



Women's
Collective
Ireland

2024

ANNUAL REPORT

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



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Foreword, By WCI's Chairperson

Women's Collective Ireland (WCI) are delighted to present this year's Annual Report for the year 2024. The impact of WCI's local and national work continues to evolve and be of undeniable support to the tens of thousands of grassroots women who seek our services – as you will discover while reading our Annual Report 2024.

WCI have always, and continue to, welcome the profound responsibility in addressing the diverse needs of marginalised women, as we pride ourselves in supporting such needs. As a national organisation, we recognise the importance of women's community development in empowering marginalised women, as they navigate barriers to education, healthcare, and social equity. These barriers, while present in the everyday lives of all women, are even more-so challenging to marginalised women who face discrimination due to their race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and more. WCI vow to continue to support marginalised women within Ireland, so that we may achieve our vision in creating an Ireland where women in all our diversity can flourish.

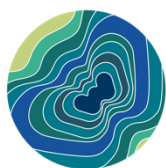
I am more hopeful than ever that our vision can be achieved, and that the girls and women who access our services can reach true equity. As an organisation, we recognise that women's community development more than a pathway to individual growth; when nurtured, it is a pathway to societal transformation.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank our core funders, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth who make our work supporting marginalised women possible. As well as this, I would like to thank the women within our local communities who, through their resilience, empower themselves by trusting the mission of WCI and allow us to support them. This immensurable responsibility we possess is made possible by the faith women put within this organisation and serves as a testament to the power of collective action, and the power of women.

In solidarity,

Maeve O'Grady,

Chairperson, Women's Collective Ireland.



Women's
Collective
Ireland



**An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige**
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

Introduction

Disadvantaged women are the target group for all Women's Collective Ireland (WCI) Projects – at its heart, WCI Projects recognise disadvantage in relation to women's socio-economic circumstances. In addition, rural Projects work with women who are often further disadvantaged through social isolation and lack of access to supports and services. Marginalised women are identified through outreach, consultation, local statistics, and information.

Funding from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) enable the WCI Board of Directors to employ 50 staff, 5 at national level and 45 locally throughout the 17 project areas. At local level, WCI staff outreach to and engage with women experiencing disadvantage and level in programme funding to support women's equality and voice in their communities.

At the beginning of 2024, WCI Projects developed and began to deliver local area work plans based on four strategic areas of priority: Engagement, Participation, Policy & Equality, and finally, Organisational Development & Sustainability. The objectives and actions within these strategic areas continue to follow WCI's Strategic Plan (2022-2026) which outlines our commitment to continuing to build on our WCI culture of inspiring and being inspired by the women we work with – as well as the actions which need to be taken to improve disadvantaged women's participation in our communities and society. WCI Projects aim to ensure that all local actions they carry out are done so on a needs-basis using a variety of methods.

WCI Projects continue to adapt by learning and using modern methods of engagement whilst connecting with women face-to-face and encouraging social interaction. Since March 2022, many WCI Projects have also engaged with and supported women fleeing from the war in Ukraine and those seeking asylum from other countries.



ENGAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

The following Engagement Highlights Report offers a detailed summary of how many women WCI engaged with during the 2024 period, and the mediums in which were used to do so.

2024 Figures:



97,888

Messages were sent



6,003 (*over 526 courses)

In Community Education Sessions



12,222

Telephone calls were made



1,613

Sessions delivered



10,466

Social media posts were circulated



1,146

Childcare places offered



7,965

Attended Events



7,275

1-1 supports

Overall # of Engagements with Women:



135,119

2024 Programmes:



Women in Leadership



Your Vote Your Power

WHO WE ARE

Women's Collective Ireland is a national women's community development organisation advancing marginalised women's equality through women's community development. Women's Collective Ireland represents and works directly with women experiencing disadvantage, through our 17 Grassroots Women's Community Development Projects and National structures.

Women's Collective Ireland has a unitary legal structure, which requires particular governance and creates specific obligations nationally and locally.

OUR VISION

An Ireland where women in all our diversity are flourishing.

OUR MISSION

To support grassroots women through collective and practical actions to achieve their full human rights and true equality.

OUR WORK

Women's Collective Ireland supports grassroots women through women's community development locally and nationally.

Women's Collective Ireland's work on the ground is central and fundamental. It shapes all our collective actions. The national work derives from and advances the work of our community development projects supporting grassroots women's empowerment.

The Women's Collective 17 local Projects are best placed to identify and respond to the specific needs of grassroots women in their communities and each of them have developed a unique programme of work with women.

