

THE WI AT 100: A CENTURY OF INSPIRING WOMEN

theWI
INSPIRING WOMEN

1915

FOR 100 YEARS

2015



The NFWI

The National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) is an educational, social, non-party political and non-sectarian organisation. It was established to ensure that women are able to take an effective part in their community, to learn together, widen their horizons, improve and develop the quality of their lives and those of their communities and together influence local, national and international affairs on issues that matter to members.

The NFWI is the largest women's organisation in the UK with some 212,000 members in over 6,000 Women's Institutes across England, Wales and the Islands. The NFWI has a long history of undertaking educational work and campaigning on a diverse range of issues. The first NFWI mandate was passed in 1918, and since then the organisation has accumulated a wide-ranging portfolio of policy concerns on a local, national and international level. The NFWI resolution process means that members play a central role in defining policy and bringing issues onto the organisation's national agenda.

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The NFWI 2015

Author: Rachel Barber and Lisa Plotkin with Oliver Hicks-Pattison and Estelle Robinson.

The National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI)
104 New Kings Road
London SW6 4LY
020 7371 9300

NFWI-Wales
19 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF11 9HA
02920 221 712

www.theWI.org.uk

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THE INDEPENDENT Wednesday 7 October 1987

LETTERS

A valuable benefit

Dear Sir,
When Norman Fowler was Social Services Secretary, he stated that child benefit was the only payment that expressly recognised the extra cost of child rearing, and

only guaranteed income for their children. This support should not be withdrawn.

Our members were disturbed at the recent decline in the value of child benefit when consulted about the 1986 social security reforms. For this reason, the Na-

Move to get benefit 20/12/74 for disabled housewives

By Our Political Staff

Mr Lewis Carter-Jones, Labour MP for Eccles, had the backing of eight Conservative MPs in the standing committee on the Social Security Benefits Bill yesterday in carrying an amendment to entitle severely disabled housewives to the new non-contributory invalidity benefit. It was carried by nine votes to eight.

Mr Kenneth Clarke, MP for Rushcliffe, who leads for the Opposition on the Bill, said afterwards: "It was quite disgraceful that the Government should have thought that it could exclude disabled housewives."

Mr David Price, Conservative MP for Eastleigh, whose wife is disabled, said that backbench action had produced an excellent result. "This will be a wonderful Christmas present for the severely disabled housewife", he said.

Introduction

The very first WI meeting in the UK took place on 16 September 1915. A century on, the world has changed in many ways. In the UK alone, women have secured the right to vote, benefited from a raft of legislation to protect against sex and pay discrimination, and seen age-old professions like medicine open up in a way that would have seemed inconceivable to many of those early WI members.

As Her Majesty The Queen noted at this year's centenary Annual Meeting on 4 June 2015: the WI has been a constant throughout. From a humble start, in a small north Wales village, members have shown tremendous vision, a dedication to build a better society, and a willingness to roll up their sleeves and take a hands-on approach to deliver it. Along the way, the WI has promoted women's education, offered an insight into democracy in action, and encouraged members to take an active role in public life. From its early days, boosting food supplies and productivity during World War One; to the canning and jamming that was so integral over the course of the Second World War; members' efforts championing the countryside, neglected in post-war reconstruction plans; and in the years since, ground-breaking campaigns on equal pay, family planning, and child allowance; WI members have spoken up and taken action on a wide range of social, political and economic challenges faced by women and their communities. 2015 has provided an opportunity to reflect on the WI's first one hundred years. This report offers a review of some of the highlights. It is designed to give an insight into the WI's historic legacy and impact on women, family life, communities and the nation, using key themes that encapsulate WI members' interests, rather than presenting a chronological record. Only a snapshot of activities can be mentioned here.

Against this record, this report also examines WI members' views on some of the big issues facing Britain today. The WI is the largest women's membership organisation in the UK, and with over 6,000 WIs in communities across England, Wales and the Islands, it has continued to grow and evolve with members. This means that understanding their concerns and aspirations is as important as ever. This research offers a unique insight into the issues that matter to members – giving voice to their opinions, concerns and experiences. It draws on the views of over 5,400 members.

The world we live in now would be unrecognisable to many of the early WI members. Much has changed for the better, frequently in no small part due to the quiet, tenacious campaigning and collective efforts of WI members. Yet our findings show tremendous challenges remain. WI members are concerned about the role models available to the next generation of young women. They believe girls are growing up in a society where women are judged to different standards than men, that raising children is still not valued in today's society, and that women are penalised in the workplace for having children. Looking at our health services, members celebrate the remarkable achievements of the NHS. They show a strong belief in personal agency and responsibility, yet many worry – particularly the carers amongst the members – that health and care services will not be able to meet their needs as they age. This report examines members' perceptions of these challenges in more detail. It also looks more widely, in true WI tradition, at members' views on the challenges facing their sisters around the world. It considers members' opinions on climate change, one of our nation's key challenges, and reflects on the role of individuals and government in taking leadership on it.

'THERE HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE SINCE 1915. WOMEN HAVE BEEN GRANTED THE VOTE, BRITISH WOMEN HAVE CLIMBED EVEREST FOR THE FIRST TIME AND THE COUNTRY HAS ELECTED ITS FIRST FEMALE PRIME MINISTER. THE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE HAS BEEN A CONSTANT THROUGHOUT, GATHERING WOMEN TOGETHER, ENCOURAGING THEM TO ACQUIRE NEW SKILLS AND NURTURING UNIQUE TALENTS.'

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN, 4 JUNE 2015

Members are clear that empowering women is the WI's number one achievement. The WI has brought women together, nurtured their voices, provided educational opportunities, and spaces for the seeds of friendship to grow. Since its inception, the WI has also tackled a wide range of issues that matter to women and their communities; delivering ground-breaking campaigns, shining a light on taboo issues, and supporting members to use their own lives as a start point for delivering change.

Through the member-led resolutions process, women have been provided with opportunities to get involved with democracy in action. This process served the WI well, from the early days of the organisation, when women were only just granted the vote. To this day, it continues to enable members to set the direction and priorities of their organisation; delivering landmark campaigns such as Care not Custody, SOS for Honey Bees, Time to Talk about Organ Donation, and More Midwives.



Image: Rebecca Miller

This report offers a WI view on some of the key challenges women and their families face today. Without question, the research findings point to unfinished business. While there is plenty to celebrate, women continue to face real challenges and on our 100th birthday, it's clear that the WI remains as relevant and necessary as ever.

The achievements and example of our WI foremothers tell a compelling story of aspiration, dedication and tenacity. The thousands of women that took part in the survey have painted a picture of a movement of women that shares this dedication and resilience, and 100 years on, shares a commitment to the ethos of the WI's founding members, to 'work for the good of the whole community.' Today's members are truly inspiring women and we hope you will enjoy hearing their voices.

Here's to the next 100 years.

Key findings

WI members on home and families

- 79%** believe that staying home to raise children is not valued in today's society
- 84%** believe it is difficult for women to balance family responsibilities with work
- 95%** think there is still an expectation for women to be the primary care-giver
- 88%** believe that traditional domestic skills, like cooking a meal from scratch, are being lost
- 87%** agree that women today are more likely to share chores with their partners than in the past

WI members on work and society

- 94%** volunteered in the last 12 months
- 69%** feel they have not very much or no influence over the country as a whole
- 32%** feel they have a good deal or some influence over decision-making in their local area
- 82%** believe that women are judged by different standards to men
- 70%** disagree that women are now equal to men
- 59%** agree that women are penalised in the workplace for having children
- 83%** believe more women are needed in leadership positions
- 78%** agree there are not enough positive role models for today's girls

WI members on health and wellbeing

- 73%** agree the NHS is excellent at caring for those with physical illnesses
- 17%** agree that the NHS is excellent at caring for those with mental illness
- 49%** disagree that health and social care services will be able to meet their needs as they get older
- 19%** agree that the non-clinical care provided by the NHS is excellent

WI members on our natural world

- 58%** are most concerned about the challenges future generations will face as a result of climate change
- 56%** are most concerned about climate change's impact on UK wildlife
- 83%** agree world leaders must urgently agree a deal to tackle climate change
- 76%** disagree tackling climate change can wait a few more years
- 70%** agree that people in developing countries are already experiencing the impact of climate change
- 50%** think climate change will negatively impact UK citizens' health

WI members on our global society

- 59%** identified access to education as the biggest challenge facing women in developing countries
- 80%** believe that women in wealthier countries have a responsibility to act on issues that affect women in developing countries

Methodology and demographic information

Methodology

This report draws on original material from the NFWI archives, stored in the Women's Library collection, at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Primary research was also undertaken to build an understanding of WI members' lives, attitudes and concerns. The NFWI commissioned BritainThinks, to provide support with the development and delivery of a quantitative survey. Fieldwork took place between 9 April and 8 June 2015.

A postal copy of the survey was sent out to a random selection of 3,000 WIs, asking them to designate one member to complete and return the survey. In addition, links to an online version of the survey were distributed via the NFWI's Facebook page, magazine and through other communications channels.

In total 5,450 members completed the survey, representing approximately 2.6% of the NFWI's membership. Of these, 3,406 completed it online, and 2,044 returned postal questionnaires.

The average completion time for the online survey was 26 minutes.

This report presents the findings of this survey. These findings are accurate to within +/- 1.31% at the 95% confidence interval. Data have not been weighted.

Please note that throughout this report we report on the overall findings, as well as subgroup differences. Unless otherwise stated, all differences are statistically significant.

Where percentages do not add up to 100%, this is the result of rounding.

In addition, four focus groups, involving members from both urban and rural locations were held in Cardiff, Lancashire, London and Norfolk during July and August 2015. Any unattributed quotes throughout this text are from WI members who participated in the focus groups.

Demographic information

The profile of the membership who took part in the survey is older than the wider population: 26% are over 71 and a further 43% are between 61 and 70. Limited demographic information was collected in order to keep the survey as short as possible. We did not ask members about their ethnicity or income.

63% of members that responded to the survey are retired. 70% are married or in a civil partnership. 76% of members have children. 36% of members have informal caring responsibilities. Members overwhelmingly live outside dense urban areas: 48% live in villages and 13% live in rural areas.

42% have been members of the WI for over ten years, and 16% have been members for over 30 years.

Our homes and families – looking back

For many of the WI's founders and earliest members, the suffrage campaign was truly the beginning. The inter-war period saw the WI embark on an ambitious public policy programme aimed at achieving equal rights in the home and within the family unit.

While 'the personal is political' was a well-known rallying cry for women in the 1960s, it was also a very familiar concept for the early WI movement when it took on what was called 'the unequal moral standard', or what we would today call 'the double standard.' The principle of the unequal moral standard meant that men were held to a lower moral standard than women were, creating a situation where society and the law forgave men their social and sexual indiscretions or crimes, but came down harshly on women who dared do the same, or were actually victims of circumstance.

The WI fight against the unequal moral standard included the campaign to raise the age of consent, to mandate that fathers support their children born outside of marriage, for sex education that didn't shame women, to allow widows and housewives to draw pensions and social security benefits, and to have family allowance payments issued directly to the mother. Many of these campaigns in the early 1920s were shepherded through wholly by 'our Institute MP' Margaret Wintringham, the second woman ever to take her seat in the House of Commons and a member of the NFWI Executive Committee.

Campaigns in the second half of the twentieth century also saw the WI continue forging this path, sometimes completely alone, as it campaigned for marital rape to be recognised as such under the law, for funding for battered

women's shelters, to increase the severity of rape sentences, to adequately define domestic violence under the law so that women and children in the home were protected, and to make sure survivors of domestic violence were able to access justice through the courts.

Alongside these campaigns, the WI fought continuously to make local community life better, safer, and fit for families of the twentieth, and now twenty-first, centuries. Many were forward-looking campaigns reiterating the importance of community bonds and seeking to strengthen them through improved housing, better care for the elderly, an increase in local amenities, and to help unemployed neighbours in times of need.

The WI's mark on home life has been so considerable that it makes it difficult to thoroughly document, as *The Times* remarked in 1933: '...what a revolution they have wrought in village life in this country, both social and domestic',¹ but in the next few pages we do try!

The Bastardy Bill (later called the Children of Unmarried Parents Bill)

The Bastardy Bill was the subject of one of the WI's earliest campaigns. The Bill was radical in its scope for it sought to remove the stigma of unmarried motherhood and place the burden of parental responsibility equally on both parents by compelling fathers to take some financial responsibility for their children born out of marriage. The Bill also required the father to help pay the mother's expenses during pregnancy and birth, a truly novel concept in the case of unmarried partners. When the Bill was defeated in 1921, the WI pledged to continue the campaign to 'arouse interest' in this 'useful measure'.² Many provisions of the

Dear Mrs Smith

Thank you very much for taking the trouble to send us your petition to "Save Child Benefit for Mum". I was also very interested to read the replies you received from your two local MPs.

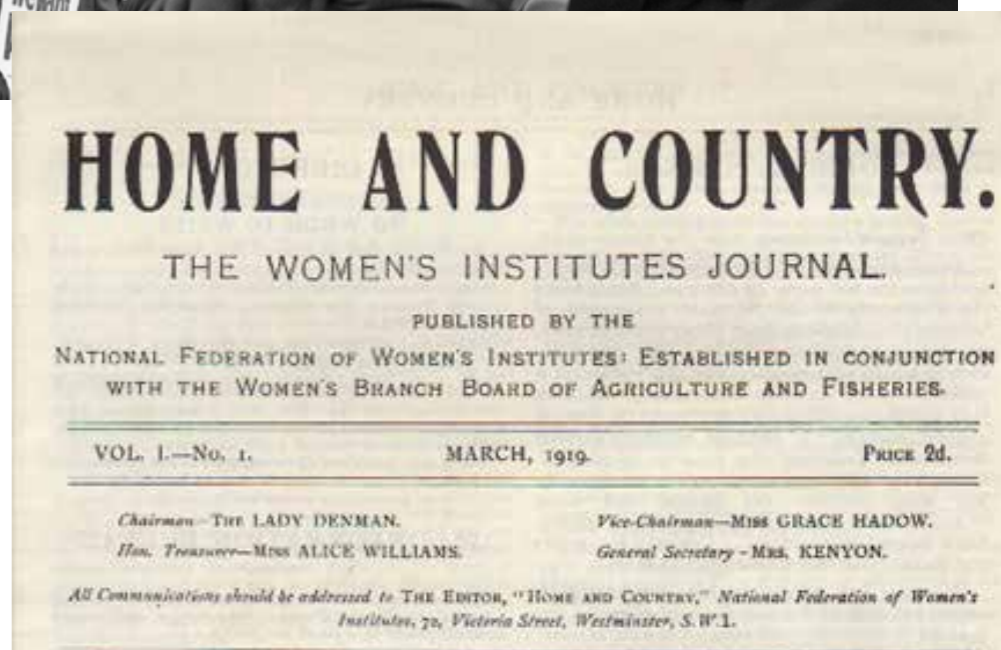
The NFWI is delighted that the Government was in the end persuaded to pay family credit direct to mothers rather than through the wage packet. It is undoubtedly a considerable victory and pressure from individual WIs on their MPs played a significant part in the campaign.



'HOUSEWIVES HAVE COME INTO THEIR OWN AT LAST!'

HOME AND COUNTRY, 1943

Campaigning on child benefit and pensions for spinsters at 55'. The first edition of Home and Country.



Act were passed in 1923 and 1926. The WI continued to campaign for the interests of children and single mothers, passing a resolution in 1947 calling for suitable homes for orphans and another in 1966 aimed at financially assisting single mothers.

The London Standard news stand at the 1986 AGM.



