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Women's Networks Information Pack



WOMEN'S NETWORKS PILOT PROGRAMME

Contact

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The Combat Poverty Agency Women's Networks Pilot Programme 1993 - 1995

Role of Combat Poverty Agency

One of the functions of the Combat Poverty Agency is to support and evaluate pilot measures aimed at overcoming poverty. Pilot programmes

- highlight the important role that local community development projects play in tackling poverty
- offer opportunities to undertake innovative anti-poverty work which is not currently funded by other agencies
- inform and advocate improved mainstream provision on the basis of lessons from the pilot programme
- create a greater public awareness of the nature and extent of poverty by empowering those affected by poverty to organise and to speak from their direct experience.

Why a Women's Network's Pilot Programme?

The Women's Networks Pilot Programme aims to support and learn from the work of networks of women's groups in particular geographical areas. The Agency is keen to learn about the types of supports that are most appropriate for women's groups operating in disadvantaged communities and how best to ensure that issues of women's poverty are articulated and acted on at a national level. This is of particular concern given the significant increase in the number of locally-based women's groups in recent years and the lack of any infrastructure to support their work.

In general, the networks resource and support women's groups in their areas through information and advice, joint training, sharing of experience and considering the policy issues arising from their work.

Networks in the Programme

When setting up the pilot programme the Agency was particularly keen to fund proposals from women's networks which used a varied approach to their work including:

- support and advice work with individual groups within the network area and to those who wished to establish new women's groups
- networking between member groups and non-member groups
- programme development for groups within the area, such as training, production of resource materials etc.
- assisting women to develop a clearer analysis of the position of women in Irish society
- encouraging and assisting women's groups to contribute to policy development and establishing and maintaining contacts with statutory and voluntary bodies working in their areas.

Five networks are part of this programme:

- Clondalkin Women's Network
- Western Women's Link
- Waterford Women's Network
- Tallaght Women Together
- Clare Network.

Clondalkin and Western Women's Link receive core funding from the Agency enabling them to employ staff and operate an office. The other three receive smaller once-off grants to undertake specific programmes. The Agency undertook to support the programme by organising and resourcing an inter-project planning group to meet training needs and address other common issues.

Inter-network Activities

Network activities undertaken by the Programme include:

- **National Economic and Social Forum (NESF)**
The organisation of a seminar on representation of women on the NESF, and an involvement in the planning group and assembly supporting the disadvantaged sector representation on the National Economic and Social Forum.
- **Live Register Seminar**
A seminar on the question of women's eligibility for the live register and the policy implications involved. The groups are involved in the continuing education of policy-makers and the public on the problems with access to training and employment opportunities posed for many women by their ineligibility to be on the live register.
- **Beyond Personal Development**
A three-day seminar which looked at the focus of women's groups and possible options for further development.
- **Financial Advice and Training**
Regular sessions with an accountant examining the individual network's needs in relation to financial management.
- **Evaluation**
Assisting the Agency with the evaluation of the pilot programme so that lessons can be drawn from the experience. It is essential to document and assess the impact of the large amount of work and developments which have taken place in order to identify possible models of support for women's groups from the perspectives of all those involved.



COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY

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Current work

Support and advice

- Providing an outreach service to assist women's groups in their every day work.

Secretarial services

- Providing a typing, photocopying, telephone and fax service.

Information service

- Providing the groups with relevant information they require, through newsletter, postal service and personal contact.

Training

- Providing training which individual groups cannot provide, for example:
 - facilitation skills
 - group work skills
 - effective management training
 - once-off workshops on particular issues eg funding applications/book keeping.

Representation outside the network

- The Network is represented on the following groups:
 - Clondalkin Partnership
 - Council for the Status of Women
 - AONTAS (National Association for Adult Education)
 - NESF (National Economic and Social Forum) - in the assembly supporting the disadvantaged sector representation.
- It is affiliated to the European Anti-Poverty Network, and maintains links with WERRC (Women's Education Research and Resource Centre based at University College Dublin), FÁS, Department of Social Welfare, and other women's groups and networks throughout the country.

Future plans

- To ensure women's issues are always on the agenda at local development level.
- To continue to be a support and advice centre to the groups in the network.
- To research the needs of women who wish to make the transition from the local group or home into further education, training or employment.
- To document the growth of women's groups in the Clondalkin area over the past decade.

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WATERFORD WOMEN'S NETWORK

Chomhraç na Bochtaine

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A Project in the Combat Poverty Agency Women's Networks Pilot Programme 1993 - 1995

The story so far

The Waterford Women's Network was established in 1992 when six groups in Waterford and one in south Kilkenny decided to come together. There are seven groups affiliated to the network. These groups consist of three rural and four urban local women's groups involved in information, advice, training and education work - mainly funded by the Department of Social Welfare. Two members from each group are nominated to the network out of which a chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and treasurer are elected.

