

COMMUNITY CHALLENGE CASCADE CONFERENCE: 2-4 MARCH 2005

GOOD NEWS ! Volunteering improves your health

The conference took place at the beginning of March and celebrated the successes of all of the WIs in working with their communities. For Gloucestershire we celebrated all of our challenges with a pot of gold! But the event was much more than a celebration – it looked forward to continuing a programme of sustainable community development.

A number of ideas came out of the conference that could be taken forward by individuals, each institute or at group and Federation level.

The Conference

Barbara Gill and Charlotte Foster the community challenge project officer in their opening addresses looked back to the original aims of Community Challenge:

- To increase participation
- To sustain and develop skills
- To encourage people to work together
- To strengthen relationships and build partnerships
- To raise the profile of the NFWI

There are now well in excess of 16,759 projects registered with Charlotte. These numbers were announced at the AGM in June. So keep going girls because it will continue to raise our profile and help recruit new members as we demonstrate how good we are at turning inactive communities into active ones.

The conference opened with examples of three very different challenges

- Joyce Moorehouse spoke about the West Yorkshire Federation challenge of supporting the tactile books by each institute making at least one tactile book. We were able to see the wonderful books and hear about the real difference they make to blind children but also to blind parents with sighted children who for the first time were able to share a book.

Wouldn't it be great if each institute could make a book? If an institute is not in a position to make then could they sponsor one - £12 a book?

Marion Ripley from WorldVision more than happy to come to speak at Autumn Council meeting

Would the Home Economics Committee like to promote this with a competition? World Vision are also looking for volunteers to road test their patterns – could anyone help?

- Evelyn Lewis from a Hullavington institute in Wiltshire spoke about their experiences of celebrating the diversity of groups within their village by having a free open day showing what was offer in the village.

How do you welcome new people into your community? This is an excellent way of seeing what other groups in our communities are doing.

- Jill Stock from Essex gave a very humbling account of the work that they had done to create a multi-sensory room for mental health patients within their local hospital. She described all that they had done and the difference that the room had made.

After dinner we heard about from Professor Paul Whiteley about the shift in community involvement over the past 40 years from collective action to individual action. The declining interest by 20-30 year olds in the wider political agenda is matched by their propensity to take individual action. He compared the levels of participation across European countries – the UK compared favourably.

The really positive news is that volunteering actually improves your health!

There also seems to be a correlation between community action and reducing burglaries, improving exam performance in schools and making you happier.

The theme of the opening sessions of day two was healthy eating. We heard from Professor Macgregor chair of CASH about the impact of salt in our diets. 4 out of 10 deaths and 6 out of 10 disabilities in the UK are as a result of a stroke, heart attack and heart failure. Through individual action in reducing salt intake we can reduce these statistics. The majority of salt in our diet is through processed foods. He quoted the example of McDonald's who because of consumer pressure introduced apparently "healthy" salads which had 7grams of salt per portion compared to 5 grams in their hamburgers.

He urged individuals to take action by

- Challenging food producers
- Changing their personal eating habits
- Writing to the Food Standards Agency to urge them to introduce a traffic light system for salt concentration and the amount per serving
- Write to MPs to encourage them to take action

We then heard from Joanna Blythman award winning author of various books on the power of the supermarket in our society and its generally detrimental impact on local food producers, food miles and our diets. There was much debate about this

- Had supermarkets made it easier for certain groups particularly the elderly to shop?
- Had supermarkets driven down prices for consumers? – probably not
- Not all supermarkets should lumped together and denigrated. Booths and the Co-op as well as smaller independent retailers eg NISA were more ethical and more committed to local producers

Andrew Trehearne from World Cancer Research spoke about the positive impact of fruit in the diet in combating different cancers. There was some

discussion about the impact of schools in promoting healthy eating and everyone welcomed the Childrens Food Bill.

A Federation - *eat well keep well day to include messages about salt and fruit in our diets?*

Locally *include a Healthy Eating event in your programmes*

Individually or collectively *campaign and write to food producers particularly on food labelling*

Visit your local supermarket and speak to the manager

As individuals use the power of your purse!

Anne Young and Ginny Smith from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Awards for All took us through their application process for funding community projects. The key message here is that they want us to spend their money!

At Federation level invite the representatives from these organisations in Gloucestershire to speak about what is available in Gloucestershire and how to access funds.

Anne Stamper the NFWI Hon. Archivist then spoke about the importance of archiving. They are an important source of social history, not only of the WI movement but also of communities and of individual's lives. Anne runs events at Denman.

Has anyone from Gloucestershire been? Do we know whether or not our institutes are actively archiving? If this particularly interested a member could they attend Denman and then attend some institutes to speak. It is particularly relevant to the older institutes.

The final part of the day was spent in workshops which prompted interesting discussion but no real issues to report back.

After dinner Pat Ashcroft from Lancashire Federation gave us a very moving account of her experience of a MENCAP project in Mozambique renovating a special needs school. Pat had us roaring out loud one moment as she described how they camped out and then crying the next as she described the conditions that the children existed in.

A possible speaker at a Council Meeting?

On the final morning we heard again about some individual projects in North Yorkshire and Hampshire. Barbara Foreman in North Yorkshire had successfully secured over £22,000 from the Lottery Heritage Fund to research and publish a book about the local history in their village. Once again the theme of working with all sectors of the community shone through. Sharon King spoke about three projects that her WI had completed. The restoration of their WI banner which dated back to the 1920s; renovating and improving the grounds around their local village hall.

Rhoda Lee from Devon Federation spoke about important resolutions in recent years and how they have made a real difference to modern society and

how as we move forward they will continue to energise and raise the WI profile as a modern voice for women in todays society.

For the concluding session we heard from two complimentary speakers Dr Robin Stott on the Ecology of Health and Tracy Sortwell on the [90@90](#) project. We were urged to think virtuous cycles and plant a tree or even an orchard.

Lisa Lovering & Isla Arendell
Tutshill WI

NOTE: We have had ideas about turning this into a more informal and easier to read newsletter but following our meeting with Jenny, she felt that this was a decision that should be left to the Public Affairs Committee.