The age of consent

By the time the WI celebrated its seventh birthday, members had long-tired of Victorian laws on sexual consent, which they believed harmed the well-being of children and violated the rights of girls to have a childhood. The law on the age of consent was still based on an 1885 criminal law statute that set it for girls at 13 - far too young in the eyes of WI members. The WI was particularly concerned that this low age of consent was being used to justify the rape and sexual abuse of young girls, as a common defence invoked by defendants on charges of rape was 'a reasonable cause to believe the girl was over the age specified by law for her protection...'³

The WI was firm in insisting that girls (and boys) under the age of 18 were children and incapable of 'enticing' anyone into sexual relations, but that often times societal norms prevented parents or victims from coming forward and alleging coercion. 'The whole intention of the Bill' Wintringham explained to her sceptical colleagues, 'is to give effective protection to children...' in those cases when victims are unable or unwilling to come forward.⁴

Opposition to the WI, and the other women's groups pushing for this reform, was strong and full of vitriol. When the measure was passed (a partial success because it increased the age of consent to 16, not 18), one commentator derisively accused the Home Secretary of being thoroughly 'henpecked'⁵ - an allegation the WI did not deny. In 1976 the WI revisited this topic again with an urgency resolution, calling for the age of consent not to be lowered to 14, which was also successful.

The prevention of venereal diseases

At a time when the phrase 'sexual politics' was unheard of, the WI did not shy away from discussing in the public domain and from the benches in Parliament, the scourge of sexually transmitted diseases; a cause that was also embraced by many other prominent suffragists like the Pankhurst family. While ostensibly primarily a health issue, the WI was also firm in asserting that the proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases was an issue that struck at the heart of the family. Once again here the WI was fighting against the unequal moral standard, when entities like the Joint Committee on Venereal Disease and the Metropolitan Police were quick to blame those who they called 'good time girls' for the spread of sexual diseases.⁶ Not so, the NFWI Executive Committee stated with its 1922 resolution, which reasoned that a lack of education - not morality - was the root cause behind the spread of venereal diseases.

Utilising this rationale, the WI embarked on a programme of public health education in the 1930s and 1940s to educate women about their own sexual health, which was widely lauded by the prominent medical journal the *Lancet* and noted in Parliament.⁷ In 1949 the WI called on the 'free, voluntary, and confidential' treatment of venereal diseases to be included in the National Health Services. Later that year the WI amendment to the National Health Services Bill on venereal diseases was championed by the Liberal MP and member of the NFWI Executive Committee Megan Lloyd George.

Widows, housewives and mothers

From the 1920s onwards, the WI campaigned for the role of women as wives and mothers to be recognised under the law as work, and compensated accordingly. At the heart of this campaigning work lay the conviction that what the stay-at-home parent did is work and should be treated by the state as work - a radical idea even today. The women of the WI asserted via the medium of a wide array of resolutions that domestic work and raising children is time-consuming, skilled labour, which requires a mixture of creativity, manual labour, and mental ingenuity.

Armed with that guiding conviction, the WI became one of the first national organisations to call for a widow's pension at its 1924 AGM. Urging the government to recognise that 'the mother...bringing up a family in such a way as to turn them into good citizens is doing work of national importance' the WI called on the government to provide an adequate state pension for widows as was their right as citizens, separate from their husbands. The WI continued to agitate on this issue, calling for increased provisions for widows' pensions in 1950 and that every widow, irrespective of her age at the time of her husband's death, should receive a pension at the age of 50.

When the government introduced a Social Security Bill in 1974 which included a pension allowance for disabled people, the WI put its weight behind an amendment that offered the same benefit to disabled housewives. As the result of pressure from the WI and other groups the government conceded in 1975 and introduced a non-contributory pension for disabled housewives. Following the 1995 Pension's Bill, which equalised state pension ages for men and women, the NFWI provided a survey report on *Women and Pensions*. This raised awareness of the necessity of the provision for retirement, especially in younger women. Having previously asked the government to recognise the unpaid work that women and carers did, the NFWI again asked for credits to be contributed towards their pensions.

The WI, along with other women's groups, was also very active in the campaign for the family allowance to be paid directly to the mother as recognition of all the work she does in the home. A rousing article to members appeared in a 1942 *Home and Country* article entitled 'The Nation's Cinderella,' which highlighted that adding insult to injury, not only was the labour of the housewife unpaid, but the housewife was also deemed ineligible for the National Health Insurance Scheme.

'FORWARD THINKING, HUMANISING INTERPRETERS OF THE WELFARE STATE'

THE TIMES, 1 JUNE 1970

A June 1934 edition of Home and Country reports on the importance of 'a real attempt' to solve rural housing problems

PRICE 1d.

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF WOMEN

HOUSING IN THE VILLAGES

HOUSING interests every one to-day, and the public that a real attempt shall be made to solve the problem. Acts concerning the housing of people in towns are difficult to master, but the Acts concerned with rural housing comparatively simple and can be grasped by all who are ardent to stand the position.

In rural housing the first thing to do is to make suitable houses we have. The way to do this is to use the (Housing) Act, 1926, commonly referred to as the Reconstruction Act. The Minister of Health, Sir Hilton Young, in his speech to the Moyne Committee in its Report agree on this. A similar Act was given in *Home and Country*, April 1932, as follows:

The Act is intended to aid in the reconstruction of dwellings in rural areas and in the conversion into buildings not previously used for that purpose.

Financial grants will be made in approved cases for workers' dwellings.

The grant will be two-thirds of the approved cost of the alterations but will be limited to £100 for any one dwelling.

No grant will be made where the estimated cost of the repairs is less than £50.

The word 'repairs' includes: structural alterations to premises, water supplies and drainage conveniences and other like work but not ordinary repairs.

When the landlord accepts a grant, the following conditions shall apply, viz.:

1. The estimated value of the dwelling on completion of the repairs shall not be less than the value of the dwelling on the date of the grant.

'She is not allowed to retain her own nationality, but made to take that of her husband... She is not allowed to contribute to, or to benefit by, the National Health Insurance; and usually gets to the very end of her tether and becomes really ill before getting medical treatment. However hard she works inside her home, she is not entitled to call a single penny her own... Housewives, playing their part (mostly with affection and efficiency) nevertheless ask themselves - and the billeting officer - the reason why they alone should be forced by law to work without pay'.

The campaigning culminated in William Beveridge's landmark report on how to provide social security 'from the cradle to the grave' that recognised the 'vital though unpaid work of the mother and housewife by calling for a state funded family allowance. Perhaps we have William's wife, WI member Jessy Beveridge, to thank as well for the 1945 Family Allowances Act, which stipulated that allowances, or child benefit, be paid directly to the mother. The members of the WI met the publication of the Beveridge Report with unbridled joy, making their 'appreciation of Sir William Beveridge's great work' the topic of their 1943 resolution.

Reflecting on the Family Allowances Act, *Home and Country* exclaimed: 'Housewives have come into their own at last!' The provision of child benefit to the mother has been an issue that has continued to capture the interest of WI members almost every decade since.

Protecting women from rape

At the 1975 AGM the WI debated an urgency resolution supporting the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill asking for 'changes in the law as it relates to rape'. Members at the Diamond Jubilee Annual Meeting were 'incensed' at the new legal interpretation of rape, which stated that 'a rape has not been committed if the man believed, however unreasonably, that the woman consented...' Under this definition it was almost impossible to convict someone for rape under the law, which was, in the words of the proposer 'a serious infringement of women's rights.'⁸

The WI was among the most vocal critics of the new legal interpretation. When the Amendment was discussed in Parliament the following year, the MP Jack Ashley said: 'But it is the women of Britain, both individually and through their organisations, such as the National Federation of Women's Institutes, who have spontaneously reacted against judicial decisions that were an affront to women. To my certain knowledge - because they were



campaigning with me - they have tried to secure a change in the law for over 10 months, and some of them have been seeking a change in the law for many years. It is those people to whom we should pay tribute today.'⁹

In 1988 the WI again campaigned against the increasing incidences of rape, urging the Lord Chief Justice to ensure that 'the sentences passed adequately reflect the extremely serious nature of the offence.' As part of the campaign, the NFWI petitioned ministers and lobbied the Home Office. The following year county federations successfully lobbied many of their MPs to sign the Early Day Motion entered in the House of Commons on rape sentencing and the NFWI secured various high level meetings with the Minister of State at the Home Office.

In 1991 the NFWI was pleased to contribute to the Law Commission's report on rape within marriage, which finally resulted in marital rape being legally regarded as that which the WI always considered it to be: a violent crime.

Supporting Survivors of Domestic Violence

In 1975 a WI resolution welcomed a governmental review into the 'social disease' of domestic violence, but cautioned that in the mean-time shelters needed to be provided for survivors of domestic violence and their children in every county. The problem of domestic violence was so endemic that year that there were actually three different resolutions on it debated amongst the membership. At the AGM, the speaker got to the heart of the matter, stressing that 'we must train people to know what violence means' in the context of the home and family.

Legal Aid

In 1994 the WI passed a resolution urging the government to reverse its decision to restrict access to the legal aid system, which members believed resulted in survivors of domestic abuse not being able to access justice. In 2011 the WI resumed its work on legal aid in response to new concerns about reforms laid out in the Legal Aid, Sentencing, and Punishment of Offenders Bill that the WI believed would make it harder for survivors of domestic violence and other vulnerable people to access legal aid. The campaign achieved a major success when the government backtracked on plans to cut access to legal aid for survivors of domestic violence and delivered concessions on the WI's major areas of concern.

Rural Housing

Throughout the WI's history housing has remained a top priority for members, being the subject of no less than 15 resolutions spanning from 1918 to 1998. From the problem of housing shortages causing homelessness in communities across the nation to ensuring improved accommodation for the elderly, WI members have often held fast to the belief that 'Institutes exist so that we may be good neighbours.'¹⁰

One of the WI's first ever resolutions passed in 1918 was for members to bring pressure on their local councils to provide modern 'state-aided' housing. This campaign was a direct response to the Prime Minister's war-time promise to build 'Homes Fit for Heroes.' In passing the 1918 resolution, members also pledged to work with local authorities to bring piped water and electricity to all village homes. Three more resolutions on housing passed quickly thereafter in the following decade. Reflecting on the energetic way WI members took up the work of smarter planning, the NFWI General Secretary Alice Williams commented: 'The knowledge that their work and their brains are being used for the betterment of future homes must be an incentive and an encouragement to many women who never before had any idea that in them lay the ability to do anything but drudge.'¹¹

WI campaigning on this issue really shot up the public and political agenda following the 1943 resolution submitted by Essex Federation that quite simply stated that the three main services - water, sewerage, and electricity - were a 'national responsibility' and should be available in country homes as well as city dwellings. Following this resolution the WI conducted a national survey of members looking into

the supply of water in rural areas, and members produced a report which they presented to the government.

Speaking of the report in the House of Commons during a debate on the Water Act, one MP stated: 'The Women's Institutes are not generally a revolutionary body, but they have produced a revolutionary document' - a document which proved that the water supply in 3,500 parishes was appallingly lacking.¹² In 1945 the Water Act was passed, expanding the national water supply into what we know and enjoy today.

Today WI members remain just as engaged in matters relevant to the home and family as they ever were, but of course with a modern twist. It was the same knee-jerk reaction felt in the past against the unequal moral standard that led the WI to pass a resolution in 2004 against the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation and led Hampshire WI members in 2008 to pass a federation resolution, then mount a nation-wide campaign for the legalisation of sex work in the UK. While ultimately the Hampshire resolution has not made it to the NFWI AGM debate stage, it shows that WI members remain unafraid to tackle all things taboo, especially in the defence of vulnerable women.

'AN INCENTIVE AND AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO MANY WOMEN WHO NEVER BEFORE HAD ANY IDEA THAT IN THEM LAY THE ABILITY TO DO ANYTHING BUT DRUDGE'

ALICE WILLIAMS,
NFWI GENERAL SECRETARY

Our homes and families in 2015

'LET'S TRY SOME WORD ASSOCIATION. WOMEN'S INSTITUTES: BRAMBLE JELLY, SINGING JERUSALEM, VICTORIA SPONGE CAKE? WRONG. THINK ECO-WARRIORS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, PROSTITUTION, THIRD-WORLD DEBT, CHILD ABUSE, NUDE CALENDARS, DRUGS.'

THE OBSERVER, 13 JUNE 1999

Today members report that they enjoy a vastly different home life than women did in the past. In fact the typical WI member in 2015 is almost just as likely to be single or cohabiting and four times as likely to be child free, than she is to identify as a housewife. Eighty-seven per cent of members today also report that women are much more likely to share domestic labour with their partners than in the past.

However, despite these shifts, WI members today report continuing inequalities in the home, and like their foremothers before them, a sense that their work in the home is undervalued monetarily and culturally. This belief is consistent across members of all ages, suggesting that the gendered experiences of domestic life have remained broadly constant over time. In fact, 95% of members still believe that women are expected to be the primary care-giver, yet 79% believe that staying at home to raise children is not valued by society. As members taking part in the focus groups stated:

'THE GOVERNMENT TREATS WOMEN AT HOME LIKE PARIAS'

'PEOPLE SAY IT'S DEMEANING TO LOOK AFTER CHILDREN AND THAT'S WRONG'

This has led some members to believe that the government and wider society sends out mixed messages about women staying at home to look after children. This belief is further supported by the 84% of members who believe that, despite advances in legislation like child benefit and maternity leave, it still remains difficult for women to balance family responsibilities and work.

Traditional domestic skills word association word cloud

79%

BELIEVE THAT STAYING HOME TO RAISE CHILDREN IS NOT VALUED IN TODAY'S SOCIETY



WI opinions

87%

AGREE THAT WOMEN TODAY ARE MORE LIKELY TO SHARE CHORES WITH THEIR PARTNERS THAN IN THE PAST

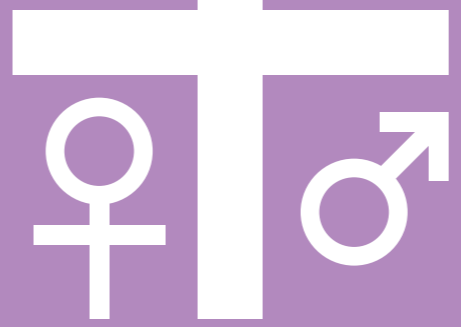
BELIEVE IT IS DIFFICULT FOR WOMEN TO BALANCE FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES WITH WORK

84%

88%

95%

THINK THERE IS STILL AN EXPECTATION FOR WOMEN TO BE THE PRIMARY CARE-GIVER



55%

of carers in the WI don't have confidence that NHS and social care services will be able to meet their needs in the future

BELIEVE THAT TRADITIONAL DOMESTIC SKILLS ARE BEING LOST

Traditional skills

Today, almost 90% of WI members believe that traditional domestic skills, like cooking a meal from scratch, are being lost. This is important to address, WI members noted, because although sometimes viewed as a burden, many domestic skills viewed as 'traditional' are requisite today for healthy and sustainable living. While members noted that in the past society may have policed domesticity in ways that were restrictive for women, a lack of interest today in handing down those skills means we are losing vital know-how. In 2003, members gave voice to this concern with a resolution calling for practical food education for children to fight obesity related illnesses and unhealthy habits.

Caring in the home

Another aspect of home life that unites one-third of WI members is their caring responsibilities, both in the home and out. Thirty-six per cent of WI members have informal caring responsibilities, which translates to about 80,000 members. This is markedly higher than the national average of around 10%. Social care and the care of the children, sick, and elderly remain a core area of concern for members.

