

THE WOMEN'S SUPPORT NETWORK
FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024

(A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE AND NOT HAVING A SHARE CAPITAL)

COMPANY REGISTRATION NUMBER NI 057580

CHARITY REGISTRATION NUMBER NIC 102763

O'HARA SHEARER
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS AND STATUTORY AUDITORS
547 FALLS ROAD
BELFAST
BT11 9AB

THE WOMEN'S SUPPORT NETWORK
FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024

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THE WOMEN'S SUPPORT NETWORK
REPORT OF THE DIRECTORS AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Directors	Tanya Hughes Susan McCrory Renee Crawford Eleanor Jordan (Resigned 14/08/2024) Eileen Gay Sherry-Bingham Isobel Loughran (Resigned 11/09/2023) Lisa Maclean (Appointed 11/09/2023)
Company Secretary	Renee Crawford
Operational Director	Karen Sweeney
Registered Office	109-113 Royal Avenue Belfast County Antrim BT1 1FF
Auditors	O'Hara Shearer Chartered Accountants & Statutory Auditors 547 Falls Road Belfast, BT11 9AB
Bankers	AIB NI 11/15 Donegall Square North Belfast BT1 5GB
Company Registration Number	NI 057580
Charity Commission for Northern Ireland Registration Number	NIC 102763
HM Revenue & Customs Charity Registration Number	XR 40415
Registered Charity Name	The Women's Support Network

The Women's Support Network
(A company limited by guarantee)

Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report)
for the Year Ended 31 March 2024

The trustees, who are also directors of the charitable company for the purposes of company law, have pleasure in presenting their Trustees' Report with the audited Financial Statements of the charitable company for the year ended 31 March 2024. The trustees have adopted the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) 'Accounting and Reporting by Charities' 2015 applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) issued in July 2014, effective 01 January 2015 in preparing the trustees' report and financial statements of the charitable company, which are also prepared to meet the requirements for a directors' report and accounts for company and charity law purposes.

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Charity Commission for Northern Ireland Registration number
NIC102763

Company Registration number
NI057580 (Northern Ireland)

HMRC Charity Registration number
XR40415

Principal and Registered office
Cathedral Quarter Managed Workspace, 109-113 Royal Avenue, Belfast, Co. Antrim, BT1 1FF

Trustees

The trustees who served the charitable company during the year and up to the date of approval were as follows:

Tanya Hughes	Chairperson
Susan McCrory	
Renee Crawford	
Eleanor Jordan	
Gay Sherry-Bingham	Treasurer
Isobel Loughran	(resigned 11/09/23)
Lisa Maclean	(appointed 11/09/23)

Secretary
Renee Crawford

Operational Director
Karen Sweeney

Auditor
O'Hara Shearer
Chartered Accountants & Statutory Auditors
547 Falls Road
Belfast
BT11 9AB

Bankers
AIB, 11-15 Donegall Square North, Belfast, BT1 5GB

The Women's Support Network
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Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2024

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS continued

Insurance Brokers

Willis Insurance & Risk Management
Newsletter Building
55-59 Donegall Street
Belfast
BT1 2FH

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

WSN MISSION

To advance women's equality and rights by working to influence policy, practice and provision while also regionally supporting and representing the interests, needs and perspectives of women, particularly those in poverty and in disadvantaged areas.

WSN VISION

To create a just and peaceful society devoid of gender discrimination, gender-based violence and women's rights violations, in which women from all backgrounds and communities can experience full equality of opportunity and participation across all spheres of their everyday lives.

The Women's Support Network (WSN) is an umbrella organisation providing support to the community-based women's sector e.g. women's centres, groups, projects and organisations. WSN provides information, support, resources, research and training to support these organisations in the delivery of services that increase opportunities for women that work towards the relief of poverty, address social exclusion, advance education and safeguard health for women in Northern Ireland, particularly in areas of disadvantage. WSN actively campaigns, lobbies, carries out research and supports funding bids on key issues affecting women, namely health, poverty, childcare and education. WSN collates the views of women to inform policy development and articulate concerns and areas of need to funders, government departments, statutory organisations and elected representatives highlighting local key issues that impact directly on women in identified areas.

