



How to...

Develop a women's network or forum

October 2010

Understanding and supporting women and their organisations

Disclaimer

This guide is not intended to provide definitive information and advice on how to set up a women's network or forum. At the time of printing, all care was taken to ensure the information contained in this guide was accurate and correct. However, websites, organisations, strategies, policies, laws, contact details etc do change or become outdated. Please always check the information to ensure it is correct and up-to-date at time of use. The Women's Resource Centre cannot take responsibility for changes to references or information in this guide.

Written by Sue Robson and edited by Karen Moore and Tania Pouwhare. Our thanks to all of the women's networks and forums that shared their good practices and learning in the creation of this guide.

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About the Women's Resource Centre

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) 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 health, 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.

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

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The Women's Resource Centre is supported by:



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Introduction

With increasing pressures on the third sector, it is vital that women's organisations work together and support each other. There are active women's networks in many areas bringing organisations together to challenge women's inequality and the chronic underfunding of the women's sector.

Women's organisations are experts in knowing how best to stop discrimination and violence against women and promote gender equality. It is crucial that women's organisations are heard, and working collectively strengthens the voice of the women's sector. Also, funders are increasingly asking organisations to demonstrate how they work with others, for example, to influence policy.

A network or forum can be formal (e.g. has terms of reference, formal membership etc) or less formal. It may also be a time-limited or issue-specific network set up to tackle a particular issue. It may even be virtual, where interaction between members takes place online.

This 'how to' guide has been partly informed by WRC's experience of running a Policy Forum for London's women's sector since 2003 and also draws upon learning from other women's networks and forums across England. It is intended to address typical issues and questions that arise in developing a forum or network.

For more information and support on forums and networks, contact the WRC Policy Team on policy@wrc.org.uk or 020 7324 3030.

Why does our network or forum exist? What will it do?

At the outset you need to define the purpose of your network or forum, and what you want to change as a result of it (i.e. what is your vision for the future?).

Defining a clear vision and purpose

Defining the vision and purpose will help you work towards setting outcomes, priorities and actions for your forum or network and identify who needs to be involved.

It is important that everyone is clear about the purpose and aims of the network or forum. With so many competing demands, women's organisations often find it hard to make time to attend meetings. Networks and forums which don't have clarity can be frustrating and not a good use of time. This will affect whether or not people will come to meetings and prioritise network or forum work.

Identifying why your forum or network exists also links to the length of its duration. For example, if the purpose is to lobby the government about a particular piece of legislation going through parliament this will limit its lifetime. If your network or forum has a much broader vision or its main purpose is to connect women's organisations, the network or forum is likely to be ongoing.

A template agenda for a 'visioning' session is given on the following page.

★ *Set-aside at least half-a-day, preferably at a venue where you won't be disturbed, to do a visioning session for your network or forum. You could ask someone independent to facilitate the session, perhaps from a women's network or forum outside of your area.*

Setting outcomes

'Outcomes' are simply changes (e.g. increases, decreases) that happen as a result of interventions, services etc. It is important to ensure that all members of your network or forum are clear about the changes that are desired and what they would actually look like if they happened.

You may want to organise your outcomes into different levels e.g. interpersonal level (e.g. behaviours and attitudes), community level (e.g. cultures and traditions), organisational (e.g. service delivery) and structural (e.g. decision-making structures, policies, laws).

Most organisations are familiar with setting outcomes but it is helpful to remember that your outcomes should always be 'SMART'; specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and have a time frame. If not, you will want to reconsider the outcome.

Decide how you will measure progress towards achieving each outcome. The things that you will use to measure progress are your 'indicators'. Indicators will enable you to assess your progress towards the outcome. There are usually many possible indicators for each outcome, so you need to decide which are the best and most practical for you to measure.