'THE CARERS ARE NOT BEING LOOKED AFTER'

'SOCIAL WORKERS HAD TO PERSUADE ME THAT I WAS A CARER'

For carers, the health and social care landscape for the future looks bleak. Carers in the WI are more pessimistic than non-carers about the ability of current services to the health challenges of the twenty-first century, with 55% of them disagreeing that the NHS and social care services will be able to meet their needs as they get older. This lack of confidence was also reflected in the focus groups, where members identified social care, services for the elderly and mental health prevention and treatment as key areas where

health services for women have not improved over time or have deteriorated during their lifetimes.

'GETTING SUPPORT FROM THE GP [WHEN YOU ARE A CARER] IS DIFFICULT. IT HAS TO GET TO A CRISIS BEFORE PEOPLE GET HELP'

'CARERS NEED A BREAK FOR THEMSELVES'

Members in the focus groups were largely in agreement that carers do not receive enough support from the government. However, positively, they believed that the WI can help fill that gap by providing 'support and freedom for carers.'



From top: The 1978 AGM makes the front page of the Evening News; touring the UK to raise awareness of the WI with the 'women in the community' tour bus (1984); speaking up on legal aid cuts in 2011.

1 Anonymous, 'Enrichment of Life in Villages: 18 Years' Work of the Women's Institute,' *Times*, 46524 (16 August 1933), 6.
 2 National Federation of Women's Institutes, 'Current Events,' *Home & Country: The Magazine of the National Federation of Women's Institutes*, 9, no. 6 (June 1927), 233.
 3 National Federation of Women's Institutes, 'Age of Consent,' *Speaking Out: A Public Affairs Handbook* (orig. published 1994), 74.
 4 *Hansard*, HC Deb (1922-07) 157 col.399.
 5 See Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930* (London: Pandora Press, 1985), 74-76.
 6 Sonya O. Rose, 'Sex, citizenship, and the nation in World War II Britain,' in *Cultures of Empire: A Reader*, ed. Catherine Hall (New York: Routledge, 2000), 260.
 7 Arthur Stanley, 'Health Education,' *Lancet* (June 1931), 1268; *Hansard*, HC Deb (1944-01) 396 col. 503.
 8 Diana Geddes, 'Rape Bill Supported by Women's Institutes,' *Times*, 59414 (05 June 1975), 2.
 9 *Hansard*, HC Deb (1976-02) 905 col. 810.
 10 National Federation of Women's Institutes, 'News of the Month- Women's Institutes and Religious Education,' *Home & Country: The Magazine of the National Federation of Women's Institutes*, 24, no. 1 (January 1942), 1.
 11 Qtd in Jane Robinson, *A Force to be Reckoned With: A History of the Women's Institute* (London: Virago, 2011), 77.
 12 *Hansard*, HC Deb (1945-02) 408 col. 877.

Our society and work – looking back

A voice for women

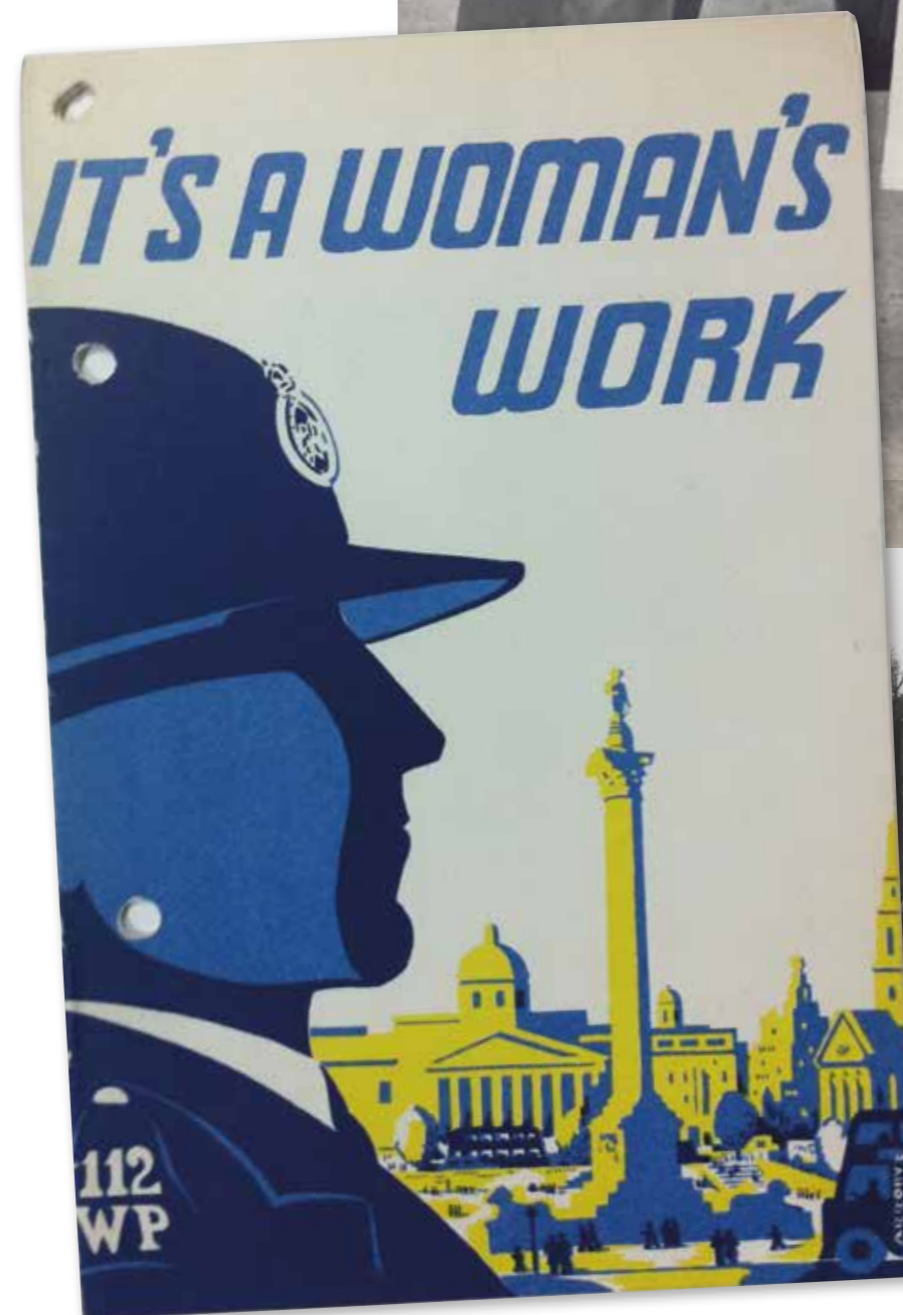
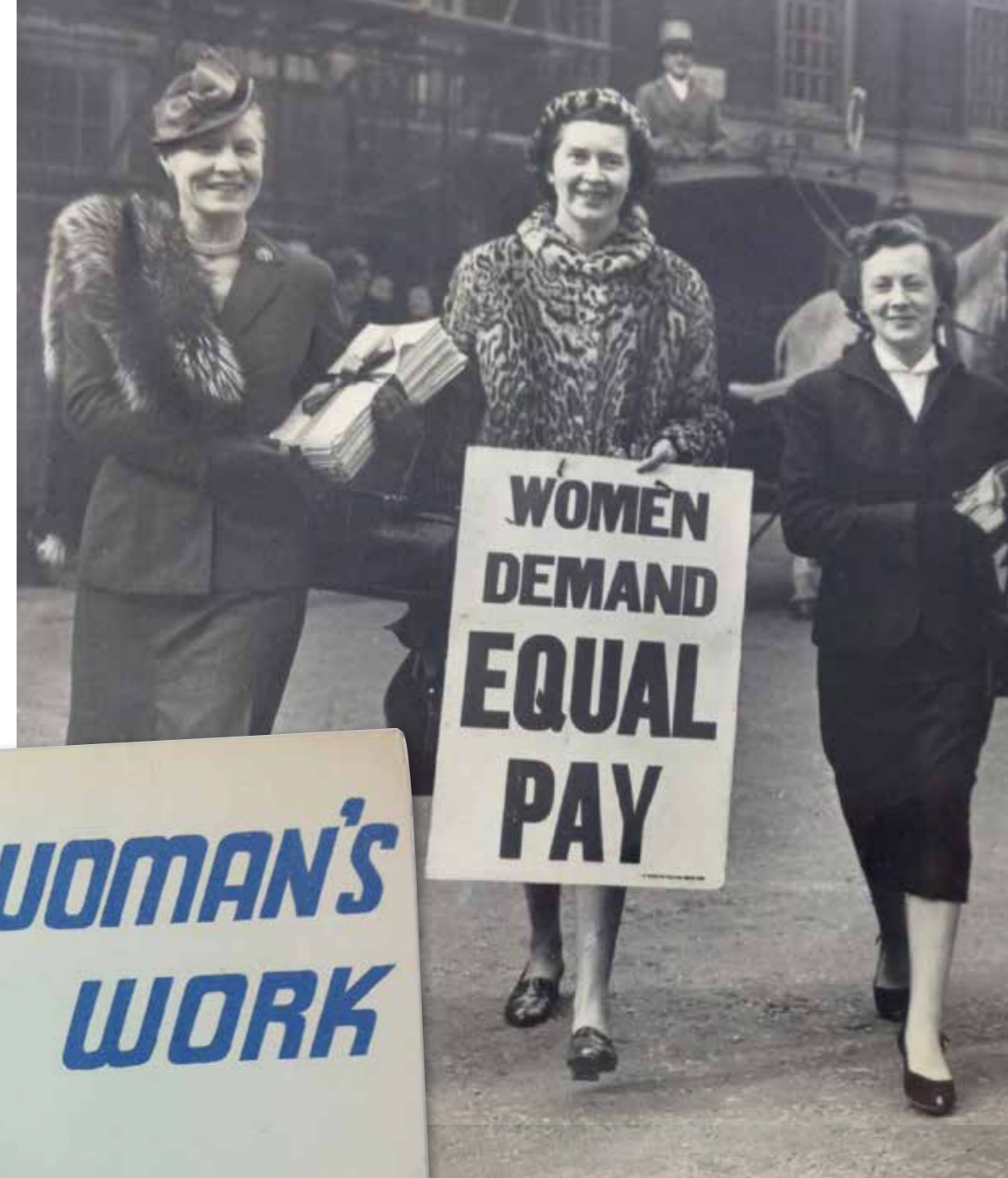
Born out of the upheaval and sense of common purpose that united the nation during the First World War, a dedication to improving individual lives and communities has long been central to the ethos and purpose of the WI. Founder members set out to empower women to get to grips with issues of concern to members and their communities. A 1921 edition of *Home and Country* magazine proudly exclaimed: 'if one person alone cannot make her wants heard it becomes much easier when there are numbers wanting the same kind of things,' encouraging members to recognise the benefits of a collective approach, 'that is why large numbers of women organised in bodies such as the National Federation of Women's Institutes can become a real power.'

In a period when few women participated in public life and the vote for women had not yet been won, the WI's pioneers and early leaders: founder, Madge Watt; the first Chairman, Lady Denman; and Vice Chairman, Grace Hadow, showed tremendous foresight in recognising the promise of this new organisation to help women reach their potential. The WI took a democratic and co-ordinated approach to organising and mobilising women. Its leaders instinctively understood that if women learnt how to chair meetings, work on committees, and built their confidence in speaking in public, these skills would equip them for a changing world and stand them in good stead for participating in other areas of public life.

This approach endured, seeing the WI offer British women training in democratic systems and the exercise of the vote. It also enabled members, many of whom had little prior experience – at least outside the home – of exerting power, to exercise influence.

'MEMBERS MUST LEARN TO REALISE THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS THE COMMUNITY IN WHICH THEY LIVE AND, FROM AN INTEREST IN THEIR OWN VILLAGE AND THEIR OWN COUNTY, COME TO SEE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THEIR OWN AFFAIRS AND THOSE OF THE NATION AT LARGE'

GRACE HADOW, NFWI VICE CHAIR



WI members, pictured in 1954, spent decades campaigning for equal pay and women police, and later campaigned for the repeal of laws preventing women working in mines. Members of Ranskill and Troworth WI are pictured visiting Harworth Colliery.

Our society and work

The first WI meeting took place at Llanfairpwll on Anglesey on 16 September 1915.



'At first it was believed, even by other countrywomen, that the "village" women would never be able to run their own little institutes, and would never be able to make their wishes known. There were among the leaders, however, a few who never ceased to affirm the contrary. They pointed out that a woman who could successfully bring up ten children on fourteen shillings a week must be possessed of great powers of organisation, great courage, and abundant common sense. In fact, they maintained that here in the country was a great undiscovered fund of ability, which only needed an opportunity: and they have been abundantly justified...' *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 August 1935

Deep-rooted social barriers were broken down with all women welcome, regardless of religion, class or status. The WI's organising model also meant all members were expected to contribute, enabling the work to be shared. Lady Denman was clear about her expectations, telling delegates gathered at the 1936 AGM: 'We do not believe in dictators...each member should be responsible for her Institute and have a share in the work...the many jobs that are to be done at the perfect WI are shared by the members and not undertaken by one or two super-women.'

This considered approach to organising created a robust and more durable movement, gradually forging the WI a reputation as an effective force for change, through which, as *The Times* noted in 1933, 'Women hitherto unfamiliar with social service are learning through their institutes to accept this kind of responsibility: they have been given a fuller conception of citizenship.'

A practical approach

It was quickly clear that by working together, members could improve both their lives and their communities. Building on their successful contributions to the war effort; growing food, and bottling and preserving excess fruit, the NFWI published a pamphlet in 1917 entitled *Women's Institutes and their part in the reconstruction of rural life*.

The pamphlet highlighted the WI's important role revitalising rural communities and made clear; 'The WI movement is not a war emergency measure but will be of permanent value in the world of rural regeneration.'

The decades that followed saw a tremendous range of projects and initiatives dedicated to responding to need and improving the nation.

Evacuations on the Home Front: laying the foundations for social security

With war with Germany looming, in September 1938 the government enlisted the help of WI members with preparations for the evacuation of children to the countryside. Starting a valuable war-time contribution that even pacifist members could approve of, 'the institute war week' as it became known, saw plans made for an evacuation scheme, where the WI worked closely with the Home Office and Women's Voluntary Society (WVS) to develop evacuation procedures.

Following the evacuations that took place some 12 months later, with war underway, in December 1939, WIs that had received evacuees were invited to complete a survey about their experiences. Some 1,700 WIs responded and the results were published in *Town Children through Country Eyes* in 1941. Evacuation was often hard for both parties. Rural WI hosts expressed shock at the state of children, reporting head lice, bed wetting and insanitary habits, and poor manners. Many urban children and their mothers meanwhile were dismayed at the very basic conditions of rural houses, which frequently lacked an electricity supply, or running water. The report recommended the introduction of a 'children's allowance' and nursery places in slum areas, stimulating a national debate about support for families that eventually led to the development of family allowance after the war.

Craft industries and markets

The WI's practical approach helped forge the way for many women into a new sphere, to work outside the home, where they received recognition for their domestic labours, and the chance to supplement family incomes. In 1918, the NFWI set up a 'trades subcommittee', WIs were encouraged to launch local craft 'industries' such as one established by Ticehurst WI in Sussex, which made smocked dresses

and jumpers for children that were advertised in *The Lady* magazine. In Warwickshire, there was fur craft and glove making, while in Devon members were dying yarn, weaving and making socks. The very first exhibition of WI crafts in 1917 featured Cuthbert rabbit, produced in great quantities by WIs that were keen to support and promote UK-made toys. The Cuthbert rabbits were sold by retailers until challenges maintaining quality standards and competition from large stores meant production ceased. This entrepreneurial spirit was also spread to other areas such as co-operative markets, where WI members sold home-made goods and home-grown produce.

