCI MEMBERS CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 3

Dublin 12 Women's Action Group Celebrate International Women's Day..... 3

Celebrating International Women's Day in Longford.....3

An Cosán Mark International Women's Day..... 3

The ICA Mark International Women's Day..... 3

Network Ireland Mark International Women's Day.....3

NEWS FROM MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF THE NWCI 3

Women in Technology and Science Re-Enter Programme.....3

Doctoral Research Opportunities at NUI Galway.....3

Behind the Veil- Speaking from Muslim Women's Perspective Conference..... 3

Women's Aid Fundraising Events..... 3

NWCI POLICY NEWS

NWCI Women's Health Roundtable Discussion

The NWCI organised a Round Table discussion on 20 February 2008 to hear the thoughts of participants, including medical practitioners, health policy advisors, NGO and community organisation representatives and trade unionists, on health issues and the current crisis in the Irish health system. The focus of discussion was on how to have an equitable health system, identifying obstacles and possible areas of action for the NWCI in helping achieve this. The discussion formed the first step in developing a three year strategy on health that will utilise our limited resources most effectively, and that will contribute to the growing solidarity for change towards an equitable health system from women's perspective.

Inequalities in health and in access to health services

Currently the Irish health service perpetuates inequality and basic human rights are denied. Key issues include the fact that poor people get sick more often and die younger and women are overly represented in poverty figures. Also poor people have slower access to what can be essential medical care and women need to access care more due to reproductive health and the fact that they live longer. The Combat Poverty Agency has shown 250,000 people who live on the poverty line do not have access to a medical card. There is a need to focus on these key issues as part of a gendered approach to health.

Ireland's two tier health system is central to the current health crisis. As the system currently operates women who can afford private care can access diagnosis and treatment quicker than women who cannot afford to pay for private care or have private health insurance.

Since the 2001 health strategy, the two main developments in health services in Ireland have been the establishment of the HSE and increased privatisation of health services. Recent events like the cancer crisis and the cutbacks have raised concerns over the HSE's ability to manage effectively and to be accountable. The National Treatment Purchase Fund and the plan to co locate private hospitals on the grounds of public hospitals diverts money and expertise from the public health service.

Round table comments

There was general welcome for the NWCI initiative as timely to achieve strategic changes based on evidence in health. The health services are currently reeling from one crisis after another, but only some issues get into headlines e.g. what about mental health services? The participants felt it would be very useful for a concerted attempt to gather evidence on inequalities in health from a gender perspective.

The main issues, questions and concerns emerging were:

- Public participation in health and the difficulties in addressing issues of concern; unspoken censure, no tolerance of dissent
- Population health approaches in DOH and need for DOH reform
- Financing of health services, poor management, and need for clarification of what health actually costs; general feeling that people would be happy to see more public money being spent on a health service they trusted
- Clarity of role of health system, where the job of the health system begins and ends
- Social Health Insurance (SHI) and the need to build infrastructure to ensure services are available
- Gendered perspectives on mental health and in particular on the relationship between domestic violence and mental health
- The economics of Human Rights, public interest litigation and rights based approaches to health elsewhere, how an EU Charter of patient rights would apply in Ireland
- Privatisation of health services
- Mobilisation on health, bringing together trade unions, Churches, health groups, and mobilising women in that process
- Navigating one's way around the health services, good things going on and there is a need to support them.

All those in attendance were very positive about the meeting, with participants keen to be kept update on follow up NWCI actions. The next step will be to design a three year strategy and recruit an outreach policy facilitator to implement the NWCI strategy.

Women and Disability – Building Solidarity and Inclusion NWCI February Members Meeting

This members meeting was on the theme of women and disability and brought together a wide range of women from all over the country to explore ways in which women's groups can meaningfully include disabled women in the work that they do. The speakers included Marian Maloney Nolan (Women with Disabilities in the West) Ursula Barry (Women's Education Research and Resource Centre), Dinah Dodrill (Fingal Centre for the Unemployed) and Dee Byrne (Irish Deaf Women's Group). Some of the issues highlighted included;

- The importance of understanding disability from a social perspective – this involves recognising that inadequate social, environmental, political and economic factors in society have a huge impact on people who have impairments and prevent them from participating fully in society.
- The importance of supporting the development of groups and fora for women with a disability.
- The need for all women's groups to make particular efforts to raise their awareness of the issues affecting disabled women, challenge their own stereotypes and work to include disabled women in all of their activities.
- The importance of developing disability inclusion policies within women's organisations.
- The importance of consulting with women with a disability and their groups and organisations before coming to a position on the best way forward for disabled women.
- The lack of resources available towards the provision of key facilities e.g. sign interpreters
- The importance of disability awareness training for women's groups.

