



Advocacy



Quarterly Zine
Apr-June
2025



INTRODUCING OUR QUARTERLY ZINE ADVOCACY EDITION

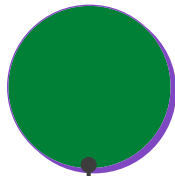
By Megan McClure Botha | WRDA

Welcome to the Women's Regional Consortium's Quarterly Zine for Quarter One. This edition is focused on Advocacy which is one for the Consortium's key areas of work.

Our first piece is from Women's Centre Derry and looks at what advocacy in the women's sector means and how it fits into the Consortium's work. We then look at the advocacy function of WRDA's Maternal Advocacy and Support project including the conference held to mark Maternal Mental Health Week 2025. Finally we look at the work of the *Shift* the Shame project which aims to highlight the connection between domestic violence and homelessness.

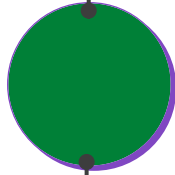
We hope you find the information contained in this edition useful as we continue to ensure a voice for women from disadvantaged and rural areas.

IN THIS EDITION



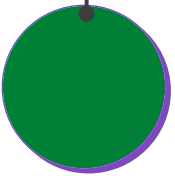
Women's Centre Derry

An explainer on what advocacy is and how it relates to the work of the Consortium.



Women's Resource and Development Agency

An overview of the advocacy function of the Mas project and recent conference proceedings



Women's Resource and Development Agency

WRDA's new campaign, *Shift the Shame* aims to shift the shame from the victim to the perpetrator.



ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN

By Rayna Downey | Women's Centre Derry

The definition of the word Advocacy is quite simple, it means **“getting support from someone to help you express your views and wishes, and help you stand up for your rights”** that's why it is one of the key themes of the Regional Consortium and why it will always be at the heart of our work. This is a great responsibility, we work in partnership with statutory and governmental agencies and local women's organisations, centres and groups to ensure that women on the ground in disadvantaged and rural areas are receiving support to meet their needs and having their views heard.

we advocate on behalf of women and children in everything that we do, we have to ensure that their rights are being protected and that their voices are being heard. Engaging with decision makers, responding to strategies, liaising with MLA's, Ministers and local

politicians is essential, we have to be the voice of women and represent them in every area. Women are all too often left behind, they are the backbone of the home and society yet the specific needs of women are not being met, the consortiums focus and work in areas such as;

- **Care**
- **Cost of Living**
- **Violence**
- **Mental Health**
- **Welfare Reform**
- **Childcare**
- **Gender Budgeting**

If we do not advocate for those who do not have a voice then we cannot live in an equal society, we have to ensure that the needs of everyone and not just the few are being met. The Community sector will continue to bridge the gap between all agencies and keep the focus on the needs of women.



MATERNAL ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT PROJECT: SUPPORTING WOMEN, REDUCING STIGMA

By Megan McClure Botha | WRDA

The Maternal Advocacy & Support Project (Mas) is led by WRDA and delivered in women's centres. In the past year we have developed a Young Mums Mas project in two centres for women who are age 16-25. We have also supported affiliate groups to set up perinatal support in their area. Women attending the Mas project benefit from peer support, conversation-based support groups where women make friends and support each other. Women also engage in a range of initiatives and workshops including mindfulness, art for wellbeing, life-coaching to support their mental health and promote emotional wellbeing.

Women have the opportunity to get involved in campaigns and advocacy and take part in our Mas group leader programme. We are an early intervention project, providing preventative healthcare in a community setting. We are committed to increasing awareness and breaking stigma in maternal mental health.

For Maternal mental health week 2025 we organised a conference entitled Supporting Women Reducing Stigma. This event aimed to highlight the importance of early intervention and trauma-informed support in maternal mental health.

Read the report [here](#).

