



# Glenrothes Roadshow Report

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) believes that cuts to local public services as well as changes to welfare benefit and tax credit systems are having a profound impact on women.

Women need to become more involved in discussions around the justice system and the referendum on the future of Scotland.

Our 2012 Roadshow programme gives women the opportunity to discuss these topics in more detail providing an insight into how these issues are having an effect on them, their families and communities.

Agnes Tolmie  
Chair SWC

The SWC arranged a consultation event at the Rothes Halls in Glenrothes on Monday 28th May 2012. A cross section of women from the surrounding areas attended. The purpose of this event was to discuss issues which are relevant in Scotland at the moment, including the impact of public sector cuts and welfare reform, women and the justice system and the referendum on Scotland's future.

Recommendations will be given to the Scottish Government, as well as local politicians, on behalf of the women.

In order to obtain the relevant information for this report, the following procedures were used:

- **Flyers advertising the event were distributed throughout the town and surrounding areas.**
- **The SWC produced a set of questions which would create discussion around the issues.**
- **Discussions were facilitated by SWC staff and volunteers at the event.**
- **Notes taken throughout the process and quotes obtained from women attending form the basis of this report.**
- **Event evaluation forms completed by participants.**



**Over the past 12 months, Scotland has seen cuts to local public services as well as changes to welfare benefit and tax credit systems. In what way are these having an impact on you/your family?**

## **Transport**

Buses are the only form of public transport within Glenrothes. Many routes have been subject to changes and cuts in the last year. Some buses, which previously ran on a half-hourly basis, have now been reduced to an hourly service. These cuts restrict the mobility of those in the area who rely on public transport. Women are forced to *"hang about"* the bus station for long periods of time, particularly if relying on other buses to come from or go to other areas.

Restricted timetables mean that services stop between 10.30pm and 11.00pm. This results in young people's ability to socialise and be involved in activities being restricted - if they miss their bus they are, in effect, 'stuck' with no way of getting home. Buses from Edinburgh, the nearest city, stop running back to Glenrothes at 9.15pm. This has implications not only for leisure activities, but also employment and education for women in the area.

The Scottish Government's Concessionary Travel Scheme (the 'free bus pass') was seen as being of vital importance to those who benefit from it. It is considered an *"excellent and vital thing for older and disabled people."*

## Public Services

*“There’s nothing here. Nothing for young people at all.”*

There is a distinct lack of services and activities for young people in the area. Attempts have been made by community workers and police officers to generate activities, for example ‘Midnight Football’. Young people are keen to be involved, however participation often comes with a number of rules which can be off-putting.

Many schemes only have funding for a certain period of time, for example 12 weeks, which means that they are over before young people have been able to fully appreciate their benefits.

The Fife Institute of Physical and Recreational Education is the Sports Centre facility in Glenrothes. Activities are available on a weekly basis during school holidays but are expensive.

*“It would cost about to £97 per week to send my teenage son to the Fife Institute. That’s a lot of money for someone on benefits. It’s too much.”*

This facility will be closing in June for approximately nine months for refurbishment. Anyone who wants to use leisure services while the centre is closed will have to travel to Kirkcaldy. This will incur further costs, especially for those without private transport.

While there is very little for the younger generation in the area, by contrast there are a number of activities available for older people.

*“The elderly are generally quite well looked after in Glenrothes.”*

Participation often depends on the individual person and also the availability of transport. There are a number of services such as Age Concern, Probus Clubs and Dial-A-Bus, as well as church-based events and activities.

Support groups and services are available, for example violence against women, drug and alcohol addiction and mental health issues. Funding reductions and in some cases withdrawal impact on accessibility for many in need. ‘Pilot schemes’ are frequently introduced for short periods of time. Uncertainty and anxiety is created amongst services users which in turn has an effect on their wellbeing. Similarly staff posts are often only part-time with some being reduced due to funding constraints.

## Education and Employment

Unemployment is high in the area, especially amongst those with poorer qualifications and young people.

*“I fear for the future of young people. Many school leavers must have no hope.”*

Opportunities for learning are available, with Adam Smith College offering a wide range of courses in various locations throughout Fife. There is, however, little motivation to study given the difficulties in accessing support and funding as well as the limited job prospects in the area.

*“I get about the same amount of student bursary as I would Job Seeker’s Allowance. However as a student I am not entitled to housing benefit and have to pay for dental treatment, glasses etc. I feel like I’m being punished for trying to better myself.”*

Fife Council is the biggest employer in the area, as well as a number of private companies. Jobs are often not advertised and given to friends and families of those already in employment which restricts opportunities for others.

## Health

Uncertainty over job security and service provision amongst NHS workers is high. The majority of these workers are women. Staff are leaving positions within various departments of the NHS and there is no guarantee their posts will be re-filled. Public service cuts are having a direct impact on NHS resources.

