

# WOMEN FOR CHANGE

Women working for social change and equality at local level

National Women's Council of Ireland  
Comhairle Náisiúnta na mBan in Éirinn

TRAINING LINKS  
2018 - 2019



# Women for Change

Evaluation report

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## EVALUATOR'S REPORT

One of the key concerns of the National Women's Council of Ireland is building support for women's groups and promoting the representation of women in decision-making is a critical area of concern.

*Women for Change* was a National Women's Council of Ireland initiative in response to the fact that there is little funding available to support training for women involved in, or interested in getting involved in, work to promote equality and social change.

The aim of the project was to bring a diversity of women who are currently involved or are interested in getting more involved in representation and participation in their local communities together, to access training, peer support and advocate for women's equality and social change. The programme was designed in the context of the need to resource spaces for women to strategise, support each other, build solidarity and exchange skills and experience.

### **The project objectives included:**

- To provide women across the country with the necessary skills and analysis to have their voices heard, build their confidence and expertise in their project work and community work for the benefit of local communities.
- Support the organisational development of NWCI through the development of a regional infrastructure making our work more effective at national level.
- To develop and support leadership among women to be advocates for women's equality issues.

### **The NWCI invited a range of organisations to collaborate on the initiative, including:**

- Community Work Ireland
- National Collective of Community Based Womens Network
- IRD Duhallow/Duhallow Womens Forum
- National Traveller Womens Forum,
- Longford Womens Link
- Women4Women/Southside Partnership
- Cultur Migrant Project
- West Clare Family Resource Centre
- Carlow County Development Partnership

Representatives on these organisations comprised the Steering Group for the project, which was funded by the Training Links programme.

The project issued an invitation for expressions of interest for women's groups to participate in the project. Within the framework of the project aim and objectives, participants were facilitated to identify the areas that they would like to focus on.

A total of 63 expressions of interest were received, an indication of the demand for this type of initiative at local level.

## Training

The training details are below. In general, the participants chose the themes that they wanted to focus on. In all 76 women participated in the training.

| Area              | Thematic areas/focus   | Number of participants |
|-------------------|--|------------------------|
| <b>Dublin</b>     | Womens Equality<br>Influencing Policy<br>Media Skills<br>Sustainable Development Goals<br>Self-care and resilience<br>Voice and Vocal Coaching | 11                     |
| <b>Navan</b>      | Intercultural and Womens Leadership<br>Self-Care and Resilience  | 12                     |
| <b>North Cork</b> | Influencing Policy<br>Effective Committees and Negotiations  | 12                     |
| <b>Mayo</b>       | Building a campaign<br>Public Sector Duty<br>Understanding Local Government<br>Self-care and resilience  | 11                     |
| <b>Limerick</b>   | Committee Skills<br>Influencing Policy   | 10                     |
| <b>Clare</b>      | Women Leadership and Communication   | 10                     |
| <b>Carlow</b>     | Preparing for Panels<br>Influencing Policy<br>Self-Care and Resilience   | 6                      |
| <b>Roscommon</b>  | Campaigning<br>Understanding Local Government  | 4                      |
| <b>Total</b>      |  | <b>76</b>              |

## EVALUATION

### Participants

The evaluation methodology included a comprehensive survey distributed to all participants, to which 45 responses were received. The survey was supported by a focus group with participants carried out on the final networking day.

### Steering Group

The evaluator attended one of the Steering Group meetings and an end of project survey was circulated to all members of the Steering Group.

