

**WOMEN LEARNING**

**An Account of the Women's Programmes  
Funded by the Combat Poverty Agency in 1987**

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**BY**

**FRAN MC VEIGH**

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## FOREWORD

This report describes the operation and activities of 18 local women's projects that received funding from the Combat Poverty Agency in 1987. It is the product of 6 weeks' work by Fran Mc Veigh with the support of the Agency staff. The report is an attempt to draw together the main features of the programmes and, as such, it provides a useful and interesting record of events on the 18 particular programmes.

Why did the Agency fund the projects in the first place? Projects such as these attempt to tackle the effects and consequences of poverty among women at a local level and this is of central relevance to the work and goals of the Agency. For the Agency the relationship between women and poverty is a priority issue; the type and amount of work that local women's programmes do is seldom recognised and acknowledged. These projects are relevant in another way also: they tell us about local poverty and enable us to understand the type of responses to it that are being developed by communities around the country. The fact that the Agency received such a large number of applications from local women's groups - 45 out of 220 received within a two-month period in 1987 - brought home to us the high demand there is for funding for such projects. The lack of other sources of funding, apart from the once-off grants allocated by the Agency (discontinued since 1987 due to cut-backs in the Agency's budget), was also clear. As the report shows, many of the programmes would not have taken place without the Agency's support.

What does the report tell us?

Its main message is that this is one area where relatively small amounts of money make a lot of difference. Clearly, the 18 programmes, run for approximately £40,000, engaged in a diverse and striking range of educational activities that have been

shown to be very valuable in their own right. There are a number of levels at which these programmes are valuable. First, for the individuals who participated in them, they were part of a process of personal growth and development. As well as providing a social outlet, they help to overcome the feelings of isolation and powerlessness that frequently assail women rearing children on low incomes. Secondly, there are direct, if more long-term, spin-offs for participants' families in that they help participants to understand and cope with the the terrible pressures of surviving on very low incomes. Thirdly, these programmes are valuable because they make a vital contribution to the process of local community development.

The report illustrates how different these women's programmes are from conventional educational programmes. Considering which aspects of them worked well underlines their uniqueness:

- a high involvement of participants in decisions concerning the running of the programmes appears to enhance their chances of success;
- the relevance of the courses to women's personal and family interests is also important;
- participative learning sessions and creative methods also appear to be of vital importance;
- the provision of a creche facility and a time schedule that accommodates participants' family responsibilities are vital.

Who should be learning lessons from the report?

The report has a number of potential beneficiaries. It can be of use to other local women's groups by providing information and ideas on possible structures, formats and content for programmes they may wish to initiate themselves. In this and other ways, the report can facilitate the exchange of information, and even support, among local women's groups and may lead to greater networking among them. A second purpose of the report is to inform statutory bodies about the existence and activities of

projects like these which tend to be quite hidden, both because they are women's activities and because they are community-based. Thirdly, the report has implications for educational provision, and especially for education programmes for women at local level. It establishes that these programmes are special and require methods and inputs that may differ from conventional adult education activities.

The Agency's experience in having funded these small-scale groups has reinforced our belief in their importance and value. It has also served to highlight the lack of any real funding for such groups. This cannot be divorced from the wider issue of the lack of a coherent national community development policy and the failure to assign the responsibility for community development to a single agency and to provide adequate funding for it. These are urgent priorities.

In funding these groups, the Agency has facilitated an important process. It has allowed 18 local groups to take an important step forward. They need to be enabled to continue in their process of development. Unless a proper programme of funding and support is developed for such projects, the work and enthusiasm that is put into programmes like this will be undermined. This is unacceptable, especially in view of the fact that they are such a cost-effective way of enhancing individual and community well-being.

Mary Daly  
Head of Research  
Combat Poverty Agency

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I extend a big thanks to those groups I visited for making me feel so welcome and for the further information made available on these occasions.

I would like also to express my appreciation to all the staff of the Combat Poverty Agency for their help and especially to Margaret Barry, Mary Daly and June Meehan who provided direction and support throughout and helped edit the report.

Finally, my thanks to all my friends and family who were around at the time I was writing up the data - they'll know what I'm thanking them for!

Fran Mc Veigh  
May, 1988

1. Introduction

This report presents information relating to 18 women's projects allocated funding by the Combat Poverty Agency in 1987.<sup>1</sup> Its purpose is to describe the activities, backgrounds and aims of the 18 educational programmes operated through the funding received. The report is not an evaluation of the programmes; rather, it is intended to provide a descriptive account of what takes place on women's programmes, i.e., the background, content and activities, structure, etc. The information on which the report is based was obtained in a number of ways: the completion of a questionnaire by all 18 groups; visits by the researcher to 7 of the 18 projects (see Appendix II); documentary research on the relevant files of the Combat Poverty Agency.