Our work continues to evolve in response to the needs identified by grassroots women. We work to make real connections in order to ensure voice and visibility of grassroots women.

To us, GRASSROOTS WOMEN is a term used for women living in often working-class, marginalised, rural and urban communities, who experience exclusion for whatever reasons including economic, cultural, social and political exclusion.

WHERE WE ARE



OUR GUIDING VALUES

Our values guide our work. When we speak or act, we are:

WELCOMING

We actively reach out to, include and develop relationships with the diverse women in our communities.

FOR WOMEN

We are feminist in our thinking and in our actions.

WITH WOMEN

We seek to be supportive of and are energised by the women we meet and work with.

COLLECTIVE

We create spaces for women to get together safely, be themselves, learn, share experiences, have their say and get involved.

ROOTED

Our words and deeds are grounded in the lives and experiences of the grassroots women we meet and work with.

ABOUT CHANGING THE WORLD

We actively listen and hear women's voices supporting transformation. We speak out about the barriers to women's equality and participation, and campaign for positive change.

OUR STRATEGIC GOALS



Strategic Goal 1

Reaching out and **engaging** women.



Strategic Goal 2

Supporting women's empowerment and participation through feminist **community development**.



Strategic Goal 3

Voicing the issues affecting grassroots women and **increasing visibility**.



Strategic Goal 4

Achieving **sustainability**: growing and developing as an organisation.

Strategic Priority 1: ENGAGEMENT

In 2024, WCI Projects continued to outreach to the most marginalised women in their areas. Women were supported within the Projects or signposted to other services and supports based on identified needs. Supports to women ranged from counselling, childcare, parenting, domestic abuse, mentoring, mental health and well woman clinics and women's group support etc. Project staff worked with women in groups and individually, supporting and encouraging them to access services and supports available in their communities.

Projects also used a variety of methods to promote and facilitate access to services, including newsletters, media, websites and social media, one-to-one engagements, referrals and word of mouth. Agencies that projects referred to include training centres, VTOS, NALA, Women's Aid, Women's refuges, MABs, Pieta House, Legal Aid, SICAP, Homecare Agencies, Social Workers etc.

With no programme funding available to them, our Projects worked hard to try and source funding from a variety of sources. Money leveraged allowed them to deliver a range of engagement opportunities and capacity building and tailored learning activities, often involving extensive outreach work in hard-to-reach communities.

Such activities included the provision of events, information and training aimed at women. These events are also used to disseminate information and create awareness regarding their project, or issues of relevance to women in their areas; and to consult with them on issues that may be of concern or affecting them.

International Women's Day (8th March) events were hosted by all 17 WCI Women's Projects which provided opportunities to outreach, highlight women's equality issues and raise the profile of WCI work at local level and celebrate women's achievements. The IWD theme for 2024 was #InspireInclusion.

Throughout 2024, a total of **329** events were held. These events included learning opportunities such as information days/sessions, enrolment days, coffee mornings, open days, fundraisers, awareness-raising events, and celebration days which involved **7,965** women. They also included mental health and wellbeing activities, a variety of exercise, and craft/cooking activities along with awareness raising campaigns on issues such as Cervical and Breast Cancer Awareness, 16 Days of Action Opposing Violence Against Women, Gender Equality Awareness, Mental Health, Human Trafficking, and various local campaigns.

In the context of the National Women's Strategy, these events help advance the physical and mental health and wellbeing of women and girls while ongoing work on highlighting violence against women and girls and support services available to them, support NWS actions to combat violence against women.

Since the Covid-19 Pandemic, technology has played and continues to play a major part in reaching out and remaining engaged with community women especially through periods of restrictions. Staff continued to use technologies that were available to themselves, to the women in their communities, and whatever technologies women were comfortable with.

The telephone is a vital tool of engagement, both landline and mobile. Staff reach out and called women individually, giving them the space to listen to concerns, as well as communicating information about supports available locally. People understand information in relation to themselves, and calls could be tailored to suit, as many of the women we work with are known to us personally. The calls could at times be lengthy especially to older women who are finding it hard to reengage with social groups post pandemic and are missing social

contact. However, this is an important part of our unique work with women at a grassroots level.

We estimate that WCI staff made at least **12,222** telephone calls to women in 2024.

Since the pandemic, many women quickly have become comfortable with smart phones and their many applications. Projects continue to text or WhatsApp thousands of messages to keep women in touch with us and our projects. In 2024, over **97,888** messages were sent to women to engage or keep women informed of activities or events.