Active citizens, changing society

Through encouraging community activity and practical action on the ground, the WI helped members to create change in their own lives and communities. This approach fostered an active concept of citizenship that was developed through the organisation's democratic structures and resolutions process. These systems supported members to campaign for change on some of society's major challenges and moved members' efforts to improve the lives of women firmly into the public sphere.

Jury service

Efforts to ensure women play a full role in public life have long been central to the work of the WI; some of the earliest campaigns centred on women's duties as citizens, and the importance of women jurors and magistrates. The WI's first campaign on jury service launched in 1921, urging eligible women to 'accept their full responsibilities as citizens in whatever way they may be called upon to serve their country' at a time when virtually no women met the qualifying criteria. Years of campaigning continued throughout the twentieth century, with members in the 1950s rallying against the limited pool of jurors, drawn largely from men because service was linked to property

'HARD THOUGHTS UNDER THEIR HATS'

THE TIMES, 1970

'DURING THE PAST 25 YEARS MANY SEX INJUSTICES HAVE BEEN SWEEP AWAY, BUT MANY STILL REMAIN. THERE IS STILL INEQUALITY OF PAY IN POSTS OPEN TO BOTH SEXES; WOMEN ARE NOT ALLOWED TO RETAIN THEIR NATIONALITY ON MARRIAGE, PEERESSES IN THEIR OWN RIGHT MAY NOT SIT IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS... THESE ARE SOME OF THE REFORMS FOR WHICH THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN THE RIGHT OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO EQUALITY ARE NOW WORKING.'

HOME AND COUNTRY, 1943

ownership. A 1964 AGM resolution called for reform of 'outdated' laws governing jury selection and service. It led to a decade of campaigning to implement the Morris Report, which called for jury service to be open to all. The Home Secretary, the General Council of the Bar, and the Committee on Jury Service were petitioned, while the NFWI submitted evidence from members to the Home Office. Pressure from the WI and other women's organisations ultimately resulted in the Juries Act of 1974.

Women magistrates

1929 saw the WI pass a resolution declaring that there should be 'at least two women magistrates on every bench' across the nation. Again, petitions were launched and members began to persuade the Lord Chancellor of the need for action. While he promised to consider lists of women suitable for appointment, the WI turned to its own membership, urging qualified women to undertake service.

Women police

Continuing with the theme of civic duty, as well as interpreting the laws, the WI was convinced that women had an important role to play in enforcing them, and protecting the nation. When the Metropolitan Police's Women's Patrols were disbanded in 1922, the WI passed a resolution calling for their reinstatement. Over the next 26 years, WI members joined a vigorous campaign to increase the number of women police, lobbying the Home Office and winning the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The results paid off during WWII, when more women were brought into the police force including a number who were given full policing powers. By 1944, 335 policewomen were employed across the country, half of them in the Metropolitan Police Service.

Equal pay

In line with the WI's rural heritage, the first equal pay campaign came in the 1920s when members began to push for better pay for female agricultural workers. In 1929, as a direct result of the WI's lobbying, the Minister of

Agriculture responded with plans to fix overtime wages for women workers. The war years further stimulated debate on equality, with a 1943 edition of *Home and Country* magazine considering the issue of equal compensation for men and women injured in the air raids. It noted WI members know from 'personal experience that bombs do not discriminate between men and women, but by all people who believe in justice.'

That same year the WI passed a resolution calling for 'equal pay for equal work' and was represented for many years on the Equal Pay Campaign Committee. Alongside other women's organisations, WI members kept up momentum for decades, lobbying the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the 1950s and then campaigning for equal pay in professions such as teaching and the civil service. By 1970, the NFWI was backing Employment Secretary, Barbara Castle's Equal Pay Bill, which was finally passed that same year. While the Bill meant it was illegal to pay men more than women for work of equal value, the WI's campaigning did not stop there. *Home and Country* declared: 'This passing of the Act is only the beginning' and the WI set about ensuring rigorous enforcement.

Equality at work

Convinced of the need for further reform, in 1975, the same year that the Equal Pay Act was finally implemented, the WI passed another resolution pledging to continue the fight 'for the principle of equality of opportunities and legal status for men and women.' Following this resolution, the WI gave support to Factory Act Legislation, which offered safety, health, and welfare protections for women working in factories, but the WI also sought to extend that protection to all workers, female or male. The WI also called for the repeal of the Mines and Quarries Act in 1975, which prohibited the right of women to work in mines, and campaigned for the right of women to work on the docks and drive construction plant trucks.

Our society and work in 2015

The society in which WI members live and work in 2015 may seem very different from that of their foremothers, yet in many ways similarities remain. The results of our centenary research reveal a membership that continues to be highly engaged in both local community and society more widely, and despite identifying improvements for women over the course of the twentieth century, members remain concerned about ongoing barriers to equality for women and men.

Social and political engagement

Members have a strong belief in personal agency, which underpins their high levels of social and community engagement. Ninety-four per cent of members volunteered in the last 12 months. Contrasting to the general public more widely, WI volunteering rates are very high. The 2013-14 Community Life Survey found that 74% of the population had volunteered at least once in the past 12 months.¹ The most common reason members give for volunteering is to improve things or help other people (35%), followed by meeting a need in the community (26%). Twenty-one per cent say they volunteer to use skills they have developed in other parts of their lives.

WI members are also more politically engaged than the wider population. According to the Hansard Society's 2015 Audit of Political Engagement, 44% of the population engaged politically in some way in the previous 12 months.² In contrast, 98% of members say they did the same thing. The WI is strictly non-partisan, and whilst it may be that the timing of fieldwork, which took place over the 2015 General Election, has meant that these figures are higher than they would be otherwise, this nonetheless speaks of a highly engaged group.



*WI digital champions conference in 2012.
Image: Louise Haywood-Schiefer*

'NURSES, BUT NEVER DOCTORS, COOKS BUT NEVER FIRST CLASS CHEFS' HOME AND COUNTRY, 1975

Influence over decision-making

Whilst WI members feel that they have considerable influence over the decisions made in their households (96% say they have a good deal or some influence here), they feel they have less influence over decision-making in their local area (32% feel they have a good deal or some influence). When compared with national data, members are more likely than the wider public to feel they have at least some influence over decisions made in their local area (32% compared with 20%), which may reflect the high levels of volunteering and political engagement described above.³

‘WE HAVE BUILT UP A CREDIBILITY THAT THE COMMUNITY IDENTIFIES WITH THE WI’

‘AS THE WI WE HAVE A MUCH STRONGER VOICE THAN AS WOMEN INDIVIDUALLY’

WIs are an integrated part of their local communities. Influence is often expressed for them in the sheer diversity of women in the WI - women of all backgrounds come together under the auspices of the WI, creating a powerful networking community and a strong base for members to make change across different fields.

Yet thinking about their influence over the country as a whole, 69% feel they have not very much or no influence. Despite the high levels of engagement in their communities and society more widely, WI members are less likely than the wider public to feel they have at least some influence over decisions made at a national level (9% compared with 17%).⁴

However when pressed in the focus group discussions, members spoke of more belief in their capacity to have an impact on communities and public life than the survey revealed:

‘WE ARE LOCAL COUNCILLORS, SCHOOLS GOVERNORS, EVEN PCCS’

‘WE’VE JOINED IN THE SYSTEM AND HAVE LOTS OF LOCAL INFLUENCE AND NATIONAL IMPACT’

‘WE HAVE POWER IN AGGREGATE’

Women in society

There is wide agreement amongst WI members that things have improved for women, 95% believe that women today have more choices than ever.

‘YOU USED TO HAVE TO RESIGN WHEN YOU GOT MARRIED, OR YOU WERE FIRED WHEN YOU GOT MARRIED, JUDGED ON LOOKS, TOLD WHAT TO WEAR’

However, despite this consensus about improvements, members are also clear that equality has not yet been reached, either in the home or at work. Eighty-two per cent of members agree that women are judged to different standards than men, while 70% still disagree that women are now equal to men.

‘IF YOU SPEAK OUT YOU TEND TO GET BRANDED AS FEISTY...OR A BALL-BREAKER, OR HARD, OR BOSSY. BOSSY, THERE’S A WORD. I HATE IT!’

‘I WAS A CITY TRADER, I STARTED IN 1976 AND WAS TOLD IT WAS A “YOUNG MAN’S GAME” AND I’D BE BURNT OUT BY 30. I LASTED UNTIL I RETIRED AT 50’

Younger members are more likely than older members to believe that there is still more to do in working towards equality. Eighty-one per cent of those aged 50 and under disagree that equality has been reached, whilst 85% agree that women are judged by different standards to men. In contrast, 64% of the over 70s disagree equality has been reached, and 79% agree that women are judged by different standards to men.

Women at work

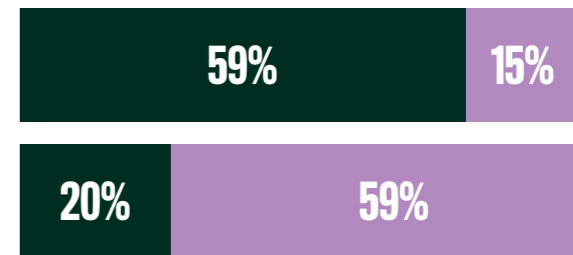
These findings were echoed in the focus group discussions where participants had a mixed reaction to gender inequalities in the workplace. Some members didn’t think inequality was an issue today, or in the past:

Women in the workplace

Women are penalised in the workplace for having children

Women have the same opportunities as men in the workplace

% AGREE % DISAGREE



‘I SUCCEEDED. YOU MAKE YOUR OWN OPPORTUNITIES’

Others reflected on differences across sectors

‘IN MY FIELD, EDUCATION, THERE’S A SET SCALE. THE PAY’S NOT GREAT BUT AT LEAST IT’S EQUAL’

‘MY LAST JOB WAS IN THE AMBULANCE SERVICE. THERE WAS NO DISCRIMINATION FROM THE EMPLOYERS; WE HAD FLEXIBLE SHIFT PATTERNS SO IT WAS GOOD FOR FAMILY LIFE. BUT THE BAD ATTITUDES CAME FROM THE PUBLIC - THEY’D SAY: “WHY’S SHE DRIVING?” OR, “YOU’RE A WOMAN, YOU CAN’T LIFT THAT” TO ME’

Among the older members in the groups, more broadly, there was consensus that work environments have become more female and family friendly than in the past:

‘BEFORE THERE WAS NO MATERNITY LEAVE SO MUCH MATERNITY AND PREGNANCY DISCRIMINATION’

Yet many members still spoke about stark inequalities that exist today.

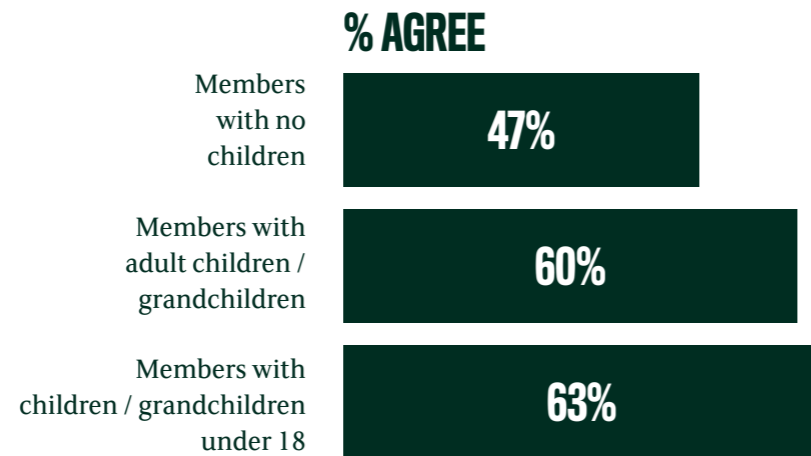
‘I MET THE GLASS CEILING AT 50. BASICALLY COMES DOWN TO AN OLD BOYS CLUB’

These inequalities are particularly evident for mothers; 59% of WI members agree that women are penalised in the workplace for having children, whilst the same proportion disagree that women have the same opportunities as men in the workplace.

‘EVEN NOW WITH THE CURRENT LEGISLATION, MEN ARE STILL GIVEN THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT MORE, PROMOTED MORE, RISE TO THE TOP IN FEMALE DOMINATED INDUSTRIES LIKE TEACHING. WHEN YOU GET PAST MIDDLE-AGE THEY PUT WOMEN IN A BOX. WE NEED TO GET OUT OF THESE BOXES’

Again, agreement that there is ongoing inequality in the workplace is correlated with age. Seventy per cent of members who are 40 and under agree that women are penalised in the workplace for having children. Agreement falls to 64% of 41 – 50 year olds, and to 54% amongst the over 70s.

Women are penalised in the workplace for having children



Members with children or grandchildren are also more likely than those without to believe that women are penalised for having children, as shown by the table above.

Women leaders and role models

In keeping with their concerns about equality and perhaps their own experiences with the WI, members expressed strong agreement (83%) that more women are needed in leadership positions.

Continuing with the theme of role models, and women in the public eye, members expressed concern about the number of positive role models out there for girls aged 13-18; 78% agree there are not enough positive role models. Concern about this is particularly high amongst members under 50 – agreement that there are not enough positive role models rises to 82% amongst this group. Role models were recognised as important influencers in a changing world, people today’s girls could learn from, look up to, and be inspired to reach their full potential by. Members recognised the multiple pressures today’s girls face and reflected on how, in an age of social media and reality television, positive role models are more important than ever.

When asked which role models alive today they admire, the number one choice was Malala Yousafzai - a young woman who had shown ‘bravery,’ and through her advocacy of female rights and education, was ‘inspiring’ others and demonstrating she was prepared to ‘stand by her principles.’

The Duchess of Cambridge was also cited, members highlighted how she uses her strong public profile to help others and support a range of causes, while staying true to her family orientated values in a changing world. Her

Majesty The Queen also featured, with members noting their awe and appreciation of her ‘commitment’ to public duty, her ‘resilience,’ ‘dedication’ and incredible ‘work-ethic.’

The best role models alive today for young women

- 1 MALALA YOUSAFZAI
- 2 THE DUCHESS OF CAMBRIDGE
- 3 HM THE QUEEN
- 4 JESSICA ENNIS-HILL
- 5 EMMA WATSON
- 6 ANGELINA JOLIE
- 7 A TEACHER
- 8 JK ROWLING
- 9 KARREN BRADY
- 10 DAME KELLY HOLMES

Members were also asked to consider the best role models from history for today’s young women. Here pioneers of women’s equality and those who chartered new territory in terms of women’s involvement in society dominate with members citing Emmeline Pankhurst, Florence Nightingale and Margaret Thatcher as their top role models.

1 *Community Life Survey: England, 2013-14* [online], London, see www.gov.uk
 2 Hansard Society, 2015, *Audit of Political Engagement*. See: <http://www.auditofpoliticalengagement.org/media/reports/Audit-of-Political-Engagement-12-2015.pdf>
 3 *Ibid.*, 36.
 4 *Ibid.*, 36.

69% OF WI MEMBERS FEEL THEY HAVE NOT VERY MUCH OR NO INFLUENCE OVER THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE

32% FEEL THEY HAVE A GOOD DEAL OR SOME INFLUENCE OVER DECISION-MAKING IN THEIR LOCAL AREA

78% agree there are not enough positive role models for today’s girls

59% AGREE THAT WOMEN ARE PENALISED IN THE WORKPLACE FOR HAVING CHILDREN

82% BELIEVE THAT WOMEN ARE JUDGED BY DIFFERENT STANDARDS TO MEN

83% BELIEVE MORE WOMEN ARE NEEDED IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

70% OF WI MEMBERS DISAGREE THAT WOMEN ARE NOW EQUAL TO MEN

94% OF WI MEMBERS VOLUNTEERED IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

Campaign for better screening

THE first major survey to reveal the feelings of women on cervical cancer screening has been published by the National Federation of Women's Institutes.

