



Valuable and much needed services for women are at risk of closure

Women's voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) in the North East provide free, and often life saving, services to women from all walks of life and lobby for better laws to end discrimination against women; but many of these women's sector organisations are in danger of being closed down. The national why women campaign is speaking up for women's organisations, which do great work for women and society as a whole, but are under threat from lack of funding.

There are currently 170 women's VCOs across the North East registered on NEWomen's Network database. In a recent survey conducted by NEWomen's Network, women's organisations in the North East said that they were responding to a broad and diverse range of issues e.g. health issues, violence against women, gender equality, education and training, economic disadvantage etc. Women's sector organisations approach women's issues in a holistic way, by seeking to empower women individually and collectively to identify their own solutions and by carrying out research and campaigning to improve the position of women in society and the economy and ultimately to eliminate gendered inequality. Research conducted by the Women's Resource Centre in 2009¹ found that the North East had the least number of women's VCOs of all the English regions and they were most likely to be facing closure. Our own survey later in the same year found that 42% of women's VCOs had lost funding in the last 12 months and were providing less services and spaces for women.

NEWomen's Network are calling for policy and decision makers and funding bodies in the North East to put women back on the agenda by:

- acknowledging the systematic disadvantage women face because of gendered inequality
- publicly recognising the essential services and expertise the women's sector provides

Who we are

NEWomen's Network's purpose is to strengthen the women's sector and to ensure the survival of women's organisations and groups, we intend to achieve this by:

- Building a sustainable women's sector through collaboration and partnership between women's organisations
- Promoting and enhancing the role of the women's sector organisations and groups in delivering economic regeneration and tackling the root causes of women's economic disadvantage in the North East
- Developing a feminist culture within the women's sector by putting into action alternative and different ways of thinking, being and doing
- Educating widely to promote gender equality and ensuring that the women's sector is equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to ensure its survival
- Campaigning for decision makers and funding bodies to acknowledge the systematic disadvantage women face because of gendered inequality and to recognise the essential services and expertise the women's sector provides

To find out more about NEWomen's Network visit <http://www.newwomens.net/>

¹ From Not just bread, but roses, too: Funding to the women's voluntary and community sector in England 2004-07, Women's Resource Centre (2009)

Women's in the North East are even more disproportionately affected by gender inequality than they are nationally

Employment - 80.2% of men compared to 72.3% of women in the region are economically active. Unemployment rates are 7.9% for men and 5.3% for women. 21.6% of men and 73.8% of women are employed part-time. 4.4% of women are self-employed, the lowest regional level in the country, as compared to national average of 7.2%. Gender segregation in the labour market persists across and within industries despite anti-discrimination laws².

- Only 17.6% of women are involved in management at higher and professional levels compared to 24.2% of men. In Easington, men are twice more likely than women to be in this category.
- Within the Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) sector only 15% of employees are women.
- Women hold only 9% of Research & Development (R&D) jobs

Economy - More women (31.6%) earn less than £250 a week compared with 16.5% of men for full-time workers. Nationally the gap between men and women's salaries is 21% in some parts of the Tees Valley the gap is 35% and the highest pay gap is found in Wansbeck (40.69% of difference).³ Despite an increase in female activity rates (compared to male rates) Gross Value Added (GVA) per head of population in some part of the North East is declining⁴ Thus suggestion that women's low pay and the gendered construction of the Labour Market are intrinsic to the overall failure of the North East economy.

Education - The proportion of women of working age without qualifications in some parts of the region is higher than the National average, for example in Tees Valley it is 22% (compared with 17% nationally). In Middlesbrough and Hartlepool the rate of working age women without a qualification is 25% and in Redcar and Cleveland it is 24%. The biggest gap is in those with NVQ4 and above which is, 21% in the North East, 25% nationally and in Tees Valley only 19%. There is still a strong gender bias in many subject areas in Further Education. Construction, Planning and the Built Environment subjects and Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies are dominated by young men. Young women dominate learning in Health, Public Services and Care subjects.

Caring - Although more and more women are undertaking paid work, women in the region still carry most of the burden of family care⁵. Women in certain ethnic groups are particularly likely to have caring responsibilities. 63% of Bangladeshi Women and 43% of Pakistani women look after their family full time⁶. Women who are caring are more likely to work part time than full-time, whereas this is not the case for male carers.

Crime - Northumbria police record 25,000 domestic violence incidents per year and in County Durham domestic violence accounts for 25% of all violent crime reported by the police⁷. In some parts of the region there are more incidents of domestic violence than for burglary and robbery added together.

Politics - the profile of councillors reflects the poor profile nationally. Around 70% of councillors are male and 30% female. BME women are virtually non-existent in North East Councils; in total, seven councillors were from ethnic minorities before May 2007 election and this rose to thirteen barely 1% of councillors in total and all but one are male.