WSN advocates for requisite resources to facilitate the sustainability and expansion of women-only, women-led spaces and provision underpinned by free childcare. WSN facilitates the sharing of information, good practice and, where possible, resources between women's centres, groups and organisations, developing an online presence to accommodate same. WSN supports women's centres, groups and organisations to work together collectively and strategically, not only for the benefit of women in disadvantaged areas but also to promote women's equality and rights across Northern Ireland and beyond. WSN acts as a first point of contact that signposts women in disadvantaged and rural communities to services, advice and information relevant to their particular needs and interests.

WSN is a partner in the Women's Regional Consortium. The Consortium is funded by the Department for Communities (DfC) in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). Through the Regional Infrastructure and Support Programme (RISP), the Consortium provides thematic regional support for women's sector organisations across Northern Ireland, which meet the needs of marginalised and isolated women in disadvantaged and rural areas.

The Women's Support Network
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Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2024

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES continued

The Consortium is made up of seven established women's organisations: WSN, Training for Women Network (TWN), Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN), Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA), Foyle Women's Information Network (FWIN), Women's TEC and The Women's Centre Derry. These organisations work in partnership to provide specialist support, advice, information and training on a range of topics to increase capacity, skills, physical resources and structures to benefit women in Northern Ireland. The Consortium also operates as the link and point of contact between government and the sector to meet the needs of recommendations resulting from consultations, surveys and policy developments that impact on women. WSN is responsible for the co-ordination of policy and research within the Consortium.

WSN has responsibility for the distribution of funding and collective monitoring of activities delivered through Belfast Health & Social Care Trust to the five women's centres in the Belfast catchment area. This funding provides support for children and their families/carers, addressing specific needs in terms of personal development, training, improved physical and mental health outcomes, reduced stress and anxiety, advocacy, efficacy including sponsored and referred childcare. Throughout the year the women's centres provided support and advocacy for women and families impacted by isolation, disadvantage and the continuing 'Cost of Living' crisis across each of their catchment areas and beyond.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

In this financial year, WSN has continued to engage in a range of activities to raise the profile of women's organisations and women's issues and to support women's organisations in the delivery of front-line services for women in disadvantaged and rural areas. WSN continued to support marginalised women and groups to ensure that their voices were heard and views taken and relayed to decision-makers throughout the year on various issues that impact women and the organisations supporting them including the impact of the 'cost of living crisis'. We have continued to lobby and campaign on behalf of individual women, community-based women's centres, groups and organisations. Regular newsletters, e-zines and funding bites support organisations through the provision of information, funding opportunities, policy updates and training opportunities.

WSN have continued to host regular on-line and in-person women's centres' managers' meetings to facilitate networking, sharing of good practise in their continued support for women in each of their perspective communities across Northern Ireland. These meetings are an opportunity for the centre managers to discuss key issues that impact the sector and delivery of support services for women and children and how these can best be addressed and adapted including the provision of childcare. The key issues of concern for the centres in this year continued to be pressures associated with the continuing rise in the 'cost of living' and the pressure this was putting on staff and budgets as operating costs continued to rise as did the demand for their services, such as delivery of training and education, specialist advice, support and advocacy.

Over this reporting period WSN continued periodically to meet with other members of the 'Co-design' working groups that input into the development of both the Gender Equality and Anti- Poverty Social Strategies to ensure that these strategies would be as advanced as soon as possible when the Assembly returned. The Assembly did return in January 2024, however the incoming Minister has yet to make recommendation on when the draft strategies will be published for consultation.

As a member of the Women's Regional Consortium, WSN is responsible for co-ordination of policy and research on issues that impact on women in disadvantaged and rural areas. Focus groups, consultation events, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were undertaken to garner the views of women in these areas to inform the policy responses and research ensuring that local women were afforded an opportunity to have their views put forward.