The publication marks the launch of a campaign by the WI — the country's largest women's organisation — to achieve adequate screening facilities for all women.

The NFWI joined forces with the Women's National Cancer Control Campaign in 1983 to discover exactly how much women knew about cervical cancer screening and whether the existing system met their needs. Questionnaires were sent to WIs in England and Wales and over 9,500 responses were received.

"This massive response shows the tremendous concern women feel about the present system," says Anne Stamper, chairman of the NFWI's Environment and Public Affairs Committee.

"Decisions on health matters are far too often made without consulting those most affected — in this case, women themselves. The vast number of replies received shows how much women welcomed this rare opportunity to express their views."

"Two thousand women currently die from cervical cancer each year — most of these deaths can be prevented. We are issuing an Action Sheet which WI members can use to campaign at grassroots level, and we are calling on all women to fight for

better provision in their own areas.

"But these campaigns can only succeed if the Government and District Health Authorities also show a commitment to providing adequate screening facilities."

The main findings of the NFWI/WNCCC report on cervical cancer are summarised:

- Although the majority of women replying had been smear tested, there were still many misconceptions about the purpose of the test. There is clearly a need for better education and information.

- Two major concerns to emerge from the survey were the recall system, and the fact that the results of the tests were not automatically made available. Sixty eight per cent of the women had never received any form of reminder.

- The majority of WI members questioned would prefer to see a three-year interval between tests — rather than the five year one currently recommended by the DHSS.

- Embarrassment about internal examinations and reluctance to be tested by a male doctor affected many women. The survey

showed a need for more reassurance and encouragement on the part of medical staff. Sixty five per cent of the women stated that a smear test had never been suggested by a doctor.

- Many women — especially those living in

rural areas — faced transport problems in attending for tests. There were also difficulties in discovering where and when to go for tests. The survey revealed a need for more Well Women clinics — over 62% would prefer to have the test carried out at such a clinic.

Cancer smear test mistaken ideas revealed

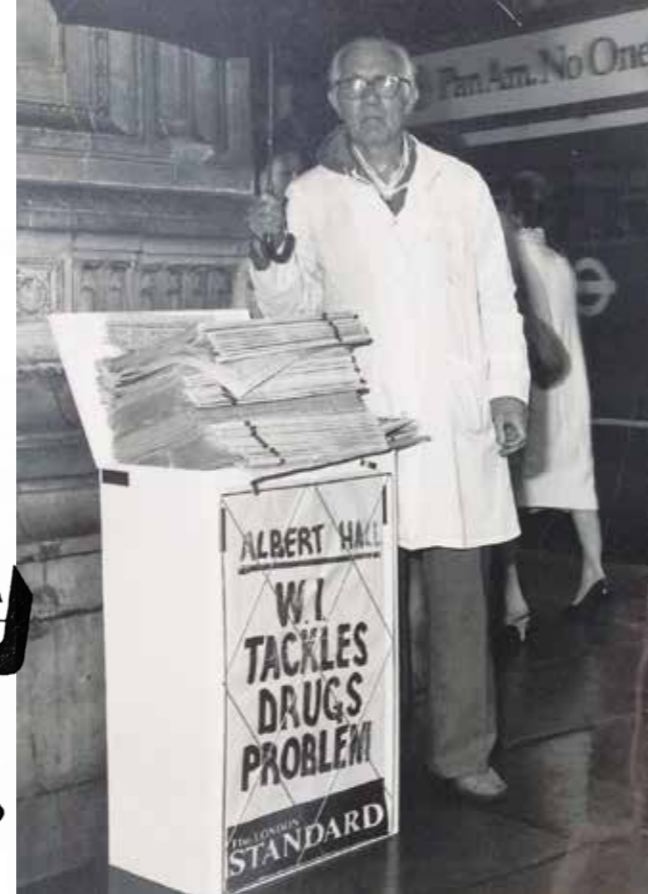
By Sue Sollohub

FINDINGS from the first major survey to reveal the feelings of women on cervical cancer screening have revealed by the National Federation of Women's Institutes.

The publication marked the launch of a campaign by WI to achieve adequate screening facilities for all women. The National Federation joined forces with Women's National Cancer Control Campaign in 1983 to discover how much women knew about cervical cancer screening and whether the system met their needs.

Education needed

More than 9,500 responses were received from questionnaires sent to WIs in England and Wales. Although the majority of women



'STRANGE THOUGH AT SIXTY, LONG PAST WHAT MY DAUGHTER RATHER DEPRESSINGLY WILL CALL THE 'STOP OF LIFE' WE SHOULD ACTUALLY BE IN THE VANGUARD'

LADY ANGLESEY, WI DIAMOND JUBILEE AGM, 1975

The 1980s saw members take action on cancer screening facilities, drug abuse, and get behind efforts to encourage the nation to keep fit with a healthy eating and exercise demo at the 1984 AGM.

Our health and wellbeing — looking back

Healthy living is at the heart of the WI. After all, the WI was founded in Canada by Adelaide Hoodless following the tragic death of her young son when he drank contaminated, unpasteurised milk. Realising that children were paying the price of parental ignorance in matters of domestic hygiene, Hoodless set out to transform the conditions of rural life by educating women on how to keep a sanitary and healthy home. That belief — that education can literally save lives — has informed much of the WI's public policy work on matters of health and wellbeing. Following that template, WI health campaigning has always taken a multi-level approach consisting of education, informed behavioural change, and where necessary, campaigning for legislative follow through to support people to make healthier choices.

In many areas of health work, WI members showed astonishing foresight and courage, calling for a ban on smoking in public places in 1964, calling for the legalisation of corneal grafting in 1952, and coming out strong when many were silent to promote HIV and AIDS education in 1986. Over the years, members have been concerned with care facilities and hospital practices, with one particularly influential campaign in the early 1950s calling for hospitals to permit parents to visit their sick children. Members have also turned their attention to women's health issues, passing resolutions on maternal healthcare, midwife staffing levels, perinatal death, breast and cervical cancer screening, endometriosis, and ovarian cancer.

Throughout all of this work the WI has always stressed to members and the larger community that these health campaigns are statements of principle, underpinned by the utmost respect of the rights of individuals to make choices when it comes to health and the firm conviction that those

choices must be informed. When the WI campaigned for analgesics to be made available during childbirth, the campaign was not about mandating that all women use analgesics, but about ensuring that the choice was there for the women who wanted to do so. As a 1927 resolution on health services stated: 'That it be clearly understood that no pressure of any kind is placed upon any individual member or local Women's Institute to adopt or submit to any particular method of medical treatment.' Today in that same spirit, WI health and wellbeing campaigns strive to empower women to take responsibility for their own health through education and equal access to information and facilities.

WI members with young hospital patients in 1969.



Visiting children in hospital

Before the 1950s parents were neither encouraged, nor in many cases allowed, to visit their sick children in hospital. When parents did visit, they usually did so sparingly, and physical contact was not encouraged and sometimes not



even permitted. The Ministry of Health tried to change this policy several times in the late 1940s, but their pleas fell on deaf ears and public opinion was unmoved to act. That completely changed following the 1950 WI AGM, where members passed a resolution condemning this practice and calling for hospital staff to work with them to make it possible for parents to visit their sick children. 'Cruel to Keep us Away, plead 438,000 women' read the headline of the *Daily Mirror* in the wake of the AGM. Following the resolution, the WI sent several delegations to Westminster to plead its case and in 1954 daily hospital visits for children were gradually phased in. Then in 1957 the NFWI sent evidence to the Platt Committee on the Welfare of Children in Hospital which, in its report the following year, recommended that hospitals reform their visiting policies to allow parents to visit their sick children whenever possible. Platt's report is today considered highly influential in the development of modern hospital practices and is something the WI is proud to have contributed to.

Maternal health

The WI passed its first resolution on maternal health in 1925 when it called for an investigation into what could be done to reduce the stubbornly high maternal mortality rate. Following more than a decade of campaigning (and two additional resolutions on the topic), the WI put out a call for analgesics, or pain relieving drugs, to be made available for rural women in 1938. At this time only obstetricians, not midwives, were trained to administer analgesics, and overwhelmingly, rural women could not afford to be attended by a private obstetrician. Pain relief during labour was thus the preserve of the wealthy, the urban, and the educated - a fact that the WI found unacceptable.

The WI resolution brought nationwide attention to the issue and the Fulham MP, Dr. Edith Summerskill proposed an inquiry shortly thereafter to investigate how to better train midwives in providing the pain relieving drugs. The decades that followed saw the NFWI and its allies successfully build both public and professional understanding about analgesics. Following WWII, the NFWI partnered with the National Birthday Trust Fund and began campaigning for all midwives to be given analgesics training. That campaign was successful and, as of 1 January 1948, new midwifery students began to undergo analgesics training.

After the Analgesia in Childbirth Bill (1949) - backed by the NFWI in an attempt to enshrine into law the right for

A midwife administering analgesia.



women to have pain-free childbirth - failed to pass, the NFWI kept up the momentum by surveying mothers on the use of air and gas during labour. When the survey revealed that women were prevented from using analgesics because they lacked information, the WI embarked on an educational campaign in county fairs up and down the country, demonstrating how the machine worked and showing women it was safe and effective.

Family planning

It would have come as no great surprise to the WI's first national chairman, Lady Denman, that in 1972 the WI called on the government to mandate that all local authorities provide a 'full, free family planning service' because, as she well knew, WI members had never shied away from mentioning the unmentionables. After all, Lady Denman herself was the first ever Chair of the National Birth Control Council (later called the Family Planning Association) when she assumed the post in 1930. Indeed, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, WI members discussed the importance of family planning in the context of their campaigning for maternity rights. As one member wrote in a 1975 letter to *Home and Country*, 'Until mum can set her own limits...she will remain a second-class citizen.'

By 1972 local authorities were permitted to provide family planning services, but they were not obliged to do so, leading to a postcode lottery of contraceptive care and advice. After the WI passed its 1972 resolution aimed at correcting that inconsistency, it launched into action, mobilising county federations behind the issue. Under the NHS Reorganisation Act of 1973, family planning services were enshrined in law and by 1974, were a normal part of the free NHS. The WI undertook extensive campaigning during the course of the parliamentary debates, helping to

establish the case for free contraception, irrespective of age or marital status.

Cervical cancer screening

When the WI passed a resolution in 1964 calling on the NHS to provide comprehensive and routine smear tests for all women in order to detect cervical cancer, it kick-started a national conversation about women's cancer screenings. In the 1960s, 2,500 women died annually from cervical cancer, so the campaign was badly needed. The NFWI started to educate its members about screening facilities and encouraged women to ask for the test, which was available, but grossly under-utilised. At that time many women, as well as many GPs, had never even heard of the test, so education was a major part of the campaign. In response to this renewed attention, the National Cervical Cytology Screening Service was inaugurated in 1966, which routinised smear tests every five years for women as part of general medical practice.¹

Despite this success, WI campaigners suspected that women were probably still not receiving the test as part of their routine health care check-ups. This fear was based on their own personal experiences of trying to access women's health services. To find out if the new screening system was working, the NFWI teamed up with the Women's National Control Campaign and together began the first major survey of women's experiences of smear testing in 1983. Over 9,000 women completed the survey and the results were revealing: 65% of women reported that their doctor had never asked them if they wanted a smear test and 23% of women had not wanted to bother their doctor to ask for one.²

In response, the WI launched a campaign for better screening facilities, more public information, and an effective recall system. Anne Stamper, then Chairman of the NFWI Environment and Public Affairs Committee, pledged the WI would help educate its members, but stressed that political decisions needed to be made in the interests of women if the screening programme was going to save lives:

'Decisions on health matters are far too often made without consulting those most affected, in this case women themselves...We are issuing an action sheet which WI members can use to campaign at grassroots level. And we are calling on all women to fight for better provision in their own areas. But these campaigns can only succeed if the government and district health authorities show a commitment to providing adequate screening facilities.'



WI LAUNCHES SMEAR CAMPAIGN!

The first major survey to reveal the feelings about cervical cancer screening was published today by the National Federation of Women's Institutes. This marks the launch of a campaign by the WI - the largest women's organisation - to achieve adequate screening facilities for all women.

The NFWI joined forces with the Women's National Control Campaign in 1983 to discover exactly how well the system met their needs. 9,200 questionnaires were sent in England and Wales and over 9,500 responses were received.

"This massive response shows the tremendous concern women feel about the present system" says Anne Stamper.

'DECISIONS ON HEALTH MATTERS ARE FAR TOO OFTEN MADE WITHOUT CONSULTING THOSE MOST AFFECTED, IN THIS CASE WOMEN THEMSELVES'

ANNE STAMPER, NFWI ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Later that year in 1988, the Department of Health launched a computerised call and recall system, and the first external quality assessment scheme for the laboratories that were processing the test results. This is considered a watershed moment in cancer screening and today the NHS highlights cervical cancer screenings as one of its biggest victories in the fight against cancer. Today, screening saves an estimated 4,500 lives each year³ and over the last 20 years the incidence of cervical cancer in England has almost halved.⁴

HIV and AIDS

The NFWI was one of the first organisations to talk about HIV and AIDS following its 1986 resolution ‘to inform the general public of the true facts concerning the disease AIDS’ and used its unrivalled network of local organisations to educate the public and get people talking about the issue.

One of its first tasks was to debunk the myth that AIDS wasn’t a women’s issue. Just because women were officially categorised as a low risk group, the NFWI argued, that didn’t mean that the challenges AIDS presented to women weren’t real, pressing, or unique. To tackle this misinformation and produce information relevant to women, the NFWI teamed up with the Terrence Higgins Trust to help publish and produce the educational pamphlet ‘Women and AIDS’, aimed at sparking a dialogue amongst women about the disease and how to protect themselves and their families.

In the years immediately following the resolution, WI members participated in the government’s awareness raising campaign and challenged media characterisations of AIDS as a ‘plague’ because ‘this has led to unnecessary prejudice and extreme isolation for many sufferers.’⁵ The NFWI also submitted evidence to the Social Services Committee inquiry on AIDS. In 1987 the BBC challenged the WI to ‘Face up to AIDS’ by organising public meetings to discuss the disease. The BBC subsequently reported that the WI response was amongst the best received, with Federations taking part up and down the country. This resolution is proof that, as the Terrence Higgins Trust said in 1986, ‘the WI does not flinch from the more difficult issues that face society.’

Smoking in public

In 1954, researchers in the UK established an incontrovertible link between smoking and lung cancer. This was followed in 1962 by a report from the Royal College of Physicians that concluded that there should be tougher laws on the sale and advertising of cigarettes and restrictions imposed on smoking in public places.

This was the first report in the UK to call for such anti-smoking measures to be implemented and was quickly taken up by the WI in a 1964 resolution, which called for measures ‘to restrict the amount of smoking in public places’, including the amount of smoking broadcast on television. The WI was one of the first organisations to call for such a change, and this added to the pressure that

ultimately resulted in a raft of law changes, including the 1965 ban on smoking in television adverts, the 1971 health warnings on packets, and eventually, the 2007 ban in all public places.

Mental health

The care and support of those with mental illness has been a constant throughout the WI’s 100 year history.

From the 1925 resolution calling for greater provisions for the care and after-care of the mentally ill, to the 1957 resolution urging the government to assist in the rehabilitation of mental health patients, to the 1977 resolution aimed at ensuring there were sufficient day centres available for mental health patients in need, the WI has made its commitment to supporting those with mental illness known. During the 1950s, the first WIs in psychiatric hospitals opened and by 1977 the WI could boast of ‘100 special WIs’ in general and specialist hospitals.

