



# **WRC Policy Forum Annual Report**

## **September 2004 - September 2005**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) Policy Forum was set up in September 2003 to:

- Proactively influence public policy
- Harness the expertise of the women's voluntary and community sector
- Developing policy capacity within the women's sector
- Work from an inclusive framework to ensure marginalised voices of women were heard.

An unforeseen benefit for groups participating in the forum has been creating relationships across different parts of the women's sector, and exploring what equality and diversity means in practice.

This annual report draws from evaluations from Policy Forum members, and our own experience of running the forum - what has worked and what we could do better. We would like to take this opportunity to thank both our existing and past Policy Forum members for their hard work, and to welcome on board the new members for the coming year. This will be the third year of the Policy Forum, and we are very excited about the possibilities for creating a stronger, more unified women's sector, and running the Why Women campaign for better funding.

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## **POLICY FORUM MEMBERSHIP**

### **Current Policy Forum Membership 2005 - 2006**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Akima Thomas	Women and Girls Network
Angelina Namiba	Positively Women
Cordelia Mayfield	Women's Alcohol Centre
Elaheh Rambarzini	Refugee Council
Isatu Sillah	Grassroots Rising BME Network at SAVO
Jane Lanyero	African Women's Care
Liz Sutton	Women's Environmental Network
Lynda Dearlove	Women at the Well
Nadia Mahmood	Middle East Centre for Women's Rights (MECWR)
Paula Thomas	Broken Rainbow
Rachel Carter	Greater London Domestic Violence Project (GLDVP)
Shaminder Ubhi	Ashiana Project
Susana Klien	Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)
Tasneem Miah	Consortium of Bengali Organisations
Wendy Davis	Women's Design Service

### **Last Year's Policy Forum Membership 2004 - 2005**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Brenda Ellis	Greater London Action on Disability (GLAD)
Christina Julios	Ethnic Minority Foundation (CEMVO)
Claudia Hasanbegovic	Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)
Cordelia Mayfield	Women's Alcohol Centre
Dzifa Afonu	Helping Empower Youth Activism (HEYA)
Elaheh Rambarzini	Refugee Council
Jane Lanyero	African Women's Care
Lindsay Rivers	Polari
Lynda Dearlove	Women at the Well
Nezahat Cihan	IMECE, Turkish Speaking Women's Group
Paula Thomas	Broken Rainbow
Rachel Carter	Greater London Domestic Violence Project (GLDVP)
Shaminder Ubhi	Ashiana Project
Rupa Sarkar	Urban Forum
Yvonne Traynor	Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC)
Zuzie Poskitt	Girl Diva at Project for Advocacy, Counselling and Education (PACE)

## **POLICY FORUM ACHIEVEMENTS 2003-05**

Work initiated by the Policy Forum includes the following:

### **Seminars:**

- 2004 Outcome Evaluation Seminar.
- 2004 'Women with No Recourse to Public Funds' Training and Strategy Meeting held jointly with Southall Black Sisters.
- 2004 Beijing+10, an international conference on women's human rights.
- 2005 Funding and the women's sector
- 2005 New public sector gender duty.

### **Training:**

- 2004/5 Introduction to the Media (x 3)
- 2004 Advanced Media: Interviewing Techniques
- 2005 Advanced media: Building a Campaign
- 2004 Influencing Policy: An Introduction
- 2005 Using United Nations Instruments and the International Human Rights Framework
- 2005 Influencing Policy at Local and Regional Levels

### **Resources:**

- 2004 Launch of factsheets about the women's voluntary and community sector.
- 2004 Influencing Policy
- 2004 Beijing +10 Information Pack

### **Briefings, Consultations and Responses:**

- 2003 Infrastructure Review
- 2004 Compact Funding Code
- 2004 Tower Hamlets Local Compact
- 2004 Community Capacity Building Review
- 2004 Commission for Equality and Human Rights.
- 2004 Big Lottery Fund
- 2004 Paying the Price (Prostitution Laws)
- 2004 Discrimination Against Women – CEDAW
- 2005 Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
- 2005 State of the Voluntary and Community Sector
- 2005 Association of London Government (ALG) Funding for the Future
- 2005 Compact Plus
- 2005 Greater London Authority (GLA) Race Equality Scheme
- 2005 Active Communities Unit (ACU) Strategic Funding consultation

### **Other:**

- 2004/05 Establishing and co-facilitating the Sexual Violence Action and Awareness Network (SVAAN) an ongoing network of women working in the field of sexual violence. This network met six times between May 04 and February 05, and has now been handed over to the Lilith Project

# **EVALUATION OF THE POLICY FORUM**

## **Policy Forum Members - Evaluation of Year 2**

### Overview:

Policy Forum members (2004-2005) were asked to complete an annual evaluation. We received eight completed evaluations, which form the basis for the summaries below, and we've included some direct quotes as well.

People joined the forum to for a variety of reasons, primarily to:

- Network and learn from other groups, and other sectors.
- Feed in issues faced by the communities of women they work with.
- Learn about and feed into policy.
- Have a collective voice / be part of bringing women's orgs together strategically.