Visioning session plan

Aim of session:

To clarify the purpose of your network or forum and establish a clear vision

Objectives of the session:

- To identify a set of values
- To explore what we want to change (vision) and identify how things would be different if we were successful (outcomes)

What you will have at the end of the session:

- A set of shared values
- A vision or mission statement for your forum or network with outcomes

Plan for session:

- 1) Welcome and outline of session
- 2) Individual introductions
 - *Why are you here today?*
 - *What are your own passions and motivations for wanting the forum or network to happen?*
- 3) Group discussion (drawing upon last exercise) - *what are our shared values?*
- 4) Group discussion - *what do we want to change?*
- 5) Creative workshop - *"If we were successful..."*
 - *What difference will we have made (outcomes)?*
 - *What would it look like (how can we measure change)?*
 - *What would it feel like (how will we know the changes have happened)?*
- 6) Feedback and defining the vision and outcomes
- 7) Evaluation of session and close

Setting objectives

The next step is to work out *what* you are going to achieve your vision and outcomes. You will need to decide on some clear objectives and develop an action plan (with priorities, identifying who will do what, timescales etc).

'Objectives' are goals you intend to achieve. By achieving the objectives you are working towards meeting your outcome.

The simple exercise below will help you to identify a clear set of objectives. *The 'Elephants'* represent the barriers you will face and *the 'Ants'* symbolise the collective power and strength of women's voluntary organisations working together.

‘Elephants and Ants’ exercise

Defining how you can remove barriers will help you define the objectives you will need to achieve your outcomes. Look again at your vision and outcomes for your forum or network:

- Elephants – What is standing in the way of achieving your vision and outcomes?
- Ants – How can your forum or network remove *the Elephants*?

Action planning

The next step is to match each objective to your identified outcomes and break down the tasks and actions you will need to take in order to achieve them. Make sure that each task or action is directly related to one of your objectives and that objectives are linked to an outcome.

Writing your action plan down is helpful to keep the network or forum focussed and can also be given to new members who join at a later date so they are clear about the purpose and activities. A template action plan, with some examples based on a fictional forum, is provided on the following page.

★ *If you are aiming to attract funding from charitable or public sources, you might want to expand your action plan into a more comprehensive business plan. See: ‘A guide to business planning’ by David Irwin and published by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation for information on how to do this: www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk/pdf/sc_business_planning.pdf.*

Deciding on actions

With limited resources, your network or forum will have to make decisions about which actions are going to best meet your outcomes.

- It is important to know who your target audience is so that your actions are the right ones. For example, if you are trying to influence decisions at a local level, you will want to prioritise actions such as lobbying local councillors, using local media and engaging with local groups rather than lobbying central government, trying to get stories in national broadsheets etc.
- Consider using social media to gather support for your aims
- Marches and processions can galvanise support, attract media attention, show the extent of public feeling and build a great sense of solidarity and camaraderie. However, organisations planning a march, procession or demonstration must comply with the Public Order Act 1986, Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Attention seeking stunts can provide excellent photo opportunities and help to get the message across. However, if you are going to do a stunt, this should be carefully thought through, it must always be legal, and you may want to discuss with other organisations who have taken similar actions
- Lobbying is an ongoing task and you may want to think about ways in which you can keep up the pressure. Umbrella organisations, such as the Women’s Resource Centre, can help you with ideas about how to do this.

★ *Useful publications about campaigning and tactics (actions) include: 'The Campaigning Handbook' (2000) by Mark Lattimer, published by the Directory of Social Change: www.dsc.org.uk/Publications/Sectorpolicyandcampaigns and the 'Trustees Guide to Campaigning and Influencing' (2010) published by NCVO: www.ncvovol.org.uk/sites/default/files/NC636_Trustee_guide_to_campaigning_and_influencing.pdf*

Evidence

If you are trying to influence decision making, you may need to do some research so you have a clear evidence base for the arguments you want to make. You may want to start with collating relevant data from members of your network or forum. WRC also has research about women's organisations and statistics about women's inequality that you can use (see: www.wrc.org.uk/resources/wrcs_research_and_reports/default.aspx).

Public bodies should also have useful data. The Gender Equality Duty (GED) came into force in April 2007. It requires public bodies to promote equality of opportunity between women and men and eliminate unlawful sex discrimination and harassment. Public bodies must gather and use information on how the public authority's policies and practices affect gender equality in the workforce and in the delivery of services. This means that there should be information available from public bodies about the economic, social and political position of women. The Equality Act will come into force in October 2010, although provisions within it will be implemented at different times. The Act includes a new Public Sector Equality Duty which will be an extension of the current provision on gender, race and disability to include: age, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief and sexual orientation. There may be data available from public bodies about groups of women such as lesbians etc.