In June 2008, the NFWI passed a resolution calling for an end to the inappropriate detention of people with mental health problems, after the son of a Norfolk WI member tragically took his own life while in custody. In partnership with the Prison Reform Trust, the Care not Custody campaign aimed to bring an end to the use of prison as a ‘default option’ for people with mental health needs or learning disabilities. It has succeeded in securing government backing, and a total of £75 million for pilot schemes to ensure that people with mental health problems that come into contact with the criminal justice system get the treatment and support they need.

As part of the developing legacy of the NFWI and PRT’s campaign work together, a ‘Care not Custody Coalition’ has grown apace. The Coalition comprises a wide range of allied professional groups and charities representing over two million people across the health and justice sectors and wider civic society. Members have agreed to work together in order to support the government in keeping its ‘Care not Custody promise’ and to hold government to account for effective delivery.

The Care not Custody campaign calls for a more appropriate response to people with mental health problems in the criminal justice system. Members are pictured with the Home Secretary (centre) at a 2014 campaign event.



**‘THE WI DOES NOT
FLINCH FROM THE MORE
DIFFICULT ISSUES THAT
FACE SOCIETY’**

TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST

Our health and wellbeing in 2015

Today, members' views towards health and healthcare are, as ever, characterised by a strong sense of personal responsibility and individual empowerment. However, there is also an acknowledgement that there is a role for the government to play in enabling healthy lifestyles by providing necessary health education and preventative services. This was especially true, members held, in light of the fact that more and more people do not receive this type of education anymore in the home, and it is often more limited in school.

Members' concerns about their health reflect the larger health landscape today. Overwhelmingly, members identified that 'doing more exercise' would have the greatest positive impact on their own health, followed by 'eating more healthily,' 'regular screening for cancer,' and 'maintaining good mental health.'

There are many reasons to be positive based on how WI members see the state of healthcare provision today. Seventy-three per cent of members believe that the NHS is excellent at caring for physical illnesses and 70% say that they can access NHS healthcare services promptly when they need to. There was regional variance revealed here, with members in Wales ten per cent less likely to report satisfaction with health services than the overall population.

'WHENEVER I NEED IT, THE NHS PULLS OUT ALL THE STOPS'

Additionally, nearly 70% of members believe that the NHS has got better at meeting the needs of women over time. In particular, members of all ages have identified women's

cancer screenings and lifestyle or preventative services as services that have got better for them or the women they know.

Interestingly, members were split by age about whether or not family planning and maternity services have improved, with older members much more likely to say those services have improved, and younger ones more likely to express frustration and disappointment with the kind of contraceptive and maternity care they are getting. Older members were also more likely to voice their concerns around maternity care not based on their own experiences, but based on their daughters'.

'FAMILY PLANNING HAS BEEN LIBERATING FOR WOMEN'

'BEFORE YOU HAD TO GO TO A FAMILY PLANNING CLINIC WHERE THEY WOULD CALL YOU 'MRS' AND YOU WOULD HAVE TO INVENT A FAIRY STORY'

'THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH MIDWIVES, THERE IS ENORMOUS PRESSURE ON THE MATERNITY SERVICES'

'MORE MOTHERS ARE NOT GETTING THE CHOICE, WOMEN USED TO HAVE THE OPTION TO GIVE BIRTH AT HOME'

There are real troubling areas for concern, particularly with regards to mental health and social care. Worryingly, almost half (49%) of members don't believe that health and social care services will be able to meet their needs as they get older and only 17% of members think that the NHS is excellent at caring for mental or emotional illnesses, reflecting a stark division between the quality of physical and mental healthcare that is available. While members acknowledged that as a society we are much more open about discussing mental illness, there was consensus that services simply haven't kept up. This is especially worrying as members have identified 'maintaining good mental health' as the fourth greatest factor that would have the most positive effect on their health as individuals and the fifth greatest positive health impact on women generally.

'MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ARE DETERIORATING. THEY ARE FAILING'

'ON THE GROUND THE [MENTAL HEALTH] SERVICE IS DIRE, YOU'RE FLOUNDERING AND NOTHING IS THERE TO SUPPORT YOU'

The non-clinical care, such as food and accommodation, provided by the NHS also remains a disquieting factor for members, with only 19% of them identifying the standard of non-clinical care as 'excellent.' While members were very positive and almost unanimous in opinion that staff attitudes towards them as patients in the NHS had markedly improved over time, they remained sceptical that other non-clinical elements of the NHS care, such as waiting times, would improve.

1 NFWI, *Keeping Ourselves Informed: Our concern: our resolutions, our action* (London: WI Books Ltd, third ed. 1981), 70
2 Letter from RCOGP to NFWI (3 June 1985), London School of Economics Women's Library, 5FWI/D/1/2/73 Box 144
3 Peto, J. et al. 'The cervical cancer epidemic that screening has prevented in the UK' *Lancet* 364: 249-256 (2004), ref in NHS, The NHS Cervical Screening Programme.

4 NCIN, Cervical Cancer Incidence and Screening Coverage. [Online]. [Accessed 28 August 2015]. Available from: http://www.ncin.org.uk/publications/data_briefings/cervical_incidence_and_screening
5 NFWI, "Women and AIDS": Report of a press launch by the Terrence Higgins Trust, 30 September 1986, LSE WL 5FWI/D/1/2/57 Box 143.

73%
AGREE THE NHS IS EXCELLENT AT CARING FOR THOSE WITH PHYSICAL ILLNESSES

49%
DISAGREE THAT HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SERVICES WILL BE ABLE TO MEET THEIR NEEDS AS THEY GET OLDER

17%
AGREE THAT THE NHS IS EXCELLENT AT CARING FOR THOSE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

19%
AGREE THAT THE NON-CLINICAL CARE PROVIDED BY THE NHS IS EXCELLENT

Our natural world – looking back

With its roots in rural life, WI campaigns have long been at the forefront of protecting the countryside and understanding the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. As early as 1927, the WI was speaking out on the threats our seas and coastal shores faced (at the time, being polluted by waste oil from ships) and the impact on sea-life. Growing concern about human impact on the natural world prompted WI members to call for the preservation of 'wide areas of special beauty' in 1938, while WI members were discussing the impact of pesticides and plastic packaging long before passing resolutions on these issues (in 1960 and 1971 respectively), without forgetting, of course, one of the most memorable and longstanding WI initiatives calling for a campaign to 'preserve the countryside against desecration by litter.' Passed in 1954, this led to the formation of the Keep Britain Tidy campaign.

Much of WI members' work focused on improving rural access, for those whose daily lives were hindered by the lack of rural transport infrastructure, but also as part of a wider movement to promote access to our 'green and pleasant land' for all citizens. A recurring concern for WIs throughout the decades was the patchy provision of bus and rail services in rural areas, even more precarious now as finances have tightened through the years.

In more recent years, WI campaigns have ranged from tackling the plight of the honey bee to reducing waste and conserving the countryside for future generations. A 2005 resolution on protecting natural resources inspired a nationwide action day that saw WIs up and down the country return excess packaging to supermarkets, as part of efforts to encourage retailers to reduce waste. The WI Carbon Challenge, launched in 2008, saw 10,000 members

sign up, pledging to reduce their carbon footprint by 20%. The savings achieved were equivalent to filling the Royal Albert Hall 108 times with CO₂. Meanwhile, the WI Great Food Debate examined the complex challenges and potential solutions for UK and worldwide food security, in a world faced with increasing demand for diminishing resources, with many members concerned that people have lost their connection with food.

The national food supply

Unsurprisingly, the topic under discussion at the very first WI meeting was *The Food Supply of the Country*, demonstrating a commitment to feeding the nation that continues to this day. In 1917, members were urged to 'take every opportunity of becoming more skilled in land work and therefore in the production of food' at the AGM. With limited food supply left in the country, members recommended guidelines of work for increasing food production to help feed everyone across Britain, as well as taking action themselves to grow more for their villages.

During both World Wars, WI members – still primarily in rural communities until the late twentieth century – really came into their own. Members organised markets and bottled and preserved thousands of tonnes of fruit and vegetables that would otherwise have gone to waste. In 1940, the Ministry of Food gave the NFWI a grant to administer the National Fruit Preservation Scheme, recognising the preservation skills of members and firmly attaching the jam label to the WI. On receiving five hundred Dixie hand sealers and other jam making equipment, sent over from America, members set to work. Between 1940 and 1945, over 5,300 tonnes of fruit was preserved; nearly 12 million pounds of fruit that helped ensure the food security of the nation.

From top: Members took the chemicals campaign to Brussels in January 2005; joined The Climate Coalition's lobby of Parliament in June 2015; spoke out on food safety with the 1987 resolution on food irradiation; rallied for government leadership on climate change at the September 2014 Peoples' Climate March; and called for action on litter with a 1954 resolution that led to the formation of Keep Britain Tidy.



'WOMEN GAIN COMPETENCE AND A SENSE OF BEING ABLE TO COPE AND EVEN IF PRESSED, TO SPEAK, TO HAVE VIEWS ON ECONOMIC POLICY AND LACE MAKING AND WHETHER OR NOT IT IS MORALLY RIGHT TO LET ACID RAIN DESTROY YOUR GRANDCHILDREN'S HERITAGE.'

THE TIMES, 19 JULY 1985

NO TO IRRADIATION
NATIONAL FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S INSTITUTES
CONSUMERS' ASSOCIATION



*WI member
Isla Arendale
launches the
Great Milk Debates.*

Food quality

Over the century, WI members have not only made sure that food was available (as individual farmers and as WI members working collectively), but that the foods being sold were of good hygiene and quality. This concern from a consumer perspective dovetailed with the WI's origins in food education, starting with the call for the loaves of bread that were being transported across districts and towns to be enclosed in paper bags (1929). The quality of the bread was also an issue, with a resolution the following year about the nutritive value of commercially-sold bread. Some 20 years later, a further resolution saw members turn attention to the 'deplorable conditions' in which food was handled, distributed and served, urging members to 'help the authorities in every possible way.'

Food labelling and safety

Food irradiation was another issue that mobilised WI members, with the prospect of the ban on commercially available irradiated food being lifted promoting members to pass a resolution in 1987. This gained the attention of WIs across the country which highlighted their twin concerns around food safety and consumer choice. WIs swung into action, urging the government not to legalise the irradiation of food without research about the effects, or the introduction of proper safeguards to protect the consumer. Members came out in force – descending on Westminster for the WI's first ever mass lobby of Parliament in 1990.

The ability of consumers to make informed choices through effective labelling continued to be raised by WI members periodically. Conscious of the health risks, in 1980, WI members demanded that all food that was initially deep frozen but then thawed for sale should be labelled accordingly. Two years later, members expanded the call, insisting that chemical colourants in food, drink and medicine be covered in the labelling. One member shared her experience of her child being prescribed medicine containing tartrazine, despite being allergic to it.¹ A decade on, it was the risk of fatal allergic reactions that prompted WI members to press for the inclusion of hidden ingredients in labelling. More recently, WI members have focused on the mandatory clear labelling of meat and fish products (including processed food) with its true country of origin. A 2010 clear Country of Origin Labelling mandate took members' lobbying efforts to the European Parliament in both Brussels and Strasbourg, where concessions were eventually secured to improve labelling on whole meat products.



Milk

In 2007, in reaction to the critical situation facing the dairy industry, the NFWI launched the WI Great Milk Debates to raise awareness of the challenges faced by dairy farmers and the importance of the dairy farming industry to the economy, the countryside, the environment and rural communities. Launched with one member (pictured) taking a milk bath outside the Houses of Parliament to highlight how low the price of milk had fallen and the detrimental impact on producers, the WI Great Milk Debates examined how best to safeguard the future of the industry. Working with the National Farmers' Union, 100 debates took place, involving 15,000 people, and tapping into the huge strength of feeling about the dairy industry that still exists across the country today. While the challenges faced by dairy farmers endure, the years that followed saw several major retailers invest millions of pounds in establishing dedicated relationships with the dairy farmers that supply them with milk, encouraging retailers to enter long term partnerships, and take greater responsibility for the fortunes of their producers. With so many members working and living on farms, the campaign was revisited when milk prices were threatened again in 2012, and work carries on across the organisation to ensure a fair deal for farmers.

This, of course, was by no means the first time that WI members focused on milk. Resolutions in the 1930s

Angry WI lobby of MPs on food issue

highlighted the very high cost of milk to the consumer at that time, and the concern that this was detrimental to the nation's health. In 1936, the NFWI was asked for evidence by the Reorganisation Commission for Milk and so a questionnaire was duly drawn up and sent out to federations. The responses received revealed the widespread concern that the price of milk was limiting the amount of milk that people could afford to consume. WI members called for the government to intervene to reduce the retail price, in a manner that bore no adverse effect on the producer, so that milk would be available more widely for consumers. Over the following years, WI members were called upon to collect more detailed information about what (if any) local schemes existed that helped mothers and young children get affordable milk, leading to letters to MPs and meetings with the Minister of Agriculture to promote the cause.

This green and pleasant land

Since its inception, the WI has been at the forefront of caring for the countryside and its wildlife. Early campaigns quickly saw WI members' attention turn to protecting wildlife from international trade, supporting the principles of the 1921 Plumage Bill, which sought to prohibit the importation of certain rare and beautiful birds. As an article in the January 1929 issue of *Home and Country* stated, 'birds are too important a feature of rural life to be neglected by the women of the country' and when the Bird Protection Bill received the Royal Assent in November 1933, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds gratefully acknowledged the help WIs gave to secure the Bill's passage.

Keep Britain Tidy

Protection of the countryside was also a subject that swiftly gained the WI's attention. Littering was first brought to the attention of the WI AGM in 1925 and in the subsequent years, ad hoc initiatives by the NFWI led to some changes. In response to letters to leading chocolate and cigarette manufacturers urging them to print an anti-litter appeal on their cartons and boxes, in 1932 two firms quickly adopted the suggestion.

However, it was a resolution in 1954 to 'inaugurate a campaign to preserve the countryside against desecration by litter' that led to the formation of the Keep Britain Tidy group, which was run by Lady Brunner of the NFWI Board (Chairman from 1951-1956) for 19 years and which is still going strong today. The 1958 Litter Act was attributed largely to Keep Britain Tidy, and MPs thanked the WI for

the role it played in transforming litter policy.

'The Keep Britain Tidy organisation was created 35 years ago in 1954 as a result of a resolution of the annual conference of the Women's Institute...appalled by the increasing levels of litter, rubbish dumping and bad community hygiene in England's green and pleasant land. They demanded that something should be done about it on a national scale.' Lord Parry, National Chairman of the Tidy Britain Group, 1989

Chemicals

WI concern about the human degradation of the land extended beyond littering, as a letter from a WI member to the Editor of *Home and Country* highlights, when she decried, in 1954, the environmental impact of the policy of spraying the side of country lanes with weed-killer. Following a previous resolution on the 'rapid and widespread destruction' of wild flowers in 1937, in later decades WI members turned their attention to the use of insecticides and other chemicals for food production in the 1960s.

In 2003, WI members worried about the health implications of chemicals teamed up with WWF to call for measures to reduce exposure to hazardous man-made chemicals, especially in household products. Members called for better protections in the European Union regulations being drafted at the time. The 2003 Biomonitoring Tour, which went round the UK collecting blood samples from 155 volunteers to test, provided a snapshot the UK public's contamination levels, revealing that a cocktail of highly toxic man-made chemicals was found in every single person tested! Through this campaign and WI delegations to the European Parliament in the following years, the WI successfully gave a voice to the rising public concern and the consumer demand for safer alternatives.