At the meeting, a draft disability inclusion policy was distributed. The purpose of this document which is currently being compiled by the NWCI is to act as a resource or guide for women's groups towards including disabled women in their work. A copy of the draft has been sent to all of our member groups for feedback and we hope to have the document finalized in April.

This members meeting also included an input by an Ceann Comhairle John O'Donoghue on women's engagement in the political process. We

hope to follow up this lively discussion with a meeting with an Ceann Comhairle to discuss ways in which the Oireachtas and the political system in Ireland can ensure greater women's participation.

NWCI Members Meeting April 12th 2008

Members Meeting on NWCI Pensions Research

Have your say on the future direction of the NWCI Policy on PENSIONS

Consultation Meeting for all members

We are seeking urgent reform of the social welfare system and in particular seeking to ensure that all women are entitled to a full contributory pension in their own right.

Women comprise the majority of the older population and historically have been treated in a discriminatory fashion in the 'male breadwinner model' of social welfare.

This is YOUR opportunity to ensure your issues form part of the NWCI policy on PENSIONS

**Saturday April 12th 2008
10.30am – 3.30pm**

The Academy Plaza Hotel, Findlater Place, Dublin 1,

(opposite the old entrance to DIT, Cathal Brugha Street, for further directions, please contact the NWCI)

Contribution towards Travel & Care costs

We want to hear your views make sure you contribute to this very important piece of POLICY

Rsvp imeldab@nwci.ie

Social Welfare Reform Campaign

The NWC social welfare campaign aims to achieve reform of the social welfare system so that it becomes more equitable for women. There has been a lot of work on the campaign over the last number of months.

Research

We have commissioned research on women and pensions which will focus on developing a model of pensions which will be women friendly. The research will be completed in May 2008.

Green Paper on Pensions

Submissions must be in by mid 2008. These submissions can be in the form of a letter detailing your issues and seeking change in this area. This green paper on pensions can be obtained from the website at www.pensionsgreenpaper.ie or phone the Dept of Social & Family affairs on 01-7043000.

Submission to Technical Review of the Social Welfare Code

We have prepared a submission to the Department of Social & Family Affairs, in relation to their call for submissions regarding a review of all social welfare schemes to establish whether they are compliant with the provisions of the Equal Status acts 2000-2004.

Legal Case

We are consulting with FLAC (Free Legal Aid Centre) they are very interested in the issue of the marriage bar. We have met with them and passed on some of the letters we have received from women around the country. They are at present going through these and are looking at solid grounds for a case. We will keep you informed of any developments with this.

Outreach Work

Over the past few months we have held workshops with women's organisations in Cork and Kerry, we have linked many individual women who are affected by the marriage bar into these meetings. We have also visited groups in Clare, Galway, Limerick and Tipperary. This outreach work is ongoing and we will inform all of you when we are in your region or county. We now have two focus groups set up in the western region and the Cork/Kerry region.

If you would like further information on the campaign please contact Valerie at Valerieoc@nwci.ie
Mobile: 0876724785

THE NWCI AND THE MEDIA

Communications and Media Work for the Social Welfare Reform Campaign

Since January 2008, the Communications Officer has initiated a regional media strategy to compliment the Social Welfare Reform (SWR) Campaign. The strategy focussed on attaining media coverage and raising public awareness of the regional focus groups taking place, as part of the SWR Campaign. Media coverage was received for both the Cork/Kerry Focus Group and the Western Focus Group. Orla O'Connor, NWCI Head of Policy conducted all interviews.

Similar methods will be put in place to raise awareness for the remaining regional focus groups. The regional SWR Campaign media strategy will be part of the National Media Strategy which will be initiated in the Summer (2008).