There are likely to be gaps in data collected by public bodies and you may find that the information (statistics etc) you want are not collected and if the information is crucial to making your case, you may need to conduct some research yourselves. Your research needn't be complicated or on a large scale but it does need to be robust. You can contact WRC for information on conducting research and where to get support.

Women's Sector Together action plan 2010-11

'Women's Sector Together' is a forum of women's organisations working together to influence local services for women with learning disabilities.

We believe that there is a need to improve services provided by public bodies and voluntary and community organisations so that they are accessible to and inclusive of learning disabled women.

'Women's Sector Together' has a diverse membership including groups run by and for learning disabled women, individual learning disabled women as well as women's organisations who have contact with learning disabled women.

Outcome	Measurement	Objectives	Tasks/actions	Who	When	Notes
Learning disabled women have better access to a wider range of local services	Learning disabled women better able to access a wider range of local services	Speak at local VCS event about forum	Organise presentation with local CVS	Mei	End of September 2010	
			Develop questions for focus groups of learning disabled women about their experiences of accessing and using local services	Annabel	End of August 2010	
		Collect evidence on services currently used	Focus groups with learning disabled service users	All	September – end of November 2010	Results to be sent to Marge to collate
			Get statistics from local council about who uses local services	Sian	August – September 2010	
		Write report on findings from focus groups and statistics research	Marge	End of January 2011	Marge to send draft report to forum members by 5 January 2011	

How will we make sure we are inclusive?

Your women's network or forum will be stronger if it is diverse and inclusive and all women involved are (and feel) able to have a say.

Network/forum membership

Groups that are more marginalised such as Black, Asian, minority ethnic, refugee, asylum, Traveller, gypsy, deaf, disabled, lesbian, bisexual, trans, young and older women's organisations or organisations in particular geographical locations, are likely to have less resources, less capacity and be less able to engage with decision makers and funders.

It is always a good idea to 'map' relevant women's organisations and identify any gaps. If your network or forum is geographically based, local infrastructure organisations and the officer with responsibility for the voluntary and community sector in local councils will be useful. As you make contact with each new women's organisation, find out about the other women's groups they know about.

More marginalised groups are likely to need outreach – proactive and person-to-person contact rather than just relying on a mass email or notice about your network or forum in a publication. Different groups have different routes to engagement so it is important that as you identify women's groups that you find out at what level they want to be involved and how they prefer to communicate. Some organisations may not be able to participate in the network or forum on a regular basis but will want to receive information and keep in touch.

How your network or forum will address representation, equality and diversity should be written into the terms of reference and could include targets for underrepresented groups.

If you have the resources to do so, set up a database of contacts details and basic information about the women's organisations you are engaging in your network or forum. This will be a valuable resource more generally.

Case studies:

Women's Resource Centre Policy Forum

The WRC's Policy Forum for London's women's sector has 15-20 members who are women working or volunteering in the voluntary and community sector, and are members of WRC. Meetings take place three to four times per year with some contact in between.

With London's women's sector being so diverse, it is important that this is reflected in the membership of the Policy Forum. WRC also acknowledges that not all organisations represented engage in the forum on an equal footing because of constraints such as time, resources and funding, and also the under-representation of particular communities in policy consultation. For this reason 'seats' on the Policy Forum are reserved for specific groups of women's organisations, which might otherwise be marginalised or excluded from the forum. These seats are based upon both WRC's membership profile. There may be crossovers, where one organisation may fill more than one seat.

The Policy Forum has a *minimum* number of seats for groups led by and for different equalities groups of women, alongside other targets that reflect the composition of WRC's membership, and also reflect issues of resources. For example, targets are set to limit the

number of second tier and infrastructure organisations on the forum so that the emphasis remains on the experiences and needs of front-line organisations. Also, WRC set a minimum number of very small organisations to ensure that engaging these groups in the forum is a priority. Organisations working in violence against women also have a 'seats' reflecting that this key issue of gender inequality is the focus of a large number of WRC's membership. These expectations are contained in the Policy Forum's Terms of Reference so that everyone is clear about representation on the forum.

There are five seats 'reserved' for organisations led by Black, Asian, minority ethnic or refugee women's organisations and a seat each for organisations led by the following:

- Lesbian and bisexual women
- Transgender women
- Disabled women
- Older women
- Younger women
- Minority religious communities of women
- Violence against women
- Mental health.

