

THE WOMEN'S SUPPORT NETWORK
FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025

(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 2025

CONTENTS

	Page
Reference and Administrative Information	1
Trustees Annual Report (including the Statement of Directors Responsibilities in respect of financial statements)	2 -10
Report of the Independent Auditors to the Members'	11-13
Accounting Policies	14-16
Statement of Financial Activities (incorporating the income and expenditure account)	17
Balance Sheet	18
Statement of Cash Flows	19
Notes to the Financial Statements	20-26

THE WOMEN'S SUPPORT NETWORK
REPORT OF THE DIRECTORS AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Directors	Tanya Hughes Susan McCrory (Resigned 24/10/2024) Renee Crawford Eileen Gay Sherry-Bingham Lisa Maclean
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 2025

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 2025. 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.

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
(A company limited by guarantee)

Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

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 families/carers and their children 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 within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

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, such as 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 former members of the 'Co-design' working groups that input into the development of both the Gender Equality and Anti-Poverty Social Strategies lobbying for these strategies to be as advanced as soon as possible by the Minister appointed in January 2024. Unfortunately as of the 31 March 2025, neither of these draft strategies has been released for public consultation but collectively and collaboratively we continue to pressure for these strategies.

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

Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE continued

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.

In this year WSN as policy and research lead in the Women's Regional Consortium made the following consultation responses and submissions on issues that directly impact women in Northern Ireland:

- 22/07/24 – Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) – Consultation response to Modernising Support for Independent Living: The Health and Disability Green Paper
- 29/08/24 – Department of Health (DoH) – response to Budget EQIA
- 03/09/24 – Department for Communities (DfC) – response to Budget EQIA
- 06/09/24 – Department for Infrastructure (DfI) – response to Budget EQIA
- 13/09/24 – Department for Communities (DfC) – response to Welfare Supplementary Payment Schemes
- 26/09/24 – Department of Education (DE) - response to School Uniform Cost Policy consultation
- 26/09/24 – Department for the Economy (DfE) - Response to Domestic Abuse Safe Leave consultation
- 30/09/24 – Department for the Economy (DfE) - response to Good Jobs Bill consultation
- 04/11/24 – The Executive Office (TEO) - Doing What Matters Most - Draft Programme for Government consultation response
- 08/11/24 – The Executive Office (TEO) - Budget EQIA consultation response
- 02/12/24 – The Executive Office (TEO) - Draft Programme for Government EQIA consultation response
- 04/12/24 – Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) - Making Work Pay: Strengthening Statutory Sick Pay consultation response
- 15/01/25 – Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) - Establishment of a Just Transition Commission consultation response
- 13/02/25 – Department of Education (DE) - Review of Free School Meals and Uniform Grant Eligibility Criteria consultation response
- 14/02/25 – Department for Communities (DfC) - Gender Pay Gap Reporting Regulations consultation response
- 28/02/25 – Department for Communities (DfC) - Policy Changes to the Winter Fuel Payments Scheme consultation response
- 06/03/25 – Department for Communities (DfC) - A New Fuel Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland consultation response
- 10/03/25 – Department of Health (DoH) - Help with Health Costs consultation response
- 13/03/25 – Department of Finance (DoF) - Draft Budget consultation response

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

Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE continued

Additional Submissions:

- 05/09/24 – Committee for the Executive Office –Gaps in Equality Legislation call for evidence response
- 13/02/25 – Submission to UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights on Welfare Conditionality & Childcare in Northern Ireland
- 18/02/25 – Holiday Hunger - Private Members Bill consultation response
- 27/03/25 – Conversion Practices Private Members Bill letter response

In this year, as a member of the Women's Regional Consortium, WSN carried out a piece of research entitled 'Women, Skills and Barriers to Work' which looked specifically at what are termed 'economically inactive' women and the reasons they are currently out of work, the barriers they face getting into work, the jobs they would most like to do and their thoughts on what is considered a good job. The paper includes the experiences of women across Northern Ireland and also reflects the views of rural women and women from minority ethnic communities. The context of this research is set in high economic inactivity levels in Northern Ireland and a Government focus on supporting people into work and on the creation of 'good jobs'. Women are more likely to be impacted by economic inactivity and issues around poor-quality work because of the structural inequalities and barriers they face.

The overall aim of the research project was to explore the following areas:

- The reasons why women are more likely to be economically inactive.
- The barriers to women's participation in the workforce.
- The types of education, skills training and jobs that women most want to do.
- The existing supports which help women undertake education, skills training and/or make the move into work and possible future supports which could help women in these areas.
- To highlight the role of Women's Centres in helping women to access education, skills training and work.