A number of methodological points should be noted. First, at the time of the research (December '87), 7 of the 18 groups had not completed their programmes. Secondly, only 1 of the 18 projects did not use the grant to provide personal and educational development programmes for local women. This is the Women's Aid Refuge which used the grant to run a staff training programme. Consequently, most of the data presented in this report is not applicable for this group. Gingerbread is the only nationally-based group.

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<sup>1</sup>Appendix 1 lists the 18 projects and the grant received.

## 2. The Projects

The history and duration of the projects varied, ranging from 10 years to 9 months. Nine were new projects, founded through the grants provided by the Agency, i.e., participants came together as a group for the first time. Before this, participants on these new programmes had had varying levels and types of involvement in local activities: as user/member of a Resource/Family Centre, as parent of a child in a nursery or pre-school programme, as participant in a once-off course.

Those projects that had been in existence for a number of years used the grant to develop a new dimension to their programmes. One example of this is the group which set up an Extra-mural Social Studies Course and opened the programme to a wider membership.

In the main, the programmes were initiated by workers or Management Committees attached to particular groups or centres. Certain supports were usually available to the groups, ranging from parish teams (6), voluntary organisations (4), local Community Associations (1) and individual workers such as teachers, social workers and community workers, and in one case an SES worker. The 2 groups that had been together only a short time before receiving funding from the Agency found it extremely hard to encourage and motivate women to attend and to maintain membership throughout the programme. The evidence available from the research indicates that the demands that programmes such as this place on the voluntary commitment of the organisers and the lack of time available for follow-up are issues critical to the survival and development of local women's education groups.

As regards those programmes that had been completed at the time of the research, 145 women had started on them and in all only

17 had dropped out. A number of reasons were given for not completing the programmes:

- taking up full-time or part-time employment;
- family illness;
- pregnancy;
- pressures or the responsibilities of Christmas
- travelling distance;
- moving away;
- lack of motivation;
- programme no longer seen as appropriate to need.

2.2 Commitment to the Programme: The projects rated participants' commitment to the programmes as very high and high. As evidence of this, they pointed to the high level of regular attendance and the enthusiasm and energy that the women gave to participating in the individual sessions.

### 3. Profile of Participants

3.1 Number of Participants: A total of 355 women took part in the 18 programmes. The average number of participants in programmes was 19. The most common size group was 14, although numbers varied between 5 and 23. A once-off event organised by one group attracted as many as 40 women.

3.2 Participants' Backgrounds: Married women comprised the majority of participants. The remainder were lone parents who were either single, separated, widowed, deserted or wives of prisoners. The majority of women participating in the programmes were in the 25-35 age range. Many married young, starting child rearing early in life. The average family size was 5 children and most had between 4 and 6 children. Those with no children were drawn mainly from a young women's group. In chatting with them they said that they " probably would have children, but not loads, maybe 3 or 4".

There was quite a large age gap between the oldest and youngest on a number of the programmes: in 1 case the ages of the participants ranged between 19 and 60 years; the smallest age range was between 24 and 32 years. Such differences in age did not appear to create any problems since most women felt the exchange and sharing of their different experience allowed plenty of scope for learning to take place.

The majority of participants had left school early and had a low level of formal educational attainment. A number had obtained the Group or Intermediate Certificate and a few had their Leaving Cert. Some had attended Adult Education classes as part of previous group activities.

Most of the participants spent their time caring for others. This meant that they had little or no time for themselves. Many had the added difficulty of financial pressures since the majority of participants were from low-income families largely

dependent on Social Welfare. Given this, it is hardly surprising that many of the women expressed feelings of isolation and low self-confidence.

The groups usually included a wide mix of women within their programmes. Only 1 group was confined: in this case to young single parents.

3.2 Roles of Women Within Projects: The roles that the women played within the projects varied greatly. Six groups had established a core group of women who, along with the facilitators, initiated the programmes and took an active role in devising the contents. However, in most cases a basic outline was first drawn up by either the Advisory/Management Committee or the Facilitator, to which the women added their ideas. As programmes developed, special efforts were made to enable the participants to articulate their needs and to make suggestions about programme content.

In 4 programmes, participants took on more specific roles such as Secretary, bookkeeper or instructor. In these programmes, the women were encouraged to become members of Management Committees and take an active part in decision-making.

In general, the participants in recently-initiated groups did not take on group tasks since it was felt that participation in the programme was a sufficient starting challenge.

4. Local Area Profile

Fourteen of the 18 projects were based in Dublin. Of the remainder, 2 were Waterford-based, 1 was in Cork and the other was based in Bray, Co. Wicklow.

All but 3 of the projects had a very defined catchment area; their participants in the main coming from either a large housing estate or a small inner city community. The other 3 programmes were run for different target groups: Bray Women's Refuge programme was solely for women using the hostel; Gingerbread distributed the grant to its branches throughout the country; the Dublin Women's Refuge ran a staff development programme. In general though, the women involved in both the Bray Women's Refuge Programme and the Gingerbread organisation were drawn from similar backgrounds to those in the other programmes.