There are four seats for organisations that have an annual income of less than £100,000. The remaining seats are distributed widely across fields of work, communities of interest, and boroughs. Seventy per cent of all Policy Forum members should be from frontline services. Organisations are invited to apply to be members of the Policy Forum, including inviting applications from particularly marginalised organisations. Where minimum representation is not reached, research is carried out to identify relevant organisations and they are contacted directly by WRC about joining the Policy Forum.

In addition to paying for travel costs, WRC pays a small donation to organisations who attend meetings as a way of acknowledging the valuable time and expertise of Policy Forum members. The total amount available per meeting is fixed at £250 and organisations indicate whether they would like to receive a payment. The £250 is then shared equally amongst those organisations. This initiative has been positively received by Policy Forum members even though the donations are small.

NEWomen's Network

During 2008/09, NEWomen's Network set up a capacity building fund for marginalised women's organisations and groups in the North East to engage in the network. Grants of up to £250 were made available for:

- Support to attend network meetings and events
- To attend a training course or learning programme
- Support to engage in mentoring with another women's group, organisation or project
- An exchange visit with another women's group, organisation or project.

When Black women's groups were found not to be engaging in events, NEWomen's Network held events specifically for the Black women's sector in the north and south of the region and paid for the time of a Black community development worker to encourage and support women's groups and organisations to engage.

CEDAW Working Group

In March 2009, WRC and the Equality and Human Rights Commission held a conference on the United Nations Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in London.

The conference inspired the formation of the CEDAW Working Group to raise awareness of the convention among women's organisations in the UK and to take forward a strategy for the next UK examination in 2012.

Bursaries for travel, accommodation and care costs were offered to make the CEDAW conference more accessible to marginalised women's groups and those from outside of London. Women came from places as diverse as Belfast, Blackburn, Birmingham, Bradford, Cardiff, Cleveland, Coventry, Derbyshire, Edinburgh, Galway, Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle Upon Tyne, South Tyneside, Worcestershire and more. This meant that from the outset, the Working Group had an inclusive base of organisations from across the UK to draw upon.

Encouraging participation

As with many other situations, some members of your network or forum may not feel able to have their say, especially if some members are more outspoken than others.

Having some formal mechanisms to your proceedings can create opportunities for women who may feel less confident in participating in discussions, raising issues etc. Some examples from WRC's Policy Forum include:

- The chairing of meetings is rotated. The chair, identified at the previous meeting, works with WRC policy team staff to identify the agenda and is given support if they are new to chairing meetings or facilitating discussions
- All Policy Forum members are given the opportunity to submit agenda items for meetings
- All meetings begin with each member giving an update on key issues affecting their organisations, updates on protects, services etc.

How can we communicate with others about our network or forum?

Your network or forum may want to let others know about its work and purpose, especially if your aim is to influence policy and decision making.

You may want to consider developing:

- A simple logo and strap line that promotes your women's network or forum and lets people know what you are about
- A website or webpage although you will need to keep this regularly updated
- An electronic newsletter - a cheap, quick and effective way to disseminate information both internally within the network or forum and also externally. Set up a template and system for a regular newsletter or email bulletin. There are some economic and effective online tools to help you do this such as: <http://www.charityemail.co.uk/> and www.icontact.com/. Examples of e-newsletters can be found at: www.wrc.org.uk/news/wrc_eneews/default.aspx and http://79.170.40.248/newwomens.net/index.php?option=com_jotloader&Itemid=42.

If your network or forum wants to engage with the media, you will need to collectively agree on your position, key messages, spokespersons, your key audience and the best way to reach that audience (e.g. local newspaper, blog, social networking sites etc).

Tips for press releases

- Your press release should answer who, what, why, when and where in the first sentence or two
- Always check your facts – NEVER rely on second-hand information
- Be prepared - know your stuff! Once you know all of the facts, you will have confidence in your message
- Write the release as much like a news story as you can. This helps the journalist see your story as news
- Do a rough draft aiming for 200-250 words
- Use plain language – short sentences and paragraphs – and avoid jargon
- Write as if you are a sympathetic outsider – talk about yourself and your campaign in the third person, as if you were someone else reporting it
- Start with the facts as seen from your point of view
- Give some background – just a few brief points
- Give practical examples, or say how people feel – this helps to bring your story to life
- Use quotes to express your central message. Always ask people for their permission before you quote them
- Provide full contact details so that journalists can follow up the story.

