



women's

RESOURCE & DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Supporting Women's Groups and Networks across Northern Ireland

Belfast City Council Draft Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan 2007-2010

A response from the Women's Resource and Development Agency

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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Introduction

The Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) is a regional organisation whose mission is to 'advance women's equality and participation in society by working to bring about social, political and economic change'.

The organisation was established in 1983 and continues to focus its efforts on working with and through women and community organisations located within disadvantaged and/or divided communities.

By strengthening the role and position of women in their own communities, it is anticipated that wider community change will be brought about, leading to the advancement of the broader vision for peace, reconciliation and social inclusion.

The Women's Resource and Development Agency welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Peace Plan developed by Belfast City Council. We attended the S75 consultation event organised by the Council, but would like to make a more detailed written response to this important issue which has the potential to make a significant impact upon the lives of the inhabitants of the city.

The profile of Belfast contained in the draft Peace Plan

We are disappointed by the gender-free content of the profile of Belfast. This is particularly puzzling, given that women are one of the key target groups identified by SEUPB. Gender analysis is important as a tool for consideration of the barriers that exist to prevent women from taking a full part in the task of peace building. It will serve to help to ensure that measures can be taken that will facilitate gender parity in future activities for peace. The following are some of the key indicators that require consideration:

Caring in the Community

- 20% of women are carers compared to 14% of men.
- 68% of recipients of Invalid Care Allowances are women.
- Women are more likely than men to provide care across all age groups, except the over 65s.
- Caring responsibilities impact on employment patterns as 48% of carers are economically inactive.

- 85% of carers look after someone with a physical disability.

Transport

Women are less likely to be car owners, more dependent on public transport. Far fewer women travel to work each day, compared to men. Women are more likely to work near home and part-time because of caring responsibilities.

- 2002 – 79% of men had licences, 61% women
- 22% of male journeys were for commuting to work; 15% of women commuted to work
- Men travel 34% further than women – which impacts on women's ability to access work and to take part in public life.
- Caring responsibilities mean that women use buses differently to men – not only arterial routes to work but buses that enable them to drop children to school, do shopping, go to the doctors etc.

Poverty

Women in NI are more likely to experience poverty than men. The *Bare Necessities* report (Hillyard et al) indicated that 57% of adults in poor households are women and 29% of women as compared with 25% of men live in poor households.

Main issues to be addressed in the Peace Plan include:

Gender-proofing of organisations delivering Peace III.

- Through their roles within the family, women are crucial to any strategy to secure shared space/transformed space. It is largely women who bring children to doctors and dentists, to childcare facilities, to schools, to libraries and to other leisure facilities. As key users of services it is therefore essential that attention is given to ways in which to ensure their inclusion in all future strategies.
- Many of the groups identified by the Council as key organisations – churches, faith groups, business, etc – are almost wholly male in terms of decision making.
- There should be gender auditing of organisations funded by Belfast City Council to ensure that women are fully involved, are encouraged to be involved and are involved at a decision making level.

- Women are extremely active at a grass roots level in the community but find it difficult to gain acceptance as a voice for the wider community. We would recommend that the Good Relations Unit within the Council adopt a pro-active policy regarding gender proofing of organisations.
- There must be a gender balance within the Steering Panel and other bodies established by the Council to implement the Peace III plan.

Shared Space

We are unsure how 'shared space' is defined by the Council. What is 'shared organisational space'? Many women's centres work hard to ensure that their centres are used by those from different communities and might therefore qualify for support, if there was a clear definition.

Changes to the Plan

Costings

- Given the level of need in the Belfast area, as one that suffered a disproportionate share of the violence and its attendant effects, we would argue that the Council should be presenting proposals for £20 million rather than £12 million.
- Council proposals for additional staff for a Good Relations Partnership seem exorbitant. There seems no convincing reason why almost one million pounds should be spent on this amount of additional staff, given the numbers already employed in the Good Relations Unit. In addition, the salary scales appear far in excess of what is necessary and certainly far in excess of any equivalent within the voluntary sector.

Small Grants Scheme

- We regard the existence of a small grants scheme as absolutely essential to the success of a strategy to involve a wide section of the population in activities for peace. Consortia-led initiatives, while important, will not have the potential to attract grass-roots support in the manner of small grants, which can often have an impact far in excess of more expensive programmes.

