



Eyemouth Roadshow Report 2nd July 2013

The SWC (Scottish Women's Convention) recognises that women are having to re-train and up-skill in order to enter into, sustain or progress in employment. Barriers also exist in accessing advice, assistance and resources to support women.

The current financial climate, with cuts to public services and changes to welfare benefits, is severely impacting on the ability of women to fully integrate in employment, education and society in general.

Women also need to become more involved in discussions around the referendum on the future of Scotland. What do women want or need from decision makers after September 2014?

The 2013 Roadshow programme gives women the opportunity to discuss these topics in more detail. It is important that women are given an opportunity to express how political decisions impact on them, their families and communities.

Agnes Tolmie
Chair, SWC

The SWC arranged a roadshow event in Eyemouth in order to meet with women and to discuss important local issues.

The roadshow was held at the Ship Inn on Tuesday 2nd July 2013 and was attended by women from throughout the area. The event was promoted through direct communication with organisations and individuals in the area. Discussions around the questions were facilitated by SWC staff and volunteers. Notes taken throughout the process and direct quotes from the women attending form the basis of this report.

Copies will be sent to the women who participated as well as key decision makers at local and national level.

What opportunities are there for formal and informal learning, training and education in your area?

“There are virtually none”

Borders College has a campus in Galashiels, which is the nearest facility to Eyemouth. People can also travel across the Border to study at Berwick college. Further travel to Edinburgh is necessary for certain subjects which are unavailable locally, such as nursing.

Subject choices available at the college in Galashiels are *“quite restrictive”*, with young women studying basic courses in areas such as hairdressing and childcare. There needs to be a broader subject choice to widen options and restrict gender streaming.

Smaller college campuses exist throughout the Borders, which often offer specialist courses, such as animal care. Poor transport links and very little information available about accessing these options mean that many miss out on the opportunity to study.

Employers can be unwilling or unable to allow women time off in order to undertake training courses.

“I had to take a day off work every week for the duration of the course I was doing because I wanted to up-skill. My employer wouldn't accommodate me and I lost a lot of holidays as a result.”

Cuts to education budgets have led to the removal of evening classes. Women who wish to undertake this type of learning would have to travel to access courses.

The Open University is a way of studying without having to travel, although it is recognised that this is not affordable for many. There are schemes which contribute to the fees of those on lower incomes or who are unemployed, and studying can be done on a part-time basis which means that people can still work.

Online courses, learning and training are available, however these options can be expensive. A lack of high-speed broadband also makes studying this way very difficult.

“The service we get is very poor, especially in the evenings when it slows down all together. I did a line test and it gave a reading of 0.5mbps. How can anyone do anything with a speed like that?”

Petitions have been circulated throughout the community to have fibre optic broadband in the area, however there has been no positive action to bring this about.

A new high school, recently built in Eyemouth, does not provide enough community activities and education in the evening.

“It’s silly because it’s right on our doorstep. People would go to classes there if they were offered.”

There is hope within the community that if enough demand for evening classes is shown, then the Local Authority will consider re-instating courses. This type of learning would be particularly beneficial for women who left school without certain qualifications, such as Highers.

“There are no jobs here for women. It’s bad for everyone but it’s definitely worse for women.”

Employment opportunities are extremely limited within Eyemouth itself. Most residents have to travel to get to work.

Farming and agriculture are the main industries in this part of the Borders, *“but they don’t employ many people now anyway and especially not women.”*

Tourism and hospitality are the largest employers of women. Much of the work available in these industries is seasonal and part-time. There were a number of woollen mills and knitwear factories across the Scottish Borders which had employed many women, however these have closed down over the years.

“The closure of the mills had a huge impact on the area - not only on women but on families and generations as a whole. There’s still a lot of unemployment as a result.”

The NHS and Scottish Borders Council also employ a large number of women. These organisations are working under very tight budgets, whereby they must keep the workforce as small as possible while continuing to provide a level of service expected by the public.

“This leads to pressure on staff, most of whom are women, and inconsistency in service provision. This ultimately has an effect on the people who need the support most.”

People rely on cars and the cost of fuel is very high. This, coupled with poor public transport in the area, makes accessing education very difficult. In some parts of East Berwickshire, the only bus available is the school bus, which means arriving at a main town just before 9am and having to leave again at 3.45pm. These timings do not tend to fit in with courses or employment opportunities.

Reston, a village near to Eyemouth, used to have a railway which was well used. The community have been campaigning for a number of years to get the station opened up again, as a local rail service would open up both education and employment opportunities for many in the area.

There is no direct route to Edinburgh. Getting two buses is both time consuming and expensive. It is possible to get a train from Berwick to Edinburgh, however parking facilities at Berwick station are *“shocking”*. It can also be difficult to get there from Eyemouth.

Childcare is expensive and *“not that great really”*. Provision is sporadic in different parts of East Berwickshire, making it difficult to commit to formal education. Some families have been forced to leave the area because of the lack of childcare.

After-school care used to be available, however the extent of provision which still exists is unknown. One of the main issues in keeping after-school care going is the need for a manager who has certain qualifications, which are a necessary expense for a job which is often only for 15 hours per week.

