



# TRUSTEE ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2022-MARCH 2023



### **NIRWN's Vision**

An equitable society where rural women are; visible, influential and valued.

### **NIRWN's Mission**

To advance the participation and recognition of rural women

Supporting-Enabling-Empowering

### **NIRWN's Purposes & Beneficiaries**

NIRWN's purpose is to promote and support rural women in rural Northern Ireland without distinction of age, sexuality, nationality, ethnic identity, disability, political or religious opinion, by associating the statutory authorities' voluntary organisations and other bodies the inhabitants and in particular:

## Chairperson's Report

In this, the 16th Annual Report for NIRWN, the Trustees of NIRWN would like to thank our members from across rural Northern Ireland for their ongoing support.

The political landscape this year saw our local Executive at Stormont still having difficulties; and the current impacts of Covid-19, rising Income crisis and the outworkings of Brexit and the NI Protocol on our membership very real. Our Strategic Plan 2021-2024 has really supported us to ensure we are delivering to the needs of our membership and future proofing our organisation. Our work has focussed on supporting our members to have their voices heard and to provide opportunities for members to engage directly with decision makers to communicate their views and influence change in an ever-changing context.

One example of this was our work with Rural Community Network supported by CFNI where we undertook research 'Looking Back to Go Looking Back to Go Forward' to learn what we could from the LEADER approach and what was worth taking forward in a new indigenous Rural Framework post EU exit. It aimed to identify what the challenges have been and what needs to be changed to improve delivery of rural development funding. The report makes recommendations on how inclusive delivery processes, like participatory budgeting, could increase engagement of rural citizens, promote openness and accountability in decision making and begin to address the well documented under-representation of women, young people and other S75 groups as applicants to, and beneficiaries of rural development funding. We completed an innovative pilot programme 'Women Breaking Barriers' under the UK government Community Renewal Fund with our partners WRDA and Women's Support Network. This was a huge investment of over £300, 000 regionally This was very successful, NIRWN led on delivery of the rural element of the pilot and 48% of participation was rural women with target numbers across the Project exceeded by 64% .

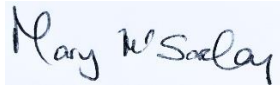
One of the key highlights of our year is International Day of Rural Women in October and it was fantastic to have our first large event post Coronavirus pandemic and see so many of our membership together in one venue. It is worth noting that whilst it was a day of celebration and joy our theme was 'Reflect, Rebuild and Renew' as our membership had been sharing their post covid and cost of living realities with us and this was a day set aside to support them through a difficult time.

We launched our new 'Women's Spaces', women and peacebuilding project as a Strategic Partner with the Irish Government. Women in Northern Ireland continue to be sidelined in peace building. Women are also underrepresented in public life, with very limited increase in women's representation in recent years and women's views rarely included in policy and decision making. Women's Spaces is a three-year project designed to begin changing these long-standing challenges. With our partners Womens Platform, WRDA and WSN. NIRWN will lead on delivery of the rural element of the programme with our new colleague and team member Women's Spaces Coordinator Charmain Jones.

NIRWN continues to work in partnership within the Women's Regional Consortium for the benefit of rural women. We continue our partnership work on Raise Your Voice to tackle Sexual Harassment and we continue to seek opportunities to work collaboratively across our islands to ensure that rural women are visible, influent and valued. We thank our funders for continuing to invest in us and assure you that our work is making a difference for the quality of life for women in rural areas.

Trustees would like to thank NIRWN staff who continue to work to improve the lives of rural women.

It would not be possible to support rural women across our region in the way we do without investment in rural women and we take this opportunity to thank all those who chose to invest in the rural women in NI through the supporting the work of NIRWN.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue rectangular background. The signature reads "Mary Mc Sorley" in a cursive script.

Mary Mc Sorley

NIRWN Chairperson

### Object 1:

To promote the efficiency and effectiveness of rural women’s organisations and projects in the area by providing advice, information, education and training, and practical support to such organisations and projects for the benefit of the public

### NIRWN Membership

NIRWN membership increased by 24% from January 2022-January 2023.

All members are invited to NIRWN events; receive our regular Ezine with information and opportunities.

NIRWN’s [website](#) hosts all NIRWN specific information.

NIRWNs Social Media Platforms have grown in membership and engagement. NIRWN has an Instagram account in addition to YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. All platforms have grown exponentially.



