



Norfolk Federation of WIs

Charity Number: 227411

WI OPINION ARTICLE for EDP: October 2020

Elizabeth Barker, Norfolk Federation Trustee and Chair Public Affairs Committee

Stop Modern Slavery

One of my favourite stories about how the Anglo Saxons got their name is probably apocryphal but still charming. A group of children captured in Northern Europe was taken to Rome where they were destined to be sold as slaves. They were blonde and attracted the attention of the Roman Emperor who said that they looked like Angels, hence, according to the story, the Angles in Anglo-Saxons! Historians and linguists would not agree but who am I to get in the way of a nice story?! The Romans took many slaves as did the Vikings as we know from the tales of pillage wherever they landed.

Slavery was a major part of both our history and that of many other societies. The feudal system was based on serfdom when the serfs belonged to their lord and had to work his land and serve him as ordered. Is your name “Freeman”? Then possibly you are descended from a serf who managed to buy or negotiate his freedom.

We are all now more aware of the historical issues around slavery, particularly as part of our colonial past, but there is still slavery around even in the third decade of the 21st century. It is called modern slavery and is unfortunately happening all around us. On July 5th 2020, the Sunday Times published a front-page story “Fashion giant faces ‘slavery’ investigation” highlighting that workers in Leicester were working in a factory making clothes for a large fashion retailer and being paid as little as £3.50 an hour! It is well documented that many of the clothes we buy on the High Street are made in appalling conditions worldwide.

This year the National Federation of WIs has chosen to campaign on issues around modern slavery. Members have for some time been concerned about this and now it is one of our current campaigns. We are trying to raise awareness of modern slavery in the UK and calling for better support for survivors, as well as more effective action to eradicate the problem.

Last year, we were all shocked by the deaths of many Vietnamese young people in a container discovered in Essex. Sadly, they were being trafficked and had paid huge amounts of money only to die tragically. There are regular news stories of the trafficking of desperate people for us to see on our television screens. Many of these victims end up in conditions of modern slavery and the UK government estimates that there are tens of thousands in slavery in the UK today. Global calculations suggest that there could be 40 million victims worldwide!



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Modern slavery crimes are being committed across the UK, in many different sectors including factories, fields, brothels, nail bars and even within people's homes. There is no typical victim of modern slavery – victims can be men, women, or children of all ages and nationalities. So, what can we all do to help? According to the Salvation Army, we could come into contact with a victim without realising it. We should keep aware of warning signs such as untreated injuries or the person appearing withdrawn or fearful. Maybe they seem to have their freedom restricted or you are concerned about their accommodation or financial situation. If you are suspicious, you should report your concerns but not try to confront the situation yourself. There is a Modern Slavery Helpline 0800 121 700 (or email <https://modernslaveryhelpline.org/report>) and do not forget also the Crimestoppers number 0800 555 111.

Like everyone, WIs are affected by the current restrictions and our members are really missing our meetings. Despite it all though, we will continue to highlight issues of concern to us and to society in general. In fact, we are now starting the process of deciding on our 2021 resolutions! We might not be able to do what we would like now but we can still be aware of people around us and the problems they could be facing!

Find us at: norfolk.thewi.org.uk/

<https://www.thewi.org.uk/campaigns/key-and-current-campaigns/stop-modern-slavery>

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