### Project Co-ordinator

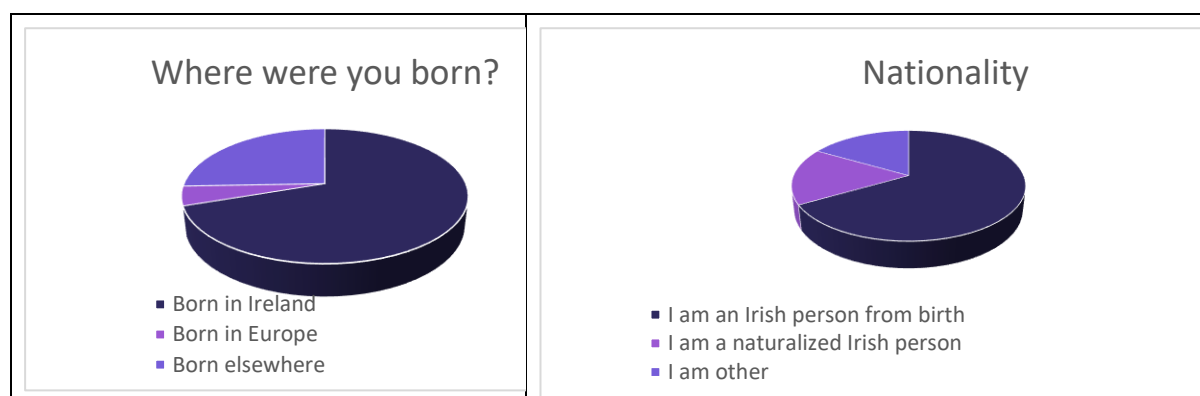
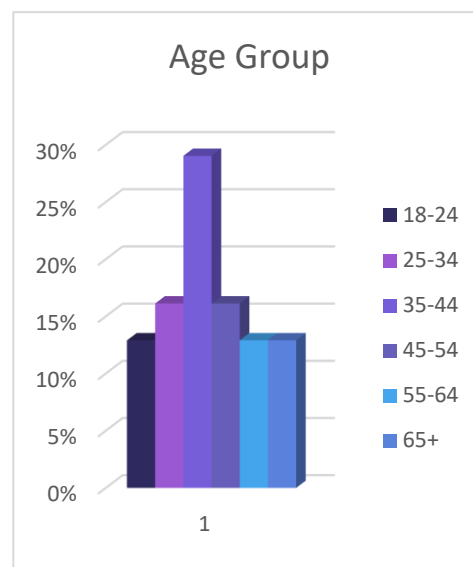
Ongoing updates were received from the Project Co-ordinator throughout the project.

## PROFILE

One of the objectives of the project was to encourage a diversity of women to participate in the programme and the profile of the participants indicate that diversity in terms of age and background was a feature of the participants.

Of the 45 responses to the online survey that were received, 13% were aged between 18 and 24 years, 16% were between 25 and 34 years, 29% were between 35 and 44 years, 16% were between 45 and 54 years, 13% were in the 55 and 64 years and 13% were over the age of 65 years.

Of those that responded, 70% were born in Ireland, 5% were born in Europe and 26% were born elsewhere including Nigeria, USA, Zimbabwe and Poland. The majority of participants (67%) were Irish from birth, 17% were naturalised Irish and 17% were 'other', including a number of people that stated they were currently seeking asylum in Ireland.



## MOTIVATION

When asked about their motivation for doing the training 33% of participants stated that they wanted to update and/or increase my knowledge of policy, 31% of participants stated that they wanted to get more involved in lobbying and/or campaigns, 18% of participants stated that they wanted to increase their skills in engaging with the media 38% said that they wanted to increase their leadership skills, 9% stated that they wanted to want to undertake a leadership position and 40% stated they got involved for 'other' reasons, including they wanted to meet with like-minded individuals, they wanted to learn more about women's equality and they wanted to get more involved in issues in their community.

*'I want to develop my leadership skills and learn more about women's equality'*  
(Participant)



*'I wanted to learn more about women's equality'*  
(Participant)

Members of the Steering Committee were also asked about their motivation for becoming involved with the programme. The responses indicated that the members felt that the programme would benefit a number of those that they engage with and/or complement work that they are engaged with.