SOS for Honey Bees

It was in the same vein that in 2009, WI members called for increased funding for honey bee health research during the SOS for Honey Bees campaign. Thousands of WI members embraced the cause by taking action in their own homes and communities. Henllan WI in Denbigshire offers one such example, taking SOS for Honey Bees to the centre of the community with their vision to create Wales' first bee friendly village. After securing funding from the Welsh Assembly's Rural Development Plan, the newly formed village conservation group began planting lavender and

Marylyn Haines Evans and Sybil Graham call on Environment Minister Lord de Mauley to develop an action plan for bees in 2014.



wildflowers in beds across the village, holding flower planting and gardening sessions, involving the whole community, from young to old.

Many more WIs took up the challenge turning unused land into community bee paradises, securing hives or donated plants, and mobilising the whole community to transform once neglected space into areas to be proud of. Others encouraged local authorities to plant bee friendly flowers, giving out seed packs and planting guides at village fêtes and county fairs. A few years later, with the research funding in place, but the situation for bees and other pollinators remaining bleak, members got behind national campaigning for more comprehensive action for bees, helping to secure the development of a government-led national pollinator strategy, published in 2014.

Access to the countryside

Along with championing rural women and their struggles, the WI recognised right from the start the need to protect and promote access to and enjoyment of the British countryside. For it was only in the understanding of such beauty, that a person could properly defend it.

After passing a resolution in 1936 to protect the British coastline and its footpaths, the NFWI took its concerns to the various government departments and Rural Preservation Societies. The disappointing response at

the time from the Ministry of Health was that it did not propose to take further action (as suggested by the WI) since it considered that local authorities already had sufficient powers with regard to footpaths and planning. Undeterred, the WI remained committed to promoting access to the natural environment through the decades, becoming affiliated with the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpath Preservation Society in 1949, and providing evidence to support the development of legislation such as the Wildlife and Countryside Bill in 1980.

Recognising the struggles of rural women in getting around, in 1948 the WI called for 'adequate provision of transport facilities' in rural areas. This was a subject that the WI would need to return to time and again over the coming decades (and indeed is still an issue to this day). In the post-war years, the NFWI drew the attention of lack of transport to many different government departments. Urging a cross-government approach, members highlighted how such a barrier impacted many aspects of women's daily lives: letters to the Ministry of Transport stressed the shortage of buses, the Ministry of Food was informed about the inability of people to access Food Offices and Welfare Food Centres; while the need for public transport to access maternity services, such as antenatal clinics, was stressed to the Ministry of Health.

The problem of public transport did not go away. Following a discussion with Lady Dyer (NFWI Chairman, 1956-1961) about rural transport on the *Come and Join Us* TV programme, many women wrote in about their struggles, showing that the situation was worsening. Realising the growing problem and the lack of evidence, the NFWI asked federations to send them up to date evidence so further action could be considered. This led to the NFWI urging the Minister of Transport, Mr Watkinson, to hold an immediate public enquiry. The Minister replied positively with news of his decision to set up a small committee to review trends in rural bus services, and to consider methods of ensuring adequate services in the future. This became the Committee on Rural Bus Services, on which Dame Frances Farrer (NFWI General Secretary, 1929-1959) served, and which reported back in 1961. The WI continued to push for better transport services for rural women in the following decades, and members remain involved in rural transport forums and campaigns to this day.

Our natural world in 2015

Rightly proud of this rich history of standing up for the natural environment, WI members continue to champion the benefits and importance of our green and pleasant land. The environment remains a central theme for WI campaigns, with members dedicated to protecting and promoting the countryside, limiting their own environmental footprints, and taking action on climate change.

'WOMEN NEED TO BE INVOLVED IN CLIMATE CHANGE SOLUTIONS'

An awareness of the legacy that we leave with the choices we make has been a constant theme within the WI over the past 100 years. WI women today remain convinced that we need to be responsible for our actions, and discussions throughout the focus groups saw members state their beliefs that 'we have a personal responsibility towards the planet'.

Members are clear that action must be taken on climate change now. Over three-quarters of WI members (76%) disagree that tackling it can wait a few more years. When thinking about the challenges posed by climate change, 58% of members are most concerned about the challenges that future generations - set to inherit a warmer and more chaotic planet - will face.

The importance of individual action and a belief in personal agency rings true for WI members who almost universally believe that each individual is able to help reduce climate change. Just 3% of members believe that 'individuals cannot do much to tackle climate change'.

'SMALL THINGS CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE'

The 'reclaim, re-use, recycle' mantra so evident in the WI's history continues to be a running thread in WI members' daily lives. The vast majority of WI members already do as much as they can when it comes to recycling, cutting down food waste, and insulating homes. Fifty-four per cent of members say the most important step individuals can take to reduce climate change is to recycle as much waste as possible, 76% say they do everything they can to do this.

WI members have also already begun to reduce their reliance on plastic bags, 51% do this as much as possible, and reduce energy wastage, and 60% have insulated their homes as much as they can. All the while members are looking for further ways to reduce their environmental impact; 42% of members say they 'do a lot' to reduce the amount of electricity wasted, but could still do more.

One area where WI members find it difficult to be more environmentally friendly is transport. While 63% of WI members use public transport to varying degrees, 46% of members say that their use of these services could improve as part of efforts to reduce environmental impact at household level.

Discussion in the focus groups centred at length on many of the challenges accessing public transport in more rural areas, members highlighted 'scanty provision' and talked about the problems accessing the services that are available, for instance where bus stops are located at a distance and on a road with no footpath - leaving them

feeling that driving was a safer option. Where public transport services and infrastructure are well organised, WI members take full and frequent advantage.

Free bus passes for seniors are universally lauded, and many members point out that using the free bus pass 'gets people out of the house'. Members in the focus groups reflected on the 'mental health benefits of good public transport', which can make social interaction easier for those in rural areas, particularly older people.

'WE RUN A CAR POOL SCHEME IN THE VILLAGE FOR OLDER RESIDENTS THAT NEED TO GET TO THE SHOPS, OR SEE THEIR GP. PUBLIC TRANSPORT OPTIONS ARE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN. OFTEN IT'S THE ONLY TIME IN THE WEEK THAT SOME OF THE RESIDENTS CAN GET OUT'

A third of WI members (34%) want the government to make it easier for people to use public transport as a means to tackle climate change. Growing numbers of us are looking for alternatives to single-occupant car journeys and these efforts need to be supported. Members also feel that businesses should 'be on board' with helping employees move to more environmentally-friendly alternatives, such as car-shares, or with policies to support employees who use alternative transport methods.

But WI members have not forgotten our roots and our reliance on the natural world. Along with how climate change will affect future generations, 56% of WI members are also extremely worried about how UK wildlife is suffering from our climate change inaction.

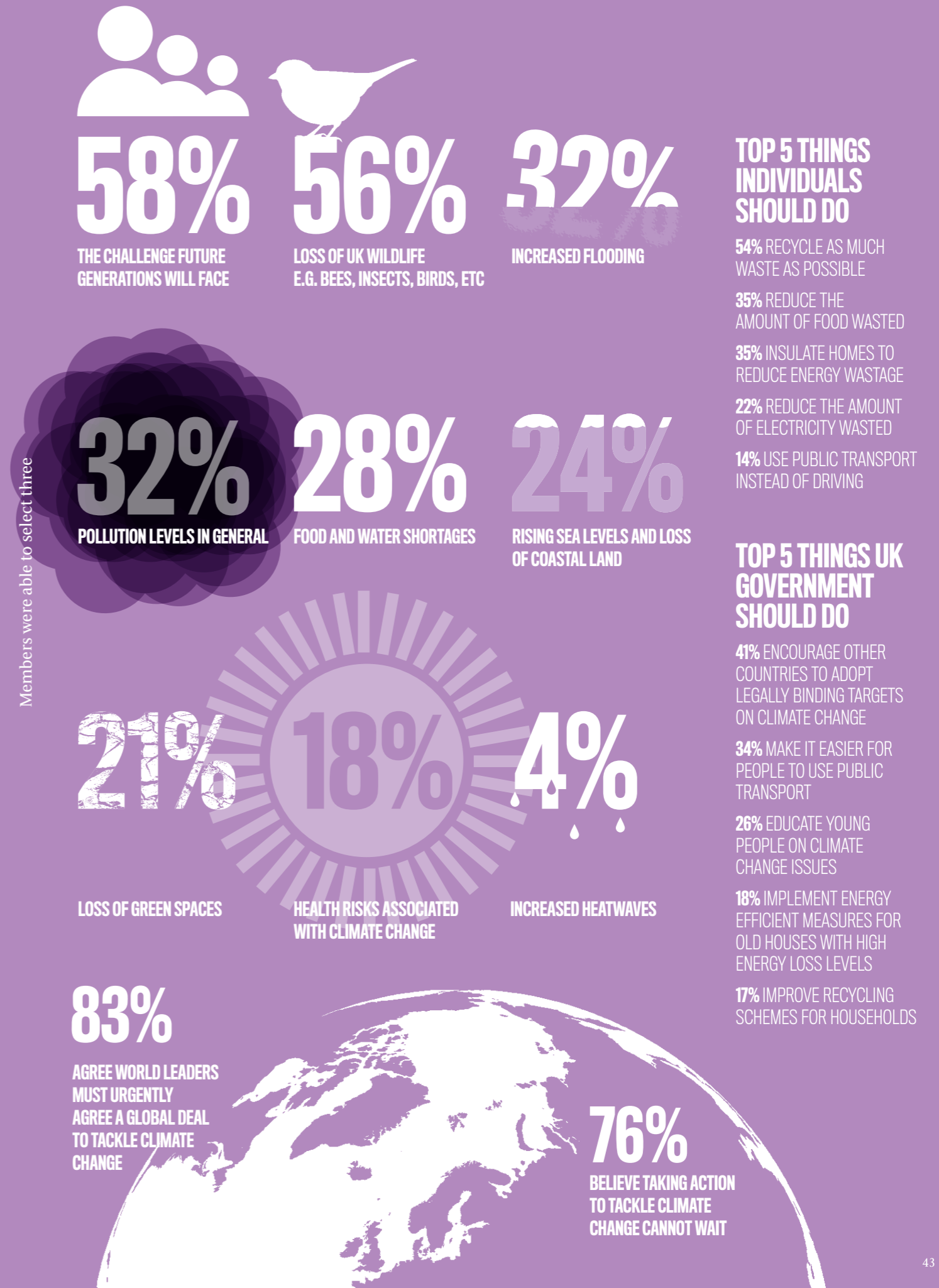
A quarter of WI members already see the impact of climate change in their local area. This concern is reflected in the speed with which WI members embraced the SOS for Honey Bees campaign and how they continue to champion the health of bees and other pollinators.

'WE NEED VISION NOW BECAUSE THAT WILL AFFECT FUTURE GENERATIONS. WHEN YOU LOOK OUT AND SEE SOME BEAUTIFUL, OLD TREES YOU THINK PEOPLE IN THE PAST HAD THE VISION TO PLANT THEM AND THE CONFIDENCE THAT THEY WOULD GROW AND NOW WE'RE REAPING THE BENEFITS'

Fittingly of an organisation that recognised the power and celebrated the responsibility of democracy in its origins, WI members expect action not just from individuals but from governments. WI members have high expectations of world leaders, with 83% of WI members believing that global governments must fulfil their obligations and urgently agree a global deal to tackle climate change.

With 50% of WI members concerned about the impact of climate change on UK citizens' health, and 70% agreeing that people in developing countries are already experiencing the impact of climate change, members are clear that the UK has an important role to play in tackling climate change, as a global leader. Forty-one per cent of members believe the government's most important role is encouraging other countries to adopt legally binding targets on climate change.

¹ Stamper, A. 1985, *WI food labelling campaign speech*, 12 December. Food Additives Press Conference, House of Commons, London



Our global society – looking back

The WI set out to 'provide for the fuller education of countrywomen in citizenship, [and] in public questions both national and international...'. This international outlook has underpinned members' commitment to play a full and active part in the global community over the past 100 years. The WI is well known for its work at home during the two World Wars, but this concern stretched to women across the world, with a resolution passed in 1943 calling for world peace and agricultural prosperity, diplomatic missions to foster friendships between nations, and full active involvement in post-war UN campaigns, such as World Refugee Year in 1960.

The WI desire to play a part in the global community saw its members take an active interest in the League of Nations, sit on a number of councils within the United Nations, and form strong relations within the European Economic Community. In 1943, the WI passed a resolution calling on members to 'work by every means in their power for the promotion of friendship between nations.' This call was quickly acted upon. The NFWI hosted hundreds of women from countries across the world every year, and many reciprocal visits for members were arranged as a result. Most notably, in 1948 at the request of the Foreign Office, the NFWI arranged for a tour for ten German countrywomen, while in 1961 the NFWI invited several women from Russia to learn about all aspects of British country life.

Global campaigns have also played a major part in the history of the WI. Members campaigned throughout the 1970s and 1980s for global food security and agricultural self-sufficiency in developing countries, culminating in the WI becoming a founding member of the Fairtrade

Foundation in 1992. The drive for women's rights in the UK was matched overseas as well, with a campaign in 1999 for women's human rights to be upheld, and the WI's ongoing concern for the environment reached as far as Antarctica in 1990.

Alongside these campaigns, the WI also utilised its considerable fundraising power to deliver a number of development projects focused on agriculture, education and self-sufficiency. This drive to provide fuller education of countrywomen around the world reflects the core aims of the WI and demonstrates a truly global outlook for WI members. The WI is a movement firmly rooted in the towns and villages of England, Wales and the Islands, yet true to the organisation's North American roots, the international work of the organisation shows that WI members feel as much a part of the global community as they do their local one.

Promotion of friendship between nations

The role of the WI has been to empower women and widen their horizons, so it should come as no surprise that members wanted to reach out to women in other nations to learn about other cultures, learn about the problems facing women around the world, and become better connected to the global community. This desire manifested itself in a 1943 resolution to promote friendship between nations; the decade that followed saw members make attempts to build on this, with a 1954 resolution to promote international understanding among countrywomen. Throughout the history of the WI, hundreds of guests have been welcomed from countries all across the world, and the WI has sent members far and wide to bring back knowledge of countrywomen globally.

Former NFWI Chair, Ruth Bond on a visit to Malawi, with Oxfam, to learn about the challenges expectant mothers face there



'CAN IT BE RIGHT THAT WE SHOULD BE HAVING SO MUCH WHEN OUR SISTERS IN OTHER LANDS ARE HUNGRY AND UNEDUCATED?'

LADY BRUNNER, LETTER TO THE TIMES, 1962

Members regularly made overseas visits and hosted international visitors to promote friendship between nations.



Our global society

The WI's willingness to reach out to other nations was clear in 1961, at the height of the Cold War, when Mrs Burkatskaya and Miss Maslova of Russia paid a three week visit to the UK at the invitation of the NFWI. Mrs Burkatskaya was a member of the Presidium and of the Supreme Soviet (the highest legislative body in the Soviet Union), while Miss Maslova taught at the Moscow Academy. Throughout their visit they stayed in the homes of WI members, undertaking a full programme that revealed many facets of country life, including schools, agricultural developments and research centres. In response to this visit, the Women's Soviet Committee invited two WI members to visit Russia. The NFWI Chair, Mrs Pike, accepted the invitation, along with former WI president Miss Bloxam. During the tour, they saw all sides of Russian life and they had the unusual experience of staying on Mrs Burkatskaya's collective farm. It was reported in the following year's annual review that:

'It is believed that this tour, and the happy contacts made with Russian women, will have done a great deal to help encourage understanding and friendly feelings between the rural women of the two countries.'

