



## Newsletter ~ June/July 2022

### In My Own Words Creative writing project



In My Own Words is a creative writing project delivered by independent Theatre Company Prime Cut Productions. **The project is your chance to contribute an Anthology of New Writing from women across Belfast** and hopefully a Digitised Performance designed as both a learning tool and a work of art in its own right. It is aimed at participants from a diverse range of communities, an opportunity for women in Belfast who feel that their narrative has gone unheard and been ignored to express themselves.

WRDA will be hosting a group of 15 women to take part in the project. The classes can be delivered either live or online and will last for 2 hours once a week for ten weeks.

#### To take part you must:

- Be a woman (cis or trans)
- Be aged 30+
- Live in Belfast City Council area

The theme will explore how women have been or are seen by wider society in the past and how you feel you want to be seen now.

In My Own Words is based on partnership and delivered in exactly that way.

The project will bring together the expertise of both Prime Cut in the arts and our Community Partners in the social and community sector to create impactful, memorable work, that resonates and reflects the place in which it was made and the people who made it.



To take part email [info@wrda.net](mailto:info@wrda.net)

### In This Issue

In My Own Words  
Creative writing  
project

Paramilitarism, Gate  
Keeping and Control  
of Funding

New Raise Your  
Voice workshops

Welcome New Staff

Pride 2022

A Visible Force  
for Change



@womensrda



@WRDA\_team



@WomensResourcean  
dDevelopmentAgency

# Paramilitarism, Gate Keeping and Control of Funding



This article is an excerpt from the WPG response to the NI Affairs Committee Call for Evidence:  
The Effect of Paramilitaries on Society in Northern Ireland.

## Women's Policy Group NI

Paramilitarism is a reality in Northern Ireland and continues to persist 20+ years after the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. Paramilitary organisations continue to exist, despite, in most cases, ceasefires being in place and the conflict being behind us. Further, many of those who are involved in paramilitary activity are not the same actors that were involved during the conflict and the activities that continue to come under the umbrella name of “paramilitary activity” are not the same as those carried out during the conflict.

Paramilitaries are known to be involved in loan sharking and this particularly impacts upon those with limited incomes, especially women, as shown in research carried out by the Women's Regional Consortium. This fact increases their control over vulnerable communities while also demonstrating the fact that they are a malign influence. Race hate crime in Northern Ireland is often linked to paramilitarism.

It is a reductive approach to say that a racist hate crime (i.e. intimidation with the intent of forcing someone from their home) committed by a paramilitary member or on the orders of a paramilitary group is a matter of race alone.

In communities which have endured and suffered under paramilitary community control for decades, paramilitaries are incentivised to target perceived “newcomer” communities, on the pretext of racism and xenophobia, to justify their grip and coercive control over the community as a whole.

Lockdown may have further entrenched the influence of these groups in local communities, based on the increased levels of unrest and violence in recent months. Evidently, paramilitary organisations continue to recruit new members, and to engage in activities that would ordinarily be categorised as common criminality; loansharking, protection rackets, and drug dealing.

**Paramilitary-run organisations continue to act as community organisations within vulnerable communities and many are in receipt of public money. These same organisations can act as gatekeepers within their communities, choosing favoured organisations to work alongside and choking off support to groups that may challenge or question paramilitary influence. These organisations are often highly male-dominated, leading to the silencing of women's voices within the local community, while reinforcing gender divisions.**

This problem has been further exacerbated by the UK's refusal to apply the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 to the Northern Ireland conflict, a situation which must be corrected in order to ensure peace, particularly at this sensitive juncture in our history.

## Paramilitarism, Gate Keeping and Control of Funding

Recent research by the Independent Reporting Commission, compiled by Monica McWilliams, confirms that paramilitary activity remains an issue in Northern Ireland, and laments that civil society has apparently learned to live with it. She describes the situation as one of “coercive control” of entire communities.

In addition, paramilitary affiliation, or alleged affiliation, is used to enact coercive control within domestic relationships and after they end. More robust action against these organisations would free up money to be invested in the communities that are currently being harmed by this coercive control, many of which have some of the worst levels of deprivation in the UK and Europe.