*Being a member of the steering group was important for the SSP women's programme to meet other women's projects and to help shape the programme. We have a group of migrant women that we want to train in taking on leadership roles in the county.*

*CWI is a national membership organisation and a member of NWCI. We were asked to participate and agreed to do so as we felt it was relevant and complimentary to our work*

*Representing women in rural areas*

*helping to empower women in the area*

*LWL has been working to support women to engage in local democracy for ten years and felt it was important to be part of this project*

*IRD Duhallow has a long history of supporting women. The Duhallow Women's Forum was established in 1997 and is a network of fourteen women's groups in the Duhallow Region, who have come together "to share information, exchange ideas and undertake joint projects". This project offered an opportunity to continue the work of the Duhallow Women's Forum.*

## EXPECTATIONS

### Participants

When asked about their expectations in deciding to participate in the training programme, a number of participants stated that they wanted to meet like-minded people and to get active in their own communities.

Others stated that they wanted to build skills and capacity to get involved in various issues such as mental health or politics at local level.

Networking was an important element of the programme for all groups, as was the social element of the programme.

When asked if their expectations were met, all the participants at the focus group stated that they were and that they were exceeded.

*'I wanted to get more involved in lobbying and campaigning'*  
(Participant)

*'I wanted to build my skills and capacity'* (Participant)

*'I wanted to meet like-minded people and network with others'*  
(Participant)

### Steering Committee

The members of the Steering Committee were asked a similar question and their responses are below.

- The expectation was to give the women from our leadership programme the opportunity to share experience and to learn more about decision making structures and engagement opportunities. Taking part in the programme will ideally facilitate personal growth.
- To build confidence, consciousness and capacity of women (with a particular focus on marginalised and minority group women) to bring a feminist perspective to local decision making structures. To establish networks of women representatives locally and a national network of local representatives
- Tools would be developed which could be used in up-skilling women in areas of policy change
- To raise awareness of and support women in decision making and in civil society
- Clear guidelines, efficient coordination and meaningful cooperation between group members resulting in positive outcomes for participants
- To provide a series of workshop for participants to increase confidence and involvement in issue based items. To develop a network with other women's groups and identify what else is happening around the country.

## SATISFACTION LEVELS

For the most part, members of the Steering Committee believed their expectations of the programme were met, with a number stating that the provision of these opportunities for women is ambitious and long-term support and resources should be made available.

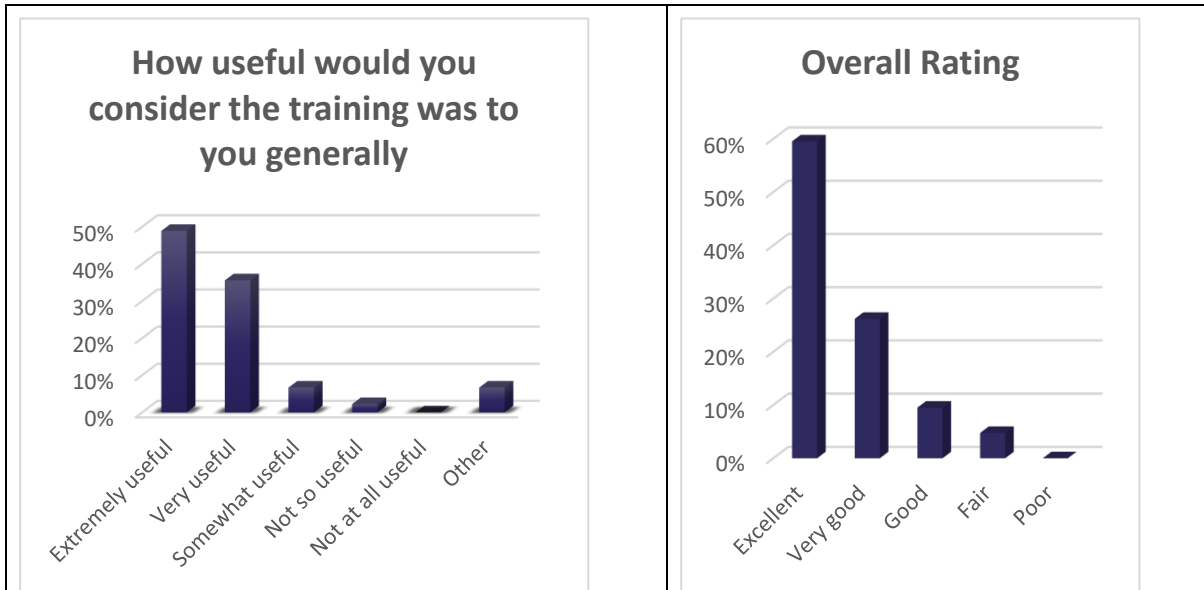
The Women for Change guide that was produced as part of the programme was identified as being particularly useful by a number of the Steering Committee members, who stated that they will continue to use it as a resource.