Key Highlights:

1. Conference Overview:

The conference featured contributions from notable figures, including the Commissioner for Children & Young People, multidisciplinary teams from GP surgeries, and the Belfast Trust perinatal mental health team. Discussions emphasized the significance of a trauma-informed approach and early intervention in maternal mental health.

1. Challenges in Maternal Mental Health:

Participants identified stigma, judgment, fear, and concerns about child removal as major barriers preventing women from disclosing maternal mental health struggles. Participants reported that past negative experiences with healthcare professionals also hindered help seeking.

1. Recommendations for Support:

The need for a holistic, empathetic, and community-driven approach to support women and their families was underscored. Key recommendations included better funding for support services, education and awareness campaigns, and the establishment of a mother and baby unit for acute maternal mental health needs.

1. Community and Voluntary Sector Involvement:

The conference highlighted the crucial role of community and voluntary sector initiatives in providing peer support and how helpful this model has been. Collaboration between statutory and voluntary services was deemed essential for effective support.



SHIFT THE SHAME CAMPAIGN: HIGHLIGHTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED HOMELESSNESS AND SHIFTING SHAME TO THE PERPETRATORS

By Megan McClure Botha | WRDA

A new campaign aims to Shift the Shame of violence-led homelessness from the victim to the perpetrator. The campaign demands that Northern Ireland works together to shape some key Steps to Safety that will protect women from the compounding cycle of homelessness in Northern Ireland. The campaign advocates shifting the shame from the victim to the perpetrator in four ways;

Shift the culture

In NI we used to say things like, "you've made your bed, now lie in it", or "say nothing" or even "that's none of my business". Violence thrives on silence and ignorance. That's why we want everyone in NI to learn and have the words to talk about different forms of violence.

We want people to stop saying, "Why doesn't she just leave?", when leaving her home often leads to a multitude of harms. We want to shift the shame women feel for their natural responses to trauma, eg not recognising or accepting the situation, or turning to substances or alcohol to cope. We want to normalise stepping in to help, giving family, friends and professionals the language to stop saying nothing and "say something".

Shift from funding to investment

if we shift our mindset from funding to investment, we can expect a return. The ambitions we had after the Good Friday Agreement included creating a world-leading mental health system, a must-have for any post-conflict society. The reality has fallen short. Our mental health services and addiction/trauma recovery and rehabilitation services are inadequate, lagging behind other parts of the UK and Ireland. The misogyny that comes with paramilitarism remains unchanged and largely unchallenged. We don't have enough social and affordable houses or safe temporary accommodation for women facing violence. Peace came to NI decades ago, but our society is still not safe for women and girls and won't be until we properly invest in the protection and wellbeing of women facing violence.

Shift to a gendered approach

Statistics prove that the vast majority of domestic violence happens by men towards women. Women who face violence are much more likely to face homelessness. Research shows that Non-Molestation and Occupation orders are inaccessible for many women and when obtained, do not work to enable women to remain in their own homes.

Women with children are particularly vulnerable with shared parental access often used as an excuse to continue post separation abuse. Some women with children are forced to leave their children behind, causing further inherited trauma. This is a gendered issue that needs a gendered response with both short and long term actions. Along with more long term social housing, we need more short term, small-scale emergency accommodation that is safe and appropriate for women and their children.

This combined approach will stop millions of pounds being wasted on sometimes unsafe, even violent emergency accommodation like B&Bs, hotels and hostels.

Shift to a shared responsibility

Proactive prevention is always smarter than waiting for the worst to happen. Usually, a broad range of public services, like housing, police, health, and education, interact with women facing violence prior to homelessness. We would like to create a shared public duty in preventing homelessness. Following the example being set by the Scottish government, we would like Northern Ireland to explore 'Ask & Act', a requirement for all public bodies to work within their existing remits to share the responsibility for recognising and preventing homelessness among women and children at an earlier stage.

Find out more, including how you can advocate to shift the shame, [here](#).

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WRC is funded by the RISP programme

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**Quarterly Zine
Jan - March
2024**