LEITRIM WOMEN IN THE 90S

A PROJECTED VIEW INTO THE MILLENNIUM

Bridie Regan



Pictured at the launch of survey (Left to Right) Margaret Harkin, Bridie Regan, Mai McMorrow, Mary Fee, Bernard Durkin - Dept. of Social Welfare, Larry Bateson ADM, Mary Margaret Parsons, Frances Feely, Celia Keeneghan and Margaret Cornyn.

In an exceptionally rural area, such as North Leitrim, factors such as lack of access to transport, information, child care, education and employment can act to impede women's ability to participate as fully as they may wish in the life of the area. The high proportion of the population which is age dependant places considerable demands on the caring role traditionally undertaken by women, whilst exclusion from the live register and related FAS courses enhances the 'invisibility' of women in social and economic terms. In this context, initiatives designed to break down physical and social isolation between women are of paramount importance in improving their quality of life.

North Leitrim Women's Resource Group (NLWRG) came together in 1990. It was initiated by a group of women who had taken part in locally run Personal Development course. The co-ordinator of the course steered the women in bringing the Group together. She stayed with the NLWRG for over two years and for the last three years the women have taken complete responsibility for the running of the Group.

Most of the women joined the Group out of curiosity and saw it as a way of getting out of the house and meeting other women. At the outset, the Group aimed to spread to other women the chance of getting out of the house and to value themselves as individuals through attending courses and training. At this stagehe focus of courses and training was primarily social, i.e. to provide an interest for, and also support and companionship to, women living in rural Leitrim.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES - The overall aim of the Group is to achieve a better quality of life for women in North Leitrim through the provision of social, educational and employment opportunities.

The Group set out to provide a way for women to:

- get out of the home
- take part in activities other than
- domestic/family duties
- value themselves as individuals

The initial course had been held in the urban centre of Manorhamilton. As many of the Group's target Population lived in rural Leitrim, it was decided to bring courses to rural areas. This course of action took account of difficulties of access and transport. It was also done to address communication between rural women at community level.

Target Areas - North Leitrim covers an area of less than 500 square miles with just over 10,000 people (1991 Census of Population). This indicates a very low population density. Manorhamilton is the main urban centre in the region. In order to make the courses as accessible as possible to women in North Leitrim, the NLWRG chose six target areas from which to begin its work. These were Manorhamilton, Kiltyclogher, Glenfarne, Rossinver, Kinlough and Dromahaire. Later courses were spread to Drumkeeran and Ballinaglera.

The Group make a policy of not overlapping on work already covered by other Groups in the area. Their main target group are women who are full-time homemakers, but all women are welcome. Overcoming difficulties of access and transport for women in North Leitrim is an important policy issue which the Group addresses. Through its activities to date, the NLWRG has been developing its role in overcoming the exclusion and isolation of a particularly marginalized group in Irish society.

Assessment of Social and Educational Needs of Women in North Leitrim - In 1996 the NLWRG undertook a comprehensive survey of women in North Leitrim. The aim of the research was to:-

- evaluate work already done by the group through a survey of past participants on courses run by the group.
- establish the future role of the group through a survey of women in North

Leitrim to assess their needs and explore how the group could meet them.

Research was undertaken by group members under the guidance of an external consultant. The findings of the study were published in a report entitled 'The Voice of Women in North Leitrim'.

The report enhanced the groups awareness of the gaps in the North Leitrim area in terms of support, advice and information for women, particularly those who are isolated and disadvantaged, while it underlined the need for the continuing provision of short 'taster' courses for women such as:-

- Women & Health
- First Aid
- Yoga
- Art
- Aerobics
- Interior Design
- Stress Management
- Parenting
- Reflexology
- Aromatherapy
- Flower Arranging
- Beauty Grooming/Colour Co-ordination
- Introduction to Computers

On April 1996 through on-going negotiations with FAS a six month extensive Computer course was brought to Manorhamilton. Sixteen participants took part in this training, which was an accredited course for City & Guilds Certificates. The trainees received FAS training allowances, this to us was a great achievement as it was bringing revenue into Manorhamilton, and the spin-off was all round. This type of course, we would like to think, could be repeated at a future time.

PROJECTED VIEWS INTO THE MILLENNIUM

1. To provide a social outlet for women in North Leitrim and a place for them to meet and network.
2. To heighten awareness amongst women in North Leitrim of the beneficial social, educational and developmental effects of participation in women's and community activities.
3. To seek out ways and means of tapping into existing and available resources for the betterment of women.
4. To plan and implement projects which will address problems caused by economic, social and gender imbalances in rural areas.
5. To facilitate, support and provide training for the women of North Leitrim, based on their identified needs.
6. To maintain an active working relationship with the North Western Health Board and the Department of Social Welfare, facilitating a two way flow of information in relation of health and welfare needs and services.
7. To strengthen the group's internal dynamics and nurture the development of new and existing women's groups in North Leitrim by facilitating the provision of management training and organisational skills.
8. To maintain and strengthen links with FAS, the VEC and other statutory agencies with a view to developing a coherent multi-agency response to the needs of women in North Leitrim.

RETIREMENT OF ÁINE REYNOLDS

Back in September '82
We first had the pleasure of meeting you
When you took our eldest through the door
And poor old mothers were feeling sore.

But the years roll on one by one
A new beginning for each daughter or son
You taught, you guided and nursed each fall
And today we say "thank you" from one and all.

To you Miss Reynolds each one was special
In all they did, they had your blessing
So good-bye, good luck from everyone here
Deep down in our hearts you'll always be near.

Poem was written by Marcella Conboy, Aughnaglace, Aughavas. Marcella and George Conboy have a family of seven, three girls and four boys. All are past pupils of Miss Reynolds who retired recently as principal and infant teacher of Aughavas School.



Left to Right -Front Row Rachel Bohan, Gráinne Tiernan, Nicola McKiernan, Aoife Williams, Lorraine Moran, Tomás Fitzpatrick, Louise McGuire, Adrian McIntyre, Geraldine McBrien, Shane Conboy. Middle Row Feargal Gallogly, Lisa McIntyre, Sharon Sweeney, Bríd McBrien, Clodagh McLaughlin, Phillippa McGuire, Michelle McKiernan, Aiden McGuire, Claire McKiernan, Nicola Kenny, Brian Moran, Niall McGuire.Back Row Anne Marie Keegan, Conor Brennan, Mark Conboy, Ciarán Moran, Laura McKiernan, Aine Nic Razhnaill O.S., Turlough Williams, Damian McKiernan, Louise Farrelly, Fionnuala Bohan, Joanne Murray.