

THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CONVENTION

SPRING
2020
DIGITAL
ROADSHOWS

REPORT

Ayrshire
& Arran

Thursday 7th May





Introduction

The current circumstances during the Coronavirus pandemic have turned our lives upside down. The SWC recognises that each woman will have a unique experience of this time, due to where you live, your job, your health, the relationships you have, your family circumstances, and so much more. It is important that we continue to engage with women across Scotland - listening to your issues and concerns, and working with decision makers to ensure you are heard.

With all of this in mind, the SWC has undertaken a series of digital roadshows across Scotland – engaging with women and trying to understand the unique issues faced by different communities. Women, who have been unable to attend these meetings have contributed to the discussions via email and online survey. Their views are also reflected in this report.



Key Points

- Women are still falling through the cracks when accessing economic support.
- There are more opportunities for women to engage with digital communications. This increases their confidence and ability to be involved with online interactions.
- Universal Basic Income would help remove the stigma of applying for benefits.
- The way forward needs to consider women from all economic backgrounds and be focussed on equality.
- Women need to be valued and decision makers need to consider their voice if economic recovery is to be manageable and fair.
- Better working hours and flexibility to ensure women are fully engaged in the workplace.

Local Support

In some areas, the local community are showing strong support. There are large numbers of volunteers at foodbanks. Families, neighbours and local shops are providing support, advice, and practical help, such as safe shopping and home deliveries.

“I have been overwhelmed by the support in the community and how we are all coming together to offer assistance...We are women empowering women.”

“Our local authority EAC [East Ayrshire Council] has gone above and beyond its remit to ensure every resident has access to services.”

VASA (Voluntary Action South Ayrshire) have provided a lot of assistance to individuals and is *“dedicated to ensuring that the Third Sector in South Ayrshire is strong and healthy.”* They have been supporting and promoting local activities such as online coffee mornings, digital youth groups and community funding advice.

There have been, however, a number of difficulties with accessing essential items and support. Shielding letters were received at different times by different individuals, depending on what health services were attended. Some who are shielding found they could not get medication delivered from their local pharmacy. They were also relying on family members for weekly grocery shopping. Although there may be local support available, individuals have to know where to find it. Many women do not know where to access support as much of it is online.

Lockdown Measures

There are mixed experiences of adherence to the lockdown rules with some reporting that residents are staying at home, social distancing and only travelling for essential reasons. On the other hand, others stated that there is more traffic on the roads and groups starting to gather.

“I’m a key worker, and I still need to do things like walk the dog. When I’m out, it’s obvious that there’s quite a lot of people not following the rules. You walk past places with big crowds.”

“Some people think it’s not real because it’s not happened to people close to them. They don’t respect social distancing.”

Economy

Women who are self-employed are finding it difficult to access government financial support.

“I’m caught between a rock and a hard place.”

Some have found support through the movement #ForgottenLtd. It is an online campaign working to highlight these complicated predicaments that many small businesses are finding themselves in.

Moving forward, there needs to be a new, fairer, more equal way that benefits all people. Austerity caused lasting, serious, negative effects on many communities.

“We need to recognise decisions made in the past that have us in this bad place. When we make plans for the future, we can’t continue what we had for those previous years.”

Women, and the way they are viewed by decision makers, will be key in this transformation towards economic recovery. Women are poorly paid compared to men, many of whom are carrying out the same work.

“It starts with the economy and with the economic value placed on women.”

“Women need to be paid their worth, their value, it’s about time. Decades have gone by and we’re still complaining that we get paid less than men.”

Investment in local produce, travel, hospitality and wider business could strengthen Scotland’s economy.

“We need a strong picture and a strong plan, and the will to go with it.”

Significant powers, however, are still held by Westminster.

“We need to remember that Scotland doesn’t have the political powers to pay a lot of things.”

“Westminster do not care about what the women up here think.”

Employment

Some women who hold part-time contracts, but rely on additional hours to supplement their income, are finding their earnings decreased after workers are redeployed across sectors. One example of this is the movement of teachers to supervise other essential youth services.

“They’re not going to pay for overtime and extra staff when they’re already paying the teachers their salary.”

Employers must work to ensure that women in their employment are both supported and reassured at this time.