5 Policy Forum members thought the Policy Forum completely met their expectations, and 3 thought it mostly did.

'I couldn't have done my job properly with out this.'

### Events initiated by the Policy Forum:

The WRC events - trainings, information seminars and consultations - were seen as of a high standard and very useful.

There were many good ideas for other events the Policy Forum could hold:

- Combining human rights awareness with immigration and gender violence.
- Panel from the Home Office regarding gender, especially refugee and asylum issues.
- Training/speakers on the age equality regulations.
- How women's experience of gender inequality intersects with others, such as age, sexuality, disability, etc.
- More events on national policy, that can help us prepare, and where there are gaps in service provision.

### Communication:

Agenda, minutes and papers, and emails, were mostly about right, 2 said they were too detailed or too many. Grading the importance of emails, and being clear about whether a response was necessary was seen as useful.

Some ideas on improving communication included:

- Summaries are useful, continue these.
- Avoid acronyms and jargon.
- Cut down the length of discussion notes in the minutes.
- Have emails come from one source, eg, WRC Policy Forum, so they are easier to find in the inbox.
- Set up working groups.

- Let people know about consultations well in advance, so they can familiarise themselves with the issues.
- Explore mentoring/external peer support, to support communication between meetings.
- Show what targets the Policy Forum is funded to met.
- Bullet point the Policy Forum achievements on one page.

'I think you work harder than any other forum I know of to respond to needs of members and make information as accessible and manageable.'

### Meetings:

The most useful parts of the meeting were seen as the round robin, the good practice presentation and the policy updates, though some found it all useful.

2 found the minutes and matters arising least useful, and 1 found the round robin least useful.

All found the frequency of meetings about right.

Some ideas for improving the meetings included:

- Organising joint presentations of good practice, between two participants.
- Keeping the good practice presentations to 10 minutes.
- Round robin sometimes too long and repetitive, focus on new developments only.
- Plan meeting dates ahead of time.
- Explore how chairing is working, eg, people are reluctant to volunteer.

'It's a meeting. If you're not keen on introducing a comedy routine, some jugglers, or funding opportunities every time, there's not a lot you can do. It's not boring, which for any meeting is very good going. Well done.'

### Impact:

The impact of being on the Policy Forum included the benefits of networking, and learning from other women's organisations; getting relevant information, advice and support; learning about policy impacting upon women, and on women's groups; indirectly influencing policy.

The personal impact for women on the forum included increasing awareness of areas they don't work directly in, as well as different equalities issues; have space to vent, to re-energise, connect with other women working on social justice for women, and to get support.

'It has given me a sense of reconnection and inspiration with my feminist values and has been personally very satisfying through the networking and the realisation of how much excellent work is going on amongst women-led organisations.'

### The future of the Policy Forum

All participants thought the Policy Forum should continue after the current funding runs out (in June 06).

'I think the Policy Forum fulfils an important role and in an ideal world it should be continued. This is because one of the greatest challenges to the women's sector is its fragmentation, conflict and competition over resources. The more opportunities agencies have to be brought together to develop shared understanding, policies and practice, the greater hope there is for the long term survival of a stronger, more co-ordinated women's sector. In addition, many smaller agencies are excluded from involvement in policy and strategic work, the forum allows these voices to be included and heard.'

The ideas for changes that could be made to the Policy Forum included:

- If you can't raise funds (harder for continuation funding), have more events, and do email updates to people.
- Campaign/lobby organisation for small Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and other women's organisations.
- Focus more on issues related to marginalised groups in the women's sector.
- Focus on reaching excluded women, getting their voices heard in policy. Could do certificated forms of training for hard to reach women.
- Need fundraising support for groups to access.

'Feel that both (WRC and the Policy Forum) have become increasingly more accessible and more relevant to the women's voluntary sector in London and are certainly the *GLUE* for it...as well as being a catalyst for development, empowerment and expansion for both the collective, organisations and individuals within it.'

## **Policy Team – Evaluation of Year 2**

The Policy Team (Isabel and Darlene) completed our own evaluation process, including a written evaluation, and ongoing dialogue. Our thoughts are summarised below.

### What do we gain from the forum?

- Keeps WRC in touch with the realities of running a women's organisation.
- Keeps us in touch with the different views, needs and priorities of different equalities groups, and helps WRC become a champion of causes and groups that otherwise get overlooked by mainstream women's organisations.
- Is a useful sounding board for ideas and project plans.
- Provides a first port of call for consulting on policy issues we are working on.
- It directly and indirectly shapes all of our policy work – our events, our lobbying, and our campaign.

### What do we think we could do better?

- Supporting smaller and marginalised groups to participate more effectively.
- Decrease the amount of paperwork.
- Tap into the particular expertise held by Policy Forum members more effectively.

## **PLANNED WORK FOR YEAR 3 – Oct 05 – Jun 06**

The bulk of our work will be preparation for the WRC Campaign, 'Why Women', which aims to highlight the need for a strong and sustainable women's voluntary and community sector. The campaign will be launched in March.