The projects were based in areas with the following characteristics:

- High unemployment
- Lack of facilities and amenities
- Large number of population dependent on Social Welfare
- Young families making up a major portion of the population
- Limited family and other support services.

5. Aims and Objectives

5.1 Aims: Each proposal outlined the aims and objectives of the programme. These fell into five main areas:

- a) Personal development
- b) Leadership development
- c) Development of group
- d) Awareness of wider community needs
- e) Education.

Not all the programmes covered all of these aims. In the main, projects covered at least 2, focusing mostly on personal development and the development of the group.

a) Personal Development: This was the major aim for each programme; it was felt that giving women the opportunity for self-development was an important starting point. Examples of relevant working objectives here were:

- (1) to enable women to recognise and affirm positive qualities - to build confidence;
- (2) to develop an orientation of self-help and self-reliance;
- (3) to make personal growth experiences available to a greater number of local women;
- (4) to develop a greater awareness of self.

Emphasis was placed on creating a space for the women to explore and identify areas of skill, to build confidence and to develop a positive self-image.

Training in assertiveness, frequently an integral part of the programme, aimed to give the participants "the right" to be who they are, to express their views and opinions and to create time for themselves without feeling guilty.

b) Leadership Development: Four programmes placed a special emphasis on enhancing the women's leadership skills. These were

mainly programmes attached to pre-schools, playgroups and Family Centres. One group ran a training programme on "Becoming a Home Help". Having leadership skills was one of the criteria for selection on this programme as the course was geared to developing this potential.

c) Group Development: As all but 1 programme were based on participants working in groups, it was a central aim to develop an awareness of the benefits of this form of learning and working experience. The creation of space for sharing support and unity was also encouraged throughout.

d) Educational Development: Since many women had left the formal educational system at an early age, the scope to be involved in an educational situation was seen as fundamental. This educational opportunity was not only concerned with areas of individual development or group awareness but also those of academic interest.

e) Awareness of Wider Community Needs: This is a potentially very large area with aims such as the following:

- develop an increased awareness of community issues;
- create networks within the community;
- develop responses to community needs;
- develop an understanding of social analysis;
- encourage greater involvement in community activities.

5.2 Changes to Programmes: In some cases, changes were made to the content and objectives during the course of the programme. All of these changes arose from a re-assessment of the participants' needs. Often, greater emphasis was placed on particular tasks, e.g., developing skills and creating a more challenging situation. One group changed what appeared to have been an initially unrealistic aim of attempting to affect a

larger number of women and contented itself with running a personal development programme for a smaller group.

## 6. Programme Structure and Content

6.1 Structures: The structures of the programmes varied. Programmes ran for between 6 and 20 weeks, the average being 10 weeks. A weekly morning or evening session of about 2 hours' length was usual. Other variants on structures were once-off full-day sessions and residential weekends. Five groups ran programmes that required a greater time commitment than approx. 2 hours a week from participants.

Many participants initially thought that they would find it very difficult to co-ordinate themselves to make the necessary commitment but the very low drop-out rate and the reported high levels of participation are evidence that they managed it.

Five groups ran their developmental programmes as part of their ongoing projects, i.e., largely informally. The fear that formalising the procedures may frighten the participants away was a concern. Consequently, formalisation was approached with caution. The informality of the weekly meeting, which was at times just a casual chat and cuppa, was stressed as being extremely important and very relaxing for the women. The remaining 13 groups operated a more structured programme, planning specifically so that topics were covered, issues were raised and an understanding developed in the short time available.

6.2 Programme Content: The programme content was an outcome in many cases of a consultative process between the participants and co-ordinators; both voicing their needs, deciding on areas of interest and in turn drawing up a programme in the context of the broad headings outlined in the proposal.

Some programmes had very clearly defined areas to cover, others branched out touching as many different strands as possible. The main thrust of the programmes was of a personal development

nature (as many of the titles of courses offered suggest). In general, programme content fell into 4 main categories:

- (i) Personal Development
- (ii) Skills Development
- (iii) Education and Information
- (iv) Leadership.

**6.3 Personal Development:** This was the area of most interest and need within all the programmes. The emphasis was on creating the space for women to increase confidence and develop self-esteem. To achieve these goals, programmes offered Personal Development sessions on any of the following:

- Getting to know me
- Personal histories
- My personal skills and gifts
- Strengths and weaknesses
- Values and attitudes
- Assertiveness
- Communication
- Relaxation
- Sexuality
- Getting to know my body
- Self image
- Confidence building
- How to enjoy being a woman
- Being married
- Mothering
- Spirituality
- Loving myself
- Awareness of self
- Physical needs
- Rights
- Public speaking
- Coping with feelings
- Expressing feelings
- Sharing with others
- Building up trust
- Understanding anger
- Saying "No"
- My positive qualities
- Appreciation of me
- Receiving feedback
- Do I want to change
- Self expression
- Putting self first
- Caring for me
- Looking for support
- Awakenning motivation
- Relationships
- Emotional needs

6.4 Skills Development: Acquiring and developing skills adds enrichment to one's life. Before starting the programmes many of the women apparently felt de-skilled so it was important to emphasise the 'worth' of the skills that they already possessed.

