



# NIRWN NEWS

## NIRWN LEAD WORLD RURAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS

NIRWN this year helped celebrate World Rural Women's Day locally with 150 rural women travelling from all over the Province to Cookstown to enjoy a local celebration of a day acknowledged across the world as one dedicated to rural women.

Speaking at the event, Joan McCool, NIRWN Chair said, “This is an important date in the calendar for rural women. The UN General Assembly declared to observe 15 October as ‘International Day of Rural Women’, which means that as a consequence all UN Member States



*l-r Joan McCool Chairperson NIRWN, Nora Quigley Consumer Council, Siobhan Doherty Director NIRWN and Alma McManus Clothesology*

Lynn spoke in particular about the new Welfare Reforms that will impact on the lives of a large number of people living in Northern Ireland and told of the responses she makes and the attention she draws to issues like this.

The day ended on a lighter note with Alma McManus, a qualified Clothesologist, with over 20 years experience in the clothing, design and manufacturing sectors who NIRWN invited along to discuss how to present yourself and how this can have a major impact on your success. Alma is a rural woman who has established her own business and she also gave an insight into the trials and tribulations of running a successful business in difficult economic conditions.

Rural women's activities have been the backbone of rural community life, in terms of supporting farming and families and preserving the social capital of communities. This activity has often been viewed as a secondary activity which is not recognised or valued at the decision making or policy level. Rural women feel the need to have a voice and this was very clear by the numbers attending today's event.

are called to officially mark the Day in their respective countries. This then allows rural women the opportunity to ask our government what it is doing to address their right to development, to acknowledge their contributions and help improve their conditions.”

NIRWN holds this day as a celebration every year and along with giving rural women the opportunity to network it does take a serious look at the main issues facing them. Nora Quigley from the Consumer Council spoke to delegates about their personal budgets and gave an insightful talk on how people can ensure that their money is used in the most effective way possible. Nora said “It is hugely important that rural women have knowledge about their personal finances as very often they are the budget holders in the home. Today it is more important as everyone feels the pinch of the credit crunch and therefore it is so important that people can manage their money effectively. “

Lynn Carvill, Women's Sector Lobbyist, then spoke to those present about the work that she does with Politicians and Elected Representatives. Lynn talked about how she works to ensure that women know about discussions and debates that will have a direct impact on their lives and that women have a voice in shaping policies.



*Bush Women's Group with Louise Coyle from NIRWN who enjoyed the World Rural Women's Day Event in Cookstown*

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<b>WORLD RURAL WOMEN'S DAY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>NETWORKING EVENT</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>WCRP UPDATE</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>EMPLOYERS FOR CHILDCARE CAMPAIGN</b>	<b>4</b>

## LADIES DAY IN CROSSMAGLEN

The sun shone warmly over Crossmaglen Community Centre on Thursday 24th September, when over seventy women came together to celebrate their cultural diversity. The ladies came from the wider South Armagh area, including Forkhill, Markethill and Tandagree, North Louth including Faughart and Kilcurry and Larne in North Antrim. The event was jointly organised by South Armagh Rural Women's Network's Behind the Masks Programme and Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network.



*Ladies from South Armagh and Antrim who thoroughly enjoyed the entertainment in Crossmaglen Community Centre*

Compere for the fun packed day was Patricia Buckley, Vice-Chairperson of the Network. The morning kicked off with an outline of the fascinating history of the local townlands which was delivered by Úna Walsh, Treasurer of SARWN. This was followed by an entertaining series of old tales and stories told by the renowned storyteller Bernadette Layden, who's love of storytelling stems from her childhood in rural Fermanagh in the 1950s when her parents' house was a popular spot for neighbours and their Céilí. The ladies were then treated to a three course meal, second to none, which was prepared by Mona McEntee and her team from Crossmaglen.

The Cú Chulainn dancers led by Raymond Carroll were the highlight of the afternoon. After the dancers displayed their impressive talents, they taught the young and not so young women how to dance to the Waves of Tory, Shoo the Donkey, the Walls of Limerick, the Kerry Set and many more energetic routines. The whole event was serenaded by Teddy Campbell and Pat Casey who closed the afternoon with two very apt tunes, namely the Green Glens of Antrim and the Boys from the County Armagh. The Behind the Masks programme is a cross border, cross community project funded by PEACE 111 jointly managed by SARWN and SAVER/NAVER of Markethill.

## MINISTERS ANNOUNCE INTRODUCTION OF NEW TRANSPORT SCHEME FOR RURAL DWELLERS

Transport Minister, Conor Murphy, and Rural Development Minister, Michelle Gildernew, have announced the introduction of two new rural transport schemes which have been developed to help meet the transport needs of rural dwellers.

