

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Please find enclosed our submission for the Public Consultation- Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality 2020.

If you have any queries about any of the below, please don't hesitate to get in contact with Lorraine O'Reilly, Community Development Worker with Travellers, Longford Community Resources Clg at [loreilly@lcr1.ie](mailto:loreilly@lcr1.ie) or call us at 043 3345555. Alternatively, you can post your questions to Longford Community Resources Clg, Templemichael, Longford, N39 RH22.

Kind regards,

Lorraine O'Reilly.

## **Submission to the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality 2020**

### **Introduction**

Longford Community Resources Clg is the integrated local development company for County Longford. The company was established in 1995 with the core purpose to promote positive change in the areas of social, economic, environmental, community and cultural development throughout the whole of County Longford using community development and local development approaches.

In response to the call for submissions to the Citizens' Assembly, Longford Community Resources Clg carried out a discussion on the subject of gender equality with our Longford Town Health and Wellbeing Group. This group is made up of women from a diverse range of backgrounds. The participants from this group would like to highlight the following barriers and suggestions after discussing gender equality.

### **Gender Norms and Stereotypes**

#### **Barriers and Challenges**

After discussing gender equality as a group it was identified by the participants that men are believed to be stronger than women and therefore men have more opportunities of getting better paid jobs than women. The pressure associated with childcare can contribute to gender inequality as the women in the group questioned how they would pay for childcare. They feel that it can be seen that men prefer to be the ones working, however women also want to work. Women want to get out of the house and have their independence. Women wish to socialise with others and to earn for themselves, and provide for their families. It was conveyed within the group that the home environment can be a hard space to work in as it means you are usually in the same environment each day. Therefore, it can be a factor affecting one's mental health or it could contribute to physical problems. Women need to see for themselves if working is worthwhile for them financially or if it is putting an extra strain on themselves, and their family. The women in the group highlighted how their children look at them as stay at home mothers, which is not

always seen in a positive light. As their children see other women working and compare them to others who have a career. Children are able to see how women and men are treated in the home and in society. They question why things are the way they are. In certain communities, women are expected to carry out the traditional roles in the home once they marry. This blocks and discourages women finishing school, participating in third level education and being part of a profession.

### Steps to Address Issues Raised

It was identified there is little value put on caring in the home or caring in general. Nobody sees the difficulties involved in picking up and dropping off children from crèche and school.

Conversations need to be had and the voices of those who care for their family or others to be heard. It needs to be heard locally and nationally for people to be valued and understood. Women and men should be encouraged to take up roles in the caring profession. Also, the value of stay at home parents and carers should be recognized to reduce the negative stigma which can be sometimes attached. Women should be positively encouraged to take up work while not losing out financially. As lone parents may want to work and when they have the courage to enter the working field they can face financial obstacles and may not be able to access extra supports they may need.

Conversations need to start at home about challenging stereotypes and social norms. This can be done when people are empowered and given education in the community on addressing inequalities relating to gender. The education system should be encouraging young people to try subjects they are interested in and not just those they are expected to undertake. Young women should further be encouraged to take up opportunities, such as apprenticeships in plumbing and electricians if that's what they want to do.

## **Work: Occupational Segregation by Gender, Gender Discrimination and the Gender Pay Gap**

### Barriers and Challenges

The women in the group highlighted that there can be a gap between men and women when working in particular fields, such as a pay gap or how men and women are treated. The group expressed that women need enough money to pay bills and their day-to-day costs. They questioned why women should not have an income as women are entitled to earn for themselves and use that money as they see fit, or to even treat themselves. It provides an opportunity to be independent. It was mentioned in the group that one of the women had heard of some employers not willing to employ women as they were pregnant. Perhaps, this was due to the need to take off time or perhaps it is because they would only be able to undertake certain tasks, however women should not be discriminated because of this. We discussed how roles were given to men and women years ago and how with time there has been some changes, nevertheless the ideas around certain gender roles and social norms still exist.