At first glance, many of the programmes appear very traditional in their choice of skills offered, e.g., cookery, crafts, but the attraction of these skills is that they are familiar and relevant and may encourage involvement in other skill areas. A wide variety of skills were offered:

- Cookery: Nutritional meals, cake making
- Home Maintenance
- Budgeting: Money and Managing It, or How It Affects Us
- Crafts: Dressmaking, Toys, Decorations
- Flower Arranging
- Creative Writing Skills
- Literacy
- Swimming
- Coping Skills
- Parenting Skills
- Committee Membership Skills
- Basic Make-Up and Grooming
- Basic Child Care.

Having sampled a new skill, many women had sufficient confidence to share their own skills, thereby increasing their own sense of value and worth.

6.5 Education/Information: The information/educational-type programmes covered 4 broad areas: Child Care and Parenting; Know your Rights; The Value of a Healthy Lifestyle; Social Studies.

Information presented on Child Care and Parenting covered:

- Child psychology

- Child behaviour
- The role of play in the life of a child
- How to help your child get the most from school
- Coping with bullying at school
- Coping with allergies
- The physical development of children -
  - Motor skills
  - Speech and language
  - Social/Emotional
- Coping with tantrums
- Toilet training
- Mothering
- Safety in the home.

Know your Rights covered:

Family Law  
Employment Equality  
Community Welfare  
Welfare Rights.

Courses on the Value of a Healthy Lifestyle encouraged women to be concerned for their own health through sessions on:

- Women's health
- Nutrition
- The Value of food
- Mental health
- Family Planning.

As part of the Social Studies course, lectures and discussion took place on topics such as:

- The Family
- Education
- Crime
- The Church and The State
- Social Class
- The Media.

The role of women in society was an important part of most educational programmes. Information was often provided on other issues that affect women directly or indirectly, such as Child Abuse and Alcohol and Drug Abuse.

One educational programme included sessions on Social Analysis - economic, political, cultural and social structures. One course on Women in History was also run, covering: the Early Women's Movement, Ladies Land League, the Second Phase of the Suffragette Movement, the War Years.

6.6 Leadership: When included, leadership courses attempted to develop leadership skills for a variety of different situations, ranging from Community Resource Centres to more specific roles, such as Playleaders or Home Helps. General topics covered under leadership skills were:

- Group facilitation
- Counselling
- Taking control
- Giving and receiving support
- Communication skills
- Types of leadership.

Specific topics covered within the leadership role of Home Helps were helping with arthritic and stroke patients and working with psychiatric patients.

The playleaders courses generally covered the role of the playgroup; using books, stories, rhymes, etc., with kids; using arts and crafts with kids; integrating the special child into the playgroup; child development through art; making use of the toy library.

Other events often included in programmes were:

- Trips to the theatre
- Exchanges with other groups
- Working with young people on a video project

- Newsletter
- Slideshows
- Visiting libraries
- Visiting agencies such as EHB and NSSB
- Yoga
- Visit to Family Planning Clinic for Smear Test and breast examination.

## 7. Methods and Approaches

7.1 General Approaches: To make the programmes as challenging, interesting and enjoyable as possible, not only did the content of the course have to be attractive to the participants but the methods used needed to be varied and dynamic. The learning sessions had as a central theme participation and learning through experience, in contrast to having a very structured or formal format. Creating the 'right' atmosphere which would give space for women to relax, be themselves, feel comfortable, and safe was the initial responsibility of the co-ordinators. As time went on, most groups took on this responsibility for themselves.

The importance of a 'Learner Centred' approach cannot be over-emphasised. The sessions that received the best response were those which participants felt approached the topics in an engaging and participative manner. One example of this is a session entitled "Be Good to Yourself": here women were encouraged to spend time indulging themselves, showering, having foot massages, and having a make-up done for them before spending a social evening together. This was widely experienced as a treat.

By all accounts, co-ordinators attempted to make the sessions as diverse as possible by using a number of different approaches and methods, though keeping in mind that it was important not to overdo it. It was felt that the use of familiar approaches or methods helped to increase participation in a session.

An assessment or evaluation of the learning that took place was reported as being important throughout the running of the programmes. In the main, this was done through individual and group discussions which had the aim of encouraging participants to identify and acknowledge for themselves the developments (if any) that had taken place through the sessions.

The variety of methods used can be seen in the diagram overleaf.