What about using social media?

Your network or forum may communicate, or even 'meet', virtually. Social media sites (sometimes called social networking) can be a good way to make connections between women's organisations, particularly in widespread geographical areas. Importantly, these sites are mostly free, are controlled by you (e.g. who can join) and provide information instantly, allowing people to communicate simultaneously without overloading email inboxes. They can be used for internal communications within the network or forum and also with external audiences, for example, gathering support for a campaign.

However, any sites you create for your network or forum must be moderated to ensure content is appropriate and safe.

Sites that can be used by networks and forums include:

- GROU.PS is a free online community site creator: <http://grou.ps/>
- With over 100 million users worldwide, Facebook is easy to use and it is simple to create a basic holding page for your organisation, which can then be found when people search. With Facebook you also don't need to update quite as much, as too many updates can clog up people's newsfeeds, but make sure you refresh the page at least once a week if possible with useful and pertinent information: <http://www.facebook.com/apps/application.php?id=2361831622&b>. WRC's Facebook page can be seen at: www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2451312346. See the Women's Networking Hub's Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=87975417702&v=wall.
- NING is an online service to create, customise, and share a social network, but there is a charge): www.ning.com. WRC's Women's Café was created using NING: <http://thewomenscafe.ning.com>.
- Twitter is one of the easiest ways to raise awareness of your network or forum and disseminating useful information. It may seem labour intensive at first but once you get used to it you have a useful resource for getting in touch with other women's orgs, spreading the word and developing a community around your network or forum: <http://twitter.com>. For guides on how to use Twitter see: www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/twitter and www.slideshare.net/onlinejournalist/twitter-for-beginners-1012050?type=powerpoint. WRC's Twitter feed can be seen at: <http://twitter.com/whywomen>.

There are also other forms of social media (and more are constantly being developed), such as:

- Blogs are like online diaries where information, thoughts etc are posted by the blog's author and people can comment. See WRC's blog at: <http://womensresourcecentre.blogspot.com/>
- YouTube is a video sharing website where you can upload and share videos. To see WRC's channel (WRC's video clips) visit: <http://www.youtube.com/user/whywomenWRC>
- Delicious is a social bookmarking web service for sharing web bookmarks. To see websites and webpages bookmarked by WRC visit: <http://www.delicious.com/whywomen>
- You can share photos and images using Flickr. WRC's photostream is available at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/whywomen/>.

Tips on using social media

- Don't think of social networking sites as a 'shiny new toy'. Social networking sites are a whole new way of communicating and will become increasingly important
- Don't say anything on social media sites you would not be prepared to say in a work capacity
- Know your audience and make sure that the information on your site is appropriate
- Make sure to include organisational profiles of network/forum members
- Keep your network or forum a friendly, supportive space for women by developing a code of conduct. For example, see WRC's Women's Café Code of Conduct:
<http://thewomenscafe.ning.com/page/code-of-conduct>

What about partnerships and consortiums?

The main purpose of many women's networks or forums is to keep women's organisations connected and enable information sharing. Others come together to address specific issues such as lobbying and campaigning for changes in policy.

For some networks or forums, the purpose of working together may be to partner to access funding and deliver services. In these situations, the network or forum will need more formal mechanisms such as partnership agreements, and decision making and financial responsibilities will need to be explicit. This is likely to be a condition of the contract/funding but it is also needed to ensure clarity between partners.

Contracts for services are becoming increasingly integrated and in these cases it may be necessary for organisations to work together in order to have any chance of winning these larger contracts.

Partnership working can bring many benefits including:

- New or improved services
- More efficient use of resources
- Knowledge, skills and information sharing
- Sharing risks
- Stronger voice
- Coordinated activities
- Collaborative advantage
- Offers greater choice
- Attract additional funding
- Reduced duplication of effort
- Access to a wider pool of contacts and supporters
- Better geographical coverage.

However, this level of working together has far more risks – both financially and also to the reputations of organisations involved. Before entering a partnership or consortium, organisations should ask themselves:

- What are you hoping to achieve by partnering with another organisation?
- Are you sure that partnership working is the best way to achieve this aim?
- Who proposed the idea? Do they have a vested interest?
- Do your Trustees and Chief Executive support the idea?
- Does it fit within your organisation's charitable objects as stated in your governing document?
- Do your plans for partnership working fit your strategic vision, values and current priorities?