Social media also plays a huge part in engaging with women. In 2024, social media was used to share and promote information, events and activities, and supports/services available locally and remotely.

Over **10,466** posts were made to social media.

Where there was capacity and technology available, Zoom continued to be used for virtual/hybrid meetups of women who may have had issues with transport, child or elder care.

WCI projects made a total estimated **135,119** engagements with women in 2024.

Most WCI Projects operate a 'Drop In' service to women in their communities while all operate an 'Open Door' policy which means they welcome women into the project at any time during its open hours. 2024 continued as a time of reengagement and encouraging women out of their homes and back into services. **7,275** one-to-one personal supports were given to women in 2024 and a total of **1,613** counselling sessions were delivered in our projects.

WCI projects refer women to other statutory agencies and services and community organisations and in turn also receive referrals from agencies. In 2024, Projects continued to get and make referrals to other community and statutory agencies around different needs and are signposting and raising awareness of resources available to women and their families during this time. Agencies referred to and from included: Tusla, PHNs, CDPs, FRCs, ETBs, St. Vincent de Paul, refuges, addiction services and MABs.



Strategic Priority 2: EMPOWERMENT & PARTICIPATION

Community education is a way of working for many Projects in Women's Collective Ireland. Often our projects are the only provider of education and training specifically designed to cater for disadvantaged women in an area. In recognition of women in their role as primary carers, our Projects plan, promote and deliver a range of accredited and non-accredited education programmes in response to the identified needs in a local area.

These are funded by monies leveraged in locally by the projects themselves with certain funds being ringfenced for certain activities. In 2024, WCI leveraged in €219,220

6,003 women participated in **526** community education and training programmes.

In addition, **329** one-off workshops/events/information days took place with a further **7,965** participants.

These activities are of immense importance and value to grassroots women as they continue to tell us in their evaluations.

The summer months are normally quieter for the women's projects in terms of activities and participation and projects spent a lot of time planning for activities for the autumn/winter months. This involved revising and adapting workplans and trying to adjust programmes, so that not only was delivery possible but was compliant with the everchanging guidelines and accessible to women in the community.

WCI Projects identify and actively participate in local social inclusion and education and training networks to highlight the needs of local disadvantaged women and promote the activities and services that local education and training organisations have to offer. In 2022, committees/interagency groups with WCI members included family support networks, community education networks, training networks, mental health and domestic violence networks to public participation networks, childcare networks and committees, feminist networks, women in business, social inclusion, and other interagency groups.

Such participation of women helps put a greater focus on gender issues and not only women's participation in general, but on the voices of socially excluded women at a community level and in policy and decision-making fora. The participation of women at a community level supports the progression of the NWS objective of ensuring the visibility in society of women and girls, and their Equal and Active Citizenship in Irish society.

WCI local, regional and national structures also further provide an effective framework for challenging barriers by building capacity and enabling women not usually heard to have a voice.

Projects have identified that one of the main barriers to women's participation is childcare. Projects support women to access affordable childcare through provision of places at childcare facilities attached to our Projects, or by signposting women to community childcare in their areas thereby improving access to these opportunities for many disadvantaged women. Some of our Projects offer crèche, preschool and afterschool services. In 2024, we offered **1,146** childcare sessions to children in our project areas.



Strategic Priority 3: POLICY & EQUALITY

WCI Women's Projects continue to play a critical role in raising awareness of gender equality through engagement with local development companies, rural development agencies and other local, regional and national bodies tasked with community and local development.

The Women's Equality & Development Programme provides an opportunity for greater visibility for women in poverty and living in disadvantaged communities.

WCI Projects have the capacity and the experience to act as a link between national policy actions and what happens on the ground. The local workplans of our projects respond to locally identified needs but are also informed by national policies such as:

- Young Ireland: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028 (Prepared by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth);
- National Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025;
- LGBTI Inclusion Strategy;
- Connecting for Life: Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020 (currently under review).
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) and the National Disability Authority, DESSA.
- Our Communities: A framework policy for local and community development in Ireland;
- Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities Strategy
- Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence 2022-2026.

WCI Projects work collaboratively in their area to ensure that they resource individuals and communities that are most socially excluded to access participate and become involved with policy, practice and decision-making processes on matters affecting them and their local community.

The Projects of WCI provide opportunities for greater influence and synergies with local government structures, and particularly in ensuring that gender equality is mainstreamed across local government and through the work of local community and development organisations.

Projects have actively participated in planning and consultation workshops feeding into Local Community Development Plan, ensuring that the voice of women was heard at local planning and decision-making tables.