7.2 Special Approaches: It is important to highlight a few approaches that differed:

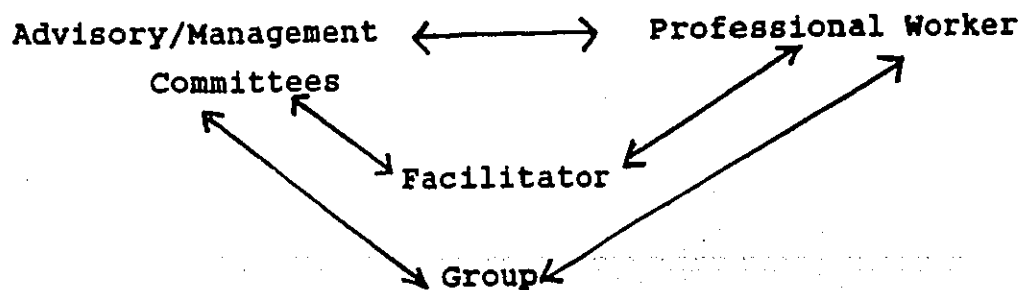
- (1) Payment for Participation: One group paid women a small allowance for attending the programme to help cover their domestic costs such as child care, transport, tea/coffee. It was acknowledged that many courses offered to men and young people automatically pay a 'wage' and it was felt that if women were prepared to attend a course for up to twelve weeks they were entitled to some small remuneration.
- (2) Food: Four projects saw the preparation of meals as a crucial part of their programmes: not only did it give participants practical experience in preparing a meal on a budget but it also helped to develop the group as a social unit. Meal times were used by many of the women to discuss issues raised during other sessions. Having food prepared and served was definitely seen as a treat (one woman asked to be pinched as she sat down to a meal as she thought she was dreaming).
- (3) Visits: Most groups at one time or another had speakers giving talks on women's health and family planning. To add a different dimension, one group decided not only to have a talk but, to encourage women to use the information, arranged for a visit to a Family Planning Clinic. There, the women had an informal meeting with the staff over a cuppa and a tour of the clinic, followed by individual check-ups, education for self-examination and a smear test. This approach aimed to give the women the security needed to follow through on the information provided.



## 8. Co-ordination of Programmes

8.1 Programme Co-ordination: All programmes were supported by either an Advisory/Management Committee or a professional worker. The Advisory/Management Committees were generally composed of local women, professionals (doctors, social workers, community workers, adult education officers) and other individuals not always local residents.

The following diagram illustrates graphically how the programmes were co-ordinated:



Fourteen of the groups had an individual co-ordinator to facilitate the programme. Of the remainder, 2 were co-ordinated by a team of participants (1 paid, 1 unpaid), and 2 by unpaid workers (1 nun and an SES worker).

All those employed as co-ordinators had a high level of experience and training. Many were graduates, with qualifications ranging from adult education, groupwork, counselling, and child care. Those without formal qualifications had all been through a number of personal development courses and had done additional training with organisations such as the NSSB.

Other support organisations available to some of the programmes included Barnardos (which in 3 cases supplied a worker and an evaluator), Eastern Health Board, Catholic Social Service Conference, Irish Goods Council, Institute for Industrial Research and Standards (IIRS), Industrial Development Authority (IDA), and St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. Many local individuals also gave support, especially local workers such as

Regional Youth Officers, as did local groups such as community associations and orders of nuns.

8.2 Outside Speakers: The use of outside speakers/resource people was an integral part of many programmes.<sup>2</sup> Those who were brought in to facilitate the group on particular topics of interest were seen as experts in their field and were usually known to either the co-ordinator or the Advisory/Management Committee. The number of outside people used varied from group to group. Their use depended on the topic to be covered, and whether or not the skills were available from within the existing support structures. Finding appropriate people to run particular sessions caused some headaches for co-ordinators, especially in rural areas.

The approaches used by outside speakers were usually similar to those used by the co-ordinator. To make the inputs as interesting as possible, speakers were asked to use a variety of techniques to establish a good rapport with the group. Those speakers who encouraged the women to participate, through exercises, questions and discussions, appeared to have received the most positive response.

Bringing outside people into a group can have its drawbacks as well as its benefits. The drawbacks came when people felt 'short changed' by the inputs - such as not getting the information they would have liked or not being sufficiently prepared for the sessions. To get around this, 1 group discussed issues relevant to the topic and drew up a list of questions before bringing in a speaker. Often, having a new face enabled participants to open up more, clarify points for themselves in a

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<sup>2</sup>Appendix 111 lists the main types of outside speakers and facilitators used.

safe environment, gain information and break down barriers between them and outside agencies or agency representatives. A benefit for the co-ordinators was that it gave them space to plan and organise forthcoming sessions.