### Recommendations:

- **Practical guidance and assistance for those in poverty, integrated with and informed by the Anti-Poverty Strategy, that will divert vulnerable people from accessing loans from loan sharks by providing practical short-term and longterm routes out of poverty.**
- A scoping exercise into the practicalities of adopting a policy position that advocates for the decriminalisation and regulation of drugs, so that this powerful method of community control and financial reward is taken out of the hands of paramilitaries.
- **Advocate for the application of UNSCR 1325 in Northern Ireland.**
- Introduce an urgent reappraisal of the process for awarding of public funds for community work, in order to ensure that these funds reach those most in need and do not perpetuate the issues that the work is designed to address.

## New Raise Your Voice Workshops



New Workshop

### Bystander Intervention

Wednesday 17th August: 1pm  
Register via Eventbrite



New Workshop

### ALLYSHIP

Wednesday 10th August: 1pm  
Register via Eventbrite



These workshops cover why allyship is important and useful, what the bystander approach means, and practical ways that people can use bystander intervention.

You can register for the two workshops which are scheduled for 1pm on 10th of August and 17th of August, at the link below. Keep an eye out for more new workshops launching soon.

**[Register for the workshops.](#)**





## Welcoming new staff to WRDA



Hi everyone!

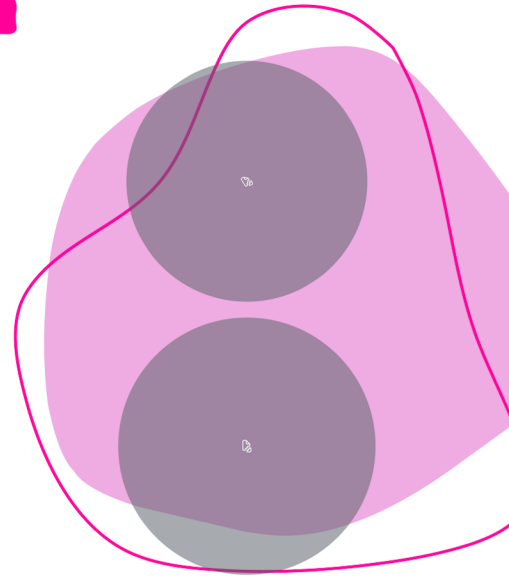
I'm Lauren and I have just joined the team as the Administration and Finance Assistant.

Before joining WRDA I worked for a recruitment agency as the office administrator and was responsible for providing support to 60 consultants across 3 NI offices.

I am extremely passionate about the women's sector and in my spare time volunteer as social media content creator for Stop street Harassment NI. SSHNI are a non-profit campaigning and lobbying to make street harassment a criminal offence.

Since joining the campaign in September 2021 I have been involved in various events such as International Women's Day in Derry, workshops on street harassment and also produced a short documentary on street harassment in the North called "Our Streets, Our Stories".

I am so excited to meet all of you and getting involved in the amazing work being done here.



## PRIDE 2022



Belfast Pride saw more than 60,000 attendees this year, it was the first Pride march to take place in three years due to Covid 19. This meant there was no opportunity to publicly celebrate the 30th anniversary of the parade in 2021, the pandemic cancellations also meant there was no way to celebrate the legalisation of equal marriage in 2020, which was a historical moment for the LGBTQIA+ community.

The theme for this year's parade was 'Community – United in Diversity', where the parade was led by a group of asylum seekers and refugees from Rainbow Refugees. The parade also included various organisations such as Ulster GAA, Amnesty International, Mermaids, The Rainbow Project and many more.

WRDA marched in the first ever feminist block led by Here NI and included Alliance for Choice, Belfast Feminist Network, Women's Platform, Reclaim The Agenda, Raise Your Voice.

The parade got under way at Custom House Square in the city before finishing at Victoria Street and was followed by an evening of entertainment at Custom House Square, including singing and drag queen performances.