How can we make sure we are around as long as we need to be?

For some women's networks and forums, the life span will be known because the activity will be time limited, such as if you have come together to hold an event. However, if the purpose of your women's network is further reaching such as achieving a sustainable women's sector or eliminating aspects of women's inequality or discrimination, then you are likely to have to be around for a long time. If you are lobbying to change a policy or law, this is likely to take a long time to achieve. Do not underestimate the amount of time that it will take to achieve your mission, even if your women's forum is only set up to deal with one issue. For example, joint work on abolishing the no recourse to public funds rule has been ongoing since 2003 and there has been a campaign group since 2007.

Women's networks and forums don't have to be costly to run if everyone is prepared to contribute something to making it happen. However, for this to happen there needs to be a clear understanding of what the benefits are of being involved and a political commitment to make it happen. Even under those circumstances it is difficult for women's groups and organisations to prioritise a great deal of time, let alone financial resources, for network activities against providing front-line services to address women's needs.

Women and their organisations and groups give a great deal to networks and forums and then get exhausted. Some ideas for breathing life into a flagging network:

- Make sure your network or forum is well run and organised so that members' time is well used
- Publicise your network or forum's successes so that current and potential members can see the value of the network or forum
- Encourage members to open up their organisation's events and training to other network members
- Try and get interesting speakers or guests along to network or forum meetings
- Hold a series of themed events to look at specific issues affecting women e.g. violence against women, women's health, women's employment and the labour market etc. Get different women's organisations to host the events over a half day with light refreshments to keep the cost down. Use the events to share what you know about the issues and to re-focus and inform priorities.

Where can we find other women's networks and forums?

NEWomen's Network

NEWomen's Network aims to strengthen the women's sector and to ensure the survival of women's organisations and groups in the North East of England by:

- Building a sustainable women's sector through collaboration and partnership between women's organisations
- Promoting and enhancing the role of the women's sector organisations and groups in delivering economic regeneration and tackling the root causes of women's economic disadvantage in the North East
- Developing a feminist culture within the women's sector by putting into action alternative and different ways of thinking, being and doing
- Educating widely to promote gender equality and ensuring that the women's sector is equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to ensure its survival
- Campaigning for decision makers and funding bodies to acknowledge the systematic disadvantage women face because of gendered inequality and to recognise the essential services and expertise the women's sector provides.

Email: info@newwomens.net

Website: <http://www.newwomens.net/>

Women's Networking Hub

The Women's Networking Hub is open to all women and women's organisations, regardless of their geographical position, faith, background, sexuality, economic, financial, social standing, or ethnicity. The Women's Networking Hub is global but based in Birmingham and aims to:

- Develop communication to foster a cross community/sector/professional networking hub
- Facilitate skill sharing
- Support and advocate for and on behalf of women, and women's issues, including matters relating to gender inequality
- Unite organisations and individuals in supporting our drive for equality for women.

Email: Shahidachoudhry@aol.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=87975417702&v=wall

Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST)

WAST is a network where women asylum seekers share experiences, empower and support each other, fight for women's rights and raise awareness about the issues that force women

to seek international protection and the effects of the injustices of the UK immigration system through. With bases in Manchester and London, WAST aims to:

- Providing a safe and secure women-only space and a source of support for each other, social and emotional
- Empowerment for one another, sharing knowledge and information, skills and experiences
- Helping each other take forward our asylum applications and run campaigns
- Promoting and improving our skills and experience
- Involving ourselves in organisational and community development activities and networking with other groups
- Raising awareness and lobbying on women's asylum issues
- Promoting a positive image of asylum seekers.

WAST Manchester

Tel: 0161 833 8835

Email: wastmanchester@yahoo.co.uk

WAST London

Tel: 07852765193

Email: wastlondon@yahoo.co.uk

Website: www.wast.org.uk

Women of Wolverhampton (WOW)

WOW is an umbrella agency for women's groups in Wolverhampton so that relevant information can be disseminated to the groups and skills and knowledge can be shared. WOW aims to:

- Act as a voice for women in Wolverhampton, advocating and campaigning for women's rights
- Empower women to take an active role in decision making, helping to influence and shape policies and services in the City
- Enable better communication between individual women and women's groups in order to improve access to services and information that have the potential to better their lives
- Work with other partners to promote gender equality locally, nationally and internationally.