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Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2024

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE continued

In this year WSN made the following consultation responses and submissions that directly impact women in Northern Ireland:

- 02/05/23 – Department of Justice (DoJ) and Department of Health (DoH) - Response to Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy Consultation
- 07/06/23 – Dept. For Communities (DfC) - Budget 2023-2024 Equality Impact Assessment
- 07/06/23 – The Executive Office (TEO) – Budget 2023-2024 Equality Impact Assessment
- 12/06/23 – Department for Infrastructure (DfI) - Budget 2023-2024 Equality Impact Assessment
- 22/06/23 – Dept. of Health (DoH) - Budget 2023-2024 Equality Impact Assessment
- 01/08/23 – Dept. for Economy (DfE) - Budget 2023-2024 Equality Impact Assessment
- 11/08/23 – Dept. of Education (DE) - Budget 2023-2024 Equality Impact Assessment
- 11/08/23 – Dept. For Communities (DfC) Response to Changes to Discretionary Support consultation – EQIA Equality Impact Assessment
- 24/08/23 – Department for Infrastructure (DfI) – Consultation Response on free and discounted fares on public transport (concessionary fares).
- 18/09/23 – The Executive Office (TEO) - Consultation Response to Free Period Products
- 03/10/23 – The Executive Office (TEO) - Consultation Response to Ending Violence Against Women & Girls Strategic Framework and Foundation Action Plan
- 23/11/23 – Dept. of Education (DE) - Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Consultation Response
- 09/01/24 – Dept. of Health (DOH) - Consultation on the "Re-introduction of Hospital Parking Charges" as a measure to support budget sustainability by raising additional revenue
- 17/01/24 – Department of Finance (DOF) - Financial Context for Revenue Raising Consultation Response
- 09/02/24 – Dept. For Communities (DfC) - Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure and Support Policy Framework
- 12/02/24 – Department of Finance (DOF) - Domestic Rating Measures Consultation Response
- 08/03/24 – Dept. for Infrastructure (DfI) - Response to Water and sewerage charges – options for revenue raising

Additional Submissions:

- 12/05/23 – Submission to Work & Pensions Committee UK Inquiry into Benefit Levels in the UK
- 12/09/23 – 'Costs of Education'- Summary from Cost-of-Living research sent to Education Committee MLAs and APG on Parental Participation in Education members
- 14/09/23 – 'Unpaid Care'- Summary from Cost-of-Living research sent to APG on Carers members
- 14/06/23 – 'Mental Health'- Summary from Cost-of-Living research sent to APG on Mental Health members and Health Committee MLAs
- 18/09/23 – 'Women's Coping Behaviours'- Summary from Cost-of-Living research sent to APG on UNSCR 1325 members
- 19/09/23 – 'Debt & Savings'- Summary from Cost-of-Living research sent to Communities Committee MLAs
- 21/09/23 – 'What Should Politicians Do'- Summary from Cost-of-Living research sent to all MLAs

In the latter half of last year in partnership with Ulster University Law Clinic research began on ‘Women’s Experiences of the Cost-of-Living Crisis in N. Ireland’. The overall aim of this research project was to explore the experiences of women living and working in disadvantaged and rural areas of Northern Ireland and the impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis was having on their lives. How it was impacting their household bills, their debts and savings, their caring responsibilities, their physical/mental health, their children, their ability to take part in social activities and the coping mechanisms they have had to use as result of the Cost-of-Living Crisis. At the launch in Ulster University on 20th June a summary of the main points in the research were outlined as well as the personal insights from women who took part in the research relaying the impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on their lives and how it affected them, their children and families.

Following the findings of the research five key priority areas were identified for action and these were:

- **Key Priority 1** – Women’s Centres provide trusted, local spaces for women to access help and support to address financial vulnerability and poverty in ways that work best for them. We recommend that Government should provide a long-term sustainable funding model which recognises the significant return on investment that Women’s Centres provide. This would enable them to continue and develop the vital services they provide.
- **Key Priority 2** – The Holiday Hunger Scheme needs to be urgently reinstated to mitigate against food insecurity for women and children during the upcoming summer holiday period. The Healthy Start Scheme needs to be increased in line with inflation and those who are entitled should be automatically enrolled onto the scheme.
- **Key Priority 3** – The Cost-of-Living Crisis has compounded the existing crisis in mental health, as women lose opportunities for social connection and peer support due to a lack of money. There is an urgent need to invest in services to prevent long term mental illness and loss of life.
- **Key Priority 4** – The School Uniform Grant needs to be increased to reflect the average cost of a school uniform (including PE kit) which would move it closer in line with other countries in the UK. The grant should also include an allowance for school shoes.
- **Key Priority 5** – We support the recommendations from the Independent Review of Discretionary Support and want to see increased investment in this vital fund to address rising levels of financial hardship and the impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis.

