

WRDA Out and About

Reach Out! A selection of where we have been promoting and delivering the BCB programme in August and September.

- ⇒ Mullaghbawn Community Centre
- ⇒ Lislea Women's Group
- ⇒ North Belfast Men's Shed
- ⇒ Whitecross Community Centre
- ⇒ Omagh Sure Start
- ⇒ Bellaghy Women's Group
- ⇒ Cushendall Men's Shed
- ⇒ Dry Arch Sure Start Dungiven
- ⇒ Mainstay DRP
- ⇒ Hungarian Women's Group Omagh
- ⇒ Maureen Sheehan Centre Women's Group
- ⇒ Mourne Stimulus Day Centre
- ⇒ Skyways
- ⇒ Women's Aid Belfast
- ⇒ Croft Community
- ⇒ Enniskillen Carers Group



If you are interested in the Breast, Cervical and Bowel screening awareness programme please contact our office on **028 9023 0212**.

Our Breast, Cervical and Bowel Screening Awareness Programme is funded by the Public Health Agency.

WRDA 36th AGM A Visible Force For Change

You are cordially invited to WRDA's
Annual General Meeting
Thursday 7th November 2019
11am - 1pm
NICVA
61 Duncairn Gardens
Belfast
BT15 2GB

RSVP to Megan by Thursday 24th October
Email: info@wrda.net
Tel: 028 9023 0212

Membership

We keep our members up to date with the latest developments in the wider women's sector and provide them with opportunities to publicise their own work in our ezine, newsletter and blog. Through our member's events and organised campaigning we create an accessible path for women to engage in activism.

We represent women at local and international level and have a diverse membership including community based women's groups, national organisations, trade unions, women's centres and individuals.

Membership is free and you can join online at www.wrda.net/membership

Rally For Choice - A Celebration and a Demand for Change!

Long before Westminster voted to lift the ban on abortion in Northern Ireland, Rally For Choice activists had been planning a huge event for Belfast. With the news that a change in law was on the cards we were even more determined to invite people on to the streets for two reasons. First of all we knew many abortion rights campaigners had worked hard for this legal development and we deserved to celebrate all we had achieved. Secondly, nothing is guaranteed until we see regulations in place and accessible services that will meet the needs of everyone here who needs abortion care.



Photo courtesy of Alliance for Choice

We were delighted as thousands of people took to the streets of Belfast on 7th September on a beautiful afternoon to join us in those 2 goals. People travelled from all over Ireland, Kildare, Galway, Donegal, Leitrim, Drogheda, and even Cork! There was a strong sense of campaigners wanting to return the solidarity that had been shown to them during the repeal campaign last year and a desire to make sure Northern Ireland isn't left isolated as the only corner of these islands with such restrictive law.

The atmosphere was loud, engaging, defiant, celebratory and fun. The Chidambaram all-woman samba band kept our energy high throughout, and the watching public waved and applauded in solidarity with many taking photos or choosing to join in. When the rally arrived back at Writer's Square the atmosphere became reflective and emotional as local band Saint Sister sang a beautiful cover of the Cranberries song Dreams. The speeches started in a similar style as Alliance for Choice and Rally for Choice activist, and Women's Sector Lobbyist, Kellie Turtle spoke to the crowd about ending abortion stigma. She asked everyone to hold hands and reminded us that **we are all connected to someone who has had an abortion - 'we have nothing to be ashamed of and we will not stop fighting for our rights.'** Continued p.3



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Women's Charter for Change Launched



On Tuesday 17th September, as part of Good Relations Week, WRDA launched the Women's Charter and the full report into the North Belfast Women's Voices programme that produced the Charter.

The report was launched in the Lord Mayor's Parlour in Belfast City Council and we were honoured to have the Lord Mayor speak at the launch and express his appreciation of the work that the women who participated in this programme put into it. The programme required a willingness to engage in challenging discussions around some of the most difficult issues that our society faces, and to be keen to do this required a generosity of spirit and a courage that should be applauded. Without the determination of these women to tackle such a tough set of problems this programme would not have been a success.