### Steps to Address Issues Raised

Traditional roles for men and women need to be critiqued and questioned why that was the case versus why those norms should change with time. Men in childminding roles are still seen as abnormal to some. This can be difficult for a man who is in this profession as they may be seen or treated differently because of their gender. It was even highlighted within the group that some would prefer a woman, but why is this the case, does it come down to women being seen as more nurturing. It was also talked about how more women need to be encouraged to take up apprenticeships, such as electricians if that is something they have an interest in. Therefore, spaces need to be provided for role models to come in and discuss their experiences. It would be particularly powerful to have role models from marginalized, low socioeconomic and disadvantaged communities explain their experiences. It would signal a change in society to others who have not seen this change before at first hand.

We also discussed the LGBTI+ community. People are more aware of gender identities and there have been improvements to ensure discrimination does not take place based on one's gender. However, for many communities LGBTI+ is a complex and difficult subject to overcome. However, this is due to a lack of understanding of the identities associated with LGBTI+ and why people identify themselves as part of this community. More education should be provided in school and community settings to overcome this barrier.

## **Care, Paid and Unpaid, as a Social and Family Responsibility**

### Barriers and Challenges

As seen from the lived experiences of the group participants, girls tend to be the family members who cook and clean at home. These responsibilities and caring roles are particularly placed on the eldest child, as age can be a factor. It was identified that for girls the caring role can come natural to them. However, it was conveyed that it depends on how people raise their children. Jobs that are assigned to girls and boys, or jobs that are expected by their parents can affect and influence their outlook on what is expected from them later in life. If conversations on equality and equal responsibilities are not discussed at a young age then this can lead to the continuing social norms which society accept.

### Steps to Address Issues raised

Conversations on responsibility and equality need to be had in the home, in school and in wider society. Caring needs to be seen and valued as a role, job and a career. We need to question why certain roles are still presumed to be attached to particular genders, particularly in marginalised and disadvantaged communities. It was said that parents should have conversations with their children about opportunities available to them and try to ensure their children are equally involved in household chores so less stigma is associated to different roles. However, education is needed in communities to encourage such equality as not everyone is aware of opportunities available to them, and their community.

When policies are being drawn up it is critical that equality, human rights and social justice are values which underpin all policies thus promoting gender equality. People who have the lived experiences need to be involved so that policy is appropriately representing them and others in similar situations. The root causes of gender inequality need to be identified and addressed in order for change to occur, otherwise only the symptoms of gender inequality may be solved.

## **Women's Access To, and Representation in, Public Life and Decision Making**

## Barriers and Challenges

Women are represented in public life, however not as much as men. For instance, the majority of people in power are men as men are seen as stronger and powerful figures in society. Therefore, it can be more difficult for the experience and outlook of women to be heard in decision making, and for women to gain access to powerful positions.

## Steps to Address Inequalities

Women need to be supported in undertaking leadership roles and in participating in decision making. Female role models are needed to empower women to take up similar roles and to change how women are portrayed in the media and in society, particularly in communities like the Traveller community. Incentives should be put in place to encourage people to try different subjects and jobs. Male role models and people from the LGBTI+ community also need to see role models which people can relate to and identify with. This needs to be done through education, to create a critical consciousness about gender equality and to effectively create long term change to produce fairer opportunities in society.

It is by community workers working with groups like Longford Town Health and Wellbeing Group where change can begin to occur. By providing a space for people to come together collectively to participate and empower each other to critically analyse why inequality exists. It is only when the root causes are identified that barriers and challenges can be tackled. Submissions like this empower communities to challenge norms and to ensure the issues at local level are known to those at national level, and to promote equality and social justice.

## Conclusion

The Longford Town Health and Wellbeing Group along with staff from Longford Community Resources Clg undertook this submission. As community workers we engage with people from marginalised backgrounds to build their confidence, education and social analysis in order to participate in decision making and work with these people collectively in encouraging agencies and politicians to become more concerned with promoting equality, protecting human rights and

challenging discrimination. In addition, further investment is needed for community and youth workers to work with people from disadvantaged and marginalised communities, in order to encourage people to have greater self-esteem, engage more in education, and become more actively engaged in dialogue and political life.