There was extensive media coverage at the launch with pieces on On Your Behalf, BBC Good Morning Ulster, U105 Frank Mitchell Show, BBC Newsline, UTV News, NTV, Byline Times and features in Belfast Live, the Belfast Telegraph and the Irish News.

A second piece of research on ‘Women, Unpaid Care & Employment’ was undertaken in this year in collaboration with Carers NI. The research took evidence from women through focus groups and interviews which was combined with the results of survey data from Carers NI through their State of Caring survey and report.

The key findings of this research were as follows:

- Nearly 60% of unpaid carers are women
- Women have a 70% chance of providing care in their adult life compared to 60% for men and are more likely to care early in their life. By the time they are 46, half of all women have been a carer (11 years before men)
- More than one in six women in employment are providing unpaid care (approximately 71,000 women)
- Women are more likely to leave the labour market due to caring responsibilities
- One in three women have given up work to care (34%)
- One in four women have decreased their working hours due to a caring role (28%)
- One in six women have taken on a less qualified job or turned down a promotion to fit around caring responsibilities (17%)
- Nearly three quarters (73%) have lost out on between £500 and over £1500 per month in wages because of challenges juggling work and care
- Women “juggle” their caring role and employment often at the detriment of their own career, finances and health and wellbeing
- The financial impact of stopping/reducing work to provide care is felt by women not only while providing the care but throughout their lives
- Carer’s Allowance in terms of its value and low earnings threshold is inadequate to support women to balance care and work

- Support for carers in work is often a lottery, dependent on individual employers and line managers
- Inadequacies in wider support services, including social services, healthcare, education and childcare are stopping women from working altogether or limiting the amount of work they can do
- For some women work can be positive in terms of mental health and wellbeing and gives them a break from their caring role
- Women feel reliable, accessible support services, a range of flexible working options, carer's leave and a change to the eligibility criteria for Carer's Allowance would help balance work and care
- A lack of support for carers in the workplace results in a loss of valuable and skilled individuals to the labour market

WSN has through the year continued to be a key contributory member of the Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland, a platform for women working in policy and advocacy roles in different organisations to share their work and speak with a collective voice on key issues. It is made up of women from trade unions, grassroots women's organisations, women's networks, feminist campaigning organisations, LGBT+ organisations, support service providers, human rights and equality organisations and individuals.

WSN continues to support the development and delivery of the Rape Crisis service for Northern Ireland which is funded by both the ROSAUK Justice and Equality Fund and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT). Another cohort of volunteer support workers commenced their trauma informed training with the training taking place both online and in-person. Ongoing recruitment and training of volunteers is essential to meet the ever increasing demand for the service and to replace support workers who leave or take a break. The Freephone Information and Support Line remains open four evening a week with the service contactable at any time via email or voicemail. Relationships and referral routes continued to grow through stakeholder organisations working with those impacted by rape and sexual assault such as ASSIST NI, the PSNI, the ROWAN (SARC), Nexus and Victim Support. Awareness raising and promotion of the service is ongoing through social media platforms and in-person events.

WSN is part of a campaign, 'Guarantee our Essentials' from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Trussell Trust calling for an Essentials Guarantee within Universal Credit. The Essentials Guarantee would embed in the social security system a principle that at a minimum Universal Credit should protect people from

WSN continues to be on the working group for the Northern Ireland Child Payment Coalition. The introduction of a NI Child Payment was a recommendation by the Gender Equality and Anti-Poverty Expert Panels and in the Feminist Recovery Plan.

WSN is a member of the Coalition of Carers, made up of a number of organisations all working to highlight the key issues that carers are facing across Northern Ireland.

WSN remains on the working group of the Cliff Edge Coalition working to strengthen the existing mitigations package for Northern Ireland. Cliff Edge relaunched their key asks which are as follows:

- Resolving the five week wait in Universal Credit
- Mitigating the two-child limit
- Providing support to private renters affected by the Local Housing Allowance

WSN continued its partnership with the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) as lead partner, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) and Reclaim the Agenda (RTA) for the Raise Your Voice Project and campaign (RYV). This project informs and raises awareness of all forms and degrees of sexual harassment, working collectively to create true cultural change in order to tackle the root causes of these behaviours and empower people to make real society change. In this year new workshops covering 'online harassment', 'ally ship' and 'by-stander intervention' were delivered both in person and online. The project continues to strengthen its presence through social media platforms, poster campaign, e-zines and website content and resources.

