



Advocacy



Quarterly Zine
Apr-June
2026



INTRODUCING OUR QUARTERLY ZINE ADVOCACY EDITION

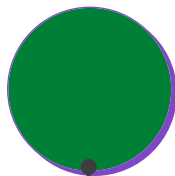
By Megan McClure Botha | WRDA

Welcome to the Women's Regional Consortium's Quarterly Zine for Quarter One of 2026. 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 work of the *Shift the Shame* project which aims to highlight the connection between domestic violence and homelessness. In our final article, WRDA provides a brief overview of some of their recent advocacy successes.

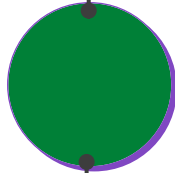
We hope you find the information contained in this edition useful as we continue to ensure a voice for women from disadvantaged and rural areas.

IN THIS EDITION



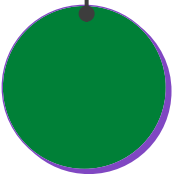
Women's Centre Derry

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



Women's Resource and Development Agency

An update on phase two of WRDA's new campaign, Shift the Shame .



Women's Resource and Development Agency

A round-robin of some of WRDA's recent advocacy successes



ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN

By Rayna Downey | Women's Centre Derry

Being an advocate for women is not easy, the Women's Regional Consortium understands the complexities of advocating for women in every aspect of their lives. This is a great responsibility, we work in partnership with statutory and government 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. **The definition of advocacy is quite simple, it means getting support to express your view and stand up for your rights.**

Our advocacy and practical support to those who are experiencing poverty, including providing essentials such as milk and formula, linking families to food banks and supporting access to financial assistance, helps to reduce immediate pressures and create stability.

This in turn has a direct positive impact on women's mental health and their ability to cope and engage.

We also play a key role in supporting women affected by Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). We work closely with partners including PSNI, statutory services and other women's organisations providing various advocacy support to ensure women are supported safely and appropriately. Through strong collaboration and joined-up working, we help women navigate complex systems and access the protection and support they need.

Our work extends beyond local delivery through collaboration with organisations across the North West and cross-border in Donegal.

This partnership approach allows us to identify gaps in provision, share learning and strengthen services for women, ensuring a more coordinated and effective response to advocacy support.

We recognise that women's safety, mental health, Poverty, care and childcare restraints impact severely on a woman's ability to advocate for herself or her family, therefore the consortium will continue to be deeply connected and liaising with MLA's, Ministers, decision makers, local politicians and grassroots organisations to ensure they are bridging the gaps.

Often women do not feel safe, whether in their homes, communities and wider society the consortium recognises that this must change. We have to advocate for those without a voice, otherwise we cannot achieve an equal society, we must meet the needs of everyone, not just the few.

Shift the shame



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

By Megan McClure Botha | WRDA

WRDA is moving into phase two of our Shift the Shame campaign as we continue our work to Shift the Shame of domestic 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](#).



AMPLIFYING WOMEN'S VOICES: WRDA'S ADVOCACY IN ACTION

By Megan McClure Botha | WRDA

WRDA works regionally to advance women's participation in all areas of life. We do this through training, health promotion, and advocacy. We centre women's lived experiences in all areas of our work and this ensures we advocate for the changes our members wish to see. In this article we will outline some recent successes;

Campaign Success: Mother and Baby Unit Confirmed

We are so happy that the long awaited mother and baby unit is happening and has been confirmed by the Health minister. The site at the City Hospital was announced in November 2023 so we are delighted that it has finally been confirmed that this work will go ahead. Now mums who need to be admitted to hospital with their mental health can get better and bond with their babies and receive the specialised care that they deserve. This sends out a clear message that mothers are at last being prioritised.

This has been a lengthy 20 + year campaign and this wouldn't have happened without women with lived experience campaigning and sharing their experiences, demanding better for women in the future. We remember and honour the women who lost their lives due to postpartum mental health illness and those who did not receive appropriate care. The Mas project worked in partnership with our colleagues in Action on Postpartum Psychosis, Aware and the Maternal Mental Health Alliance on the MBU campaign, we are overjoyed that it is finally being recognised that Mas matter!

WRDA research centres young women's experience of bathroom access denial in schools as a human rights issue

On Wednesday 25th March, WRDA and Menstruation Matters joined a panel of young women to discuss the key findings and recommendations of a report on bathroom access in schools in Northern Ireland.

The findings, based on 221 responses from young people, their parents and some medical practitioners, show some concerning trends. These include:

- **Only 9% of respondents said that their school does not restrict bathroom access in some way**
- **63.8% said that access was limited to break or lunch times, with some operating medical passes**
- **Of those schools where bathroom access is at the discretion of a teacher, inconsistencies are reported**
- **46.1% of respondents have reported period leaks or accidents as a result of this policy**
- **Students report avoiding school when they have their periods, or experiencing anxiety as a result of the policy**
- **Some students report missing breaks because they have to queue for the bathroom**
- **Students and their families are rarely consulted when bathroom access is restricted**

We have worked from these findings to try to find a series of recommendations that respect the rights of children to bathroom facilities, while at the same time appreciating schools' concerns, and we believe that the recommendations are practical and sensible, including a survey of all schools by the Education Authority to ensure we have accurate data on how widespread the issue is.