Engagement with international society

Throughout its early days, the WI took an organised approach to ensuring women's voices were heard, encouraging members to take up public service on juries and councils, and get involved in all aspects of civil life. As the twentieth century went on, the UK became increasingly involved in international organisations and the WI, not one to sit on the sidelines, became as active in these institutions as they were in local parishes.

In the aftermath of WWI, the NFWI passed no less than five resolutions between 1921 and 1934 pledging its support to the League of Nations and calling on members to educate themselves about it and to promote its work widely within their community. One of these resolutions recognised the need to mobilise public opinion and called on WIs in areas with no local branch of the League of Nations to hold open meetings in order to promote its work and engage the general public.

In 1943, before the United Nations had even been formally adopted, the NFWI pledged themselves to study its work having recognised the important role that women can play in promoting world peace and agricultural prosperity. By 1949, the NFWI had joined the General Council and

the Women's Advisory Council within the United Nations Association, an organisation which works to connect people to the work and values of the UN. Over the following decades, WI members reaffirmed their commitment to global solidarity by getting behind a number of UN projects, including World Refugee Year in 1960, which saw WIs sponsor refugees, UN Human Rights Year in 1968, and the Second UN Development Decade throughout the 1970s.

When the referendum on Britain's entry into the European Economic Community was held in 1975, the WI again sprang into action. Seventeen members of the National Executive Committee and HQ staff visited the offices of the European Commission to learn first-hand the work and purpose of the European Community. Federations were then encouraged to arrange open meetings throughout the referendum campaign, which were often held by a committee member who had been to the European Commission, enabling members to disseminate their learning throughout the country.

Following the referendum campaign, the WI started getting involved in the institutions of the EEC, becoming a member of the Committee of Family Organisations, working on social affairs, consumer affairs, and education. It also formed close links with the Confederation of European Agriculture and the Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations. By 1983, the WI Annual Review reported that 'WI representatives are now well-known within the institutions of the EEC, contributing where possible to the consultative process.'

'OUR COMMITMENT TO REALISING THE POTENTIAL OF A RESPONSIBLE CIVIC SOCIETY IS AT THE ABSOLUTE CENTRE OF OUR WORK ON NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS'

RUTH BOND, NFWI CHAIR (2009 - 2013)



Mrs Pike and Miss Bloxam, capturing events on their 1962 visit to Russia.

The government, however, failed to support this option at the subsequent Antarctic Treaty meeting in November 1990. Pressure intensified during the run-up to the next Treaty meetings, in Madrid during May 1991. The three Chief Executives of the alliance groups (Heather Mayall, George Medley, and Peter Melchett) met with the foreign office minister with responsibility for Antarctica at the end of March, reporting that the government was now showing signs of changing their position on the issue.

At the Madrid meeting, the Treaty members, including the UK, firmly backed a 50 year moratorium on mining, and designated Antarctica as a 'natural reserve', devoted to peace and science. The final dissenter, the USA, eventually put its weight behind the option in July. Antarctica's near future is now safe from degradation due to mining with a 50-year moratorium on mining in the area, enshrined in the 1991 Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty.

International development

In 1962, the NFWI pledged support to the Five Year Freedom From Hunger Campaign. Following the passing of this resolution, two projects were accepted for support, a trading store near Radisele, Botswana, and the establishment of a farming institute in the Karamoja district of Uganda. These projects both reflected the core aims of the WI by empowering people through education. Today, 77% of members think that women in developing countries should be empowered to find solutions to the challenges they face. This commitment to personal agency is reflected in these projects of the 1960s that were designed to give people the tools to sustainably improve their farms and their communities.

WIs were given the challenge of raising around £26,000 towards these two projects, which was met within two years, and by the end of 1964 a sum of £180,000 had been raised, approximately £3.3 million today. With the extra money, a further set of five projects were supported, including a research farm for the University of Trinidad; Lady Aberdeen scholarships for the use of projects in India and Pakistan; the training of buffaloes in Sarawak; and sending ten graduates to help with education, medical, nutritional and hygiene training in developing countries.

Food security and agriculture

The WI's historic roots as an organisation of country women has meant a continuous and strong link with farming and agriculture. This remains evident today, including with well-supported WI campaigns to help save the dairy farming industry. This interest in agriculture hasn't been confined to the UK, and in 1975 the NFWI passed a resolution to 'support United Nations action in securing a more regular and even distribution of resources in the world at large.' In 1985, this was followed up with a resolution which 'urge[d] the UK Government and the European Community to establish a long-term programme of technical and financial assistance to increase the agricultural self-sufficiency of Third World countries.'

Action on these two resolutions culminated in 1992 when the WI joined with CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Traidcraft, and the World Development Movement to become a founding member of the Fairtrade Foundation. Today, the foundation reports that the Fairtrade certification mark is on over 4,500 products in a market worth over £1.7 billion, which includes the UK's top-selling fruit, the banana. As a result, over 1.4 million farmers and workers have been supported in improving their lives and their communities.

Antarctica

The NFWI joined with the Worldwide Fund for Nature and Greenpeace UK to form a successful alliance campaigning to preserve the natural state of Antarctica. This campaign was launched at the Conservative Party Conference in October 1990, where a fringe meeting was held urging the government to support both the declaration of Antarctica as a wilderness park and a ban on all mining activity.

Our global society in 2015

‘WE ARE SISTERS ON THE PLANET...WE ARE ALL GLOBAL CITIZENS’

A commitment to the ‘global village’ is felt as strongly by WI members now as at any point throughout the past 100 years. This was demonstrated through the recent Women Reaching Women project, run by the NFWI in partnership with Oxfam GB and The Everyone Foundation from 2008 - 2011. The project took an educational approach to empower people to take action in support of development efforts around the world. Through working with dedicated, nation-wide teams of WI ambassadors, raising awareness of the experience of women around the world, this project helped realise the WI’s ambition to build an informed and active society that is prepared to take responsibility for its own impact on the planet.

For WI members, the issues facing women in developing countries are so important that, when prompted to name a role model for young girls of today, Malala Yousafzai was their most commonly named candidate. Malala, of course, is famous for standing up for the right for girls and women to have access to education, and it is this interest in education and empowerment that makes her stand out to members. Indeed, members in the focus groups commented that it is a focus on education and empowerment that defined the most popular role models.

‘EDUCATING WOMEN AND GIRLS CHANGES A COMMUNITY’

This focus on empowerment through education shone through again when 59% of members stated that access

to education is the greatest challenge facing women in developing countries. This answer was far ahead of concerns such as harmful traditional practices (46%), facing violence in war or conflict (27%) or access to health services (24%). The importance of education far outweighed the importance of access to paid employment (4%), a finding that was reiterated in the focus groups where members stated that education empowers women and allows them to forge their own way in the world.

‘EDUCATION EMPOWERS WOMEN, IT IMPROVES THEIR SOCIAL STANDING’

A resolution passed at the Annual Meeting in 1999 called for women’s human rights to be upheld around the world, demonstrating a sustained commitment to ensuring women’s equality. Today’s members believe strongly that equality for women has a positive impact, with 89% believing that equality for women and girls is good for communities everywhere and 86% believing that equality is good for economies around the world. Whilst agreement on the positive impact of equality is strong across all age groups, the younger generations of WI members feel particularly strongly that it has a positive impact on communities and economies.

‘ANY ECONOMY IS BETTER WITH THE WOMEN INVOLVED - IT’S NOT AN EQUALITY ISSUE, IT’S JUST COMMON SENSE’

A lot of the WI’s earlier international work centred on

81%

OF MEMBERS BELIEVE THAT ISSUES FACING WOMEN IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES WILL BE OVERLOOKED IF WOMEN IN WEALTHIER COUNTRIES DON’T STAND UP FOR THEM

80%

OF MEMBERS BELIEVE THAT WOMEN IN WEALTHIER COUNTRIES HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO ACT ON ISSUES THAT AFFECT WOMEN IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

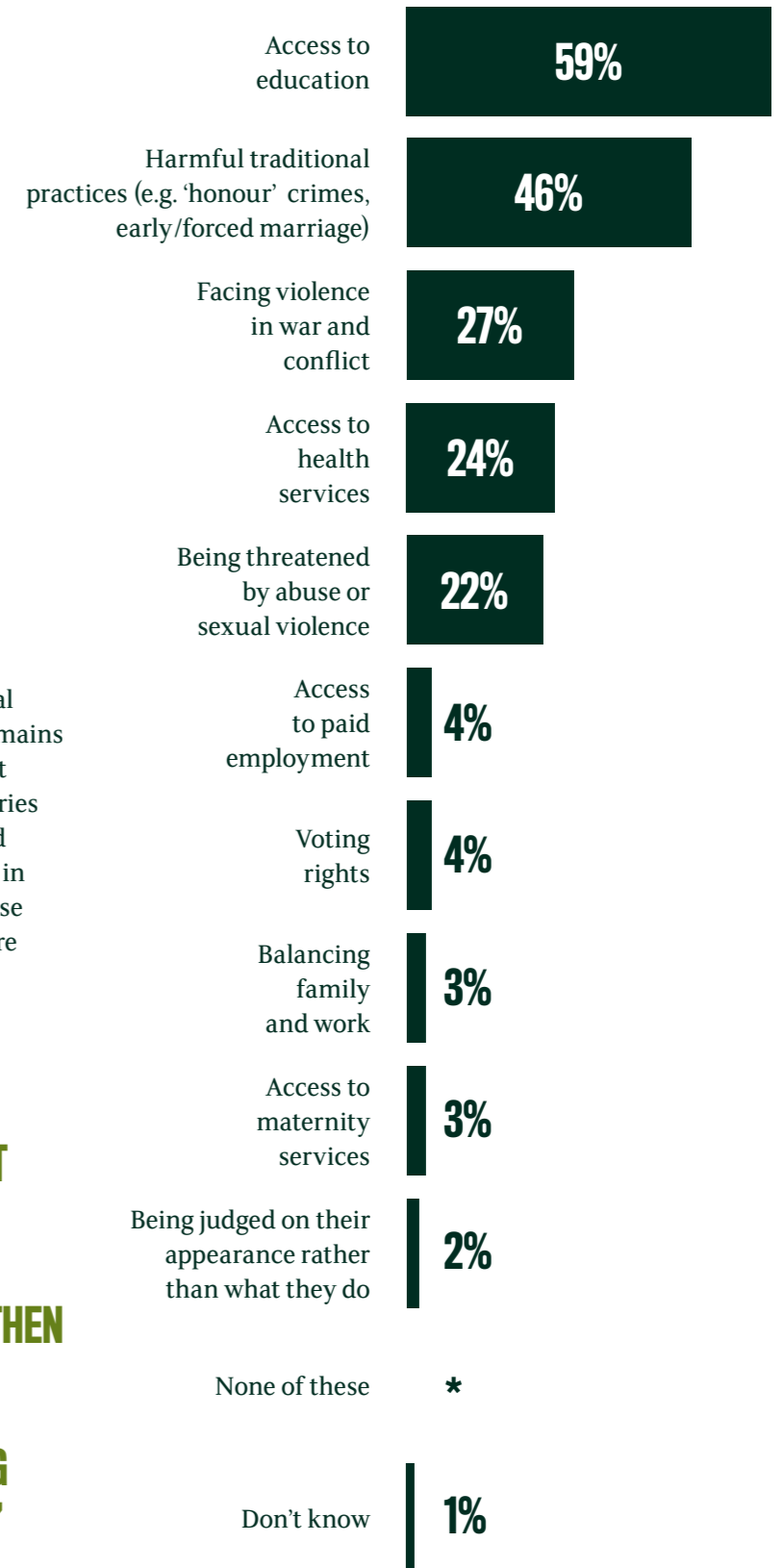
building international understanding and promoting friendship, in order to develop a global community of countrywomen or a ‘global village’. This sense of global solidarity, coupled with a belief in personal agency remains powerful for today’s WI members. Eighty-one per cent believe that issues facing women in developing countries will be overlooked if women in wealthier countries did not stand up for them, while 80% believe that women in wealthier countries have a responsibility to act on these issues. As one member of the focus group put it ‘We are sisters on the planet... we are all global citizens’.

‘WE ALL HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO EACH OTHER, BUT I FEEL A GREATER RESPONSIBILITY TO WOMEN WHO DON’T HAVE THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT WE DO’

‘IF WOMEN DON’T HELP OTHER WOMEN THEN WE’RE IN A POOR STATE’

‘WE HAVE A VOICE AND WE’RE NOT BEING PERSECUTED SO WE NEED TO SPEAK UP’

‘POVERTY IMPACTS MORE ON WOMEN. GROUPS OF WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER ARE MOST SUCCESSFUL’



Concluding remarks

The WI at 100 reflects on some of the highlights from the WI's first 100 years, and considers WI members' perspectives on some of the key challenges women and their families face today. There is undoubtedly a huge amount to celebrate; the report is a reminder of the tremendous journey that the WI has made, and also of how much things have changed for women in all spheres of their lives. Yet indisputably, tremendous challenges remain and the research points to the fact that there is still so much more to be done.

Members clearly identify 'empowering women' as one of the WI's greatest achievements. This theme, combined with the ambition to unlock the potential of all women, to support women to use their voices, and build dynamic, sustainable communities, was at the heart of the WI's founding members' vision. As we celebrate the WI's centenary 100 hundred years on, it's clear that this ethos remains as valid and vital as ever. While the challenges remain, as we move into the WI's next century it's also clear that the WI's values of solidarity, democracy, sustainability, friendship and fun, will stand the organisation in good stead for the next 100 years.

At all levels the voices of members are at the heart of the WI. We close here by sharing their thoughts on what the WI means to them:

'THE WI EMITS A VERY QUIET ROAR; IT'S ABOUT MENTORSHIP, COMPANIONSHIP, PROVIDING THAT SPACE'

'I'VE ALWAYS BEEN SHY, NOT A CONFIDENT SPEAKER BUT THROUGH THE WI I LEARNT TO STAND IN FRONT OF A GROUP, AND TO CHAIR MEETINGS'

'NO ONE IS EXCLUDED...EVERYONE BRINGS SOMETHING DIFFERENT. I TRY AND LEAVE A TRAIL OF MEMBERS EVERYWHERE I GO. I PROMOTE IT TO EVERYONE'

'THE WI HAS GIVEN ME ACCESS TO A WEALTH OF INFORMATION. I ALWAYS GET AN ANSWER TO A QUESTION; AND USUALLY VERY SAGE ADVICE'

'THE LADIES I HAVE MET ARE SO AMAZING. THEY BECAME AN IMMEDIATE GROUP OF FRIENDS. I JOINED, THEN GOT MY MUM TO JOIN TOO'

'THE WI HAS HELPED ME ALL THROUGH MY CAREER. IT'S THE MOST WONDERFUL COMMITTEE YOU WILL EVER SERVE ON. WE KNOW HOW TO RUN A MEETING. YOU ALWAYS HAVE SOMEONE WITH A WEALTH OF INFORMATION THAT YOU CAN CONTACT'

'IT'S THE COURAGE TO DO THE UNFASHIONABLE'

'THROUGH THE WI YOU MEET SO MANY PEOPLE; PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUND AND AGES'

'IT BROADENS YOUR HORIZONS... YOU DO THINGS YOU DIDN'T THINK YOU COULD'

'EVERYONE WANTS YOU TO SUCCEED'

'WOMEN BECOME INVISIBLE AT 50 - UNLESS YOU'RE A MUM OR A WIFE, IT GIVES YOU SOMETHING FOR YOURSELF, YOU STILL FIGURE IN SOCIETY'

'THE CAMPAIGNS HAVE BEEN SO COMMENDABLE; TIDYING BRITAIN AND SO MUCH MORE. THE WI HAS BEEN TRULY RADICAL'

'IT'S LIKE A FAMILY'

**National Federation
of Women's Institutes Research**
September 2015