### 9. Childminding Facilities

The availability of a creche was seen as integral to the programmes. In most cases, the provision of a childminding facility was part of the initial proposal, underlining an awareness of how essential this service is if women are to be encouraged to become involved in "out of home" activities. Without a creche facility, many women would be unable to participate in or follow-up interests they may have.

Two groups did not offer a creche as part of their programmes: one because it was not needed - the women's children were all of school-going age - the other holding its meetings in the evenings.

The creches were in the main supervised by paid experienced staff. It was generally agreed that the quality of the service and the benefits the children gained while attending the creche alleviated the guilt many women felt when initially leaving their children there.

Though the majority of the programmes offered a free creche service, 5 groups charged a minimal fee of between 50p and £1.00 per session to help cover some of the running costs. One centre charged £1.50 per week extending its service to women even when they were not attending the programme.

Even though the creches were run by experienced staff, many women still felt that they should drop in and check on the children. The temptation to do this was very strong since the creches were usually in an adjoining room and every bang, cry, shout or giggle could be heard. One group made a deliberate decision to locate the creche in another building so that the women could be totally free of outside distractions, particularly the temptation to check on the children.

10. Other Facilities

10.1 Accommodation: Many courses or programmes which are run specifically for women operate with the bare essentials. Women often have to turn up on cold, damp nights for sessions run in large, unlit, unheated rooms or halls with no facilities for even making a cup of tea. Most of the programmes in the present study were no different, although great emphasis was placed on acquiring the best possible facilities available.

Most groups used their usual meeting room(s) which ranged from a large airy room with soft chairs and fitted kitchen to a playgroup premises with only child-sized chairs. The norm appeared to be an average size room with stacking chairs and the facility to make a cup of tea. Six groups shared their premises with others, which meant that they couldn't leave their work displayed from week to week.

10.2 Other Resources: The resources of other community groups were used on once-off occasions when they were available and required by the women's programmes. These included the use of a community mini-bus, using the local swimming pool and the use of a local Convent's holiday home. The availability of these resources helped the smoother running of the programmes.

The need for access to resources such as these was voiced by all projects.

11. Funding

11.1 Funding Allocated: There can be few comparisons drawn between groups on funding since the grants allocated to groups varied between £450 and £6,000. (See Appendix 1.) In all, the total funding allocated to the 18 groups was over £40,000. Only 4 groups received the full amount sought.

Most groups felt that funding was adequate and, in the main, groups appeared to have been relieved to receive financial support at all. One group stated that having one's own funds created an air of independence - something they had never experienced in the past. Only 3 groups voiced dissatisfaction with the size of their grant allocation.

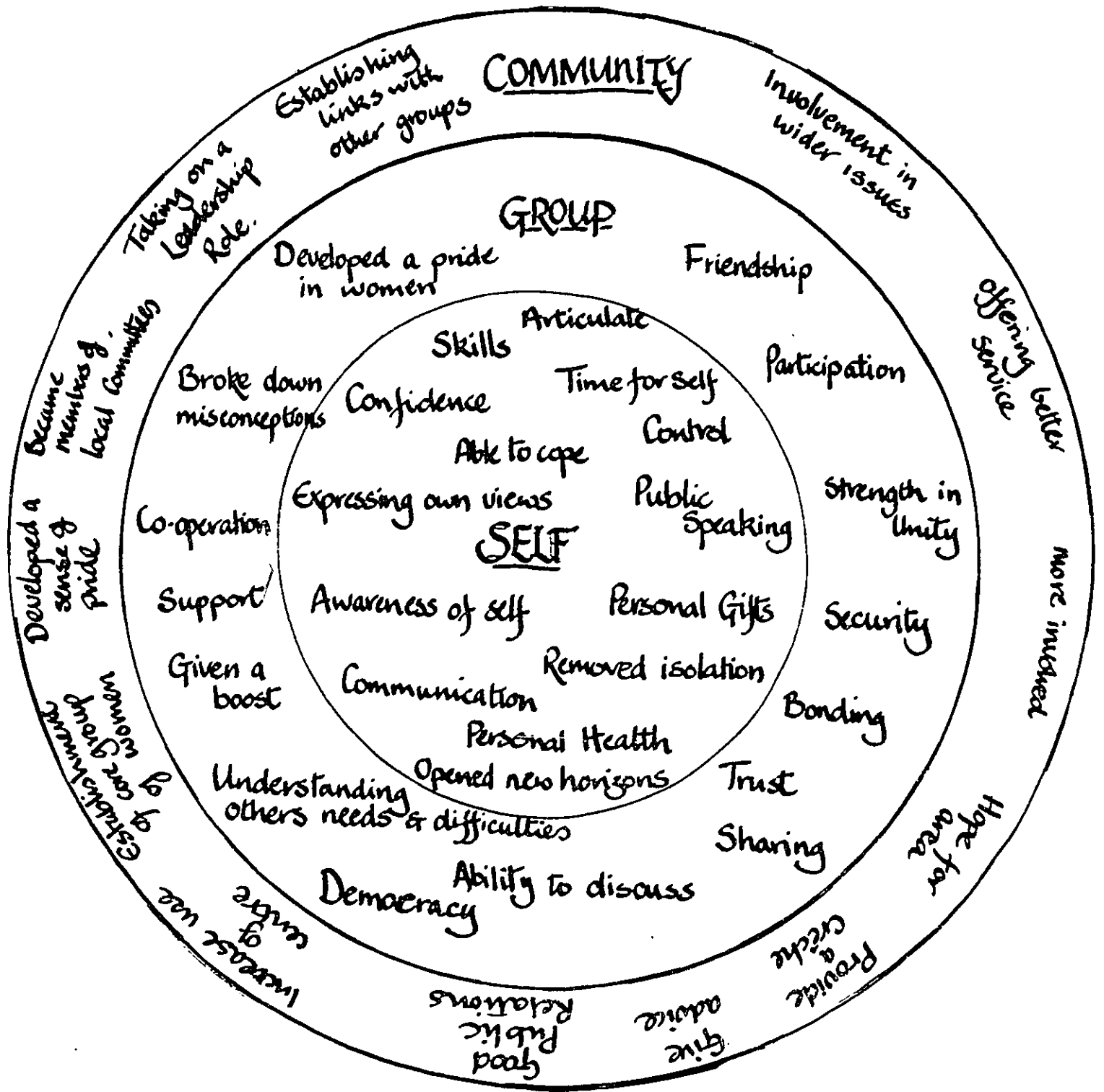
11.2 Other Funding: In the main groups worked within their allocation since funding from other sources was very scarce. One programme received additional money from a Special Projects Fund within a parish. A small grant from the Vocational Education Committee was available to another - the group running the Social Studies Course. Those who needed more money to finance their programme used such fundraising activities as cake sales and seeking donations to subsidise the grant.