THE NWCI CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2008

To celebrate International's Women's Day this year, the National Women's Council of Ireland joined with TASC (a progressive think tank for social change) on Wednesday 5th March, to launch a new and exciting book on Feminism. 'Where are we now? New feminist perspectives on women in contemporary Ireland' was received with great enthusiasm and interest by a large audience who had gathered for a seminar in Dublin, to discuss the book and the issues it raises.

The book, which aimed to bring new feminist perspectives into the public arena was jointly commissioned by the NWCI and TASC and was edited by Ursula Barry, from the School of Social Justice, University College Dublin. Ursula, along with nine contributing authors examined various issues pertinent to women's equality in 21st Century Ireland, including:

- The gender pay gap and women's economic status;
- The rise in domestic service and the crisis in care provision;
- Women with disabilities and those of migrant communities;
- The inequality of health and welfare services;
- Violence against women and reproductive choice; and
- Parenting among lesbians.

The seminar heard opening addresses from Ursula Barry and Joanna McMinn, Therese Murphy, NWC Chair, as well as Paula Clancy, the Director of TASC and the journalist Medb Ruane, who offered her views on the impact and challenges of feminism in Ireland.

Approximately 90 people attended the seminar and entered into lively discussion on round tables about the issues that were raised by the opening speeches. An open plenary session followed, where inputs from the various contributors to the book were heard. Some contributors brought very personal accounts to the discussion, while others spoke of the diverse inequalities that women in 21st century Ireland experience. The shared outlook amongst all contributors was one of greater equality between women and men, respect for gender and sexual diversity within a system of enhanced economic and social justice, human and reproductive rights.

The numbers that attended the seminar were bolstered in the evening, by many well-wishers and interested members of the public and the NGO sector, who arrived to the Wine Reception to officially launch 'Where are we now?' Author and journalist Susan McKay, who wrote the Introduction to the book was the Guest Speaker.

Media coverage of the event, the book and the issues for feminists in contemporary Ireland was received from television, radio and print press. Interviews were shared amongst Ursula Barry, Joanna McMinn, Paula Clancy & various contributing authors.

If you would like further information on the book, or would like to buy a copy please see www.newisland.ie .

For further information on TASC, please visit www.tascnet.ie.

NWCI Members Celebrate International Women's Day

Dublin 12 Women's Action Group Celebrate International Women's Day

The Dublin 12 Women's Action Group is a local voluntary group of women who are committed to promoting Women's issues in the Dublin 12 area.

On the 6th of March we celebrated "International Women's Day" by holding an event in St Agnes Parish Centre. This is a beautiful new centre in our area.

It was a very successful morning, and the event was very well attended by local women who enjoyed the free treatments that were on offer i.e. ear acupuncture, head massage and reiki.

These alternative disciplines were embraced by young and old alike. The morning also served to promote services in the area i.e. MABS, Childcare Information bureau, Mental health and Gardai, Loreto Centre, Local Employment Service and Citizens Information Service. The day highlighted and celebrated the hard work done by women in the community.

Celebrating International Women's Day in Longford

Longford Women's Link celebrated International Women's Day in Co Longford with an exciting and well-attended day of food and activities at their centre. Over one hundred and fifty women participated in a day that offered an international café, drumming, pampering and other workshops, and an exhibition of women's arts and crafts.

Organiser of the event, Siobhán Madden, said, 'It was a fantastic day, a special day, with women celebrating their achievements together and in their own unique way. We had teenagers saying the day was 'deadly' and 'funky', and older women who admitted they didn't expect to enjoy themselves nearly as much as they did! Having food from a dozen nations, including Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Iran, Pakistan, Latvia, Slovakia, Spain, Russia, South Africa, and Scotland proved a great way to get women of such different ages, cultures and

backgrounds conversing with each other, and we built on that commonality with our workshops.'

These workshops included a highly-popular drumming workshop that encouraged women to create sound and energy together using African drums, and a creative-jigsaw workshop that created a collage of women's achievements locally as well as globally. Pampering and relaxation sessions with holistic therapists who had been supported by Longford Women's Link economic-independence programme, encouraged women to take care of themselves in practical ways. The Day was organised in such a way as to provide an opportunity for women to 'sample' each workshop, just as they could sample the diverse foods of the International Café.