² Equality and Diversity in the North East - a statistical profile (NEEDP and Northumbria University, August 2008)

³ Source: ONS annual survey of hours and earnings - residence analysis (2007)

⁴ Tees Valley JSU Information and Forecasting Group (2007)

⁵ Equality and Diversity in the North East - a statistical profile (NEEDP and Northumbria University, August 2008)

⁶ Research from Sheffield Hallam University conducted in Newcastle

⁷ Information taken from County Durham Domestic Abuse strategy 2006-08

Support women's organisations to change lives...

...to change lives

Women's organisations work with some of the most forgotten and isolated women in our communities. Very often, these are the women whose needs are not being met by government agencies, or by other charities. Without women's organisations, these women would not have the same opportunities to change their lives.

"The plays ... tell the stories of women in our region, drawing attention to issues which are often hidden and seldom discussed, raising audiences' awareness and promoting change and action. We work in a very unique way, carrying out drama workshops where groups of women create characters from their own experiences. This allows women, young women and lesbians to safely address issues that have affected (or are affecting) them through the character, gaining validation and possible solutions." (Open Clasp Theatre)

"The project has developed in a unique manner due to the hidden and invisible nature of sex work in our area. We have utilised peer support to access a client group who, for understandable reasons, are frequently mistrustful of professional services. We have managed to engage women, help them access services and in a number of cases supported women to make significant changes to their lives including finding full time permanent paid employment." (The GAP Project)

...to stop violence against women

Women's organisations provide safe, women-only spaces, where women feel they can talk openly, be comfortable, be understood, and feel safe. Many women, when given the choice, will choose women-only services to get support. Without women's organisations, there would be a lack of appropriate advocacy and support for women survivors of violence.

"Our raison d'etre' is the defence of women and children from domestic and sexual violence. Eva is an independent organisation and can speak up and advocate to the statutory sector on issues around domestic and sexual violence. Eva has excellent links to local schools, statutory agencies including the police and social services and utilises these for the prevention of violence to, and protection of women and children."
(Eva, Redcar and Cleveland)

"We bring the 'issue of domestic abuse to life' via live performance and participatory workshops equipping participants with the crucial tools for the practical application of their learning. Pro-Act's quality of work and commitment to violence against women and children spans 16 years." (Pro-Act)

...to provide value for money

Women's organisations provide essential, high quality, cost-effective and often life-saving services that are tailored to meet women's needs. Women's organisations prevent problems from happening or from escalating. more if it wasn't for women's organisations. This saves the government money and relieves the burden on public servicethrough preventing situations and problems becoming chronic.

"We recently won a volunteering award encouraging people to develop healthy life styles and work which improves the quality of life for individuals. The fact that we have operated for 19 years and survived funding and financial crisis is evidence of success and commitment. In a recent 12 month period we provided 1043 hours of face to face counselling sessions and 600 hours of available telephone support."

The Rape & Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre (Darlington & Co Durham Rape Crisis)

...to improve women's economic position

Women's organisations can help to deliver economic regeneration that tackles the root causes of women's economic disadvantage by identifying and removing barriers and delivering practical solutions to women's economic disadvantage. The women's sector can contribute to mainstreaming gender equality into economic regeneration by providing challenges to the gendered construction of the labour market in the North East

"Over the last 15 years we have developed an excellent track record in engaging and progressing black and minority ethnic women into further education, training or employment. We use two complementary strategies to achieve this: customising training and support activities to meet the specified needs of women through partnerships with mainstream service providers; networking with mainstream and other voluntary agencies to raise awareness of structural barriers to women's economic inclusion. Our on-site crèche has, over the years, developed into a multilingual childcare service available to public, private and voluntary agencies. This has extended employment opportunities as well as access to childcare support in formal settings to black and minority ethnic women." (The Angelou Centre)

Women's organisation can help to mainstream gender equality in the labour market and strengthen the economy by removing barriers to women's education, training and employment.

...to provide solutions to meet women's needs

Women's organisations have added value, in that they work in different ways to other services. They are different because they are independent services focused on meeting women's needs, they provide integrated services, they are specialists in their fields, they empower women through peer support and strong service user involvement and they reach the 'hard-to-reach' communities of women that fall through the gaps in other service provision.

"We have developed a full responsive support service by identifying the need and gap in services and taking action through peer support and full service user involvement to develop access to provision for this hidden and marginalised group. Through this we have developed to provide a full time integrated holistic support service. We address individually identified needs of each woman we work with, however we also provide innovative alternative life experiences and opportunities to help women realise their aspirations." (Women's Health in South Tyneside)

Without women's organisations, there would be a loss of expertise in how to meet women's needs.

What can you do?

- Show your support for women's organisations by signing-up in support of the campaign
- Help women's organisations strengthen and thrive by becoming a volunteer or trustee
- Do our two minute survey and help us strengthen the case for sustainable funding
- Let others know about the why women? website and distribute our campaign resources

To find out more about the Why Women Campaign, visit www.whywomen.org.uk