



Connecting Women, Building Communities

Strategy statement
Roscommon Women's Network

2019 -2024



Chairperson's Address

We are delighted to introduce our strategy statement which will guide the development of RWN over the next five years. This publication represents the best thinking of our Staff, Board members and Volunteers, and we have carefully considered how we can build on our successes and continue to be a role model when it comes to engaging women who want to make a positive difference in their families and communities.

This year long engagement in making the strategy helped us to highlight our achievements and our members are determined to work on our four goals, namely:

1. Sustain our networks and alliances through participation in decision making and overcoming barriers to our progression.
2. Protecting our environment through education and developing practical supports and local solutions to encourage environmental protection.
3. Enable women to generate an income through education, skills training and work experience.
4. Encourage mutual support and self-reliance by empowering women to challenge inequality nationally and globally, by encouraging active participation and having a welcoming approach to diversity and inclusiveness.

In making all this happen, I would like to thank our previous *Chairperson*, Tara Farrell, whose dedication and expertise has helped RWN flourish. Tara has been and continues to be integral to the important decisions and direction of RWN and we value her commitment, investment of time and continued support.

I need to acknowledge and sincerely thank the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWN) for funding and supporting the core staff to manage the RWN project locally. Being a member of the NCCWN enables locally based projects like RWN to have a national profile and voice as well as providing a platform for the sharing of learning, and best practice among the seventeen NCCWN women's networks around the country.

I would like to thank Nora Fahy, our *Project Co-ordinator* for her vision, hard work and long hours and for her generosity of time and guidance that she so willingly gives to help and support others. Nora is the driving force behind RWN and we are all grateful to have a valued, committed and inspirational leader.

We are also very lucky to have Maria Harris, our *Development worker*, on our team, her varied skills, dedication and hard work have a positive effect on the services of RWN and I am very thankful to her for her commitment.

I would like to thank the *staff of the Training Centre*, James, Teresa and Ursula for the excellent work they do in providing a range of accredited relevant courses incorporating the ethos of RWN.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work of Liz Hayes, *Corporate Community Management Consultants*, who with the help of Nora, and staff, volunteers and board members has guided the work on this Strategic Plan.

And finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all the *members and volunteers*, past and present, for giving their time so generously to help RWN make a positive impact in the lives of so many.

Una Groarke
Chairperson

Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) is a local community project and charity dedicated to supporting women and families throughout County Roscommon

Our work is all about engaging with women and getting to understand the needs of the county from the perspective of women's experience. This starts from a determined commitment to providing a welcoming, friendly space where women can enjoy meeting others and choose how they want to engage with the network. Some 800 women per year use the drop-in facilities and associated services and we outreach around the county to another 200+ women per year. We want to 'do something' to change personal and community circumstances in ways that address women's concerns and ambitions at all stages of life for themselves, their families and their community.

Publishing a strategy

This strategy was over a year in the making as we engaged the Board, Staff and Women involved in all aspects of our work. We used external facilitation to help us think about what we had learned from our work over the last ten years. This helped us to see how needs had changed, our profile and skills had grown and that we have the potential to do some amazing work over the next five years. We know that we need to work in partnership with others locally, regionally and nationally and this strategy sets out our ambitions and plans for the future.

MAKING AN IMPACT

We set out, as a women's network, to make County Roscommon, a better place for women. Many of us know the experience of isolation and times when we are less able to reach out and make new friends or learn in ways that suit our particular circumstances. We consider it a privilege to earn women's respect and trust and even as we support individuals and groups, they in turn support the network. After ten years of working to realise the power of women's participation and developing our network, we are confident in our ability to

- Make a positive difference in the lives of women and their families
- Take informed risks and relish opportunities for innovation
- Know how local structures and services work and influence change
- Get better access to local services
- Celebrate and share women's experience and ambitions by connecting across the county and beyond
- Continue to make County Roscommon a better place for women and families

Staff & Volunteers

RWN has 4.5 staff and 18 Volunteers at the heart of the action

The RWN Voluntary Management Committee consists of twelve company directors. A full time Project Co-ordinator and a part time Project Worker manage and support RWN's work in the resource centre and around the county. Three full time training staff support twenty-one full time trainees at any one time, to achieve QQI accreditation level 3, 4 & 5 major and minor awards. The day-to-day running of the RWN Charity Shop is undertaken by one Tús worker and seventeen very reliable and committed volunteer shop assistants. Our resource/drop in/information centre admin and reception duties are undertaken by one RSS worker, two CE workers and one volunteer.



