

Women's Lives in Devon ... Are We Connecting

Key issues arising from Women's Conference



Delegates at the Womens' Conference held in June 2007

'Helping to Make Devon an Inclusive County'



Tarte Noir - a women's playback theatre

The Gender Issues Group



Lili-peds cycle rickshaw service



Context

Nearly 100 women gathered together on June 23rd 2007 at the St Lyses College campus in Exeter, to look at what life is like for women in Devon today. The conference was hosted by the Gender Issues Group of Common Ground, the social inclusion arm of the Devon Strategic Partnership. Despite the many unresolved issues around gender inequalities, there is currently no place in Devon to advocate and

debate areas of inequality for women and men, and to promote actions to tackle these.

This conference was put together to inform the thinking of the emerging Sustainable Community Strategy in relation to gender equalities, and to seek the commitment of organisations to being part of an infrastructure that will move this work forward. The day was chaired by Angela Clinch of Fairplay South West and

speakers were writer and broadcaster Bea Campbell and Tania Pouwhare of the Women's Resource Centre. Tarte Noir - a women's theatre group - captured and replayed emerging issues and responses. Delegates attended a series of workshops and accessed a marketplace of relevant products and services.

Key Lessons for the Devon Strategic Partnership (DSP)

- Women's concerns are not being listened to.
- Women are undervalued by society – women continue to face systematic economic inequalities
- Systems and structures in society and among organisations are still largely male-oriented - women continue to feel that their preferred styles of thinking, communicating and working do not fit within the status quo.
- Public authority structures and democratic processes are not always understood by women and are often worked in ways that deter women from becoming involved.
- Women themselves often do not recognise the value of their point of view.
- Women need to build confidence to vocalise their gender experience of key issues affecting them.
- Women need to be proactive in joining boards/organisations - in order to

promote equality and fairness in strategy, policy and delivery.

- Women need to lobby the public sector to lead action on gender equality in the workforce e.g. the promotion of flexible working.

New work is needed on gender equality. Public sector bodies need to work in partnership with women, to look at their role as employers and service providers.

Bea Campbell (feminist, academic, writer and broadcaster) described how women need to ensure that tools like the Gender Equality Duty are most effectively used. Tania Pouwhare (Policy Coordinator at the Women's Resource Centre London) revealed that Local Strategic Partnerships are widely failing to involve women in articulating their views or in picking up on women's issues.

Building a Forum

On the day, 83 women said that their groups or organisations wanted to be involved in future developments.

There is a clear need for the Gender Issues Group to develop a 'gateway' function, establishing a forum able to act as an effective linking agent between Devon's women's organisations, informal groups and active networks, and the formal structures and processes of the Devon Strategic Partnership.

A forum would:

- Act as a source of information, communication and consultation – providing a voice for women on key issues.
- Link into existing networks - engaging women when issues arise and helping to build capacity among these groups, including among minority groups.
- Undertake practical action on specific issues.
- The forum needs to be properly resourced, with a paid co-ordinator, and resources for projects, gatherings and communications. It needs to be organised in a way that suits women.

How women felt about the event

- The conference was booked up within 2 days of its announcement.
- 74% of participants rated it as "Excellent".
- The creative and supportive style of the event really suited women.
- Women called for more networking and consulting opportunities.
- Delegates said they felt a shared sense of purpose and community.
- 86% of the 96 participants wanted to be "counted in" on any future developments.

Key Actions for the Devon Strategic Partnership:

- The DSP should ensure that the work of the Gender Issues Group continues and that women's issues should be taken seriously.
- Support for women should be delivered in the way women themselves need it to be.
- Women achieve more when they collaborate and support each other.
- Information from and about women needs to be better researched / disseminated / shared / developed and responded to.
- The DSP should support the creation of a forum which would help women provide peer support, build consensus, and inject women's ideas and energy more effectively into the planning, delivery and scrutiny of services in Devon.

Bea Campbell on Neo Patriarchy: "It's now assumed that women can do everything but it's not assumed that men can do childcare."



Learning from the workshops:

98 women want more action taken to address / improve the following issues:

Applying the Gender Equality Duty (GED)

Organisations need a greater awareness of how inequality affects women.

- Organisations need to listen to women's voices at the grass roots, and communicate messages through training to staff.
- More women should be involved in the processes of the Gender Equality Duty, especially at senior levels.
- Organisations need to break the stereotypes that still exist around women's lives and skills

Involving Women in Politics

Women identified a number of barriers for women in the political arena including issues affecting confidence, and practical conflicts:

- Politics demands unsociable time, often leaving women with a sense of guilt about the conflict with commitments at home.
- Women's preference for collective action, and consensus building rather than confrontation, can make women feel alienated by the adversarial conduct of party politics
- Women find the current protocols of the democratic process inexplicably complex and this is off-putting
- Young people expressed the feeling that they have no voice because they lack confidence to debate with middle-aged men.
- Small things can make a huge difference to increase participation – like encouraging women to speak up at meetings, by facilitating them well, or providing appropriate childcare.

Climate Change Workshop

Women can become a powerful force in tackling climate change if they are supported in their solutions.