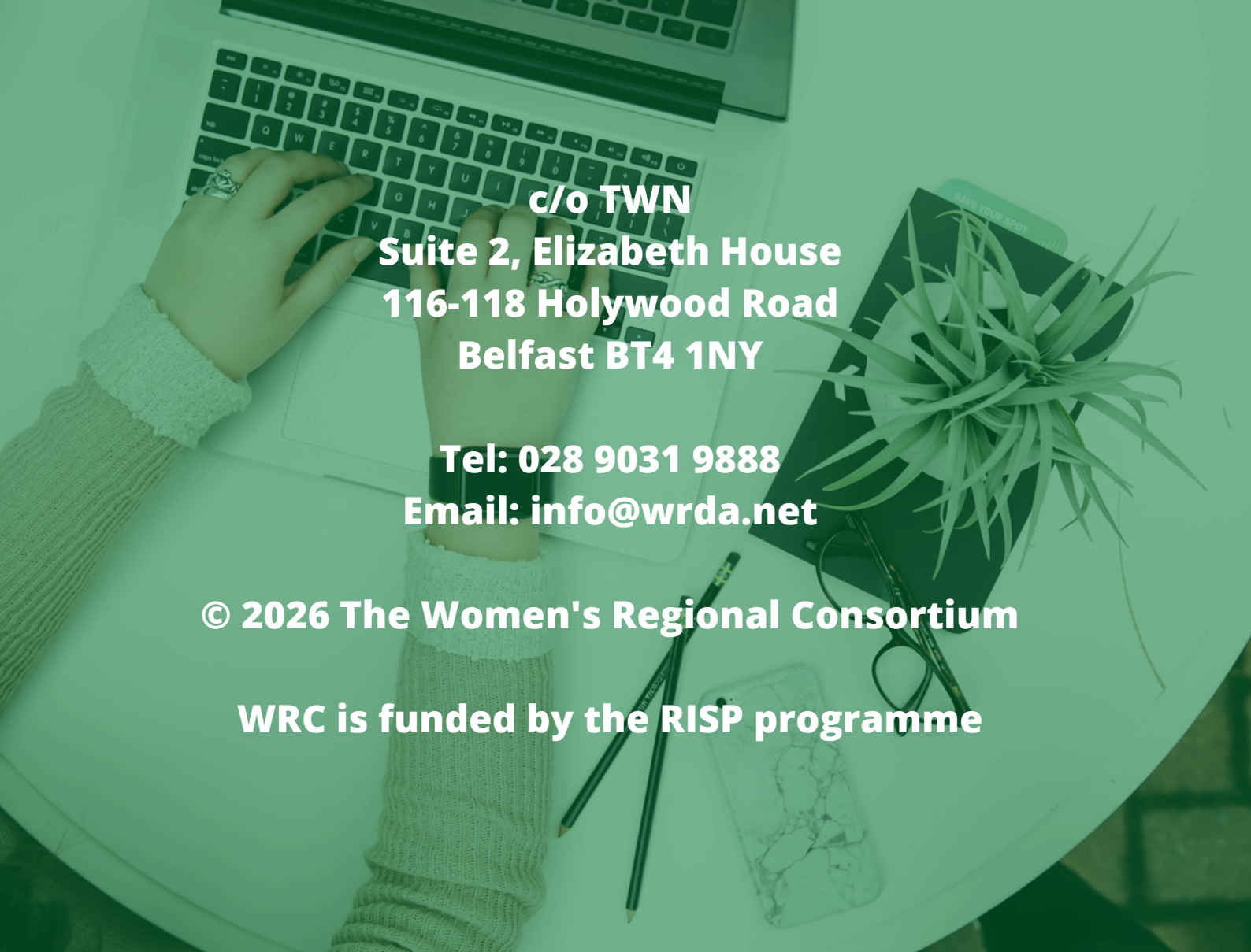
WRDA amplifies survivor's experiences for firearms related violence against women and girls

A survivor-initiated study based on women's lived experience

The WRDA based Women's Sector Lobbyist, Elaine Croy, discussed how the research began with a call from a survivor, a moment that highlighted the hidden role firearms play in domestic abuse. That call prompted the Lobbyist to embark on a comprehensive study aimed at understanding how perpetrator access to firearms can intensify violence against women and girls (VAWG). The study is grounded in women's lived experience through anonymous accounts collected by survey. Quotes have been published verbatim, with anonymity preserved, ensuring findings reflect genuine lived experience. The research exposes how gun ownership can escalate abuse: even if not fired, the presence or threat of firearms creates a constant sense of fear in victims. Perpetrators range from intimate partners to fathers, fathers in-laws, and colleagues, highlighting that the dynamics of firearm-related VAWG extend beyond the home.

The event featured a panel discussion with Karen Devlin from Women's Aid NI, Danielle Roberts from Reclaim the Agenda, and Meghan Hoyt from WRDA. Karen Devlin stressed that while firearm involvement in VAWG cases may seem infrequent, the outcomes are severe. She noted that three adult women on the island of Ireland have been murdered with guns since 2020 (one firearm was legally held and two firearms were illegally owned). Danielle discussed the experience of women in their 30s and reflects that firearms related VAWG isn't a problem of the past. Danielle made the point that we are a post-ceasefire society but not post-conflict. This was supported by the comments of Meghan who emphasised the particularity of VAWG in NI due to the legacy of the conflict and how this research brings this together.

The Women's Sector Lobbyist pledged to meet with government ministers and MLAs "anytime and anywhere" to drive forward the changes women need to achieve liberation from firearms related VAWG. In her closing remarks, the Lobbyist thanked the survivor whose testimony initiated the study and urged the implementation of the recommendations. Without decisive action, particularly around vetting, monitoring, and regulation, women will continue to be terrorised by perpetrators with access to firearms.



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