The new Dial-a-Lift services will be available to members of Rural Community Transport Partnerships. These services are similar to the Door-to-Door services that are available in urban areas and are designed to allow individuals who have limited access to transport to get to local services and facilities.

The second scheme is the Assisted Rural Transport Scheme (ARTS). This scheme is being supported by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and will allow eligible members of Rural Community Transport Partnerships to obtain concessionary travel when using community transport. This initiative which is being launched as a pilot will help ease the financial burden on rural dwellers.

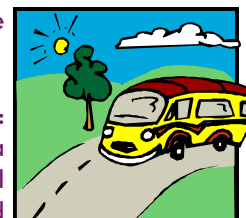
Minister Murphy said: "This new Dial-a-Lift scheme provides transport to those who are socially isolated and cannot access the local services and facilities we all take for granted. I welcome the commitment from all the 16 Rural Community Transport Partnerships across the North in working together to introduce these enhanced services and I also welcome DARD's support in providing funding for the Assisted Rural Transport scheme. I think that this

is an excellent example of how Ministers, Departments and the Community Sector can work together to bring real benefits to the lives of local people."

Minister Michelle Gildernew added: "As part of my work on developing a Rural White Paper for the north, rural stakeholders have consistently identified transport as one of their biggest stumbling blocks. Having spoken to young people with disabilities and hearing at first hand how lack of transport provision inhibits their ability to work or socialise; the lack of suitable, reliable rural transport provision has for some time been a concern for me as it compounds rural poverty and social exclusion.

"I am very pleased that through working closely with DRD we are able to announce these Rural Transport schemes today. I believe they will make a real difference to the lives of rural dwellers - particularly for those mainly elderly and disabled people who are entitled to a SmartPass".

The Ministers fully recognise the importance of transport for people in rural areas and their Departments have worked closely together to introduce the Dial-a-Lift scheme and Assisted Rural Transport Scheme pilot. Both these initiatives will improve access to essential local services for users and will be available from early December 2009.



Over 40 women, Civil Servants and Elected Representatives from across Northern Ireland came together on Thursday 22 October to launch the WCRP “Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities – Barriers to Participation”. The report, commissioned by the Department for Social Development, brought together research carried out into the barriers women who live in disadvantaged urban and rural communities face when they are trying to access public services, training, education and employment.



*l-r WCRP Directors Siobhan Doherty, Dr Margaret Ward and Patricia Haren with Russel McCaughey DSD, Dr Helen McLaughlin report author and Eileen Sung OFMDFM at the Launch of the 'Barriers to Participation' Report*

Speaking at the event, report author, Dr. Helen McLaughlin said, “Having reviewed a wide range of existing and recent research, the report gathers clear evidence supporting the statement that women do not have equal access to work, education and training, and public and political life. The report identifies specific barriers like lack of childcare, poverty, gendered career pathways, low level of skills, qualifications and confidence which have a disproportional impact onto the life of women. In the report it is evident that all barriers are amplified and become insurmountable if women are living in disadvantaged areas, or have a disability or are from an ethnic minority group.”

Dr. Margaret Ward of the Womens Centres Regional Partnership who chaired the event reflected that living in a disadvantaged community has multiple impacts on a woman's ability to improve her quality of life.

Poverty, cost of transport, access to skills and education are all more difficult for women living in these communities across Northern Ireland. “Each barrier is integrally linked to the other: for example, low level of flexibility and choice in the workplace push women into low paid, part-time, low status jobs which embed women in poverty. In other words, the barriers identified in this report are structural.”

In the Ministerial Foreword of the report, Minister of Social Development Margaret Ritchie MLA wrote “This report calls for cross-cutting departmental commitments to tackle the barriers that lead to social exclusion and deprivations of women in disadvantaged communities. This collective approach, I believe, will improve the health and well being of our society and help build a fair and shared future for all.”

Copies of the report are available through the WCRP by e-mailing [info@wcrp.org.uk](mailto:info@wcrp.org.uk)

## LAUNCH OF WCRP TRAINING AND EDUCATION PROSPECTUS

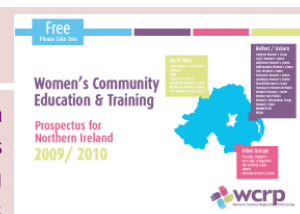
The WCRP launched the ‘Women's Community Based Training and Education Prospectus for 2009-2010' in Belfast's Clifton House on Tuesday 25th August, a unique package of over 400 classes and courses aimed at improving the lives of local women and their families. Margaret Logue, Chair of the WCRP said “The new prospectus highlights the range of programmes provided by the 27 women's organisations located in socially and economically disadvantaged areas across Northern Ireland.”