Tel: 01902 572122

Email: info@wowonline.org.uk

Website: www.wowonline.org.uk

Women's Café

The Women's Café is an online social media site set-up and moderated by the Women's Resource Centre, is a virtual network which connects women's organisations with each other online. Members of the Women's Café use it to:

- Find other women working in their local area
- Find other women interested in similar issues
- Provide each other with advice and support on fundraising, campaigning, research and other topics
- Co-ordinate campaigns and working groups with other women across the country
- Share their experience, expertise and best practice examples.

You can join the Women's Café at <http://thewomenscafe.ning.com>. A step-by-step guide to developing signing-up to the Women's Café is also available from www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2009/s/step_by_step_guide_to_the_womens_cafe.pdf

WRC Policy Forum

The WRC Policy Forum is administered by the Women's Resource Centre and is made up of around 20 women from London based voluntary and community organisations and has met three to four times a year since September 2003. The aims of the Policy Forum are to share information, network, support each other and help shape the work of the policy team and WRC generally.

The Policy Forum's Terms of Reference are available from:

http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/p/policyforumtor.doc

The Forum has designated seats to ensure a diverse cross-section of the women's sector, including Black and minority ethnic women's organisations, disabled people's organisations, lesbian, bisexual and transgender organisations and refugee organisations.

Tel: Rebecca on 020 7324 3030

Email: policy@wrc.org.uk

Website: www.wrc.org.uk/policyforum

CEDAW Working Group

The CEDAW Working Group is a forum of women's and human rights organisations from across the country building the capacity of the women's sector to use the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other and human rights tools and language to address women's inequality. Administered by the Women's Resource Centre, the CEDAW Working Group aims to:

- Raise awareness of the Convention, Optional Protocol and General Recommendations amongst women's organisations

- Build the capacity of women's organisations to use CEDAW and human rights legislation to address women's (in)equality
- Engage more women's organisations in official CEDAW processes, including in the development of shadow reports and at the next examination
- Co-ordinate CEDAW-related activities within the sector and increase partnership working and solidarity
- Monitor and hold the Government to account on its obligations to women's rights under CEDAW
- Gather evidence about the state of the women's equality to inform robust shadow reports and effective lobbying
- Lobby the Government on priority issues affecting the women's sector as enshrined in the Convention (e.g. sustainable funding, misapplication of the Gender Equality Duty, the impact of commissioning on women's organisations).

Tel: Charlotte at WRC on 020 7324 3042

Email: charlotte@wrc.org.uk

Website: www.wrc.org.uk/cedaw

WAITS Policy Forum

The WAITS Policy Forum is an emerging women's forum aimed at women leaders and women's groups in Birmingham who work collectively to identify strategies that will influence policy and service provision on issues affecting women, their families and communities. It is coordinated by Women Acting in Today's Society.

Tel: Anita Shervington on 0121 440 1443

Email: anita@waitsaction.org

Campaign to abolish the 'no recourse to public funds' rule

The campaign to abolish the 'no recourse to public funds' rule is a coalition of organisations from across the UK working to highlight the devastating impact of this restriction on access to public funds on a particularly vulnerable group of women. The 'no recourse' campaign is calling upon the Government to:

- Abolish the 'no recourse' requirement for abused women who have insecure status
- Provide a special fund pending long term solutions, to enable all women to have living expenses and have access to refuges and local authority accommodation pending a final decision on applications to remain in the UK
- Fast track applications to remain in the UK (process within 2 months) where there is prima facie evidence of domestic violence
- Reform the Domestic Violence Rule so that all types of evidence of domestic violence are accepted
- Extend the Domestic Violence Rule to all abused women with an insecure immigration status and introduce similar protection for trafficked women subjected to sexual and

economic abuse and to overseas domestic workers experiencing violence from employers

- Provide adequate levels of legal aid so that there is access to good quality legal advice and assistance.

Tel: Charlotte at WRC on 020 7324 3042

Email: charlotte@wrc.org.uk

Website: www.wrc.org.uk/norecourse