### **Gender Duty work**

- Consultation with women's groups on the WEU outline for specific duties (13 Oct).
- Response to WEU consultation
- Roundtable event with women's groups and Gov on how they will implement the gender duty (15 Nov.
- Briefing, consultation and response to EOC consultation on gender duty

### **Research**

WRC research into why the women's sector is valuable and important (Launch March 06).  
Economic value of the women's sector (proposed start 2006).

### **Training/seminars:**

Media Training: Eight media sessions, Introductory and Advanced. Four for small groups.  
Policy Training: Two introduction to policy training sessions  
Three discussion seminars about women-only services. (First 4Nov).

### **Launch of campaign – 23 March**

WRC conference

Launch of 'Why Women' campaign, includes research report, postcards, poster, and charter.  
Press conference

Staggered launch of range of briefings about the women's sector (April 06 on), including:

- Guidance for the women's sector on the gender duty legislation
- Why women-only services are important and needed
- Funding
- Gender mainstreaming

## POLICY FORUM FUNDING TARGETS

This is a brief summary of our funding, and what targets we have to reach this year. Last year the Policy Team exceeded all of its targets and increased the number of activities (by 192%), attendance at events (185%) and policy briefings and responses (157%) since the previous year.

### City Parochial Foundation

£26,000 for year 3 (April 05– March 06)

Output	No.
Consultation events	4
Conferences	4

Outcomes
User friendly information
Forging close links with key officers in London governance agencies
Targeted involvement of marginalised groups

### Lloyds TSB Foundation

£7,180 for year 3 (Aug 05 to June 06)

Output	No	Participants
Policy Forum meetings held	4	
Seminars held	4	120
Information pieces for WRC and other publications	12	
Training events	4	100
Consultation events	2	30
Responses to policy consultations	2	
Briefings on the women's voluntary and community sector	3	
BME participants		40%
LGBT participants		10%
Disabled participants		10%

Outcomes
User-friendly information
Greater awareness of policy development processes
Greater awareness of how to influence policy effectively
Effective partnership working with other voluntary and community sector organisations

## Big Lottery Funding

£56,297 for year 3 (July 05 – June 06)

Output	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Forum meetings	2	4	4
Consultation participants	55 pax	24	29
Training/capacity building	20 pax	66	80
One-to-one capacity building sessions	-	-	-
Policy submissions/responses	4	4	6
Forum members	15	15	15
Set up Policy Forum	-	-	-
Support mechanism for Policy Forum	-	-	-
BMER participants	25%	25%	25%
<£50k participants	33%	33%	33%
Setting up of e-group	-	-	-
Total beneficiaries	90	108	130
Invitations on forums, networks, events, speaking engagements, publications etc	-	-	-
Orgs responding to policy consultations	-	-	-
Changes to policy docs	-	-	-

Outcomes
Greater awareness and involvement in policy consultation and development
High profile forum whose views are sought
Sustainable networks

## **What is the Policy Forum? – Comments from members**

This is how Policy Forum members described the Policy Forum in their evaluations.. We've included all respondents descriptions, because we think they give a fantastic picture of what the Policy Forum means to them – we couldn't say it any better!

'I would describe the Policy Forum as a friendly, efficient, hard working, diverse, and democratic environment where group of women's organisations can learn from each other, and from events/workshops/material organised there, and support each other through networking and advise.'

'Very useful platform to influence policies

Effective and collective way of working

Relax and very encouraging environment

Provide an opportunity to learn and put ideas into the practice

Enable small organisations (especially marginalised groups) to learn about policy and influence policy

Encourages policy makers to listen/learn from frontline/grassroots organisations

Very good efforts to close the gap between statutory & voluntary sectors.'

'Its been very beneficial to us as a service provider, I think you've shouted loud enough, it's been really a good voice for women's organisations. We can see the work we've done.'

'An essential organisation to provide an overview and expertise to small women's organisations with relatively little power in the voluntary sector but who have enormous experience from the direct services they provide.'

'Meetings are usually "energetic", rarely drag....always need more time...but that just a fact of life.....I feel mostly in my experience of the group - as new possibilities or ways of doing things evolve members will identify and act on it.....Members are PROACTIVE and DYNAMIC so tend to be evaluating practice as going along that is part of the glue and plus factor of the forum also all are open to exploring aspects of diversity that are outside of their own experience and interested to make policy as fully inclusive as possible. This enables us to begin to evaluate and future proof our own services as fully as possible wrt diversity issues!'

'A forum with an unusually committed focus on inclusion, information and consultation, with active willingness to be responsive to the needs of its members'

'A live facilitated 'swap shop' for women's organisations and others interested in the advancement of women. I would note it for its cross-section of national organisations to local front line ones, that we meet in a relaxed and evenly paced environment to look at specific issues and action, and consider the local to national picture. Very useful and unique as far as I'm aware.'

'The forum has a diverse membership and that's very positive, you have people from all sectors but a common agenda about women's issues. For example, disability, sexuality. The forum has been about changing the environment that women work in and hopefully the work we're doing is going some way towards changing that in a positive way. Trying to influence policy centrally and locally. We are raising the issues and trying to find solutions. But given our limitations, as members very few of us are able to give more than attending the meetings, so need to acknowledge that you do all the work.'