12. Outcomes of the Programmes

12.1 Perceived Outcomes: The fact that the women attended on such a regular basis, organising themselves to get to a meeting and participating to the high level that they did, were reported as important achievements. That programmes were initiated and completed was seen by 4 groups as an achievement in itself. All groups but 2 believed that their aims and objectives had been met. The 2 groups for whom it was too early to identify achievements felt confident that major progress would be made.

The main achievement acknowledged by all the groups was the personal growth of individuals. The extent of personal growth, though not objectively measured, was reportedly large. As evidence of this, groups cited the fact that participants' self-esteem had increased. Sometimes, the growth of confidence and assertiveness that took place appeared to have surpassed the participants' own expectations. The achievements were listed by the groups under the general headings of benefits for the individual, the group and the wider community. The diagram overleaf outlines the main areas of benefit.

# Benefits.



Even though the content of the programmes varied, participants on each programme were able to identify benefits. There were many common benefits. These were mainly in the area of personal development, centring on rediscovering the worth of themselves and their skills and opening up new horizons. Examples of this include:

- Going to the theatre for the first time
- Learning to swim
- Realising one's own learning capacity/potential
- Sitting down to a prepared meal.

Two of the main areas highlighted of a personal development nature were the increased self-confidence and recognition of the importance of taking time for oneself without the accompanying guilt. Often, gaining access to information and education is key since information is in many cases the privilege of the few. Consequently, acquiring information on topics such as Social Welfare Rights reportedly gave the participants a feeling of empowerment, allowing them to take more control and feel less intimidated by official and even unofficial structures. In addition, often, being part of an educational process dispelled the notion that learning stops once you leave school. Furthermore, the topics covered gave the women the chance to explore new areas of interest and revitalise old ones.

At the group level, the main identified benefits related to social factors such as creating bonding, trust and friendship among participants as well as greater understanding of the needs and difficulties of others. At the community level, the programmes reportedly facilitated an identification with the local area and led to involvement in local other activities.

13 Perceived Drawbacks of Programmes

13.1 Identified Drawbacks: There are inevitably a number of drawbacks associated with running any programme. They are usually seen from 2 different perspectives, those of the participants and those of the organisers.

All but 4 groups identified some drawbacks. In general, programme content was not a source of criticism. The main complaint voiced by participants was that programmes were too short and did not allow enough time or space to cover topics as fully as was sometimes desired.

The co-ordinators voiced a number of drawbacks, mainly in relation to the organisation of the programmes:

- (i) Finances: Money and the lack of it, having to raise funds, the difficulties created by having to spend money before end of year and in such a rush.
- (ii) Timing: Timing programmes better, playleaders course should run before playgroup opens. Programmes too short and, therefore, a need to establish ongoing programmes. Programmes too rushed, with not enough time being spent on certain topics.
- (iii) Premises: A lack of appropriate training space which affected the ability to create the right atmosphere or level of comfort.
- (iv) Planning and Preparation: One facilitator felt that the programme restricted participation by being too structured.
- (v) Restricted Numbers: The inability to cope with the numbers interested in participating.
- (vi) Outside Speakers: Unsatisfactory approaches and methods of organising and delivering

presentations sometimes meant that information did not get across or did not have the desired effect.