### Women Breaking Barriers Pilot

NIRWN completed a pilot education, training and employment through Community Renewal Fund with partners WRDA, WSN and Reclaim the Agenda. NIRWN led on delivery of the rural element of the pilot and 48% of participation was rural women with target numbers across the Project exceeded by 64%

[www.womenbreakingbarriersni.com](http://www.womenbreakingbarriersni.com)



## NIRWN International Day of Rural Women 2022

NIRWN held their annual **International Day of Rural Women** event in FermanaghOmagh District Council area this year at the Mellon Country Inn where we had 100 women in attendance focused on the theme of: 'Reflect, Renew, Rebuild' in direct response to membership feedback on the impact of Covid 19 and the cost-of-living crisis.



## International Women's Day 2023

NIRWN celebrated **IWD 23** by supporting our members groups to host their own events. This was a departure from our usual regional, large event and in direct response to membership feedback. Member groups shared that they were still struggling to encourage their own members back to their local groups post Covid crisis and that trying to access funding for 'fun' activities was increasingly difficult. We took a decision to distribute the money we would usually set aside for a big member event to support eleven of our member groups to host their own local event to celebrate IWD 23 instead. The opportunity was opened to all member groups.



## ‘Menopause & Me’

NIRWN developed and secured funding to deliver a bespoke ‘Menopause and Me’ programme for membership. This was designed to address a direct need expressed by our membership that were struggling to access local support and information in rural areas post Covid.



The poster features a stylized illustration of a woman with long purple hair, wearing a black top and purple leggings, standing on the left. The title 'menopause & me' is written in a cursive font at the top. Below the title, a question asks if the reader would like support to navigate menopause and thrive rather than survive. A purple box contains details about a 6-week online programme covering topics like HRT, nutrition, and yoga. Three icons (Zoom, email, location pin) precede information about session dates, registration email, and limited spots in the Western Trust area. Logos for HSC, Clear, and NIRWN are at the bottom, along with a note about funding support.

*menopause & me*

WOULD YOU LIKE SUPPORT TO NAVIGATE THROUGH THE **MENOPAUSE** AND THRIVE RATHER THAN SURVIVE?

NIRWN is running a 6 week programme covering all aspects of the menopausal transition. Topics covered will include HRT, alternative therapies, self-care and coping techniques, nutrition, mindfulness, yoga, etc.

- Sessions will be held online via Zoom and begin week commencing **November 1st at 7pm**
- To register your interest please email **paula@nirwn.org**
- Places are limited and preference will be given to those living in the Western Trust area.

HSC Public Health Agency  
Project supported by the PHA

Clear

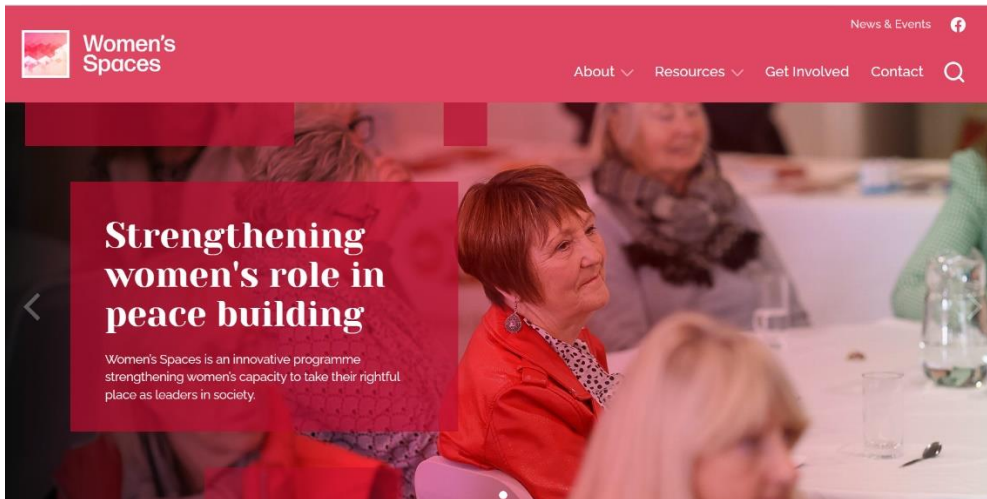
NIRWN  
Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network

This Project is supported by the Public Health Agency through the Clear Project

## Women's Spaces Launch

[Women's Spaces](#) is an innovative programme strengthening women's capacity to take their rightful place as leaders in society. The project builds women's skills and shares tools needed to engage effectively in peacebuilding, community development and public life, and aims to create new opportunities for women of all backgrounds to share their stories to shape future work and a future Northern Ireland.

Women in Northern Ireland continue to be sidelined in peace building. Women are also underrepresented in public life, with very limited increase in women's representation in recent years and women's views rarely included in policy and decision making. Women's Spaces is a three-year project designed to begin changing these long-standing challenges. With our partners; Women's Platform, WRDA and WSN we are a Strategic Partner with the Irish Government. NIRWN will lead on delivery of the rural element of the programme with our Women's Spaces Coordinator Charmain Jones.



