

UNISON NORTHERN IRELAND



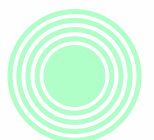
WOMEN'S COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

Covid-19 Crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic has firmly placed everyone's focus on the value & importance of care work paid and unpaid. It's no surprise as UNISON members that women undertake the majority of caring, cashiering, childcare, catering and cleaning and are bearing the brunt of this crisis. Over 70% of health & social care staff are women and for many this is a double burden as women also shoulder the lion's share of unpaid work putting them at increased risk of infection as well as spreading infection to vulnerable family members.

School closures bring stark choices between paid work and care commitments and presents challenges for many families as women may be forced to leave work to care for children particularly if the child is disabled increasing the risk of poverty and adverse health impacts. Often precarious & low paid work on zero-hour contracts, leaves women extremely vulnerable. If they do get ill, a shocking fact is 70% of workers do not qualify for Statutory Sick Pay-SSP highlighted by the UK Women's Budget Group.

Stormont has listened to some of our concerns that the Covid-19 crisis affects men & women differently and, in many cases, deepens the inequalities women experience on an everyday basis. We welcome some measures introduced such as SSP payable from first day of illness & treatment of work related payments i.e. statutory maternity pay, free school dinner allowances, are very much welcomed. However, more needs to be done and we are fiercely lobbying for an increase in Child Benefit & Carer's Allowance as this will make a significant difference for women who are currently shouldering the majority of caring during this pandemic.



Women's Aid is open

Domestic violence rates rocketed in China with the pandemic and NI is no different. In the first 3 weeks of Lockdown, the PSNI received over 3,000 calls from victims and as of the time of writing over 20 women have been murdered in the UK including 5 women in NI representing an increase of 40% homicides per week. Despite an additional £76 million package for domestic violence victims announced by UK Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick last week, domestic violence & sexual abuse groups in NI received none of this funding confirmed by Finance Minister Conor Murphy. Stormont did respond with additional resources for on-line support and refuge services and we are demanding Stormont prioritise all domestic violence services and identify staff as key workers.

Chair and Blaine McCarthy Orchard Branch Welfare Officer presented cheques to:

Women's Aid Portadown - It is well documented that during this period of isolating there has been an increase in the reporting of domestic violence incidence and our donation will support their continued work.

<https://www.womensaidni.org/24-hour-domestic-sexual-violence-helpline/>



Pictured Petra Mc Creesh Orchard Branch presented cheques to Women's Aid Portadown



As I go into do my days work as a registered nurse in these coming days/ months, not knowing what each day brings... If you or your family member are patients in the Emergency Department I make you this promise! I promise I will look after them! I promise I will hold their hand in their darkest hour! I promise I will talk to them and they won't feel alone! I promise I will respect and honor them! I promise I will treat them with dignity! Please don't worry I will look after them as if they were my own family. ♥

**Sibhan O'Neill –
Craigavon Area Hospital**

**there
for you**

COVID-19 response fund

we're there for you

UNISON COVID-19 RESPONSE FUND GRANT

Times are tough, but UNISON is there for you ☐ If you're in financial difficulty because of the coronavirus crisis, or you're a key worker whose care, transport or laundry costs have increased, then UNISON's charity may be able to help with a £250 grant from our limited fund

<https://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/services-support/there-for-you/financial-assistance/?fbclid=IwAR3jnWJFlhh25Hd9IiNuMxyXlYvQHG0iRZ4ybkT5sWLqa3wIbnHouOsAqM>

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Residential and Nursing Homes

It has come as no surprise to the UNISON Women's Committee that one of the front lines of the Covid 19 pandemic is being fought by our members, on the battle grounds of the Private Residential and Nursing Home sector. Care staff in this sector have literally been putting their lives on the line, as they care for our most vulnerable citizens often with minimum staffing and without the Personal Protective Clothing (PPE) which is seen as essential for employees and residents to stop the spread of the virus. Many of these workers are low paid women workers. It's a disgrace that many of them are going into workplaces where PPE is still unavailable or inappropriate and to top it all, government advice on PPE for the care sector remains inconsistent and confusing. This is simply unacceptable nearly two months into the pandemic, this is further compounded by the fact that despite the tremendous skill and accountability of their roles in private Homecare settings frontline workers are almost exclusively on, or near, minimum wage salaries. This should be a matter of national shame and must be addressed by bringing care homes back to public ownership and management. UNISON NI also acknowledged in a recent press release that Care staff who should be shielding, or self-isolating are being pressured into attending work by unscrupulous employers or because they can't get by on less than their full wages. The Coronavirus pandemic has brought these issues into the public arena in a dramatic way. It is scandalous that workers in care homes right at the front line of Covid 19 have been left to exist on statutory sick pay when they become ill as a result of the risks they are taking to protect the residents they care so much about.

In a recent UNISON press release it was highlighted that the pay, conditions and safety of all workers in this sector needs a massive boost. If employers can't or won't do the right thing then it is time for the health service to step back into a service that was originally their responsibility but one, they were too quick to off load. UNISON wrote to Northern Ireland's care home providers back in March asking that anyone who had to shield or had tested positive would be offered full sick pay. However, very few of the care home operators have responded. It is a 'scandal' that staff at private care homes who test positive for Covid-19 are not offered full sick pay.

The Future is Female

Look around the world at how female leaders responded, Angela Merkel was quick to implement a strategy of test, track and trace, resulting in lower mortality. Taiwan leader, Tsai Ing-wen at the first sign of a new illness in January introduced 124 measures to block the spread without having to resort to lockdowns. Iceland, under the leadership of Prime Minister Katrín Kobsdóttir, offered free testing to all its citizens, and instituted a thorough tracking system that means they haven't had to lock down or shut schools. Sanna Marin, the world's youngest head of state, recognised social media influencers as key agents in battling the crisis and invited influencers of any age to spread fact-based information on managing the pandemic. Norway's Prime Minister, Erna Solberg, had the innovative idea of using television to talk directly to her country's children. She was building on the short, three-minute press conference that Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen had held a couple of days earlier. Solberg held a dedicated press conference where no adults were allowed, and responded to kids' questions from across the country, taking time to explain why it was it was OK to feel scared. Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand was early to lockdown and crystal clear on the maximum level of alert she was putting the country under—and showing compassion reassured the children the tooth fairy and Easter bunny were essential services. Compare this to other countries where the first response was to introduce laws that gave them greater powers and fines!!



UNISON'S Womens Committee campaigns for equality, improvements to womens rights in the workplace and the wider community. Some local events and ongoing campaigns within UNISON branches include welfare advice sessions, WASPI workshops and promoting positive leadership of women to encourage greater involvement at all levels within UNISON. Deborah Yapicioz and Anne McVicker are joint Chairs and UNISON is represented on the ICTU by Danielle Mc Cusker Area Organiser