



Haddington Roadshow Report 3rd 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 Haddington in order to meet with women and to discuss important local issues.

The roadshow was held at the Bridge Centre on Wednesday 3rd 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 *“quite a few”* opportunities for formal learning through adult education services, although it is acknowledged that not everyone can commit to undertaking a block of classes for a certain period of time because of other responsibilities. Another issue is that many of those who attend these classes *“would turn up anyway”* and those who would gain more benefit from attending are less likely to access them.

The cost of formal education is a real barrier for women. This, coupled with limited and expensive childcare and poor public transport, can make it extremely difficult to access courses.

A positive example of informal learning is the establishment of a website by a local woman, which brings women together and allows them to learn from each other and improve skills and confidence. Many do not realise or value the skills they have.

“Confidence is the biggest issue for many women”.

Women can find it very difficult to juggle employment, education, caring responsibilities and family life. Building confidence as a first step back into education or employment needs to be supported and encouraged.

The Bridges Project, which covers East Lothian and Midlothian, works with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The centre in Musselburgh works with approximately 150 young women a year, many of whom are looking to study or are studying for careers in traditionally female roles. This is a consequence of not only limited opportunities and information, but also what is seen to be a *“societal obsession with the way women look”*.

There is a lot of pressure on young women. Ambitions, career prospects etc can be heavily influenced by their peers. The media also has a huge part to play and can be seen to *“trivialise aspirations and to set the agenda as to what’s important.”*

Young women have “*narrow options*” from an early age and do not see the full potential of what they can achieve. There is a feeling in many schools that a female head teacher makes a real difference. Individual teachers also try and encourage positive female role models. For example, English teachers will pick books with strong women characters or which portray women in a positive light, or books by female authors.

Careers advice in schools is also an issue. There is not enough person-centred information and young women are faced with limited options. As a result, gender streaming continues.

“You never hear of young people saying they want to be a funeral director or a forester. If they are unsure what they want to do then they’re expected to pick from a list. If they know about ten jobs, they will choose from the ten. However if they know about a hundred jobs then they can choose from that hundred. It’s about widening choices.”

Edinburgh College covers the local area. There is, however, no campus in East Lothian, just “*very good partnership working*”. Despite the partnerships, it can be very difficult for students to physically travel to access the facilities in Edinburgh, which are not all based in the city centre. Those who rely on public transport, which is infrequent and expensive, would have to get more than one bus to Telford or Sighthill campuses. If a person has additional support needs “*they’re just not going to make that journey*”.

The Local Authority subsidises certain services for those with additional support needs (ASN) who are seeking to enter or who are progressing in education. However more needs to be done overall to assist them. Young people with ASN are being referred to services such as the Bridges Project, who are unable to fully assist them, because of the length of waiting lists for specialist provision.

Public transport “*just doesn’t exist*” in the area. Many villages across East Lothian look close together on a map, however they are impossible to travel to using the transport system. Poor transport contributes to isolation in rural communities.

“Just being able to get up, go somewhere and do something with minimum fuss and hassle is crucial.”

East Lothian relies heavily on the tourist industry, which employs many people on a seasonal and often part-time basis. If a worker does not have access to a car and they live outwith a main centre, it can be extremely difficult for them to get home at night, particularly later on in the evening.

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

Welfare Reform measures are causing stress and anxiety within families and communities, which will only increase as the impact of changes to benefits comes into force.

Some parents who rely on child benefit can struggle once the child reaches the age of 16 and the entitlement stops.

This can lead to tensions within households and young people can be asked to leave because their parents cannot afford to keep them. The introduction of the so called 'bedroom tax' means these young people will be forced to stay in the home, even where there are difficulties, as parents would be financially worse off by having to pay for the extra room left empty by their departure.

Steps by Local Authorities to mitigate the impact of the bedroom tax are welcomed. There is very little social housing and even less single tenancy accommodation in the area.

"It's inhuman to make people move out of the homes they have lived in for years. The overall impact of welfare reform is going to be enormous and people just don't have a clue how hard it will hit. It's a time bomb."

Healthcare services have also been subject to change and reorganisation. East Lothian and Midlothian deliver certain services jointly, however the partnership is not seen to be working as well as it could. Similarly the integration of social care into the NHS will have an impact, both on service provision and on the workers who will have to deliver the services, the majority of whom are women.

The nearest hospital is in North Berwick, approximately 12.5 miles from Haddington. Those who rely on public transport have to take two buses to get there, which can be *"really stressful if you are unwell."* There are volunteer driver schemes in place, however the cost of these can be quite high.

There are huge gaps in mental health services for young people. CAMH (Child and Adolescent Mental Health) services are available until a young person reaches the age of 18. However, unless they are diagnosed with a psychiatric illness they do not have automatic access to assistance in adulthood. Those who suffer from issues such as low mood, anorexia and those who self harm will not automatically qualify and are at risk of further mental health issues as a result.

"This has such a big impact when they've been used to strong advice and support throughout their teenage years. It makes them very vulnerable."

Healthy Respect, the local sexual health service, provides drop-in clinics in a number of locations throughout East Lothian. This was available at the Bridges Project, however it was not very well used due to stigma issues, namely that *"the kids didn't want other folk knowing they were going to the clinic."*

The reduction and in some cases removal of statutory services has led a number of local communities and voluntary groups trying to fill the gaps which have been left.

"There's a massive amount of social capital in communities here and we're really having to draw on these resources."

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?

Issues such as equality and respect, the eradication of poverty and more devolution of powers at a local level are important for the future of Scotland.

“There has to be more of a focus on the individual. The one size fits all approach which is taken with regards to so many policies at the moment just isn't working.”

More women in positions of power should be a goal regardless of the outcome of the vote. 50/50 representation in public office, boards of companies etc would be extremely positive.

The importance of the public sector in Scotland should not be underestimated. However the contribution of the private and voluntary sectors to communities and society as a whole must also be valued.

“I want to see a Scotland where everyone is fundamentally safe, well and happy.”

What one thing could improve your local area?

- Increased job opportunities.
- More opportunities for employment so that people do not have to travel as far to get to work.
- An accessible and affordable transport system which gets people to where they actually need to be.
- Rebalance health service delivery between main centres in Edinburgh and local communities.
- Wider range of leisure facilities and opportunities for young people in communities.

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.