The Northern Ireland economic inactivity rate is 28.2% and it is consistently above the UK average (now at 21.8%). Northern Ireland has the highest economic inactivity rate of the twelve UK regions. The female economic inactivity rate has also been consistently higher than the male economic inactivity rate – the most recent figures show the female rate at 31.8% compared to 24.6% for men. The research used a mixed methodological approach, combining a literature review with focus groups and questionnaire engagement to capture the experiences and views of women across Northern Ireland of working age who are economically inactive.

The findings of this research clearly show that women face many barriers to work and in trying to access the education and skills they need to access good jobs. The structural inequalities which mean that women are more likely to provide care particularly childcare, increasing levels of sickness and disability particularly around mental health and a lack of confidence and skills to access good quality work were frequently reported as barriers to work for women. What is also evident from this research is the need for education and skills development for women particularly for those furthest from the labour market alongside other critical 'softer' supports including confidence building and managing stress.

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

Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE continued

Based on the research findings identified the following recommendations are needed to support women to overcome the barriers they face entering the labour market and in accessing the education and skills they need to do so:

- That Government provide long-term, sustainable funding for the full cost of delivery of community-based women-only, training and education.
- The creation of more Government funded training/education schemes to help those with no qualifications, those most likely to be economically inactive and those in low paid work. They should be free, for all age groups, part-time workers and those on out of work benefits.
- The enacted Good Jobs Employment Rights legislation provide for paid Carer's Leave, a day one right to flexible working and the banning of zero-hours contracts.
- Delivery of a fit for purpose, accessible, affordable childcare system across NI including childcare for children with special educational needs and for those on the lowest incomes to enable them to access the education, training and skills they need to work.
- Improve access to education and learning opportunities for people with disabilities and better integration between local health and employment support services focusing on the health conditions which are causing increasing rates of economic inactivity.
- Investment in improving access to mental health support services across NI.
- Greater value placed on care work and for Government, employers and trade unions to work to improve the quality of these jobs, increase pay levels and invest in skills.
- Employers do more to make it easier for workers to combine work with caring responsibilities and illness/disability, including the provision of flexible working, family and carer's leave beyond the statutory minimum.
- Support for the Essentials Guarantee in Universal Credit so that the basic rate of Universal Credit at least covers life's essentials to help address poverty as a barrier to work.
- A benefits run-on in the social security system to allow people to try work without losing benefits and a work allowance for second earners in Universal Credit to make it more financially worthwhile for women to take up paid work.

WSN has again throughout 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 continues to be funded by both the ROSAUK Justice and Equality Fund and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT). Trauma informed trained volunteers continue to provide one-to-one support to survivors of rape and sexual assault who have contacted the service for support. 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 continues to grow through social media platforms and in-person events.

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

Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE continued

WSN continues as a campaign member of, 'Guarantee our Essentials' led by 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 going without the essentials.

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 continue to lobby for their key asks of:

- 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 is part of a coalition of organisations led by Inspire Wellbeing NI who have come together to host a one-stop shop service for the many impacts of the Cost-of-Living Crisis. The **Cost of Living 24** campaign aims to make navigating community and voluntary services easy, local and accessible, thanks to a dedicated webpage and freephone number. The partnership provides information and advice on a range of subjects: benefits and entitlements, fuel and child poverty, affordable childcare and housing. It also signposts to foodbanks in towns and cities throughout Northern Ireland.

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 societal changes. In this year the project continued to deliver, both in person and online, a suite of workshops that tackle sexual harassment. The project continues to strengthen its presence through social media platforms, poster campaign, e-zines and website content and resources. In the next year the project will expand delivery of training through funding secured from the Executive Office to support the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework (EVAWG).

WSN continues 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 delivers a series of workshops and has been developing 'Pillars for Peace', a digital 'toolkit' on women, peace and security that will

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

Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE continued

inform and enhance further training and workshops through a collective of programmes, tools and information. In this year content for the interactive 'Toolkit' was created, recorded and built and will be launched in May 2025 in City Hall.

WSN in partnership with WRDA as lead, NIRWN and Reclaim the Agenda continued in the delivery of the 'Women Breaking Barriers Project' funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund as part of the UK Levelling Up initiative under the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. 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 project aims to deliver specific tailored support to 600 economically inactive women across urban and rural settings over the two years. WSN are responsible for the urban delivery working in partnership with women's centres and other urban groups while NIRWN has responsibility for rural delivery. As of 31 March 2025, 718 economically inactive women had participated in the project, 695 of which gained qualifications and 114 entered into employment.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Financial Position

The accounts on pages 17-19 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 £20,075 (2024: 25,024) and a restricted surplus of £24,427 (restricted deficit 2024: £13,325) producing an overall surplus of £44,503 (2024: £11,699).

At the year-end unrestricted reserves were £106,724 (2024: £77,159) and restricted reserves £31,770 (2024: £16,832).

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

Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

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
(A company limited by guarantee)

Report of the Trustees (including Directors' Report) - continued
for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

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 15 January 2026 and signed on its behalf by:



Renee Crawford - Trustee