*'The participants of the programme system and how decisions are made' (SC Member)*

*'I feel that this is the start of a process and more work needs to be done' (SC Member)*

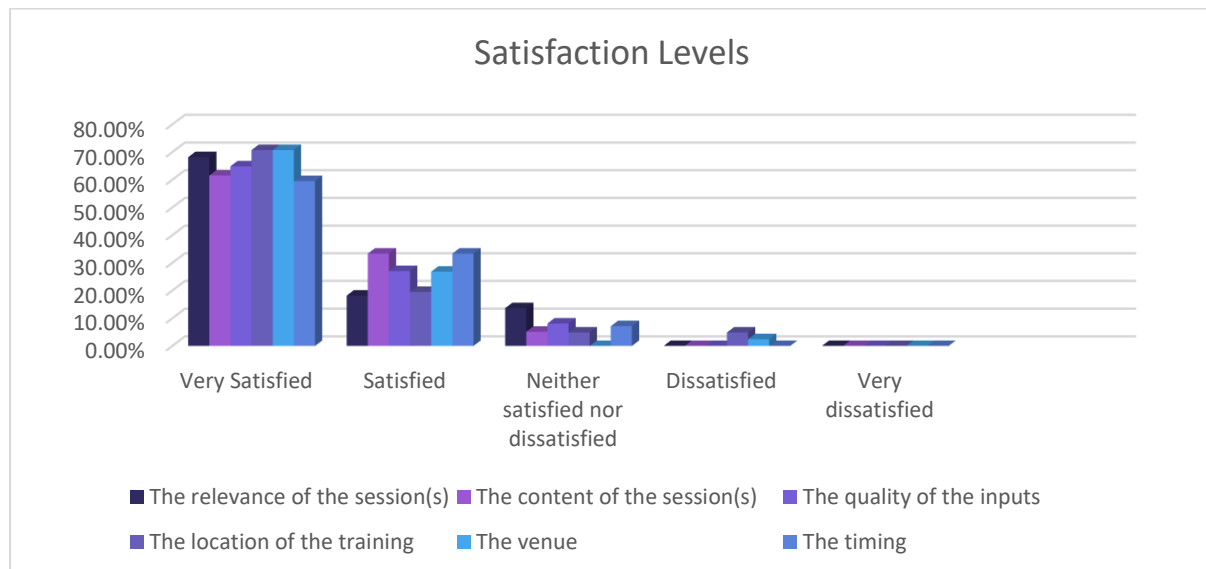
Participants were asked how useful the training was to them and to rate a number of factors on a satisfaction scale.

The responses indicated that the majority of participants (over 84%) considered the training to be 'extremely useful' or 'very useful' to them and over 96% of participants gave the programme an overall rating of 'excellent', 'very good' or 'good'.



In addition, the majority of participants stated that they were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the training from the perspective of:

- The relevance of the session(s);
- The content of the session(s);
- The quality of the inputs;
- The location, timing and venues for the training.



