



Women's Resource Centre

Response to the London Development Agency
Corporate Plan 2007-2010 consultation

March 2007

Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the London Development Agency's (LDA) Corporate Plan 2006-2009 given its role in informing economic development in London. The results will have a significant impact on women in general and the women's voluntary and community sector (VCS) more specifically. We are pleased that the Corporate Plan sets out how it will address economic development in London and aims to reduce economic inequalities which can disproportionately affect women. We are also encouraged by the LDA's promises to work more closely with the voluntary and community sector and we believe this will be beneficial for both sides.

However, we believe the Corporate Plan needs a more specific focus on women's organisations, especially in recognising the value of training from women's organisations, particularly, women-only training. We agree that the LDA should work with umbrella bodies for the voluntary and community sector but would add that they also need to work with specialist equalities infrastructure organisations. We also recommend that the LDA take account of the importance of tackling violence against women as part of a strategy to reduce overall crime, and that they produce specific actions as to how they intend to reduce barriers of entry such as access to childcare, housing and flexible working that prevents many women from entering education, training and employment.

About WRC

The Women's Resource Centre is a charity which supports women's organisations to be more effective and sustainable. We provide training, information, resources and one-to-one support on a range of organisational development issues. We also lobby decision makers on behalf of the women's not-for-profit sector for improved representation and funding.

Our members work in a wide range of fields including violence against women, employment, education, rights and equality, the criminal justice system and the environment. They deliver services to and campaign on behalf of some of the most marginalised communities of women including lesbian, bisexual and transgender, disabled, black and minority ethnic, older and younger women.

There are over ten thousand people working or volunteering for our members who support almost half a million individuals each year.

About the Women's Voluntary and Community Sector

There are an estimated 32,000 women's voluntary and community organisations in England and Wales, including, 2,160 in London.¹ These organisations range from large, national and international registered charities to small, local grassroots community groups.

Women's organisations work on a wide range of issues affecting women and children, including violence (e.g. rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence, trafficking and forced marriage), poverty, asylum and immigration, employment, drug and alcohol problems, health (including mental health), education, criminal justice and the environment (including the built environment). They deliver a wide breadth of specialist, and sometimes life-saving, services such as emergency refuge accommodation, counselling, advice, training, childcare, outreach and support groups. Women's organisations make up 7% of the UK's voluntary and community sector and perform vital work to help address some of the gross gender inequalities that still exist.

The women's VCS provides life-saving, cost-effective services to women and their children. However, in the current shift towards public service delivery and the preference for generic organisations to deliver women's services, many women's organisations are facing imminent closure. They are repeatedly overlooked in funding streams, receiving just 1.2% of central government funding and 2.8% of charitable trust funding despite making up 7% of charities. They also represent only 2% of the voluntary and community sector of Local Strategic Partnerships across the UK.

WRC Response

1. Violence against women

It is essential that addressing violence against women is an integral part of the LDA's plans on tackling inequalities. The impact of domestic violence is highlighted in the Women and Equality Unit's report 'The Cost of Domestic Violence'². The report analysed the cost of domestic violence not only in terms of financial costs to public services, but also in terms of employment losses and costs borne by the wider society. In 2005 the Greater London Authority (GLA) produced their Second London Domestic Violence Strategy which calculated that the average cost of domestic violence in London to the NHS was £195.31 million and to the criminal justice system was £142.29 million a year in London³.

Violence against women needs to be established as key concern for the LDA in its Corporate Plan and it should refer to the actions of the Greater London Authority (GLA) Second London Domestic Violence Strategy to guide their work, for example,

¹ Estimate based on proportion of London's registered charities focusing on women – 5.4% (7% nationally) from Guidestar charity database (www.guidestar.org.uk). Assuming the same proportion for community organisations not registered with the Charity Commission, the London-wide estimate for the total number of voluntary and community organisations (registered and not registered) is 40,000 (London Voluntary Services Council – www.lvsc.org.uk), giving a London women's sector estimate of 2,160 (of which 1,200 are registered charities).

² http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/cost_of_dv_Report_sept04.pdf

³ http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/dom_violence/docs/2nd-dv-strategy.pdf

reducing inequalities in employment, health care and housing as well as crime prevention.

2. Women in the economy

WRC supports the aims of the GLA and LDA's Women in London's Economy project to achieve maximum use of all talent within the London Economy through, for example, promoting flexible working, improved access to childcare and promoting women's employment in non-traditional areas. We would like to see the LDA give greater detail as to how they will ensure that women will be equal recipients of the benefits of economic growth in London and how they will ensure access to these benefits for women from Black and Asian minority ethnic (BAME) and marginalised communities. We are disappointed that the 'What Works is to Tackle Worklessness' project did not appear to address gender inequalities in anyway.

The study into the social and economic impact of women's centres in Belfast found that not only did women's centres provide effective support services covering issues like sexual and domestic violence, self harm and social security advice to some of the most vulnerable women in the community; they also played an important role in the local economy and in local community infrastructure.⁴

We recommend that the LDA's Corporate Plan is implemented in line their forthcoming Gender Equality Scheme (GES).

3. Working with the voluntary sector

We encourage the LDA's continued support of the voluntary and community sector by working with organisations such as the London Voluntary Services Council, but it is **important that the LDA also works with other specialist equalities infrastructure organisations** such as Race on the Agenda, Women's Resource Centre and other organisations tailored to meet the needs of specific marginalised groups.

Using voluntary and community sector training can help access 'hard-to-reach' groups and open up these services to a wider audience. However, it is important to ensure that Full Cost Recovery for these services is implemented, as outlined by, as shown by ACEVO and NAVCA, otherwise voluntary services may incur extra costs for the work they are commissioned to do⁵.