Alignment and the restructuring of local government in recent years has meant changes in many of the areas in which WCI works, however some project staff have been elected on to the new Local Community Development Committee in their area while others are members of local community development and social inclusion working groups.

A major strength of WCI is the way in which it effectively connects women at the local level to a strategic role at the national level, and in turn links national priorities to the local level. WCI staff represented women's affairs at local level and participated in decision making structures. WCI staff and advisory group members sat on boards and committees including LDC Boards, RAPID AITs, PPNs, Youth Forum, local education networks.

Communication between WCI staff and the wider network of community and interagency workers who have built up great working relationships over the years and were able to

respond to issues as they arose such as meeting the needs of hundreds of Ukrainian refugees who fled the war in March 2022 in addition to the increasing numbers of other asylum seekers.

WCI Project staff represent their projects and the women of their communities on various local planning decision-making fora, committees, and interagency groups. These groups include; Public Participation Networks, Childcare Centres, Family Resource Centres, Community Network Meetings, Drugs Task forces, Equality Networks, County Councils, Education & Training Boards, Migrant Support Groups, Violence Against Women Networks, Local Development Companies, Child & Family Support Networks, Meitheals, Regeneration Networks, Cultural Networks, and a wide range of local community organisations committees.



Strategic Priority 4: DEVELOPMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

As a national organisation with a total of 17 community-based projects with professional community development staff, WCI Projects aim to grow and develop in the areas in which they are located. Our new name and image have allowed us an opportunity post-pandemic to promote our Projects and services as open, nonjudgmental, friendly, and safe spaces where women can go for support and to meet other women for social interaction.

As we continue to grow and develop, staff also continue to up-skill and train in new areas that are of benefit to the women in their communities.

In 2024, WCI Project staff undertook training in: Unconscious Bias, Intercultural Training, Health & Safety, Safe Talk & Assist Suicide Prevention, LGBTQ+ training, First Aid, Microsoft Office, Train the Trainer, Physical Activity Leadership, Tusla Meitheal, Understanding & Managing Conflict and Training on the Dignity and Respect in the workplace section of the Staff Handbook/policies Manual was provided for all WCI staff.

Various WCI Shared Learning sessions were held online nationally for all WCI Staff.

We held an in-person organisation wide WCI 'Making Connections' - Patron, Board & Staff Gathering in November 2024.



NATIONAL WORK THROUGHOUT 2024

- **WCI GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S MANIFESTO AS A LIVING DOCUMENT** - Newly updated 'WCI Grassroots Manifesto' was launched in January 2024 nationally and locally in projects throughout January and February 2024.
- **CARE REFERENDUM** – WCI engaged in conversations with Ailbhe Smyth on the up and-coming referendum on Article 41.2 of the Irish Constitution. WCI staff encouraged participants to ensure they were registered to vote and avail of their constitutional right to use their voice in voting.
- **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY** All WCI projects hosted their own IWD events, hosting local initiatives, seminars and information activities. Nationally WCI led out on an online campaign in line with UN IWD theme of 'Inspire Inclusion'.
- **WCI WOMEN AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME (WILL)** - Based on the 2023 WILL evaluation report recommendations WCI updated the Programme Manual. WCI Projects delivered the 2024 WCI WILL programmes in their local communities – a total of 129 women took part.
- **WCI HOSTED AN EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION AWARENESS SEMINAR** - Funded through The Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission (IHREC), the event was held in February with WCI staff and board engaging in the seminar. The event saw six guest speakers speaking on the following D & I subject matters:
 - Ableism – Independent Living Movement - Fiona Weldon
 - Equality & Sexism – Dr Aideen Quilty UCD
 - Racism – Dr Jennifer Okeke
 - Ageism - Ailbhe Smyth
 - Homophobia and Transphobia – Matt Kennedy
 - Unpacking our Unconscious Bias – Paula Fagan, LGBTI Ireland
- **SOUTHEAST TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP WITH WCI** -
 - SETU has funded a Module in Advocacy for WCI Staff. 22 WCI staff took part. The programme ran until 8th February 2024.
 - SETU provided a fully funded, 8 weeks: Learning to Learn module. 8 women have taken part in the programme to a group of learners progressing from our WCI Women in Leadership programme.
 - Bystander Intervention Programme: SETU have made available to WCI staff access to the SETU Bystander Intervention Programme which aims to highlight the danger of normalising and accepting abusive behaviour and through education, inform and empower programme participants to better understand their ability to intervene as pro-social bystanders.
- **WCI PRE BUDGET SUBMISSION** - was submitted to the Minister in June. The submission was circulated by each of the 17 Local WCI Projects to their public representatives.
- **WCI OUTREACH STRATEGY GUIDE** - WCI consulted with Projects to develop a WCI Outreach Strategy Guide to be used as a tool for feminist outreach community development work by WCI Projects. The guide was circulated to all

WCI Projects and highlights WCI models of best practice, 'Reaching out to & engaging women: Making Connections with Marginalised and Isolated Women: Models of Good Practice and Innovative Activities.