Facts and Figures from 2018

RWN supports, services and county wide development work

One thousand and eighty one women engaged in activities in 2018. Eight hundred and eleven engaged directly through the RWN Resource Centre and two hundred and seventy women engaged through our development worker around the county.

The women tell us that they feel relaxed in RWN. It feels “like home away from home”, a “safe space.” Both staff and volunteers enjoy getting to meet women from around the county.

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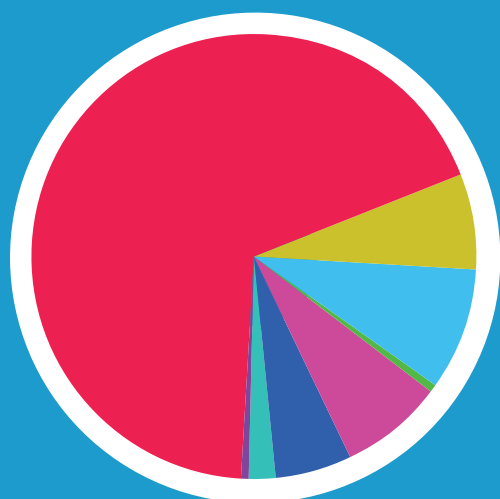
I was supported to access a wide range of supports, help with getting information and support from other agencies, as well as the ongoing help I needed to keep me going and to follow through.

This is a place where I can come back to again and again whatever my problem, even if it's the same problem, or even when I don't have a particular problem, and just want a chat. I know I will be listened to and not be judged.

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2018 Financial Breakdown



€66,520 Core funding (NCCWN)

enabled us to leverage over **€190,000**

from other funding sources

Training Centre GRETB	€125,871
Women into Business Ulster Bank	€12,500
Intercultural Project Dept of Integration Roscommon County Council National Lottery	€5,000 €15,250 €1,000
Women's Manifesto Roscommon Leader Partnership (SICAP)	€1,100
Charity Shop Social Enterprise Sales Roscommon County Council Community Grant Scheme	€13,793 €400
Textile Upcycling Project Roscommon County Council	€7,600
Personal Development Dept of Social Protection	€10,000
Women's Group's Roscommon County Council Arts	€682

RWN successfully leveraged funding over €190,000 in 2018

New Activities

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

We are constantly finding new ways to involve women. In 2018, we collaborated with GRETB to deliver a community education programme on environmental awareness. We encourage women and families to gain a more critical understanding of how small changes in daily routines can positively effect and protect our community and environment.

These six week part time **"Healthy Greener You"** courses were delivered and completed in five towns in the county between September and December 2018, attended by over 70 participants both male and female of all ages. The participants feedback is informing our future plans and more courses are planned for 2019 along with a **step up Healthy Greener You course**.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK

Over 300 people from over 25 different nationalities and cultures took part in a variety of activities in 2018. This included a futsal tournament, Irish dancing, sports taster day, drama workshops, capoeira, singing, dancing and much more. A concert showcasing the drama and arts was performed for Culture night at the Roscommon Arts Centre. The steering committee consisted of participants from various cultures and relevant agencies. This project was videoed and can be viewed on our website - www.rwn.ie and on our You Tube channel - Roscommon Women's Network

A successful collaborative process led by RWN. The work is all about supporting integration and raising awareness by regularly bringing people together from different cultures and nationalities, with support from FAI, Roscommon Sports Partnership, Local Links, EROC Ballaghaderreen, Ballyhaunis Refugee Centre, Emergency accommodation centre in Athlone and local sports and dancing clubs. This project was funded by Department of Integration and Roscommon County Council.

On-going Support to Individuals and Groups

A PLACE TO MAKE FRIENDS AND GET INVOLVED

Since 2007 the contact point for RWN activities has been Castlerea. People interested in getting involved in the community or seeking information about supports, services and activities are always welcome. Staff and volunteers know the value of making connections and supporting women and families with whatever they need as they take on new challenges.