The Day itself closed with live entertainment. Siobhán added, 'It is clear from our event that as well as violence and economic hardship, many women also experience profound isolation and loneliness. While some of these women have moved to Co Longford from other countries and face language and cultural barriers, there are also many women who are isolated because they are lone parents, or elderly, or live in rural areas with no access to transport.' 'While we are delighted that this year's celebration proved so engaging, we will be taking the issues that women have raised with us, and reminding all political candidates of their obligations to address women's equality and safety and health issues under the Lisbon Agreement.' Finally, Elsie Moxham, Chair of Longford Women's Link, acknowledged the help the organisation had received from its staff and volunteers. 'Such a great day has only been possible because of the people who put so much effort into making International Women's Day a special event here in Longford. We would like to offer them a particular 'thank you'.

An Cosán Mark International Women's Day

The annual L'Oreal International Women's Day Luncheon in aid of An Cosán took place on Friday 7th March in the Four Seasons Hotel. One of Ireland's most acclaimed broadcasters, Miriam O'Callaghan, acted as MC for the afternoon luncheon, with over 300 guests in attendance. Key notes speaker Kathy Sheridan and guest of honour, Minister of State with responsibility for the Drug Strategy and Community Affairs in the Department Community, Rural, and Gaeltacht Affairs, Pat Carey were welcomed by Liz Waters, Chief Executive of An Cosán.

An Cosán is a community adult and early childhood education and enterprise centre, empowering women, enabling them to re-evaluate their lifestyle and ensuring a brighter future personally and socially. This highly regarded event raised in excess of €50,000 for the community development project, An Cosán in Tallaght West.

The ICA Mark International Women's Day

The Irish Countrywomen's Association organised their Spring Council meeting to coincide with International Women's Day. Hosted by Cork Federation at Moran's Silver Springs Hotel Cork, on March 7th and 8th.

Cork Deputy Lord Mayo Terry Shannon in his welcome said it was wonderful that ICA would hold their Council Meeting in Cork on the Centenary year of International Women's Day. A Social Evening followed with superb entertainment of drama and poetry, coral recitals from Douglas Guild and Togher Guild Choirs and a display of line dancing from the Ballyphenane Guild.

Saturday morning saw Maureen Quill open the conference. It was attended by hundreds of members from all twenty seven Federations. Then it was down to a very busy schedule with presentations from the Officers and Committees. The issues of the Breast Cancer misdiagnosis were discussed as well as an update on the roll out of BreastCheck.

Over all it was a very busy and successful meeting and truly a wonderful weekend celebrations of business and pleasure for International Women's Day 2008.

Network Ireland Mark International Women's Day

Network Ireland President Maria Groarke attended Kildare Network Dinner in Newbridge Silverware Restaurant which was a great success. A cheque for €14,000 was presented to the charity AWARE, the result of the Networks charity luncheon in Killashee Hotel.

The Network Ireland President celebrated International Women's Day in the Stephens Green Club, Dublin on March 12th with the launch of Veronicas Cannings "Shoeisms". There was also a Network National

Celebration trip to Brussels and Cologne. See <http://www.networkireland.ie> for more details.

NEWS FROM MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF THE NWC

Women in Technology and Science Re-Enter Programme

WITS | Re-Enter is an accredited return to work programme for women scientists, engineers and technologists. This is a comprehensive 1 year pilot programme comprised of a 10 week online course delivered by the Open University, followed by tailored mentoring and networking aimed at supporting women returning to a career in science, engineering and technology. This programme is co-funded by WITS and Inter Trade Ireland, the cross-border Trade & Business Development Body. WITS – Women in Technology and Science – are an independent, non-profit organisation to actively support women in technology and science across the island of Ireland.

The aims of the Re-Enter programme:

- To have 20 women successfully complete the Re-Enter programme and return to a technical career.
- To create awareness among employers and relevant state agencies of this untapped pool of experience and skills.

Who is eligible to apply?

