

THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CONVENTION

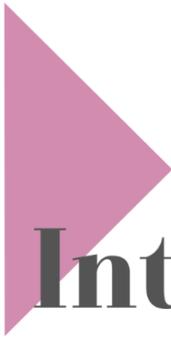
SPRING
2020
DIGITAL
ROADSHOWS

REPORT

Inverclyde

Thursday 21st 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

- Grassroots level community support has been incredible.
- Services have quickly adapted to support women and their families. *“We’re rich in community.”*
- An expansion of violence against women services is required across the region.
- Volunteering has a positive impact on mental health.
- Universal Basis Income will address levels of poverty in the area.
- Carers and key workers need to be valued and supported.

Local Support

Due to the existing structures of community-based service provision, there was a quick response to the various needs of women following the lockdown. This included providing food, health access and mental health support.

“Inverclyde’s a marvellous place. It’s full of community spirit, and all of the positive things happening recently have reinforced that.”

Awareness of local support has increased by word of mouth. Using social media has strengthened the more traditional communications eg posting phone numbers through neighbours’ doors offering any assistance.

“We’re very lucky having the local paper, The Greenock Telegraph. It’s helped keep everyone supported and aware of what help’s there for you.”

The Inverclyde Community Volunteer Group has broken into sub-groups. It has joined a wide variety of third sector organisations to be in the right places at the right time.

“Pulling all of that together is what’s made Inverclyde an absolute beacon in terms of co-ordinated response.”

Volunteering

Women who have been volunteering spoke of how it was supporting their mental health during this time.

“My role delivering meals has been a saviour for my mental health.”

They have also found that they are helping others who are maybe not in social contact with others. A chat about how people are spending their time or coping really makes a difference.

“You’re helping the other person because you’re maybe the only person they’re seeing in the day. Volunteers are doing a huge amount for mental health, when that’s maybe not the original aim.”

Inverclyde’s volunteering services have found that service users are becoming service providers. For example, women who are shielding have become volunteers making calls to other vulnerable people.

Perception of Region

“We’re rich in community, and we want to demonstrate that. We were already equipped because we’re used to helping each other.”

Inverclyde has caught national attention due to its successes within the Coronavirus community action response. This has included media coverage in The Herald, The Guardian, STV news and BBC news. While women are very proud of the area's efforts, there are concerns about negative perceptions relating to economic and social issues.

"There's been a lot of 'Poverty Tourism' with the media and film crews focussing on how we're 'all sick and we're all poor'."

Mental Health

There is good mental health support available at both local and national level. Local counselling groups, which originally focused on NHS workers, have expanded throughout the community. Counsellors and psychologists have come out of retirement to meet the increase in demand for services. Creative Inverclyde are also campaigning to reduce the stigma of local people asking for help.

"It's a sign of strength to ask for help, not a sign of weakness. We're trying to reinforce that message."

"There are counsellors available that you can talk to any time of the day or night, no matter how small you think the issue is."

While the existing levels of support are impressive, concerns were raised about the mid and long term impacts on women's mental health. The crisis response infrastructure therefore needs ongoing financial support to continue working into the 'new normal.'

"I had Covid, and it's been 6 weeks of a difficult time and recovery... I'm lucky, I had lots of resources, but it must have been a nightmare for people going through this on their own."

Violence Against Women and Children

Specialist organisations, like Women's Aid, are available to women across Inverclyde.

Women are concerned about those at risk who cannot access services. Many of the support services have adapted to using phonecalls or internet access which are not accessible to all.

"There are women indoors, with perpetrators, who can't actually get an opportunity to phone or get online. We're great at helping the women we know about. But it's those that we're not reaching who are in the greatest need."

The Children's Panel, as well as Child Welfare, have seen a spike in referrals. Some digital panels have taken place, but there is an expectation of a significant backlog in cases. This will result in these services being incredibly busy as lockdown slowly eases.

Looking to the future, Inverclyde needs a significant increase in localised support for women who have experienced Gender Based Violence. The neighbouring region of Renfrewshire has a lot of facilities and some of these can be used by women in Inverclyde. This cross-regional service use, however, could cause accessibility issues. Therefore, work should be done to increase support closer to home.

Equality and Representation

There is an opportunity to recognise systems that are unfair and unequal, and change these in the months ahead.

"It's time to stop and rethink our values. It's been painful, but it's a time of growth."

"We want to go forward. We've made so much progress and we don't want to let that slide."

One issue is the unequal gender representation within decision making. If it is mainly men around the table, how are women's voices heard; how are their priorities and considerations taken seriously? There needs to be gender equality across in all roles and responsibilities in society.

"Most structures around us have been created by men, for men. But look who we're relying on now – nurses, the vast majority are women; carers, the majority are women. We're the ones who have had to come in when the disaster has actually struck."

Carers

Carers, the majority of whom are women, have played a critical role in the Coronavirus response and are not valued in the way they deserve. They have also not received the correct financial support at this time. This has put a disproportionate number of women, who are working with vulnerable people, at higher risk of catching the virus.

"Carers are only getting £94 a week if they go off work to isolate. If you're a single parent with kids you need to weigh up staying off and struggling financially against going to work and possibly being exposed to COVID. What a choice!"

There needs to be a full review of the care system. Privatisation and commercialisation of elderly care has led to devastating circumstances during this pandemic.

“We’ve seen the level of care so widely varied. It depends how adequately the care home is run; how much is invested in it.”

“If we could begin to discuss the nationalisation of private care homes, we could change so much.”

Poverty

Inverclyde has seen an increase in Universal Credit claims despite the UK Government’s furlough scheme. Last year, just under half of the parents of P1 school children qualified for benefits. People across Inverclyde have mixed incomes and wealth. These inequalities must be addressed.

“Some children are going without a hot meal. Others, at the same school, attend summer camps and have horses. There are areas where one neighbour could be in extreme poverty and the other sitting completely comfortable. We need to address this imbalance of wealth.”

Economy

Universal Basic Income (UBI) could create a more sustainable and equal way forward. It would also have a positive impact on women. Individuals could invest in their own learning and development resulting in an up-skilling of people across the Inverclyde.

“We must have a universal income to stop children going to school without food, without a breakfast. That’s just a disgrace in our society.”

Women would hugely benefit from the financial independence provided by UBI. It would need to go hand-in-hand, however, with placing a true value on the roles that are held by women. This would incentivise more to become active and independent.

“What’s wrong with being a carer? It’s one of the most rewarding jobs you can have. We need to start rewarding people for doing these jobs, and valuing them.”

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

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter - @SWCwomen