When RWN began development work in Castlerea, members realised that the town needed a Family Resource Centre (FRC) and for a number of years endeavoured to meet this need while continually seeking funding for much needed family supports. Finally in 2016 RWN secured funding from Tusla for a new FRC for the Castlerea community. Now that the Family Resource Centre is open, RWN needs to re-focus our limited resources on working more intensively throughout the county Roscommon and to focus primarily on women. We also recognise that there is a need to create a dynamic new space so that the current atmosphere of mutual support and friendship can continue to be a stepping stone to wider community involvement.

Charity Shop

The RWN Charity Shop is a volunteer led facility. It is a space for social inclusion and enables ease of access to supports and services. The shop proceeds financially sustain the entire RWN Resource Centre and also provides work experience opportunities for many students including the QQI level 5 Retail students in RWN Training Centre. The shop creates a vital link for the community and depends on community support.

Training Centre

The Training Centre enabled forty six students to complete training in 2017/2018. Learners complete full time QQI accredited courses in Information Processing, Retail Sales and accredited in Employability Skills. The retail learners do a few hours weekly work experience in the charity shop and all learners can also avail of counselling supports, attend awareness workshops, the Citizen Information Service, MABS and other outreach clinics available from the RWN programme.

The Roscommon Women's Manifesto Group

The Roscommon Women's Manifesto group, which supports women to be more politically aware, started out in early 2017 and has gone from strength to strength in terms of growing membership, alliances and experience in 2018. The group organised an event themed "Smashing the Status Quo" in November 2018, to provide an insight on running for and being in political life.

Our Strategy

STATING THE RWN AMBITION

In RWN we meet women where they are at. We encourage women's voices and support them to be heard and heeded. RWN creates space for women to network in friendly, safe, comfortable and non-threatening environments. We reach out to all women, knowing the importance of being culturally appropriate and accepting of women's diverse experience. We celebrate the unique contribution of all women as we grow in confidence and build momentum to be involved and take up leadership in our communities.

OUR VALUES

- Women-centred through all the work
- Equality through raising awareness of inequality
- Empowerment through increasing women's voice and self-confidence
- Progression for all women at all stages of life
- Confidentiality through being clear about boundaries
- Accountability for our actions and resources



Our Approach

Community based work depends on being able to organise with flexibility and constantly adapt to needs that change and become more apparent over time. In order to name our working principles, our members contribute their opinion based on what they see and experience at Roscommon Women's Network.

We are an enterprising, business savvy group who know how to share ideas and create collaborations that do amazing work with minimal resources.

- ➔ RWN depends on two key projects that provide support in the immediate area of Castlerea and also bring much needed additional income to the network
- ➔ We share a common purpose and strive to live our values
- ➔ We operate an open-door policy where everyone is welcome
- ➔ People hear about us through word of mouth and we make friends across the network
- ➔ We make it possible to engage with the board, staff and volunteers without facing lots of bureaucracy
- ➔ Our work is about sharing information, discussing different views and opinions and thinking carefully about what needs to happen and why
- ➔ It is about building confidence as we go along – individually and as a group



Choosing Four Strategic Priorities

**Sustain our
networks and
alliances**

**Protect our
Environment**

**Enable women
to generate an
income**

**Encourage
mutual support
& self-reliance**

Goal 1: Sustain our networks and alliances

1. Involve women and local groups in celebrating the contribution of women in our communities
 - a. Develop our relationship with our sister NCCWN projects around the country, enabling learning, sharing information that supports local work as well as working on national branding and national projects
 - b. Re-imagine and celebrate safe spaces for women by working in collaboration with local groups and agencies for example annual International Women's Day events
 - c. Continue to support existing and establish new women's groups around the county

2. Maximise women's participation in all aspects of local decision making
 - a. Support, develop and build the capacity of the **manifesto group**
 - b. Continue to build collaborations with the Longford Women's Manifesto and other manifesto groups around the country
 - c. Encourage and provide opportunities for volunteering and awareness raising work
 - d. Provide training and capacity building for service users and volunteers to progress onto local and national committees including the RWN Board

3. Highlight 'blind spots' and institutional barriers to participation as we promote greater co-operation in the design and delivery of local services
 - a. Identify barriers and challenges by listening to women and being a voice for women in service design and delivery
 - b. Work collaboratively with all stakeholders to address barriers and find solutions to issues
 - c. Support local PPN & other local structures to adopt gender balance in the local and national structures
 - d. Encourage our members and staff to participate and represent the network on local and national structures