Females who:

- are resident in Northern Ireland or Ireland
- have previously worked in SET
- have a degree (or higher) in SET
- have taken a career break of more than 12 months
- are highly motivated to return to a technical career
- have access to the internet and a computer suitable to participate in the Open University programme

- are willing to act as a role model

The Programme content includes

- a series of information workshops
- tailored basic skills development
- a 10 week accredited on-line educational programme –

Open University (T161) Return to Science Engineering and Technology
Initially the student reflects on what has been achieved so far and develops their CV. The student then explores the employment trends and opportunities within their specific area of interest. Finally the student will produce a powerful action plan that will help them achieve the goals they have identified for their future.

- tailored mentoring and networking programme with both regional and sectoral focus

Costs:

The programme is free to successful applicants

To find out more:

Attend one of our countrywide information workshops.
For details go to <http://www.witsireland.com/re-enter>

Interested in Re-Entering a career in Science, Engineering or Technology (SET)?

Contact us at

E re-enter@witsireland.com

T +353-87-769-0319

W www.witsireland.com/re-enter

Doctoral Research Opportunities at NUI Galway

The School of Political Science and Sociology at NUI Galway is pleased to announce three thematic doctoral research fellowships in the field of Rural Studies in the following areas:

1. New Forms of Governance in Rural Areas

2. Rural Livelihoods

Contact person: Professor Chris Curtin chris.curtinn@uigalway.ie , School of Political Science & Sociology

3. Women, Leadership and Rural Development

This scholarship contributes to the development of gender-focused research in Rural Studies. Specifically, it will fund doctoral research relating to the lives of 'rural women' in the context of new thinking around sustainable rural development policies and practices. Recognising that the work women do in the countryside is not only economically important but is also significant socially, politically and culturally, we welcome doctoral scholarship proposals that:

- Investigate the range of theoretical and policy frames, national and/or international, available to interpret the lives and interests of 'rural women'
- Critically examine the engagement of rural development and agricultural policies with gender issues and of gender equality and human rights frameworks with sustainable rural development
- Maintain a strong focus on developing and engaging women's leadership capacities, visions and action around sustainable rural development issues from national and international perspectives
- Explore the role of public policy in either reproducing and/or challenging inequalities
- Evaluate the relative effectiveness of community-based or state-led strategies to empower 'rural women' through women's groups, networks, education, training and other measures
- Explore the involvement of 'rural women' (or lack thereof) in local governance structures
- Investigate tensions between aspiration and implementation in advancing women's leadership and full participation in governance and decision-making in rural contexts

Contact persons: Dr. Anne Byrne (anne.byrne@nuigalway.ie)
and Dr. Niamh Reilly niamh.reilly@nuigalway.ie School of Political Science & Sociology NUIG.

Behind the Veil- Speaking from Muslim Women's Perspective Conference

As part of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue you are invited to attend a conference on the topic of Muslim Women in Ireland. The Conference takes place on Friday March 28th 2008 from 9 am – 4 pm in the Walton Theatre, Trinity College Dublin 2.

The theme of the conference is “Behind the veil”–Speaking from Muslim Women's Perspectives. Speakers include: Khadija Podd, Alicia Gayson, Umm Hisham, Bridget Tobin and Batool Al-Toma. All women are welcome. If you would like to attend please RSVP to womenconference@hotmail.co.uk .

Women's Aid Fundraising Events

ON YOUR BIKE!

Women's Aid Annual Fun Cycle
Saturday 17th May 2007
Dublin – Arklow

The Women's Aid Annual fund-raising cycle from Dublin to Arklow is happening on May 17th 2008.

Total sponsorship is €450.00, a non refundable deposit of €150.00 will secure your place.

So, start polishing those spokes and join us for a weekend to remember, when we cycle to the Arklow Bay Hotel for an overnight stay – with massages for muscles, leisure facilities for lounging, an evening meal to devour, spot prizes to win and many songs to sing until the early hours.

For more information and sponsorship cards, contact Ger Ennis (01) 8684721 or email ger.ennis@womensaid.ie

SINAI DESERT CHALLENGE



October 18th – 25th 2008
The sun ... The People ... The Dunes ...?

Join Women's Aid in the Sinai Desert Challenge

Sponsorship is €2950.00

Women's Aid is a voluntary organisation that support women who are physically, sexually and mentally abused in their own homes. Help us by taking part in our fund raising challenge and raising much needed funds to enable us to continue with our work.

For more information on this amazing trip please contact Ger Ennis now on 01 8684721 or email ger.ennis@womensaid.ie