“People say a solution is applying for universal credit, or applying for benefits. That’s fine but a lot of people don’t fit into their categories.”

Women in this situation are often unable to apply for short-term support. Household circumstances, uncertainty of working hours and concerns over job security make it difficult for individuals to access financial assistance.

Communications

The current situation has called for women to adapt and work differently as well as consider ways to use technology. This has changed how many have worked in the past.

“Everybody’s learning to work differently.”

Many older women are having to enhance their computer literacy. Using video conferencing has increased skills and confidence allowing women to have their contributions heard, even in daunting meetings with over 200 people.

“It’s got real potential for us in the future.”

“For some women who haven’t used digital platforms before, this situation is making them quite confident about using them. So, when you get an opportunity like this [roadshow], a wide meeting where you maybe don’t know people, you feel like you can do it!”

Digital communications have had a generally positive impact at this time by bringing women together in different ways. Video calling children, grandchildren and friends can be emotional. But it also helps alleviate isolation.

“I used to meet with a group of ex-colleagues once a month in town, for coffee, dinner and a good catch up. Now it’s every week with a glass of wine and a bowl of crisps!”

Some women are finding it difficult to adjust, having relied on printed documents for many years. They are missing opportunities to engage and be involved. Also, those working from home may find video conferencing stressful due to their busy, loud environment, their altered working hours, or their internet connection.

Healthcare

During the current situation, some individuals are not receiving the correct healthcare advice or support. This can lead to increased and unnecessary visits to multiple health care destinations (e.g. GP to opticians to pharmacy) before finding the care they need. This is particularly concerning for the wellbeing of those with disabilities, older women or those with mental health issues.

Carers and Older Communities

Women caring for elderly relatives have had to make adjustments. Some have stopped the services from external carers, due to the risk of a number of people entering their relative's household. This has led to the reallocation of these responsibilities across family or friends. Others have not received help with very simple things which causes frustration and anxiety for the carer.

“Women being women, you just get on with it, and do what you need to do as best you can.”

The wellbeing of unpaid carers, the majority of whom are women was also discussed.

“How are they being taken care of?”

Concerns were raised regarding older people, living in poverty, in poor housing and with underlying health conditions who need a lot of personal care.

“As soon as you start looking at all that and looking at why so many older people have poor quality of life, you have to see that the root cause is austerity.”

“Normal isn't good for a lot of people. If you're poor, if you're old, if you're young, so that's why this is a critical time for all of us to be considering the way forward.”

Essential Workers & Frontline Staff

Those who are in essential roles should now hold a new level of respect from their employers and society. They should also benefit economically.

“You just hope they're not forgotten in all of this. That people are actually appreciated more. They've come out to work every single day and helped thousands.”

Decision makers must also take responsibility and be accountable, particularly regarding policy affecting the NHS. There are significant concerns over staff wages, wellbeing and safety during this time.

“Money didn't go into health service, stocks or supplies and now look how we're suffering.”

“We need to remember those people who denied the wage rise for nurses - who felt they weren't good enough.”

Universal Basic Income

The introduction of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) in Scotland needs to be discussed. COVID and the impact on individuals, has caused attention to be focused on the current benefits system. The universality of this proposed new system would help so many people in need.

“It just puts everyone on same footing. There isn’t the stigma of the people who are unworthy, the undeserving poor - considering the way things are with Universal Credit just now and all of the negatives around that.”

While economic difficulties in the current crisis have highlighted the potential of UBI, the long term impacts also show positive outcomes. Trials and subsequent research in different places across the world have shown particular benefits for women.

“There’s been incredible trials in places like India where women have built businesses and walked away from abusive relationships.”

Finally, it is recognised that a UBI would discourage underpaid or low-paid employment positions which are predominantly filled by women. By placing a value inherently on women and their time, they could be empowered to be selective in their choice of employer. This, in turn, could ensure their rights to fair pay are upheld in the workplace. Furthermore, this new model would also be more affordable than current methods.

“Often badly paid jobs don’t give you enough to live on. The government has to give you money through credits, thus saving bad employers cash. It’s ridiculous!”

Thank You

Thank you to the women who joined our online discussions, as well as those who contributed to the discussion via our online survey and by email. The information contained in this report will be forwarded to local and national decision makers for their consideration.

Website - www.scottishwomensconvention.org

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