

THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CONVENTION

SPRING
2020
DIGITAL
ROADSHOWS

REPORT

Dundee
& Angus

Tuesday 19th 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

- Longer term funding is needed to support local communities and services for women.
- Accessing assistance is difficult for women with caring responsibilities.
- Universal Basic Income (UBI) will provide financial stability for women.
- Women need help in getting advice with social security matters.
- Concerns around the reopening of schools and how this will work in practice for women and their families.
- Clear and user-friendly information is required for women who do not have access to online technology.

Services and Community Groups

A number of organisations have moved their work online rather than having face to face contact. It was hoped that others will also do this as a temporary measure during lockdown.

Local community groups have been coordinating their operations and spreading information via social media. Coronavirus Support Groups are offering assistance such as buying shopping or picking up prescriptions.

- It is *“exciting to see how organisations have adapted”*.
- The joined up support provided by different community groups has had great impact.
- With flexibility around home working, service users are able to access appointments at a time which suits them.
- For some service users, video conferencing has worked well.
- Services were *“extremely mindful”* that women’s experiences of lockdown were not all the same.
- The third sector and community groups have come together to help those in need. Delivery of food to at risk individual’s homes, for instance, has seen a major rise.

“There are some service users who are uncomfortable with using video conferencing. We need to adapt to this and help these people, particularly where complex needs are present.”

“We shouldn’t need a pandemic to bring people together. We need to make sure that sticks.”

This way of working, however, should only be a temporary measure. Women will not engage with online services long term due to a lack of safe space to talk or free time.

- Some women’s childcare and other caring roles prevent them from taking the time to interact with a service.
- Staff are often stressed as they are not able to reach out to clients as they have done previously.
- Many carers do not think about themselves which is a barrier to accessing support. There has to be more emphasis on what carers need on an individualised basis.
- Worries that whilst many services have benefited from extra funding during this time, this will be lost after lockdown when it is still needed.

“Face to face support allows vulnerabilities to be picked up on and makes communication easier. The idea that women come to services to be away from their home space to unpack and discuss difficult issues may be missing at present.”

“Charities are used to working with small teams and trying to get stuff done with less resource. This allows for flexibility. There can be difficulties in a large system when it is implemented on a national level. This way of working often doesn’t take into account local structures and funding. It’s there that more creativity is needed.”

Education

Teachers are now having to navigate online resources to continue pupil's education. This format of working can be particularly difficult to ensure that children do not *"fall through the cracks"*. Parents are often unable to support children because of other responsibilities, lack of understanding or lack of technology skills. This is leading to fears over what this will mean for educational attainment. More assistance for parents and pupils is needed.

- Some homes lack the resources required for home schooling.
- Worries over the impact on child development given lock down and long absences from schools and peers.
- The practicalities around reopening schools and putting in place rules for children. Wider sharing of best practice amongst councils and schools is needed on how to implement children transitioning back into schools.
- Teachers can design lessons that can be done on paper. To help with this, local authorities should offer "take home" packs of papers and stationery.
- Mothers struggle to juggle home working with home schooling.

"There is a worry for mums about how to go back to work if schools are still shut. We need to stop going full throttle with what is happening in the economy and focus on families individually."

"I don't think schools should go back until testing is properly in place. Pushing for schools to reopen simply to get adults back to work is wrong."

Universal Basic Income (UBI)

Discussions around UBI are *"extremely exciting"*. Income inequality and vulnerability has been highlighted by the pandemic. UBI should be looked at as a resource to support women and the economy recover from the current crisis.

- Money spent on assessments for means testing benefits could be spent on more vital services for women.
- UBI would make a difference to individuals and society.
- The current means testing system *"attributes an economic value to every human rather than seeing them as a human."*
- With UBI in place, women would not have to worry about finance issues. This, in turn, would help their mental health and wellbeing.
- Current social security procedures mean that women must complete long complicated forms. These are very off putting and stop many getting what they are entitled to.
- Lockdown has shown that the current system is not working. It needs a radical transformation to value everyone in society.

"The financial aspect of UBI is just one side to it. It is also something that could bring equity into the communities we live in."

“The universality aspect is great. Everyone gets it and that allows people to have a basic level of security and safety that can give them the time to do other things.”

“Having benefits like Universal Credit and Carer’s Allowance require a financial assessment - it’s like measuring the caring you give. It takes out the human being aspect. It would take all that stress and expense of assessing out of it if we had UBI.”

“We say people live in poverty, but they live in a system that’s been created for them. It’s not people that are the problem, it’s the world we live in that makes it difficult to have their voices heard.”

Post-Lockdown

Life cannot go back to the way it was with no safety net for the most at risk in society.

- There needs to be flexibility for women approaching services.
- Empty Council buildings could be sold off to local businesses or turned into services rather than wasting money by sitting vacant.
- Services need to reach out to women who are not accessing what they need at present. This should include talking to women about their experiences and including them in planning individual support programmes.
- Consideration must be given on how to save high street shops. Issues such as high car parking charges are stopping many from visiting amenities. This results in a switch to online shopping at the detriment of the local economy.
- Information about services and support should be available in one place.
- Accessing social security needs to be more user friendly.

“We need a more holistic approach to benefits that looks after everyone rather than trying to catch people out. Many people feel overwhelmed which is a key issue stopping them coming forward.”

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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