

NATIONAL COLLECTIVE OF COMMUNITY BASED WOMEN'S NETWORKS (NCCWN)

PRE-BUDGET 2021 SUBMISSION

NCCWN Key areas of Work with Grassroots Women in 17 Communities.



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Introduction

This proposal is being submitted to Minister Roderic O’Gorman - Minister of Children, Disability Equality & Integration, Carol Baxter - Assistant Secretary & Head of Asylum Services, Integration and Equality, Jane Anne Duffy - Principal Officer and Aidan O’Brien - Principal Officer, seeking reinstatement and investment of funding to NCCWN.

The National Collective of Community Based Women’s Networks (NCCWN) very much appreciates Government’s commitment to funding the NCCWN. However, due to cumulative cuts during austerity, NCCWN funding is 23.5% less than in 2008. This disinvestment has impacted on our capacity to provide a full range of needs-based services and supports to disadvantaged women due to the reduction in staffing hours.

NCCWN welcomes the Programme for Government commitments in relation to gender equality and socio-economic equality. NCCWN is a national women’s community development organisation, core funded by the Department of Justice & Equality, to advance disadvantaged women’s equality through women’s community development. NCCWN represents and works directly with, women experiencing disadvantage, through our 17 Women’s Community Development Projects. We have 46 mainly part-time staff, most of whom work on the ground in NCCWN Women’s Projects throughout Ireland, and two who comprise our national team overseeing the Projects. At local level, NCCWN Projects work directly with disadvantaged women and with statutory and non-statutory organisations and agencies to increase disadvantaged women’s social capital. At national level, we participate on key national structures supporting women’s equality. In 2019, NCCWN Women’s Projects had over 30,000 interactions with women from disadvantaged communities. As the only national organisation working specifically and directly with women from disadvantaged communities, NCCWN have demonstrated that we are an experienced and essential part of the infrastructure to support and advance disadvantaged women’s equality both locally and nationally.

The NCCWN addresses a wide diversity of issues impacting on the most disadvantaged women in Ireland. The specific focus is support for working class women, women without formal education, women living in poverty, older women, lone parents, women from the Traveller community, minority ethnic and migrant women, women with disabilities, lesbian and bisexual women, women living in rural areas, homeless women and women experiencing domestic violence.

NCCWN Projects recognise disadvantage in relation to women’s socio-economic circumstances. In addition, rural Projects work with women who are often further disadvantaged through social isolation and lack of access to supports and services. Marginalised women are identified through outreach, referrals from statutory and community agencies, consultation, local statistics, and information. As NCCWN projects are only core funded for staff and some overheads, they lever in programme funding from a variety of sources to outreach and deliver their programme of work to support disadvantaged women’s inclusion in education, training, cultural and community life and overcome barriers. Our work not only

implements NCCWN objectives but also supports other government policy objectives, i.e. women's health & well-being, education, employment and domestic abuse supports. NCCWN holistic services and supports represents excellent value for money.

Supports and services provided by the NCCWN Projects include targeted outreach strategies, accredited and non-accredited needs-based community education, training, health and well-being, childcare centres, drop-in/information centres, referrals, and counselling. In the 17 Projects, this has resulted in the additional employment of approximately **200 people**, managed and coordinated by NCCWN staff.

The NCCWN also have an important role to play in furthering government commitments to women's equality outlined in the National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG) 2017-2020. As a member of the NSWG Strategic Committee, NCCWN represents the voices of disadvantaged women in developing and monitoring the NSWG. We look forward to working with the Minister and his officials on developing and implementing a new National Strategy for Women and Girls.

NCCWN recognises that while there have been many successes in the fight for equal rights for women globally and nationally, equality has yet to be realised, particularly for disadvantaged women. Through our work with women across the country, it is evident that while gender inequalities impact on all women, women experiencing disadvantage are impacted disproportionately. Women living in poverty face barriers to health services, which in turn makes them more vulnerable to ill-health, physical and mental, thus exacerbating health inequalities. Furthermore, access to education is impacted by lack of finance, leading to multi-generational unemployment and poverty. While the management of wealth falls mainly to men, the burden of managing poverty is usually carried by women. Families headed by a lone parent, the majority of whom are women, are consistently and significantly more likely to be living in poverty and deprivation than the general population.