The Women's Support Network
(A company limited by guarantee)

Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2024

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE continued

WSN continue to be a strategic partner in the 'Women's Spaces Project' funded through Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Reconciliation Fund, led by Women's Platform (formally NIWEP) and in partnership with NIRWN and WRDA who have responsibility for key delivery areas. The project is designed to give women the skills and capacity to engage in public life and strengthen women's voices in peace-building and decision making. The project will deliver a series of workshops as well as develop a 'toolkit' on women, peace and security that will inform and enhance further training and workshops through a collective of programmes, tools and information.

In this year, WSN in partnership with WRDA as lead, NIRWN and Reclaim the Agenda began delivery of the 'Women Breaking Barriers Project' funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund as part of the UK Levelling Up initiative under the Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing which is a follow-up to the UKCRF Women Breaking Barriers project. The overarching UKSPF intervention for Northern Ireland is; 'Supporting economically inactive people to overcome barriers to work by providing cohesive, locally tailored support including access to basic skills'. This two year project aims to deliver specific tailored support to 600 economically inactive women across urban and rural settings. WSN are responsible for the urban delivery working in partnership with seven women's centres and other urban groups while NIRWN has responsibility for rural delivery.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Financial Position

The accounts on pages 17-26 deal with all the income and expenditure of the charitable company, as well as its financial position at the year end.

Principal funding sources supporting key objectives of the charitable company and funding both charitable activity and support costs are shown at notes 1 – 6 (pages; 20-21).

The results for the year show an unrestricted surplus of £25,024 (2023: 10,021) and a restricted deficit of £13,325 (2023: Surplus £10,235) producing an overall surplus of £11,699 (2023: £20,256).

At the year-end unrestricted reserves were £77,159 (2023: £52,135) and restricted reserves £16,832 (2023: £30,157).

The Women's Support Network
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Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2024

Reserves policy

In line with good practice The Women's Support Network aims to build towards and retain a level of unrestricted reserves that match the needs of the organisation that equate to six months operational costs, both at the current time and in the future to meet statutory obligations for both staff and suppliers in these times of funding uncertainty.

These include:

- Statutory Redundancy
- Salaries and Pensions
- Organisational Running Costs

Reserves will be monitored on an ongoing basis by the Finance and Personnel Trustee sub-group and an overview presented by the Operational Director at Trustee Board meetings to ensure the progress towards target level.

Risk management

The Board have assessed the major risks to which the charitable company is exposed, in particular those related to its operations and finances, and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate any exposure to those major risks.

Going concern

After making appropriate enquiries, the trustees have a reasonable expectation that the charitable company has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. For this reason, they continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the financial statements. Further details regarding the adoption of the going concern basis can be found in the Accounting Policies.

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Governing document

The organisation is a charitable company limited by guarantee, incorporated on 14 December 2005. The company was established under a Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the charitable company and is governed under its Articles of Association.

Organisational structure

The Women's Support Network is overseen by a Board of Directors which meets at least six times a year. The Board is responsible for the strategic direction of the organisation and oversees the management of the organisation. The day-to-day management and operation of activities are carried out by a staff team led by the Director who reports regularly to the Board.

Recruitment and Appointment of Board of Directors

The directors of the company are also charity trustees for the purposes of charity law and under the company's Articles are known as the Board. Under the requirements of the Memorandum and Articles of Association the members of the Board are elected from the membership to serve for a period of three years after which they must be re-elected at the next Annual General Meeting.

PUBLIC BENEFIT STATEMENT

The Directors have complied with the duty to have due regard to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's statutory guidance on the public benefit requirement issued under the Charities Act (NI) 2008.

The Women's Support Network
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Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2024

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The trustees (who are also the directors of The Women's Support Network for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the Report of the Trustees and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to;

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP 2015 (FRS 102);
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable United Kingdom Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the trustees are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the charitable company's auditor is unaware; and
- the trustees have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information.

AUDITORS

As per procurement procedures this will be put out to tender and agreed at the next AGM.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

Approved by order of the board of trustees on 19 December 2024 and signed on its behalf by:



Gay Sherry-Bingham - Trustee