“This type of service is usually the first to go when budget cuts hit.”

Childminding services are relied upon more than private nurseries due to the rural geography of the area. There is, however, a feeling that fewer women are becoming childminders for a number of reasons. There is a lot of ‘red tape’ involved in the process and in some cases those qualifying have to make alterations to their home. The cost of childcare often means more women are choosing to stay at home with their children rather than returning to work, which is driving down demand for services.

“Women are weighing up the cost of all of these factors against how much they will earn and for many it’s just not worth it.”

Have any changes to services, facilities and welfare benefits affected you, your family and your community as a whole?

Changes to welfare benefits are having a significant impact on people and their families throughout the area.

The local Jobcentre is in Eyemouth and is difficult to reach for those who live in nearby villages and rely on public transport. There is a real worry of the threat of sanctions amongst people who may be unable to attend interviews and work related requirements due to poor transport or lack of childcare.

“There’s no consideration made for people who need transport or can’t get anyone to look after their kids. This has to be taken into account as a valid reason for not attending an interview.”

The experience of the Jobcentre is *“demoralising”*, especially for young people who are *“pushed into any job available”* and not given information about other options available to them.

“They end up coming out feeling worse than they did when they went in. It’s difficult to see how we will get out of the job situation faced by young people at the moment because there’s nothing to give them any hope.”

It does not cost anything to phone the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) using a landline but the cost for using a mobile phone is very high. Public telephones are no longer available in the area, meaning that those with limited incomes either have to use a mobile and incur the cost or physically go to the Jobcentre to call.

The so-called bedroom tax is also having an impact.

“How can you tell people they have to move if there isn't any alternative housing for them?”

The health service has been subject to cuts across a number of areas. For example in community health, there used to be five health visitors whereas now there are only two or three. There is a dependence on charities and third sector organisations to *“pick up the slack”* where there are gaps in service provision. These agencies themselves rely on precarious funding which is often subject to cuts.

Maternity services have also been affected. Previously three midwives covered the Berwickshire area, however now five must work across both Berwickshire and Roxburghshire. They can have to travel as far away as Peebles, which is approximately one hour and forty minutes away by car.

“The stress midwives are under is massive. These women just aren't happy in their jobs any more and they're now doing it because they feel they have to. It's become so bad that some new mothers are not even getting one visit per day for the first few weeks.”

The removal of district nurses and matrons had a huge impact in rural Scotland. Bringing this service back would create jobs and also be an extremely positive step for healthcare in more remote parts of the country like East Berwickshire.

Services such as exercise and dance classes, which are a good way of keeping people active as well as engaged within the community, are often unavailable locally and people have to travel to access them. It is important to recognise the value of these types of activity.

“I've had to give up going to my dance class in Galashiels because it's just not sustainable to keep travelling over there on my small pension.”

Some services have been amalgamated and libraries do more than they used to. The Local Authority is looking at using the library to provide more access to computers for local people. This is in part to do with the changes to welfare benefits application processes, whereby all claims must be made and managed online by an individual claimant.

Both the Better Together and Yes Scotland campaigns are setting out their vision for Scotland's future. What kind of Scotland do you want to see after the vote?

There is an overall feeling that while neither campaign has set out concrete information about changes that would be made, the referendum is dominating headlines.

"I think it's overkill to be honest."

Women want to find out how financial matters such as benefits, taxes and pensions would be paid. For example, there will be those who have lived and worked in England who now reside in Scotland and have paid their taxes and pension contributions down south.

"We need the truth about things - no spin, just the facts."

Eyemouth is in very close proximity to the border with England, however there are no issues with cross border working.

"The media can 'hype up' friction between us and the English. It's distasteful to those of us who live here."

Policies, practices and services need to be sensitive to local needs and not just take a 'one size fits all' approach which only really works in towns and cities. Better public transport, for example, is a necessity in the area, however a policy for the whole of Scotland would not necessarily be appropriate for rural parts of the country.

What one thing could improve your local area?

- More affordable resources and activities for families who live here.
- Better use of the High School facilities for adult education purposes, especially evening classes.
- Consideration that a car is a necessity, not a luxury and in some cases two cars are needed in a household.
- Improved public transport.
- More job opportunities, better housing etc so that young people do not have to leave the area.
- Affordable housing *"across the board"*.
- Re-opening the train station at Reston to widen employment and education opportunities through new transport links.
- Focus on relative poverty which is apparent in the Borders.
- More training opportunities and links between Borders College and other education facilities.
- Better understanding of what poverty means - *"this would be considered a 'well off' area looking at statistics but that's really not the case."*

Conclusions

Following on from the discussions, women asked the SWC to submit recommendations to the Scottish Government, relevant Ministers and Representatives at all Government levels. Copies will also be distributed to Non-Governmental Organisations.



The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy.

This is achieved in a number of different ways - through roadshow, round table, conference and celebratory events. Following each event a report is compiled and issued to women who attend and relevant policy and decision makers.

The SWC uses the views of women to respond to Scottish and UK Government consultation papers.