

## Newsletter ~ Jan - March 2024

### Mas Project Wins Big at STAR Awards



We are delighted to have won the Aontas award for Special Recognition for an Initiative Supporting Shared Island and Peace Building Activities. The judging day and awards ceremony in Croke Park were

attended by myself Clare Anderson, Mas Project coordinator, Lynette Glen, Mas worker in Atlas centre Lisburn, Gillian McCarroll, Health coordinator and Mas lead in Ballybeen Women's Centre and Jenna Peacock, Mas Group Leader in Ballybeen Women's Centre. This award is an acknowledgment of the powerful work of the women on the project in supporting each others well-being, campaigning and sharing their lived experience to improve services in the future and break the stigma in maternal mental health.

The award acknowledges the support and role of the women's centres in delivering the Mas project and supporting women across communities. The Mas project has many layers of adult learning, learning for well-being delivered in the peer support sessions where women have engaged in art, mindfulness, life-coaching sessions to support their own emotional wellbeing. Mas is located in the holistic environment of the women's centre with progression routes to other supportive well-being initiatives and adult learning courses. In addition, WRDA deliver a group leader programme including a Maternal Advocacy & Support OCN Level 3 that provides women with the opportunity to gain training and experience in assisting in the delivery of the peer support groups. We believe that the project delivers societal and community learning, educating wider communities and influencing health leaders and politicians on the lived experience of women, reducing and breaking stigma in maternal mental health.

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@womensrda



@WRDA\_team



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## Mas Project Wins Big at STAR Awards

Our work is developing as we are currently in the process of supporting other organisations in rural communities to set up maternal mental health peer support groups and become part of the wider Mas network. We are also excited that the new Young Mums Mas groups will also soon be starting in Ballybeen and Atlas Women's Centre and we welcome new Young Mums Mas staff member Jennifer Wright to WRDA.



Receiving this wonderful award is recognition of the work and commitment of women across the project who all share in the pride of the Mas project. A sincere thank- you to everyone involved in Mas, women who attend the project, group leaders, campaigners, steering group, Kellie Turtle for developing the original model and the Mas pilot, mas staff and wider women's centres. The connection felt within the groups and throughout the project is powerful and is a testament to the dedication of all involved to break the stigma and continue our work in maternal mental health and let everyone know that Mas matter!

## New Worker Joins Mas Project



Hi, I'm Jennifer and I have just taken up the role of MAS young mums project worker. I am super excited to begin this new chapter with WRDA. Having twenty years youth work experience, supporting young people in a range of settings and locations all over the world, I am delighted to finally have the opportunity to work specifically with young mothers in NI. I believe this particular area of work is such a privilege and I'm really looking forward to getting alongside the mummy's, to cheer them on, to listen to their stories and hear their views. Through the MAS young mums programme I will pour my heart and soul into advocating for young mums and ensuring they have support during their motherhood journey.

I hope my professional and personal life experiences will help me to connect and empathise with mums on the project and show them that health, happiness and hope is possible.

If you would like to find out more about MAS young mums project, please get in touch, it would be lovely to chat with you.



## WRDA Celebrates International Women's Day 2024



The theme for this year was “Peace and Courage”, recognizing that it takes courage to create peace. Conflicts are raging in Ukraine, Sudan, and Yemen, Genocides are happening right now against Palestinians in Gaza and against Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang province of China. In a world, in the words of our final speaker, “hurtling towards World War three”, standing up for peace is its own kind of bravery.

The rally was well attended with hundreds of people turning up with placards, banners, whistles and painted faces! In spite of the times we are living in the rally managed to maintain a hopeful, festival atmosphere. Congratulations are due to the organisers, Reclaim the Agenda, for creating a safe, fun, and hopeful event bringing together all sections of our movement.

Two speakers had to withdraw due to online hate but the speakers who were able to speak were an inspirational cross section of the feminist movement here. Sarah Griffiths MBE, also known as “whellie momma”, is an intuitive speaker, author, copy writer empowerment mentor and a disabled mum of 3. She helps exhausted people pleasers know their worth and prioritise themselves to become unshakeable and build a life that lights them up. Alina Gawhar, an artist who escaped Afghanistan and is now making her home in Belfast, addressed the rally. She spoke passionately about the situation facing young women in Afghanistan. “The only thing I can do as an artist for my country and my family is to show beauty, unheard voices and beauty of music. I use my brushes as a weapon in front of the sad things which are happening in my country”. Avila Kilmurray, a veteran of the feminist movement and peace activist, has long advocated non-violent activism to deliver progressive change. Alexa Moore, Policy, Campaigns and Communications Manager for the Rainbow Project, got the crowd chanting during her speech. She led an inspiring call and response of “trans rights are women’s rights”. We are proud to be an inclusive feminist movement and it was lovely to have a good chant reflecting this.