The income of women in paid employment continues to be significantly less than that of men. In addition, the concentration of disadvantaged women in part-time and low paid insecure work is of concern to NCCWN.

Domestic and sexual violence remains a serious issue for women we work with which can be further intensified by social exclusion and poverty. Women and children are all too often forced to stay in violent homes, as we have seen particularly during the Covid-19 restrictions, because of lack of financial resources or a viable alternative due to lack of education or social capital.

NCCWN have made submissions to the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, seeking to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in the workplace, politics, and public life, particularly in relation to disadvantaged women. One of the actions NCCWN has undertaken to support women's representation and participation in politics is through the development and piloting of a local women's caucus. Mirroring the work of the National Women's Parliamentary Caucus in the Dail and Seanad founded and chaired by Catherine Martin T.D, our NCCWN Limerick Project has developed a support mechanism for female councillors to come together on a cross party basis to work on issues of concern for women in Limerick. The role of the NCCWN Limerick project has been to provide non-party secretariat support while informing women councillors of the needs of women at a local level. The Caucus was officially recognised by the City and

County Council in February 2020. In December 2019 in collaboration with the NWCI, NCCWN Limerick hosted a national networking event to bring elected representatives and NCCWN Projects' staff together to explore ways for local or regional Caucus to be developed. This work has helped to inform NCCWN and the NWCI in developing a guide to developing a local caucus which was published in Jan 2020. Going forward in 2021, we aim, with adequate resourcing, to initiate the development of Caucus at local or regional levels, depending on local need, that will support the development of a national network of local women's caucus.

NCCWN look forward to working with you and your officials to ensure the sustainability of our valuable work carried out with disadvantaged women throughout the country, framing our work in line with commitments to the *17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, underpinning sound community development practices, and reflecting a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on women's poverty and social inclusion.*

Concerns

The NCCWN Board have serious concerns about **current limited financial and human resources** and the implications for the sustainability of the organisation and, particularly, our work on the ground.

NCCWN recognise that the *current crisis has underlined how community and voluntary sector is crucial to the lives of many women in terms of social outlets, work, and community participation.* We have developed a survey throughout our 17 Projects' areas to assess the impacts and needs of women we work with. Early findings from this survey highlight that women's well-being and mental health will be one of the key areas of work for NCCWN local Projects going forward.

We are seeking your consideration under two key areas to ensure sustainability and development of NCCWN work - seeking **reinstatement** and **investment** of funding to NCCWN.

Action Required

Reinstatement of Funds and Investment in NCCWN

The staff of NCCWN are our most valued asset and provide highly skilled, unique interventions, not provided elsewhere. NCCWN are a national organisation that work with women from disadvantaged communities at a grass roots level that enable those who would not otherwise, participate in all aspects of society.

- **Reinstatement of funding and investment would enable the NCCWN Board to further implement good governance procedures and processes in relation to bringing pay parity for staff in line with other organisations in the sector. The collective cuts to already low pay and the stagnation of this pay, has resulted in a lack of pay parity both in the community/voluntary sector and with public sector pay scales.**

The country has now moved into an unforeseen situation in relation to the COVID 19 Pandemic, thus leaving disadvantaged women in society more vulnerable than ever. The valuable community work of NCCWN staff has never been more required nor the sector more in need of support.

The reinstatement of the NCCWN funding to 2008 levels will allow for the resumption of supports and services for disadvantage women that were lost due to the cuts. A further increase in funding and investment will allow for an expansion of our work into other geographic areas and support more women experiencing disadvantage. Evidentially when women are supported, it impacts positively on their children, families, and communities. It can halt multi-generational unemployment, low educational attainment and increase participation in both community and society.

Appendix 1

1. NCCWN Blayney Blades
2. NCCWN Clare
3. NCCWN Claremorris
4. NCCWN Clondalkin/Lucan
5. NCCWN Dochas for Women
6. NCCWN Donegal
7. NCCWN Limerick
8. NCCWN Mullingar
9. NCCWN North Leitrim
10. NCCWN Ronanstown
11. NCCWN Roscommon
12. NCCWN Rowlagh
13. NCCWN Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown
14. NCCWN South Kerry
15. NCCWN Tallaght
16. NCCWN Waterford
17. NCCWN Wexford

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Locations of NCCWN Women's Community Development Projects