3.1 Women's organisations as training providers

The WRCs economic impact pilot study on the women's VCS provides an effective methodology for calculating the economic gains brought about by the investment in women's organisations. It found that women's voluntary and community organisations provide value for money, represent an impressive return on funding/investment (up to 385% in the case studies), and are saving the state potentially millions of pounds through their intervention and prevention work. Without women's organisations, more women would be turning to public services with problems which could have been prevented.

⁴ Taillon, R. (2000), *The Social and Economic Impact of Women's Centres in Greater Belfast: Summary Report*, Women's Support Network: Belfast.

⁵ Fully Cost Recovery, ACEVO and NAVCA <http://www.fullcostrecovery.org.uk/main/index.php?content=home>

Women's organisations in the voluntary sector provide vital services that help women to take part in all aspects of social and civic life. For example, the Creative and Supportive Trust (CAST) works with women leaving prison as well as women involved in drug/alcohol rehabilitation or the mental health system. It offers a range of courses, accredited and non-accredited, including English, Computing and Art as well as welfare advice, education/employment advice, counselling and support groups. These services allow their clients to develop the skills and confidence needed to take control of their lives and to make the changes needed to move on successfully to further education or employment. Their output in 2004-2005 saw 80% of their students go on to further studies, many of these women would otherwise re-offend and return to prison. CAST and other women's organisations help women rebuild their lives and become economically independent.

Similarly, half the organisations interviewed for the WRC why women? report enabled women to access training or education either by providing it directly or by supporting them to access external opportunities, such as going to university⁶. Hillcroft College, a women-only college specifically working to empower women through learning said:

"...we change women's lives. The majority of women will progress either into work or to further higher education...they start believing in themselves...so yes, we empower women and build their confidence and ability to achieve" (Hillcroft College)

Organisations in this study provided access to training for some of the most vulnerable people in society such as newly arrived refugees, trafficked women, women with few English language skills, prisoners and survivors of childhood sexual abuse or domestic violence. It is these services, informed by specialist knowledge and experience that must be at the forefront of helping women including those from marginalised communities, into education and training.

It is, however, important to be aware that many women's organisations are small and lack the capacity to invest in tenders in order to compete with the private sector or large, generic charities. **The LDA should specifically set aside funding for support for women and women-only training, in order to help them advance their employment. The LDA should also ensure that women's organisations provide these services rather than relying on generic organisations to work in what are very specialist areas.**

3.2 Women-only Spaces

A key feature of the effectiveness of the women's voluntary and community sector is that they provide women-only services. The example of CAST illustrates the importance and success of women-only spaces and women-only training as 80% of their students stated that it was very important that CAST provided a women-only space. In 2005/6 WRC provided high-level management and leadership training and support to 180 women from micro and small businesses, including the voluntary and community sector and social enterprises. The programme resulted in 74% of women on these courses reporting that it improved their confidence, 28 were promoted and 4 went on to start their own businesses⁷. The women-only aspect of this training was key, evaluation reports showed that 89% of respondents felt more supported in a women-only environment and 87% felt they could be more open.⁸

⁶ WRC why women? 2006 report <http://www.wrc.org.uk/downloads/WRC%20Why%20Women%20Report.pdf>

⁷ Elevate Report (WRC 2005/6) <http://www.wrc.org.uk/downloads/ElevateFinalReport.pdf>

⁸ For more data from the interim reports of Elevate please contact the WRC

The constant threat to women's voluntary and community sector funding means that a vital resource removing barriers into employment for women is under threat. **Not only should the LDA actively work with the women's VCS in terms of providing training, employment, education and support but they should also show their support in demanding that this sector be subjected to no more funding cuts.**

4. Access to childcare, flexible working and affordable housing

As the LDA is already aware, access to childcare, flexible working and affordable housing are some of the barriers preventing women getting into work or training. Housing is a critical issue and particularly affects lone parents, women on low incomes and women subjected to domestic violence.

In terms of childcare, research in Belfast, showed that women's centres that provided childcare enabled women to take up training and employment opportunities, and acted as a gateway to employment. In the study, 40% of women's centres' employees had previously been volunteers or users at the centre⁹. **We are pleased that the LDA has already highlighted childcare, housing and flexible working as barriers that particularly affect women and have a great impact on economic growth in London but we would encourage the LDA to set more specific targets in these areas.**

5. Crime reduction and child poverty

It is important to re-iterate the impact of violence against women in the area of crime reduction and child-poverty. **The impact of violence against women is something that the LDA must take into consideration and should be addressed in their Gender Equality Scheme.** As noted above and in the GLA's Second London Domestic Violence Strategy, the Metropolitan Police Service attends around 300 domestic violence incidents every 24 hours and domestic violence accounts for 19% of all homelessness acceptances in London¹⁰.

Women are hindered by the threat and actuality of violence in their and their children's lives. Eradicating child poverty cannot be done without addressing the lives and opportunities of their primary caregivers, who need to be empowered to access opportunities to help lift themselves and their children out of poverty.

Women escaping violent relationships with limited resources, or women marginalised in other ways such as limited education or being stuck in low paid part-time work will undoubtedly affect their abilities to provide sufficiently for their children.

CONCLUSION

Women's Resource Centre would like the LDA to recognise the work and value of the women's voluntary and community sector. These organisations *must* be a part of the scheme to ensure that more women, especially women from marginalised communities have fair and equal access to training, education and employment.

⁹ Taillon, R. (2000), *The Social and Economic Impact of Women's Centres in Greater Belfast: Summary Report*, Women's Support Network: Belfast.

¹⁰ Second London Domestic Violence Strategy (2005)
http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/dom_violence/docs/2nd-dv-strategy.pdf