

NFWI Annual Meeting in Cardiff 6th June 2018

Report by Julie Roberts, Renhold W.I., delegate for Renhold, Pavenham & Library Walk, Bedford Women's Institutes

After a 5-hour coach trip, with a half-hour stop at lunchtime, we arrived in Cardiff at 3pm on the Tuesday, a little weary and stiff. Some ladies were disappointed as they felt they had been lead to believe that they would have single rooms, and were not told until they were about to disembark the coach that they would be sharing. (By the end of that evening though everyone had made friends and no one seemed unduly worried).

Most of us took off in groups of about 3-4 for a short walk around Cardiff Bay, before our evening meal pre-booked at Pizza Express. We had a very pleasant evening, and it was great to meet so many ladies from different W.I.'s and hear what they do, which speakers they found particularly entertaining and how they go about raising funds.

Next day, off we set to Motorpoint Arena, where we queued outside for about 10 minutes, not easy for some of the ladies, one of whom was on crutches following an operation. It was however quite something to see so many women gathered together outside. You could see people held up in the in the traffic looking at us all trying to work out what was going on, especially as hoards of women crossed the road between their vehicles.

CHAIRS ADDRESS

The meeting opened fairly promptly with the Chair's Address. Lynne Stubbings proved to be a very interesting, humorous speaker Chair who was very much in command of the meeting and kept it all flowing beautifully.

We all stood for the singing of Jerusalem, which sounded great and I felt helped bring us all together as one, although I am told the acoustics in the Albert Hall are much better.

Sally Kingham moved the appointment of the Tellers, and introduced those on the stage.

Lynne gave us lots of facts, including that last year 30,000 new members joined and 86 new W.I. groups were formed. There are 220,000 members, who collectively manage to make the news on television & in newspapers, appear in magazines and are mentioned in television & radio programmes. Social media is now playing a big part in accessing/sharing information. A short film celebrating 100 years of some women being granted the right to vote was shown.

Ann Jones reminded us of the success of some previous campaigns, Smoking in 1964 (which took until 1984 for action to be properly taken), Raising awareness of Aids in the 1980's and many more. A Healthy Living Resource pack will be issued to start next week. We were also reminded that the Huxley Cup, floral art, runs from 15th-17th June at Three Counties Showground, Malvern. Lady Denman Cup deadline for a diary entry of no more than 500 words is 3rd August, and Elizabeth Bell Challenge, 12 photographs to represent a year of W.I. events is still running.

HON. TREASURER'S STATEMENT

Julia Roberts presented the figures, which were given out quite quickly, but all appear in the Annual Review. In brief, across all 3 parts of the W.I. Income £7.63M (+6%) and expenses £7.37M (+4%) Gains on investments £289K Net increase in funds £549K Total funds £10.07M with £4M available to spend.

(I believe all figures above to be as read to us, but should be checked against Annual Report)

An up-date on Gift-Aid will be issued shortly.

Subs at their current level still continue to represent value for money, and the Teams were all thanked.

Lynne thanked Julia, and then pointed out the beautifully embroidered Coat of Arms at the front of the table, which after 100 appearances was sent to Hampton Court where conservations replaced the backing, made slight repairs and cleaned it. It was stunning even from a distance, but I had no opportunity to get close enough to photo it.

RESOLUTIONS

The only Resolution being “Mental Health Matters” was proposed by Louise Jones. Being open to talk about mental health, a cultural change being needed, choose to listen & learn how to start conversations, react appropriately and find out what is available locally in the way of support. This was seconded by Caroline Hall (Bewdley W.I.)

RESOLUTION SPEAKERS

The only speaker, who was in support of the Resolution, was Andrew Molodynski, a consultant psychiatrist at Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust & Hon. Senior lecturer at Oxford University.

Andrew told us how 1 in 4 will suffer from mental illness at some point during their lives. Mental health problems represent ¼ of the conditions in the UK, yet the funding is only about 11% of the total NHS spend. Stigma still exists. Sufferers are not seen for several months, sometimes even up to 4 years, despite often being unable to look after themselves, their families, attend work etc. When they are offered treatment/therapy it can mean being transported miles. Beds on specialist wards for such cases are full. Sufferers are sometimes considered to be weak & feckless, when nothing could be further from the truth. Andrew indicated that he himself has been a sufferer.