- **WCI DEI FRAMEWORK** – WCI’s Board has developed and circulated a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Framework and WCI DEI Statement for engaging with Women. The WCI Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Framework and Statement outline’s WCI’s commitment to promote and facilitate equity, inclusion, and to develop a sense of belonging. The purpose of the DEI Framework is to support staff in ensuring a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment which respects the diversity of women.
- **WCI SUBMISSION ON DEVELOPMENT OF NEW STRATEGY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS** - Following consultation with and by local WCI Projects, WCI submitted a written submission to the Department, including a survey with input from the women we work with. WCI also took part in the Department’s consultations to further inform the development of the next National Strategy for Women and Girls.
- **THE RED SHOES PROJECT** – Through our local WCI Lucan Project, WCI hosted a powerful art activism project known as The Red Shoes, created by renowned artist Elina Chauvet. This project aims to raise awareness about violence against women and commemorate the 266+ women who have been murdered in Ireland since 1996. All 17 WCI Projects participated by supporting the participants to collect and paint shoes red, creating a poignant visual statement against femicide – these were then sent to WCI Lucan. The installation held in Tallaght on Sunday 8th December, showcased a collaborative effort to raise awareness about violence against women across the nation.
- **WCI CLIMATE JUSTICE, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, AND A JUST TRANSITION TRAINING AWARENESS SEMINAR** - WCI were successful in our application to IHREC to host a WCI Climate Justice, Environmental Justice, and a Just Transition Training Awareness Seminar. (To take place early 2025.)

WCI National Representation Spaces

WCI are represented on the NSWG Implementation Committee and NGO sub-group, AONTAS, Abortion Working Group, Irish Observatory on Violence against Women, Policy Advisory Group on Women in Local Government and Development, Irish Network Against Racism (INAR), All-Island Women’s Forum, Women’s Support Network of Northern Ireland, Community Work Ireland (CWI), CRANN, Community Platform and the Ukraine Civil Society Forum.

WCI Representation – 2024 Meetings & Events:

- Community Platform meetings and Joint Working Groups.
- Community Workers Ireland Policy and Practice Sub-Group. (CWI) Social Inclusion Forum Workshops, EAPN's Network.
- IHREC Events - Achieving Equality at Work; Thought Forum - 'Keeping Hate Out of Community Events; Feminist Communities for Climate Justice
- IHREC - Live Screening of Examination Proceedings on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). WCI raised issues across the report, in the sections on civil society participation, education, and participation in public life.
- Gorm Building Bridges in Business Masterclass Series.
- UCD RESEARCH - WCI is working with UCD on a research project which will explore women's' experiences of the Community University Partnership Programme in Women, Gender and Social Justice at UCD.
- Crann Childcare Support Agency.
- NWCI Event: Dublin Human Rights and Arts Festival. "Where are women organising?" National Programme Coordinator gave a presentation on the work of WCI and how women's engagement with WCI can lead to activism.
- National Women's Council of Ireland events & AGM.
- TU Dublin Research Path 3 - Research 'University Partnerships.'
- Glencree Gender Equality & Climate Justice Panel & Network.
- AONTAS: Storytelling for Connecting Communities Training.
- AONTAS CEN meetings.
- Report Launch of the All-Island Violence Against Women Working Group.
- Briefing event on the EU Directive to combat Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. Frances Fitzgerald MEP and Una Clarke, lead technical negotiator for the European Parliament briefing - an opportunity to understand the impact that the Directive will have in Ireland and across the European Union, and what measures are included in the finalised piece of legislation.
- Women's Aid Impact Report Event.
- Rochtain - Effective Oireachtas Communications for Community and Voluntary Organisations.
- Centre for Effective Services (CES), Community Foundation Ireland and the Bechtaire Fund launch of research report titled: "The Power of Community Education: Supporting lone parents to fulfil their potential in education, employment, and society". WCI Ronanstown were a case study for research.
- WCI Interview with European Institute for Gender Equality regarding their study on institutional mechanisms for gender equality and gender mainstreaming Area H of the Beijing Platform.

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Department of Children, Equality,
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