- Women make more household decisions and could put pressure on retailers. Women have a strong influence on future generations.
- Women are in a good position to turn around adverse climate change behaviour, but are often disempowered in taking positive local action or affecting broad social behaviours.
- Women need to be part of the leadership on this, and need to make environmental education attractive to all ages.

Being a modern mother

With the changing economic demands on families most mothers don't have the luxury to 'choose' whether to work outside the home. Housing prices force parents to work longer hours, impacting on families. The situation is even harder for single parent families and disabled parents.

Things that would make a difference include:

- Adequately valuing parenting (recognising women still do most)
- Promoting the equal role of men with women in parenting
- Statutory pay for a longer maternity period
- Keeping jobs open for longer (up to 3

years), with longer maternity/paternity leave

- More, good quality, subsidized childcare – provided at places of work, at schools, and nearer to homes.
- Making income spent on childcare costs tax free
- Flexible working - actively offered and better paid, without expecting more done in less time, to men and women as a right (including to foster/adoption carers)
- More training for women returning to work and to improve career prospects.
- Breaking glass ceilings – actively supporting women to move into senior roles.

Transport & Rural Isolation

Many women find themselves, and those they care for, without adequate access to transport, isolating them from services especially in rural areas.

Issues that need to be addressed to improve access to services are:

- Women's experience as key end-users of local transport and their creative solutions need to be listened to better.
- The cost of using both cars and public transport is key.
- Safety while walking and cycling, and when waiting for and using transport is a widespread concern.
- Planning for transport (or how it can be avoided) at the same time that new jobs and services are created would help reduce isolation
- Fostering local community action:

Women are major players in reducing isolation through community or neighbourly initiatives.

There needs to be:

- increased community involvement, community support, participation, restoration of the old values of looking after others in your community.
- improved alternatives to car use; reduce car dependency; increase cycling, walking, 'walking bus' for adults, public transport, develop footpaths / bridleways as motor-vehicle-free routes between places.
- increased provision of services/synergy – taking services into rural areas – making better use of existing services/transport – linking public transport services better

Tania Pouwhare, Policy co-ordinator at the Women's Resource Centre, London



Women Do Business Workshop

- Business Support providers need to provide appropriate support to realise women's economic potential, through targeted support for women's businesses.
- They need to consider the needs of rural women – offering more on-going

support, not just one session, to help make the transition into business start-up

- Support needs to be better publicised – e.g. through other services that could promote women's business support

Topics not possible to address within the time-scale

No conference could hope to cover all the gender issues affecting women. These are additional areas of concern that the Gender Issues Group where recommends further investigation:

- Education, skills training, access to employment/business creation

opportunities

- Health, wellbeing, eating disorders / obesity, infertility, menopause
- Sexual diversity, expression of sexuality and of gender, provision of sexual services, sex-workers
- Race, immigration, community interaction

- The criminal justice system, whether as offender or victim
- Access to sport and leisure; opportunities to make a career in sports and leisure, media balance of representation of women and men engaged in sporting / leisure activities

Organisations with representatives at the Conference

Devon County Council
Citizens Advice/Devon Welfare Rights Unit
Exeter Women's Aid
Exeter City Council
Card Mentoring Project
FEDT
South Devon Womens Aid
Queen Elizabeth Community College
Westcountry Housing Assoc
Devon United Women
Teignbridge Letting Co
ActorFactor
Devon Youth - DCC
Hannah Reynolds Associates
Torbay Council
Sanctuary Housing Association

ATU PLUS
Devon & Cornwall Police
Intercom Trust
North Devon Enterprise Agency
Devon Rural Network
Peninsula Medical School
Tiverton and District C T A
Magellan Projects
Taw Valley Ventures
KP Management Solutions
SWOOP (Uni of Exeter)
Devon Care Training, DCC
Women in Business
University of Exeter
Fawcett Society SW Branch
Trading Standards

Devon Welfare Rights Unit (Citizenship Advice)
Community Council of Devon
Teignbridge Strategic partnership
UNISON
Exeter Labour Party
ADVA Partnership DCC
Torrige Voluntary Services
South West Regional Development Agency
Bournemouth Churches Housing Association
Diocese of Exeter Church of England
Center for Ministry in Small Churches
Leadership South West

About the Gender Duty

The Gender Equality Duty came into force on 6th April 2007, obliging public authorities to eliminate discrimination and harassment, and promote equality of

opportunity between men and women, in all their functions. This means local decision makers will need to have schemes of action to address the issues that cause

inequality, and ways of measuring their impact. It presents a new opportunity for women to bring their experience to bear on services that affect them most.

More About the Gender Issues Group

The Devon Strategic Partnership comprises public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations, all working together to deliver real improvements to the issues that matter most to the people of Devon. The Gender Issues Group, under the Devon Strategic Partnership, is attempting to address gender inequalities in Devon. The

group – interested individuals from voluntary and statutory agencies – are undertaking a programme of research and consultation in order to plan for better service provision in the future.

The Gender issues group is developing an open forum. If you would be interested in

getting involved in this work please contact myself at the CCD offices.

This work is being funded through DEFRA's Rural Social and Community Programme.

Charlotte Benson, Chair,
Community Council of Devon



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