Goal 2: Protect our environment

1. Educate and inform individuals and families on how their personal choices impact on the environment
 - a. Provide community training and awareness raising, build individual and community capacity
 - b. Work with GRETB to develop accredited training in this area
 - c. Collaborate with Roscommon Environmental Network, Roscommon County Council and all related agencies locally and nationally
 - d. Establish a steering committee and secure funding for an upcycling centre in the county

2. Highlight how the exploitation of the natural environment is linked to women's inequality
 - a. Reaffirm a collective community development approach to tackling the environment protection problem
 - b. Collaborate with other groups and agencies to assess attitudes and experiences of protecting the county's natural environment
 - c. Hold a seminar in the county on a community development and feminist approach to tackling environmental issues
 - d. Explore the potential to link with women's groups globally around climate change

3. Develop practical supports and local solutions to encourage environmental protection
 - a. Source funding and resources to deliver a social enterprise upcycling project in the county
 - b. Volunteers, learners, services users, and community groups to be provided with environmental protection awareness raising training on an ongoing basis
 - c. Become role models for best practice in environmental protection



Goal 3: Enable women to generate an income

1. Source investment for the design and delivery of relevant learning opportunities around income generation
 - a. Collaborate with third level institutions and ETB to develop 3rd level education and training in the county including virtual learning
 - b. Create opportunities for women to generate small business ideas and provide appropriate support and links to other relevant agencies
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2. Find innovative ways for women to get paid work
 - a. Continue to provide and expand our on-going confidence building, skills training and work experience
 - b. Build relationships with local businesses and colleges to advocate for and support the most marginalised women
 - c. Seek funding to support women into business and women into employment
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3. Initiate working with women who are NOT on the live register, to generate an interest in non-traditional work roles/income generation
 - a. Develop and support RWN TUS/CE/RSS scheme staff, volunteers and learners into employment, further education and active citizenship
 - b. Collaborate with other agencies working with this group
 - c. Target and consult with women to identify the need, approach and solutions



Goal 4: Encourage mutual support and self-reliance

1. Empower women to challenge inequality and act in solidarity with others locally, nationally and globally
 - a. Continue to provide a safe space for building relationships and open dialogue across cultures and communities
 - b. Support the development of Roscommon Cultural Forum involving representatives from the different cultures and relevant agencies
 - c. Support active participation of all cultures by highlighting barriers to participation and finding solutions
 - d. Identify and highlight barriers to participation as experienced by the different cultures

2. Co-ordinate action to provide opportunities for peer learning, acquiring new skills and stepping into community leadership
 - a. Support RWN Charity Shop to develop and expand
 - b. Support and develop the RWN Charity Shop volunteers to learn new skills especially around environmental protection, customer care, marketing, sales, supervising and financial reporting
 - c. Establish a second RWN Charity Shop / Upcycling Enterprise
 - d. Source funding for staff to operate the charity shop and Upcycling Enterprise

3. Promote a holistic and welcoming approach to diversity and inclusion
 - a. Continue to provide valuable volunteering opportunities for the most vulnerable and marginalised in the community
 - b. Work closely with all agencies that support marginalised and vulnerable communities
 - c. Provide ongoing awareness raising training on Mental Health, LGBT, Cultural Diversity etc, to staff, volunteers, learners and the wider community
 - c. Provide training for staff and volunteers in integration and diversity and arrange talks/workshops on social inclusion and on issues facing marginalised communities
 - d. Continue to develop RWN as an environment where talents, experience and skills are recognised and new skills are gained in a welcoming safe environment

Getting under way in 2019

This strategy helped us to see that we are no longer in a 'founding phase' and that our continued success and presence in the county leads to greater demand and higher expectations.

We acknowledged the fear of losing 'the personal touch' as we continue to expand (resources permitting) and engage with women in more creative ways. We know that if the figures do not add up, we cannot afford to trade on good will and the invisible work that we tend to do, in order to sustain the network.

Having named the risks highlighted in the consultations for this strategy, we are also keen to sustain what we do and remain open to new possibilities in 2019. **This includes:**

- ➔ Open a base for environmental practice in Monksland or Castlerea
- ➔ Continue in Castlerea as a centre with a focus on learning and social engagement
- ➔ Create a focus for multi-cultural practice & integration in Roscommon Town
- ➔ Continue programme activities on a county wide basis



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A steady ship that needs a new direction

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*We're a collective of kindred spirits that make an awful
lot happen with little more than our wits and a shoestring
budget*

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