The methodology was also key to the success of this programme. Taking around 2 years to complete, we worked first to give the participants a sound understanding of human rights, difference and othering and critical thinking, while also including training around inequalities and issues they faced in common, particularly health and gender inequality and a concern for younger people. By the time we began work on writing the Charter and discussing more sensitive issues such as parades and flags, the participants had built a mutual trust and respect. This allowed an openness and a degree of compromise not seen enough in these conversations.

The summary of the Charter is as follows:

- **People want a better future for the next generation but fear this may not happen**
- **Integration, whatever way that happens, is key**
- **Understanding and education can help us understand the difficult parts of our history, as well as the reasons for certain traditions**
- **This understanding enables genuine respect and that must be mutual**
- **There is a feeling that certain vested interests want to keep us divided and suspicious; what more can be done about that?**
- **There is a role for women, specifically, who are more willing to engage in cross-community work and healing.**
- **There is an enormous well of trauma and grief and not enough help available for those who need it.**

We believe that the learning from this programme seems to point the way forward; when we truly strive to include communities in these conversations we can foster trust and respect by genuine integration and good faith cross community work. It is vital also that we include women, as they are key to the long-term success of peacebuilding efforts. We won't always agree, but if we can learn a little more about who we are, who our neighbours are, and how best we can share this place we call home, then we can go a long way towards making that better future for our children and future generations.



Rally For Choice ... Continued

Shannon Patterson spoke on behalf of Alliance For Choice Derry, a group that had been heavily involved in canvassing voters during the repeal referendum and have recently been winning new support in the North West. The other speeches highlighted the intersectional issues connected to abortion rights and reproductive justice that we always need to include in our activism. Clare Moore spoke about abortion as a worker's issue and drew parallels with the campaign for marriage equality for LGBT people. Faolan Hook talked about how trans and non-binary people are affected by restrictive abortion law compounded by the many other barriers they face to accessing healthcare generally. Hamsavani Rajeswaren talked about women of colour and reminded the crowd that the tragic death of Savita Halappanavar in Galway in 2012 should drive us to support women of colour in addressing the added discrimination they face. Ivanka Antova addressed the issues for migrant women such as the asylum seeking women in Direct Provision centres in the south of Ireland who have so little autonomy over their own lives that accessing an abortion could be impossible. Gemma Hutton was our brilliant compere.

Finally the crowd was addressed by the formidable Bernadette McAliskey who took the stage to rapturous applause. She emphasised that this fight for abortion rights is part of a long history of women fighting for the right to control our own lives that has been going on for centuries. She made the simple but effective point that no one who disagrees with abortion will ever be forced to have one. She also stated that one of the biggest lines of division in the world right now is between those who believe in pursuing rights and equality for all, and those who do not. Her closing words were that she wanted to repeat back to the church something that the it says to us as part of its liturgy that she now wishes to reclaim....'This is my body!'

Rally For Choice would like to thank the march lead organiser Elaine Crory for all her hard work, all of the women's organisations who participated in this important protest and those individual women who we work and organise with on other issues who came to lend their support.

Hellos and Goodbyes in Lobbying



Kellie Turtle, Women's Sector Lobbyist, will be leaving WRDA in October. Kellie joined WRDA in 2017 and has campaigned relentlessly on issues such as the Two Child Tax Credit Cap and Rape Clause, maternal mental health and childcare for all to name a few. Kellie will be working on a PHD on Reproductive Rights discourse in faith communities at Queens University and we wish her all the best.

We are excited to announce the new Women's Sector Lobbyist will be Rachel Powell. Rachel has been committed to women's rights and equality for many years and has an MA from Queen's in Conflict Transformation and Social Justice. She was heavily involved in student politics and has been both VP for Equality and Diversity and VP for Postgraduates. Most recently Rachel worked as a Human Rights Officer for the Human Rights Consortium. We are looking forward to welcoming Rachel to the team.