*“There’s a lot of frustration, particularly for frontline staff. They are so stressed.”*

Classes run by Health Visitors are being cut because they are not considered *“core business”*. There are a number of Health Visitor vacancies within NHS Fife at the moment and a *“critical staffing issue”* is envisaged in the near future.

The removal of GP Out-of-Hours services and the reliance on NHS24 is having a detrimental impact on women. It has been reported that calls to NHS24 are expensive. These should *“cost no more than the price of a local telephone call”*.

Glenrothes has a small hospital which offers certain services such as X-Rays, speech and language therapy, mental health services etc. The nearest Accident and Emergency or maternity provision is in Kirkcaldy.

*“We could really do with a few more emergency services here in Glenrothes.”*

## Welfare Reform

Changes to welfare benefits and tax credits systems are already having an impact on women in and around Glenrothes. At least 5,000 people across Fife will be affected when the changes are implemented.

A number of those who are in receipt of benefits such as Jobseeker’s Allowance, Employment Support Allowance (ESA) and Disability Living Allowance have mental health or drug and alcohol misuse problems. The introduction of Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payments, as well as amended qualification for and payment of these benefits, will cause additional stress.

New application processes are confusing for claimants. The sheer number of people who are having to adjust to new procedures means that workers are unable to devote the time necessary in order to fully assist those making claims.

*“You feel as though you are just ticking boxes and not looking at each individual person and their needs.”*

A number of organisations, for example Volunteer Centre Fife, are witnessing first hand the impact of return-to-work schemes imposed by the UK Government.

*“I feel that the job centre gives false hope to many. For example, lone parents are being referred to the Volunteer Centre with the impression that a job is guaranteed. It’s not.”*

The sudden suspension of benefits can have a damaging impact on those who rely upon the money they receive. Lengthy and confusing appeals processes can cause real financial hardship as well as serious mental and emotional stress.

*“I had to wait 8 months between my benefits being stopped and my appeal being heard before my money was reinstated. I had to make many sacrifices during this time just so I could get by.”*

Women who move from overseas to the UK and marry men based here face huge challenges if, for example, they are in an abusive relationship. These women have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) due to their immigration status and as a result are unable to apply for benefits. This makes it very difficult to leave their partners, with support services to help these women stretched to capacity. If they do leave without any money or place to live, Courts often appoint the father as the children’s carer, meaning that these women can have no contact with their children.

**Women are in contact with the justice system in Scotland on many levels. What services are available to support women in your community?**

There is a degree of awareness of services to support women and their families in the judicial system in and around Glenrothes.

The Fife Law Centre, which provides legal assistance to those who have difficulty accessing or are unable to afford representation, has offices in Crosshill near Lochgelly and Leven. There is, however, *“little or no access to the Law Centre”* available to women in the area.

FRAE Fife, an organisation which builds capacity and empowers the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community in Fife, hold immigration surgeries on the last Monday of every month.

CrossReach, which is a nationwide scheme, part of the Church of Scotland Guild, run the visitors centre at HMP Perth. The project supports families affected by imprisonment and offer a place ‘outside’ of the prison building for those who have often had to travel long distances to visit husbands, partners, fathers, sons etc. They provide information and advice and allow women to access support. CrossReach also offer support services specifically for the children of prisoners. The project is currently being developed with the hope that it will be rolled out throughout other prisons in Scotland.

*“There’s such a stigma attached with being in prison. Why should families have to suffer?”*

The Mother’s Union collects items such as toiletries and underwear for women in HMP Cornton Vale. This is considered a valuable gesture for those who often enter the prison system with little or no knowledge of how to obtain these basic necessities.

Women are often sent to prison for minor offences such as non-payment of fines. While women who commit serious crimes should be punished, it is unfair and unhelpful to imprison women who have complex social needs and require rehabilitation.

**There has been discussion recently regarding a referendum on the future of Scotland. Do you have enough information to make an informed decision and use your vote on this important issue?**

*“The whole thing needs to be ironed out and really hasn’t yet”*

Generally more information is required on the ‘pros and cons’ of what would happen if Scotland were to become independent. While each individual detail cannot be determined, more information is required about certain factors. These include whether Scotland would continue to be a member of the European Union, what currency would be used, how defence would be paid for and how borders would be patrolled.

*“How would we survive? Where would the funding come from?”*

Face to face discussions between the public and those campaigning around the referendum would be welcomed. There is concern that television and radio debates, as well as information being available on the internet, will be heavily relied on.

**What can be done to make your area a more attractive place to live, shop and work?**

- Less litter and dog mess in the streets.
- Something has to be done about levels of radioactivity in Dalgety Bay.
- *"We need to do something to put Glenrothes on the map."* - more shops, restaurants and general investment in town centre.
- Affordable, accessible childcare and better public transport are necessary. These are considered *"horrendous"*.
- More play areas so that families do not have to travel to access parks.

**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.

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