(vii) Initiating  
Programmes:

Not approaching participants in a receptive way that is based on an understanding of their fears of and prejudices towards programmes such as these.

13.2 Suggested Improvements: The following improvements to the programmes were suggested

- More involvement of participants in planning.
- Making better use of women's own skills in particular areas such as Arts and Crafts.
- Challenging participants more.
- Including other methods, e.g., visual aids
- Discussing sessions in advance with outside speakers to ensure more appropriate approaches.
- Ensuring appropriate venue and facilities.
- More research into appropriate approaches to setting up programmes and follow-up work.

14. Attitudes to the Future

14.1 Aspirations: Staying together and remaining active was the immediate answer to the question "What does the future hold?". Having been part of a group which offered support, security and learning, the women felt that it was important to continue the process of development and maintain the same levels of support that were available during the programmes.

Involving other women in the process was a priority for at least 5 groups. These had already established core groups whose purpose is to set up similar programmes and encourage other women to avail of them. Following through on areas of interest by attending other courses/programmes organised by either themselves or other groups was another follow-up considered. One group expressed interest in offering opportunities to men.

Linking into other schemes such as the Social Employment Scheme was seen by 1 group as a way of offering a service to others by utilising a community flat as a creche and craft centre.

Those groups with a specialist emphasis, i.e., Playleaders and Home Helps, subsequently began to draw up plans and strategies for implementing the skills they acquired.

14.2 Local Involvement: Due to their increased confidence and awareness of broader issues, a number of women have begun to take an active role in the management or administration of: 1) School Committees, 2) Tenants or Residents Associations, 3) Community Associations. Being active in campaigns on issues such as the health cuts and education cuts was also identified as an outcome of the programmes.

In general, the increased interest being taken by participants in their local community was apparent from the amount of time and energy they began to put into local activities and commitments.

15. Conclusions

All of the evidence obtained indicated that the programmes have had a substantial personal impact on those who participated. In addition, it was a widespread belief that the programmes would have spin-offs not only for the participants and the communities in which they live in the short-term but also that they might in time have a significant impact on the overall effects of poverty on women's lives. Consequently, the continuation and development of their programmes was an aim for all 18 groups. However, having the necessary funding and supports to do this was a major concern. All of the 18 programmes stressed the need for funding to be continued.

It is important to emphasise the necessity of providing a creche facility as an integral part of programmes initiated for women. Funding for such programmes should include allocations for the running of a creche.

A useful recommendation made by some groups was for the establishment of an Information and Resource Bank which would offer ideas and names of possible resource people to enhance the programme and enable a greater choice of content, structures and speakers.

## APPENDIX 1

## LIST OF PROJECTS AND GRANTS RECEIVED

Lourdes Youth and Community Services	£6,000
Larkin Centre for the Unemployed	£5,000
Good Shepherd Sisters	£3,600
Tallaght Playgroups Co-op	£3,500
Gingerbread	£2,500
Neilstown Women's Group	£2,500
St. Brigid's Welfare Centre	£2,500
Women's Community Education Project	£2,200
Little Sisters of the Assumption	£1,900
Togher Pre-School and Family Centre	£1,860
Finglas Women's Collective	£1,690
Women's Aid	£1,500
Fettercairn Family Support Group	£1,418
O Devaney Gardens Community Association	£1,300
Mercy Family Centre	£1,280
Bray Women's Refuge	£1,000
Toy Library Parents Support Group	£ 734
Rainbow Women's Group	£ 450

APPENDIX II

LIST OF PROJECTS VISITED DURING THE RESEARCH

Lourdes Youth and Community Services (Inner City, Dublin)

Community Playgroups Co-Op (Tallaght, Co. Dublin)

Rainbow Women's Group (Clondalkin, Co. Dublin)

Good Shepherd Sisters (Waterford)

Women's Community Education Project (Finglas, Dublin)

Larkin Centre for the Unemployed (North Strand, Dublin)

St. Brigid's Welfare Centre (Waterford)

APPENDIX III

LIST OF SPEAKERS AND OUTSIDE FACILITATORS

Literacy Teachers  
Public Health Nurses  
Keep Fit Instructor  
Family Planning Tutor  
Arts and Crafts Instructors  
Catering Instructors  
Assertiveness Trainers  
Psychologists  
Community Welfare Officers  
Yoga Instructors  
Hairdresser  
Swimming Instructor  
Employment Equality Representative  
Social Workers  
Play Instructor  
Media Facilitators  
Specialist Speakers on topics such as:  
Alcoholism.....AA  
Drugs....Concerned Parents Against  
Drugs  
Family Law  
Women's Health.