

Longford Women's Link (<https://www.activelink.ie/node/674>)

Since its inception in 1995, Longford Women's Link has been guided by a fundamental purpose of providing a space for Longford women to 'develop their voice' in order to address the myriad issues that they and their families face. Despite major changes within the organisation and within the County over these years, Longford Women's Link remains committed to this guiding vision.

Our *Strategic Plan, 2008-10* is the second of our plans, devised in order to give the organisation, its Board of Management, and its staff, direction and focus. The plan reflects the growth of our work and our presence in Longford, now widely acknowledged, as we have developed our understanding of the complexities and challenges faced in addressing gender inequality and its consequences.

The new Strategic Plan is acknowledgement too, that when we support the women of our community, we also support their families – our childcare, counselling, and economic independence programmes are clear evidence of this 'double dividend'. The Plan also reflects the changing face of Co Longford, and particular emphasis is given to the challenges faced by the new communities of the County, the refugee and migrant women of many countries, and their families.

The *Strategic Plan 2008-10* signals a significant shift taken by the Women's Link in addressing women's issues. Whereas the range of services previously provided by the organisation were largely project-based, funding-driven and time-constrained, leading to a 'silo' type development, our process of facilitated critical reflection that underpins this Plan, undertaken over a period of two years, has determined that if our work is to achieve maximum impact it needs to be embedded firmly within advocacy and policy-influencing contexts. Furthermore, our traditional approach of supporting individual women is steadily being redirected towards a more collective approach, to the building of the community-capacity of women to act as agents of local and national influence.

We have grown to be a substantial local organisation, in its own premises, providing affordable childcare, training and support in employment and self-employment options, domestic violence support and advocacy, and counselling services for women and their families. Longford Women's Link has established productive working partnerships with many local agencies, and represents women's issues in an ever-increasing number of local, regional, national and transnational fora. Nevertheless, we still remain a place of 'women supporting women', and a place where women can come to share their laughter and their tears.

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