Acknowledgement of the problem is desperately needed. What the W.I can do:-

1. Campaign for better statutory services – talk to Councillors, M.P.’s, Hospital Trusts, G.P. Surgeries.
2. Raise awareness. Mental health first aid could be brought into our W.I.’s
3. Move towards alleviating loneliness. Form a working group, etc.

In the absence of someone to speak against the Resolution (and a huge amount of effort had been put in to try to find someone) Mary Clarke, NFWI Board Member, put forward some items for consideration against it, to try to allow a balanced argument:-

1. Focus & announcements aimed at meeting access to care, the Prime Minister has already made promises with regard to help for new mothers, school children, etc. Can the W.I. really make a difference?
2. Can the W.I. add anything?
3. With poor training there could be concern about people jumping in to help
4. Adding to the stress of those already experiencing mental health issues

OTHER GUEST SPEAKERS

In the absence of any further speakers members from the floor were invited to the microphones to speak. In brief:- (hopefully I recorded people's names correctly, but it was quite difficult to hear)

Rose Stour, Gloucestershire. Her 8 year old grandson from Gloucestershire, with special needs, was sent to Newcastle for treatment.

Auriel Hamilton, E. Yorkshire. Her daughter was successfully treated after self-harming & attempted suicide, but when she applied for a place somewhere and had truthfully put this on her application she received a telephone call telling her to remove it and lie.

Irene Price, Cheshire asked how effective is what is already in place, before more funds are allocated to the same thing.

Pat Combes, who has a younger sister with learning difficulties, whose father was always ashamed of her, told us there is a new organization "Mental Health First Aid" which is offering training to millions.

Lynn Smith, Durham Two specialist hospitals in her area have closed, with patients now attending the general hospital. Lynn questioned how many mental illness are drug related.

Janet Pert, Leicester found it unacceptable that the Federation couldn't find anyone to speak against the Resolution. Lynne Stubbings replied that they really had done their best to try.

Bridget, from Buckinghamshire said she would vote 'for', if we are to receive education, and Lynne said a pack will be issued if the Resolution is passed.

Deidre Smade, Buckinghamshire has a sister who is bipolar & a health services activist. She suggested the most important thing is to listen to people with long term conditions, and ask them how they wish to be treated.

Susan, Winchester Advice is about to be printed in Mental Health First Aider & this will be available to organizations such as the W.I.

A lady from Lancashire told us 2 school children & 2 college students committed suicide recently in her area. Of the ethnic minorities/immigrants, she questioned how many seek help with mental health issues. Schools may help those who attend, but is someone else in the family over-looked? As women we can display mental health problems in ways such as over-eating. How can we help ourselves?

Susan David, Hertfordshire, a trained Counsellor, suggested we should not consider that we have become Counsellors just by being W.I. members. 1,000 people last year with learning difficulties & health problems died unnecessarily.

A lady from Cheshire detailed how it can be difficult to access the services needed for autism, with few specialist schools. Support for good health & well-being can be offered by listening.

Lynne Morris, Gwent, a retired child development officer, whose grandson went through a very rough period when his great-grandmother passed away the day after he had been with her & he was also bullied, received successful counselling at school. Prevention is better than cure, & she suggested yoga, tai chi, singing & befriending. Lynne attended the Hay Festival & discovered that Ruby Wax has written a book "How to be Human" which is well worth reading.

Daisy Fletcher, Hampshire Consideration needs to be given to the many refugee families entering the country, the whole family, not just the children might need support with mental health issues.

Yvonne Smith, Powys - The assessment for Dementia is a long & drawn out process. In the case she experienced the sufferer was not asked the questions, her husband was. Why are there no information packs available when someone has been diagnosed?

Barbara Turner, Derbyshire Mixing older people with younger people helps. Schools should have more training.

Louise Jones closed discussion on the Resolution with a Right to Reply; The title says it all. Just by voting we have already raised awareness. She thanked the expert speaker, and asked everyone to lobby – "it all starts with a conversation".

W.I. Advisors (formerly VCO's who wore brown cord suits!) were thanked. They do 2 weeks training (some at the W.I. training site with some training being delivered on-line) & there are currently 372 advisors.

GDPR – practical steps will need to be taken & more information will be provided in the June mailing, and in W.I. Life there will be a section explaining to members what happens to their information.