The courses, which range from GCSE's and ICT, to Arts and Health, Aromatherapy, Stress Management and Plumbing, offer local women, families and communities the chance to develop skills, boost their self-esteem and improve their lifestyle. This year the Prospectus also features courses designed specifically to reach those women who do not engage in learning, learners who have historically been marginalised and who have been hard for educational institutions to reach.

These programmes, run through the WCRP's Women's Learning Partnership project which is funded with a grant of £994,000 from the Big Lottery Fund's Live and Learn programme, consist of a broad range of both accredited and non-accredited tailored courses, targeted specifically at ‘hard to reach women’.

The courses will work with women who feel isolated and excluded and who may have a low level of self confidence. All courses will be delivered in an encouraging, welcoming and supportive learning environment giving them the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge resulting in increased confidence and higher self esteem.

You can download a free copy of the prospectus at [www.wcrp.org.uk](http://www.wcrp.org.uk) or by contacting WCRP on 028 9023 0212 or email [info@wcrp.org.uk](mailto:info@wcrp.org.uk)



## RURAL TRANSPORT FUND VOUCHER SCHEME

The Department for Regional Development wishes to announce the Rural Transport Fund Voucher Scheme in your area. This scheme is aimed at rural community groups and organisations wishing to transport 17 or more passengers. The scheme will provide a voucher towards the cost of transport for successful applicants.

The scheme is being rolled out in a phased approach during 2009-10. This round of the scheme incorporates the rural areas in and around the Ards Peninsula, Downpatrick, Newcastle, Newry & Mourne, Lurgan, Banbridge, Lisburn, Strabane, Foyle, Omagh, Fermanagh, Dungannon, Armagh, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Coleraine, Limavady and Antrim. Application packs are now available for those non-profit making community groups in these areas who are planning on travelling during January, February and March 2010 and the **closing date to return** the completed applications is **30<sup>th</sup> November 2009**.

There is a limit to the number of vouchers available in each area. To ensure those community organisations that help or support the most vulnerable in society there is a selection process.

To receive an application pack please contact **028 905 40620** or e-mail [melanie.parker@drdni.gov.uk](mailto:melanie.parker@drdni.gov.uk).



At the Labour party conference on the 29<sup>th</sup> September Gordon Brown announced plans to axe the tax relief on childcare vouchers. Childcare vouchers are a Tax and National Insurance exemption on the cost of registered childcare for working parents. They are used by **340,000** parents across the UK including at least **10,000** parents in N. Ireland. Mr Brown did not consult with any of the devolved Administrations in relation to this policy reform. There has been no consideration given to the contribution that the local economy receives by providing the opportunity for two parents to work. The decision will force many families into a position where one parent has to stay at home, therefore the government will lose out on tax and national insurance contributions from salaries. The social security benefit system may come under more strain and the local economy will also lose the skills and experience of key employees. In his speech, Gordon Brown announced that he was reforming a tax relief scheme which benefits "rich" people and intends to use the money to fund free childcare for 250,000 2 years olds. What he failed to mention was that the free childcare places are only for 2 hours per day, which is useless for working parents and for children in **England only**.

Employers For Childcare launched the ChildcareSOS campaign and on-line petition to protect working parents from these proposed reforms. We have been overwhelmed by the response from angry parents and employers who are clearly stating that this may force employees to leave work and/or use unregistered childcare. This is unacceptable. We are calling on local organisations to support our campaign. Any help that you can give us will be much appreciated.

Register your support via the petition [ChildcareSOS@employersforchildcare.org](mailto:ChildcareSOS@employersforchildcare.org)

If you would like to learn more about the campaign or have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us on **0800 028 3008**

### STAFF CHANGES

NIRWN has had a few staff changes in the past month. Louise Coyle has taken over the post of Policy Officer from Nora Smith who recently moved to Employers for Childcare as their Policy & Information Manager. We would like to take this opportunity to wish Nora every success in her new position.



Also Maureen Hughes has joined us as our new Regional Development Officer (Skills) and we wish both Louise and Maureen all the best as they undertake their new posts.

### NEW CHAIRPERSON

Joan McCool from First Steps Women's Centre, Dungannon has taken over from Mary Duggan as Chairperson of NIRWN. Mary has done a very fine job for the past 3 years but decided to step down and give someone else a chance in this role. Joan brings with her a wealth of experience from the women's community sector and we wish her all the best in her new appointment.



## NORTHERN IRELAND RURAL WOMEN'S NETWORK

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