## Object 2:

**To raise awareness among the general public and provide representation to policymakers of the needs and experiences of rural women in the area of benefit**

### Protocol Ireland/Northern Ireland

NIRWN Director was part of a small delegation of women who travelled to Brussels with FCDO to amplify the views of our membership on the impact and potential of NI protocol and the Windsor Framework and the legacy of women and the Good Friday Agreement on civic society and peacebuilding.

- As part of this work NIRWN met with: EU Commission, UK ambassador, Irish Embassy, MEPs and more in Brussels.
- We met with Steve Baker MP UK Minister for State NI.
- We met Brandon Lewis MP Secretary of State NI.

NIRWN were on the Steering Group for Women in Brexit Research commissioned by ECNI and included membership in the research focus groups.



## Looking Back to go Forward Research Report

This research was jointly commissioned by Rural Community Network and Northern Ireland Rural Womens' Network to take stock of how rural development funding has been delivered in Northern Ireland since the 1990s. We believed that it is timely to reflect on previous Rural Development Programmes as Northern Ireland prepares to deliver a new Rural Policy Framework post Brexit.

We believe this research can make a valuable contribution to DAERA's consideration.

The aims of the research were to identify what worked well with the previous LEADER approach and what is worth retaining in any future programme. It also aimed to identify what the challenges have been and what needs to be changed to improve delivery of rural development funding. The report makes recommendations on how inclusive delivery processes, like participatory budgeting, could increase engagement of rural citizens, promote openness and accountability in decision making and begin to address the well documented under-representation of women, young people and other S75 groups as applicants to, and beneficiaries of rural development funding.

The research also aimed to explore how new approaches to funding delivery can support innovation in rural communities to address the challenges and opportunities presented by climate change, Brexit and Covid recovery. The research also considers how the Framework can complement place shaping, community planning and community wealth building agendas.

Research was supported by CFNI

## DfC Developing Women in the Community

NIRWN was selected to represent rural women in a review of the Fresh Start Developing Women in the Community Programme. In addition to being a panel member, Louise Coyle, NIRWN was selected as Chair Developing Women in the Community Advisory Panel by the other panel membership.

Louise coordinated and wrote the final report and recommendations on behalf of the Panel for presentation to Minister Hargey.

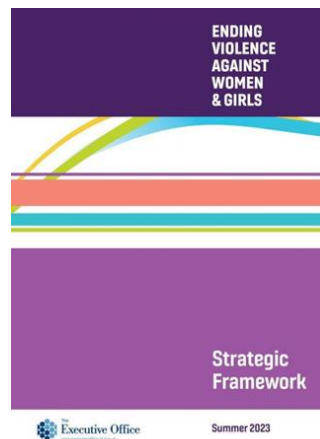


## Representation

### End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy TEO

NI is without an EVAWG Strategy and in the year 22-23 NIRWN was heavily engaged in working with TEO (The Executive Office) to support the development of a fit for purpose strategy.

Frances Kerr our Trustee, Paula Mc Aliskey, Engagement Officer and Louise Coyle Director all participated in and attended engagement and development sessions and supported our membership to engage via focus groups sessions.



### Object 3:

**To promote or assist in promoting cooperation and networking between women's organisations in the area of benefit for information exchange and policy consultation**

### Weaving All Island Connections

NIRWN is working in partnership with Women's Collective Ireland (WCI) on a programme connecting women across Ireland called Bonding & Bridging – Weaving All Island Connections. Paula, Engagement Officer sits on the Advisory Group and NIRWN recruited a rural women's group from Portglenone and a border women's group from Hilltown to partner with groups from North Leitrim and Kerry for a 6 week programme of workshops, exploring and sharing issues and challenges and building connections with each other.



#### Object 4:

#### To promote the participation of rural women in decision making amongst public bodies in the area of benefit

NIRWN hosted a range of funders and decision makers at NIRWN HQ an example of a few of these include:

- Hosted British-Irish Secretariat at NIRWN
- NIRWN members provided with the opportunity to meet with Minister Hargey MLA (DfC) and shared their experiences of impacts of the cost-of-living crisis in rural areas.
- NIRWN met with SF Mid Ulster Team to discuss IWD Provision for women and the EVAWG Strategy



## Nothing About Us Without Us

NIRWN, working with other grassroots women's organisations and with the support of CFNI and SCI worked with our membership on developing and delivering a regional event on a theme chosen by the women of NI.

The women selected 'Health' as their focus and developed a key ask of a Women's Health Strategy for NI.

NI is the only jurisdiction across these islands with 'no plans' for a Women's Health Strategy.