The chairperson is elected every two years, the treasurer and secretary every three years and every member is entitled to stand for election.

Meetings are held on average twice per month to keep members abreast of any information of interest to their own groups and of courses that are available for them to attend.

Representatives from each local group attend all meetings and bring back information to their groups which helps to keep them better informed of meetings and other relevant activities.

Aims and objectives

- To strengthen the work of the individual groups by bringing back the information and training gained through the network.
- To link, network and get to know each other both locally and nationally, to break down barriers between rural and urban women and the social and domestic lives of women.
- To improve skills, grow personally and develop as leaders through taking active roles in the network.
- To have and use a political voice.



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Current work

The work of the network currently involves;

- holding seminars
- publishing newsletters
- providing training
- providing information to members
- networking with local women's groups in Waterford
- linking with four other networks supported by the Combat Poverty Agency Women's Networks Pilot Programme and planning nationally
- representation in local partnerships
- involvement in the NESF (National Economic and Social Forum) - in the assembly supporting the disadvantaged sector representation.

Future plans

- To continue training women to make change.
- To publicise the network through the media.
- To be more visible and vocal.
- To speak out on issues that effect women in the network.

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WESTERN WOMEN'S LINK

Ghlomhailreacht do
Chomhrac na Bochtaine

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A Project in the Combat Poverty Agency Women's Networks Pilot Programme 1993 - 1995

The story so far

The Western Women's Link was founded in 1990 following a survey of local women's groups which showed that many women's groups were working in isolation, without contact with each other and having limited access to information on funding, tutors, training opportunities, workshops and seminars. At the request of many groups for more information and contact the Western Women's Link evolved and has been involved with community development initiatives focusing on women's groups for the past three years.

There are currently over 40 women's groups affiliated to the network with a further 40 associated groups. These groups are involved in activities including personal development, adult education and support work

The network is directed by a core group of 12 women elected by the affiliated members at the AGM. An effort is made to get a fair balance of interests and geographical spread in the core group. A development worker and an administrator are employed on a part-time basis.

The Western Women's Link operates as a non-party political, anti-sectarian, non profit-making group.

Aims and objectives

- To improve the general status of women in the west of Ireland.
- To provide a link between women's groups thus reducing their isolation.
- To provide support and information to women's groups.
- To raise awareness of the valuable contribution which women's groups are making at a community and regional level.
- To strengthen links with and exchange of information between statutory and non-statutory agencies.



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Current work

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The Western Women's Link aims to facilitate a minimum of two full day seminars and 8-12 workshops annually.

The network supports groups in their formation and development. This support is offered through personal visits from project workers and regular contact by phone.

The network provides an information service to all groups and encourages group members to use the office as a drop-in facility.

Regular newsletters are issued and circulars regarding current activities and forthcoming events are an important task of the network.

Administrative assistance is offered to emerging groups eg photocopying, fax, phone and groups are assisted to access funding, training courses and tutors.

The network organises regular committee meetings to evaluate and monitor work progress.

Close contact with statutory and non-governmental agencies at local, regional and national levels is maintained.

The network is associated with the following organisations:

- Council for the Status of Women
- AONTAS (National Association for Adult Education)
- NESF (National Economic and Social Forum) - in the assembly supporting the disadvantaged sector representation
- Galway Partnership Development Group.

The network is also involved in the:

- formulation and implementation of a research project looking at the needs of existing women's groups
- initiating the development of an inter-island network
- establishing cross-border links with non-governmental organisations and liaising with women's networks.

Future plans

- To complete the research project.
- To support the inter-island network when established.
- To evaluate and document the work of the WWL.
- To further support women's groups in obtaining recognition for their working contribution to community and local development.
- To continue lobbying for change on social issues directly affecting women.



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WOMEN TOGETHER TALLAGHT

Chomhraic na Bochtaine

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A Project in the Combat Poverty Agency Women's Networks Pilot Programme 1993 - 1995

The story so far

Women Together was set up in June 1991 following a half-day seminar organised by the West Tallaght Resource Centre (WTRC) entitled *Beyond Personal Development*. The core group with responsibility for managing the network consists of representatives of fourteen women's groups in the Tallaght area linking over thirty groups in total. These groups include those involved with adult education, personal development and childcare, as well as Travellers' women's groups and lone parents.

A conscious decision was taken in the early stages to maximise participation. The core group meets on average once a month or more often if the need arises. Notification of meetings and minutes are circulated to all member groups and all are invited to attend.