Participants and members of the Steering Committee were asked what the most and least useful aspects of the programme were. For a number of respondents, fact that women were given the opportunity to collectively learn, exchange ideas and network was one of the most useful aspect of the programme.

*'The fact that women were facilitated to learn from each other and to network was really useful'* (SC Member)

A number of people mentioned the final networking day as being very useful and suggested that one could also have been held at the beginning of the programme. A number also mentioned the toolkit that was developed, which they feel has left an important legacy for the programme that will be used by many groups.

*"For me those most useful thing was meeting other women and learning together"* (Participant)

When asked what the least useful aspects of the programme were, participants stated that travel was sometimes difficult for them. Others mentioned the difficulties in engaging women, particularly in rural areas, without access to childcare and transport. Other mentioned more substantives issues such as the fact that the programme was once-off when it needs to sustained and mainstreamed.

*'Lack of a sustained programme of supports – lack of mainstreaming'* (SC Member)

When asked ho the programme might be improved, participants and members of the Steering Committee made a number of suggestions, including:

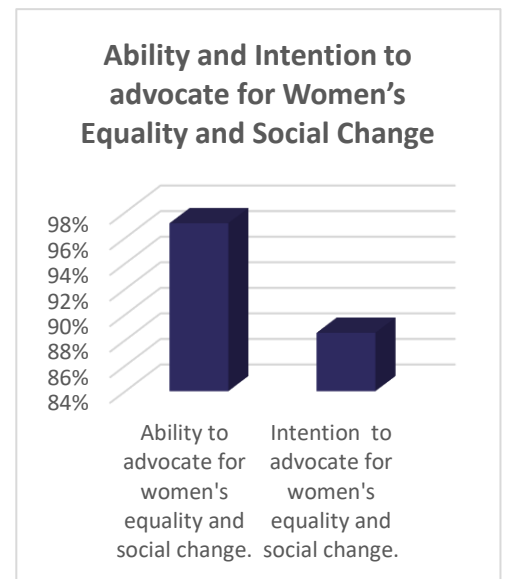


- Doing pre-development work with women locally;
- Increase the budget for transport and childcare;
- Targeting women that have a certain level of experience in representation of the issues affecting women;
- Run the programme in areas outside of main towns;
- More advertising to increase participation;
- Providing the training on-line.

## IMPACT

The aim of the project was to bring a diversity of women who are currently involved or are interested in getting more involved in representation and participation in their local communities together, to access training, peer support and advocate for women's equality and social change. In that context, participants were asked what (if any) impact has participation on the programme had on their ability and intention to advocate for women's equality and social change.

Ninety-seven per cent of participants stated that participation on the programme had a positive impact on their **ability** to advocate for women's equality and social change and 89% of participants stated that the training had a positive impact on their **intention** to advocate for women's equality and social change.



Participants were asked to rate their levels of ability, knowledge and skills in relation to participation before and after the training. Before the training, the majority of participants rated themselves as only 'somewhat', 'not so much' or 'not at all' confident in their abilities. After the training, confidence rates shifter considerably and all the participants rates themselves as 'extremely', 'very' or 'somewhat' confident in their ability, knowledge and skills to participate.

| Before the training                                |           |           |           |             |            |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|------------|
|  | Extremely | Very      | Somewhat  | Not so much | Not at all |
| I was/am confident in my ability to participate    | 0         | 10        | 10        | 6           | 6          |
| I was/am confident in my knowledge to participate  | 2         | 8         | 14        | 5           | 5          |
| I was/am confident I had the skills to participate | 2         | 8         | 15        | 3           | 3          |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>4</b>  | <b>26</b> | <b>39</b> | <b>14</b>   | <b>14</b>  |
| After the training                                 |           |           |           |             |            |
|  | Extremely | Very      | Somewhat  | Not so much | Not at all |
| I was/am confident in my ability to participate    | 10        | 14        | 3         | 0           | 0          |
| I was/am confident in my knowledge to participate  | 12        | 15        | 2         | 0           | 0          |
| I was/am confident I had the skills to participate | 10        | 16        | 3         | 0           | 0          |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>32</b> | <b>45</b> | <b>8</b>  | <b>0</b>    | <b>0</b>   |

The participants in the focus group at the end of the training were asked to repeat this exercise and the results reflect those of the survey.

