



Talk Learn Connect

with Yvonne Reddin



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Writer Yvonne Reddin asked Ciairín de Buis, CEO of *Women for Election*, a not-for-profit, non-partisan organisation to share some TLC (Talk Learn Connect)

Could you share a summary of your career to date that has led you to your current position as CEO at Women for Election?

Like many, I've had a career that has wended it's way, rather than gone in straight lines.

As you say I currently head up *Women for Election* an organisation that inspires, equips and supports women to succeed in politics.

Before coming to *Women for Election*, my focus was on children's rights and early years in particular. I headed up *Start Strong*, an advocacy organisation focused on children's early years and bringing about change in government policy. After that I did some consultancy work before coming to *Women for Election*



Previously I've managed services for people with disabilities, worked as a policy officer, had a brief stint in the civil service and done some work in prisons. I've also served on the Parole Board. Like I said, my career hasn't been in straight lines so far!

I've always tended to do voluntary work, outside of the day job, and have had the chance to work with some great groups. I've recently joined the board of the Children's Rights Alliance and am also on the board of Sonas (Freedom from Domestic Violence).

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Who are your biggest influencers/thinkers that have helped you build your own strong values in strategic thinking?

Where to start? There's been a lot.

In my family life, it would be my grandmother. She was widowed very young, went back into the workplace (at a time when very few women worked) and brought up her young family. She was adventurous, always on the go, and a force of nature.

Norah Gibbons, who died recently, has been a huge influence in my career over the past decade or so. She was a fearless advocate, a brilliant policy mind, a great mentor and a wonderful friend. I, along with countless others, miss her enormously.

I've been lucky enough to work with a lot of really brilliant people who were very generous in sharing their expertise, experience, talent and skills - mentors, formal and informal, are a key part of the way I work.



Women for Election trains and supports women in Ireland to run for politics

“We’ve also found the fundraising environment a real challenge. Over half our annual budget is through fundraising, and our fundraising dinners have had to be cancelled – we haven’t yet worked out how to fully replace that aspect of our income, but we will get there”

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How do you think our accustomed way of life will change in the future and how has Women for Election managed throughout this crisis?

In *Women for Election* we've pivoted to online delivery, along with the rest of the world we've been learning about Zoom and other platforms and are working to ensure we still reach as many as we can with our online training and webinars. We've found we've been able to reach more women, particularly outside of Dublin, and women with whom we haven't worked with before, which is great.

One of the challenges has been, and this is the same for everyone delivering services on-line, the digital divide. So for homes without wifi, or devices, or the space to sit for an hour or two attending a session, our training might be harder to reach than before. That's one we're still figuring out how to tackle.

How things will change in the future? I don't think anyone really knows yet. At least not fully. I think for many of us this Covid Crisis has helped us clarify our priorities in life a bit more – I think working from home will become more normal. I hope we will all value our neighbours and local communities more. And I hope, we will see a lot more women entering politics – while I think we have seen some brilliant leadership from the Irish political system, we've also seen the real gaps that have happened because there weren't enough women in the room

Can you share any words of wisdom that you received that helped you in your successful career?

Be ambitious,
be audacious,
ask questions and remember the why
- why are you doing this.

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