The co-founder of the Community of Peace People, Mairead Maguire, brought the rally to a close with her call for a peaceful solution to the world’s conflicts and a warning that if such peaceful solution was not pursued we could be on the precipice of “World War three”. A sobering but hopeful reminder that peace is an action and we all have a contribution to make.





## April is Bowel Cancer Awareness Month

Bowel cancer is the fourth most common cancer in NI. Around 1 in 20 people will be diagnosed with bowel cancer and around 430 people die from the disease. Early detection is key to improved survival rates and the recently introduced FIT home screening kit is key to this. It is also a good idea to be aware of the symptoms of bowel cancer.

If you are aged between 60–74 you should automatically be sent the FIT home screening kit every 2 years. It is really important you complete and return the FIT kit as regular bowel screening has been shown to reduce the risk of dying from bowel cancer by 16%. You can also reduce your risk of developing bowel cancer by making some lifestyle changes such as eating a healthy, balanced diet and keeping active. It is also a good idea to find out if you have any family history with the disease if you can ([find out more about this here](#)).

### Bowel Cancer – Reduce Your Risk

- Eat a high fibre diet
- Eat more white meat and fish
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Regular exercise
- Stop Smoking



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WRDA's ground breaking Breast, Cervical and Bowel Screening Awareness programme was developed to tackle the low uptake of screening invitations by women living in some areas of NI. The programme is delivered by Community Facilitators who have completed our accredited Level 3 Certificate in Learning and Development. The bowel session is available to both men and women and like the breast and cervical sessions can be fully tailored to meet the needs of groups with additional needs such as sight impairment, learning disability or non-English speakers.

Before taking part in our programme only 51% of men and women surveyed said they knew what a FIT kit was. This increased to 99% after the training with 96% of those surveyed saying they would now use the kit. The programme is available free for community groups. To find out more or book a session email [Pamela Armstrong](#) for Community Groups or [Paula Murray](#) for groups with additional support needs.

### Bowel Cancer – Know The Signs



**Blood in your poo**



**Constipation/Diarrhoea/  
Narrow stools**



**Unexplained weight loss**



**Abdominal pain**



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## April is Bowel Cancer Awareness Month

If you want to find out more about bowel cancer screening or raise awareness why not book a bowel screening awareness session.

WRDA's bowel screening awareness session is delivered to groups across Northern Ireland. The session provides information on ways to reduce the risk of bowel cancer, what symptoms to look out for and how to use the screening test.

Some quotes from previous participants:

- **"It made an embarrassing subject more comfortable to talk about".**
- **"The new FIT test is so much easier to use".**
- **"The risks and symptoms are important to know".**
- **"I will encourage friends and family members to do the test".**
- **"Bowel screening and early intervention improves survival rates".**

For more information or to book this session, please contact [paula.murray@wrda.net](mailto:paula.murray@wrda.net) or [pamela.armstrong@wrda.net](mailto:pamela.armstrong@wrda.net)

Delivered to you in your community and funded by the PHA with no cost to participating groups.

WRDA Programmes are delivered by experienced trainers qualified to Level 3 in Training and Development through WRDA's Community Facilitator Training Programme

The end of December 2023 IASSIST NI had a meeting with WRDA's Training and Development team to discuss scheduling Breast, Cervical and Bowel Screening Awareness sessions for BAME communities across Northern Ireland. IASSIST NI in collaboration with Macmillan Cancer Support are running a cancer awareness campaign with a focus on raising awareness in the BAME Community across Northern Ireland, starting with Belfast wide. Further to our meeting, from January 2024 to February 2024 WRDA have facilitated 11 screening awareness sessions over 5 venues: Ballynafeigh Community Development Centre, Wellington Park Hotel, The Park Inn Hotel and Sandyrow Community Centre. The campaign will be rolled out over 2024 across Northern Ireland, as such, WRDA look forward to replicating the work we have already done in Belfast to BAME communities in other parts of Northern Ireland.

### Join WRDA

**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. Find out more at [www.wrda.net/membership](http://www.wrda.net/membership)**