Saving Denman raised £661,978.91 with donations still being received. Maintenance of the fabric of the building & the grounds will need continued support.

2nd January Birmingham Hippodrome, W.I. members, friends & family invited to an exclusive showing of Peter Pan – information will be on the My W.I. website

GUEST SPEAKER

Dame Stella Rimmington was an extremely interesting & entertaining speaker. She met her husband at University & whilst he went into politics she became an archivist. When her husband was appointed Home Secretary she was keen to join him in India. The official advice she received on what to pack was a fur stole, and elastic – she was told Indian elastic rots quicker in the climate than English elastic. Upon their return to England Stella was quite bored with being the wife of a Minister, with one of the most important roles seeming to be to belong to amateur dramatics, and

was quite relieved when someone at a party almost, but not quite, tapped her on the shoulder & asked her if she would like to be a spy! She detailed her training, which had been aimed at men and not really suited to a woman – part of which involved chatting up strangers in a London pub pretending to be someone else until her cover was deliberately blown to see how she handled it. This almost back-fired when the gentleman concerned misread her intentions completely. Stella was very relieved to have her cover blown. Stella talked us through her very interesting career, becoming the first female head of MI5, Director General, from 1992-1996 and explained how surveillance etc has changed so much since the days of the Cold War, with the introduction of mobile phones & social media.

Dame Stella was thanked, and we broke for lunch

After lunch voting took place with regard to unincorporated federations becoming incorporated, and the Resolution was passed.

The results of the voting on the Resolution “Mental Health Matters” was announced:-

In favour 5,945

Against 103

Resolution passed with a 98% majority

Ann Jones detailed the success of some of the previous Resolutions: End plastic soup; Alleviate loneliness; Food Matters – supermarket waste (Tesco is removing best before dates from 70 fresh food & other products) – with the second phase being Food Poverty; Show the love Green Heart climate change; Dementia care – access of carers to hospitals; Care not custody, diverting those with mental health problems from prisons to specialist treatment (there are now 5 W.I.’s in prisons); s.o.s. for honey bees.

GUEST SPEAKER

Huw Edwards started by saying standing in front of so many women was far more daunting than commentating on any Royal Wedding or the Olympic Games. Huw, an accomplished pianist/organist has lived in London for 30 years. He was born in Bridgend, and when he telephoned his mother to tell her he was going to talk to the National Federation of W.I.’s in Cardiff what she said, in Welsh,



roughly translated to “are you bonkers?”!

Huw was an interesting speaker, advising if we ever need to improve our street-cred we should accept a role in a Bond Film. Skyfall did wonders for his relationship with his children. Huw is recognized regularly, with one lady saying to him when she saw him in real life “you look ok, widescreen does you no favours”, and another being thrilled to think she had just met Eamonn Holmes. Huw went on to say how worrying he found the addiction of some to their mobile phones/social media and it was obvious that the audience agreed with him.

During question time Huw was asked how he felt about the issue of equal pay for women at the BBC. Huw said whilst a lot of his colleagues would have said “no comment” he was prepared to answer, as the father of 2 teenage daughters he dared not. Whilst the issue has been highlighted, there has been no clarity of what people actually do, how many hours they put in, and their level of popularity – work of equal value being difficult to measure and more work needs to be done on this issue. As an employer Huw feels the BBC is within its right to set levels of pay.

Huw was thanked for his talk.

Brief details of the My W.I. website were given. All one needs to do to register is enter the email address and a password of choice. 20,000 people have so far logged in.

Walking Netball sessions are already being introduced to W.I.’s with several wishing to sign up, and a short film showing how it is enjoyable and easy, with players able to take a rest whenever they feel the necessity.

The Chair closed the meeting by stating everyone seemed to have been having a ball, and that is what it is all about.

The 2019 Annual Meeting will again be held in June, this time in Bournemouth.

We then queued for our coach, which had an allocated time slot for our collection, and a very weary, but happy group of ladies left for home.

I believe that the above is accurate, although perhaps not necessarily absolutely in the right order as writing with a pad balanced on ones knee and between 2 other ladies doing the same, it is not easy to turn the page. Please bear in mind this is only the way I think I heard things, not necessarily as some others may have reported what they think they heard.

Julie Roberts, Secretary, Renhold W.I.