The group is co-ordinated by a staff member at the WTRC but the long-term aim is to establish an autonomous management committee which will employ a full-time co-ordinator to resource the development of the network and its constituent groups.

Individual women's groups in the network have well-established relationships with voluntary and statutory organisations working in West Tallaght eg Barnardos, Home-School Liaison Programme, Tallaght Youth Services, Tallaght Partnership, Public Health Nurses and Social Workers.

Aims and objectives

- To link new and existing women's groups in the West Tallaght and wider Tallaght area.
- To exchange experience and learn from each other.
- To seek improvements in social and political policy affecting women in general.
- To improve the social and economic position of women in West Tallaght and the wider community.
- To share information and experience among women and other groups.
- To explore creative ways of progressing beyond people's current focus and experience in local groups.
- To develop ways to enable extended co-operation in the future.



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Current work

Since its establishment the group has organised a major seminar on women in employment and have been pursuing several issues including women's participation in partnership initiatives and cross-border co-operation between women's groups. The network has also compiled and published a directory for women's groups, and organised a Women's Studies course, and an Alternative Health Care Course.

Employment

The seminar on women in employment highlighted the difficulty many women experience in accessing supports, advice and training which would lead to income-generating opportunities.

Of further concern to women groups is the lack of clearly identifiable progression routes from community-based skills development courses to jobs or enterprise opportunities. The network is organising a group to create awareness of disincentives for women returning to work and provision of an enterprise and employment programme which will:

- Identify and highlight the potential for women's enterprise and employment.
- Explore technical and financial assistance available to women.
- Provide ongoing support and advice to those seeking to develop enterprise initiatives.
- Develop a community enterprise agency for those wishing to generate secondary income from their crafts.

A sub-group began by organising an exhibition of women's craft work and is now examining the feasibility of setting up its own enterprise. This is now at an advanced stage and an application has been made through the Tallaght Partnership to the EU New Opportunities for Women (NOW) Programme to develop a Women's Enterprise Co-op.

Future plans

Networking

To continue to network with other women's groups in Ireland, north and south, to identify common issues and develop strategies for action, eg attend seminars, visit other areas, host seminars and visits from other groups.

Survey of needs

To carry out a survey of needs of women's groups in order to ensure that the work of the network remains relevant to the groups it services.

To continue information dissemination as a major function of the network to ensure that all relevant information is passed on to women's groups. A series of half-day information seminars will be organised to meet this objective.

Management training

To develop and enhance the management capacities and the structure of the core group.

CLARE WOMEN'S NETWORK

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The story so far

In November, 1993 a seminar for women's groups was organised by the East Clare Women's Health Group and funded by the Combat Poverty Agency. Over two hundred women attended and discussed the needs of women in Clare, and in particular, the difficulties encountered by women in remote rural areas.

A follow-up seminar in March 1994 identified the need for a women's network with representation from all over Clare - the Clare Women's Network.

The county was divided into five areas: North Clare, East Clare, West Clare, Shannon and Ennis, with representatives from each, and the first meeting was held in Kilrush in March 1994.

The 15 women came from the following groups:

- The East Clare Women's Health Group
- The Carers Group Ennis
- Just for Women
- The Kilrush Women's Group
- The Carrigaholt Women's Group
- The West Clare Community Development Resource Centre
- The North Clare Women's Group
- Shannon Mother and Toddler Group.

Aims and objectives

- To explore the means to enable the development of women's groups in Clare.
- To strengthen and build on existing groups and networks.

Current work

As the network is still at a very early stage, work at present is focused on strengthening the structure and on networking in an informal way in each area. Relevant information on the network is printed in the East Clare Women's Health Group newsletter and profiles of women's groups in Clare are being compiled for inclusion in local newspapers.

The network organised a celebration of International Women's Day in the Old Ground Hotel Ennis. Over 200 women viewed the various stands and participated in the workshops. Following positive feedback and a review of the day, the network propose to make this an annual event in Clare. The network is also compiling a directory of women's groups, organisations and services for women.

Future plans

As part of the overall aims of the network, the establishment of five women's centres throughout Clare will form a major part of the work. These centres will provide information on women's issues and services, research the needs of women on an ongoing basis and plan an overall strategy for the Clare Women's Network.

Women's Networks

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A Combat Poverty Agency Pilot Programme

The Women's Networks Pilot Programme 1993-1995 is a Combat Poverty Agency initiative to develop, support and enhance the range of anti-poverty work undertaken by networks of women's groups in the community development sector.

The Combat Poverty Agency is a state body established in 1986. Its general functions are:



to advise the Government on all aspects of economic and social planning in relation to poverty



to initiate and evaluate measures aimed at overcoming poverty



to research and examine the nature, causes and extent of poverty



to promote a greater public awareness of poverty in Irish society.



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