It is clear from the following summary of responses that the training had a significant impact on the ability and intention of participants to begin or increase their work to advocate for women's equality and social change.

- *It has given me an overview of structures, policy, frameworks in place, it has supported me to develop my skills in interviewing on radio by providing an opportunity to go into a studio setting.*
- *The skills to identify leadership as a means of advocating for women's equality and social change*
- *Course was interesting and helped give women a voice*
- *becoming more aware of the inequality in society and becoming more confident*
- *I feel more informed about women's issues after the opportunity to speak with people about their struggles coming from different social backgrounds*
- *It was very enlightening, I found it very uplifting and informative.*
- *Significant*
- *By working with these women and hearing their stories and experiences, I felt as though I was better able to understand them. In understanding them, I felt more comfortable advocating alongside them.*
- *The most helpful thing was learning about local authorities and at what level to become involved to effect change*
- *I'm much more confident!*
- *I feel that I am more able to communicate.*
- *this training had a very positive impact in reaffirming what we already know to be true and how the lived realities of women need to change in order to bring about a more equal and fairer society.*
- *I have met more like minded people and a little more advocacy and planning.*
- *Yes, I can tell people the reasons women's voices are not heard*
- *I have been empowered by the course*
- *I'm more active in social change now*
- *It has introduced me to a wide range of organisations and leaders who participated that I did not previously have in my network. I hope to at some stage in the future use these contacts to create change in my work in diversity and women's equality.*

## SUSTAINABILITY

The evaluation asked questions in relation to the sustainability of the project once the funding was finished. The focus group and the survey indicated that the groups that pre-existed the programme will continue to meet and to use the learning and skills gained during the programme. At least one other of the groups that did not pre-exist the programme indicated that they intend to continue to meet and explore areas for collective action.

Members of the Steering Group had a number of comments about sustainability, with some of the members indicating that they will continue to support the existing groups and use the Women for Change guide to develop further groups. There were also suggestions that deeper links with the Education and Training Boards and Local Development Companies need to be made and the Community Work in a Changing Ireland programme run by the Department of Applied Social Studies in Maynooth University should also be explored.<sup>1</sup>

However, there was an acknowledgement that it will be difficult to ensure sustainability in the absence of ongoing resources to support facilitators and pay for participation costs such as travel and childcare. There was consensus that the programme needs to be sustained but that resources are required to do this.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

This project was designed to address the lack of opportunity to provide training for women that want to increase their skills, knowledge and confidence to advocate for equality for women. The aim of the project was to bring a diversity of women who are currently involved or are interested in getting more involved in representation and participation in their local communities together, to access training, peer support and advocate for women's equality and social change. The programme was designed in the context of the need to resource spaces for women to strategise, support each other, build solidarity and exchange skills and experience.

The programme was ambitious and implemented in the context of a dearth of opportunities for women in many areas for some time. However, it is clear from the evaluation that the programme was significantly successful from a number of perspectives.

**Expectations** – the programme managed to meet the expectations of the participants and of the members of the Steering Group;

**Satisfaction** – there was broad satisfaction with the programme from the perspective of the participants and the Steering Group;

**Impact** – critically, the programme clearly has had a significantly positive impact on the participants and on their ability and intention to advocate for women's equality and social change.

### Recommendation

This programme has had a demonstrably positive impact on the participants. It is recommended that the programme be mainstreamed and rolled out on an annual basis.

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<sup>1</sup> Community work in a Changing Ireland is a programme that can be adapted to the particular circumstances of the group to which it is being delivered.