



Norfolk Federation of WIs

Charity Number: 227411

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Women Walk the World – in Different Ways

Do you enjoy a walk in the spring sunshine? For many of us, going for a walk is an entirely normal, and cheap, way to spend sociable leisure time, with the added benefit of fresh air and exercise. But among Norfolk WI members and other rural women's groups across the world, one walk which takes place on, or near April 29th, has an additional purpose: to raise money for women who can never think of walking for pleasure.

The WI, nationally, and the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), with its headquarters in London too, have been linked since the 1940s by the donation of 'Pennies for Friendship', still so-called although nowadays they amount to ££s. The aim is to bring to women and girls in difficult circumstances the kind of woman-to-woman help that WI members find in their own local groups. And, as with the WI, it is often not only the women themselves who benefit, but their families and, ultimately, the wider community.

So, in 1915, when the first WIs were formed, part of their purpose was to harness women's labour and skills to harvest and preserve fruit and vegetables, during the shortages of the First World War, and to learn how to make palatable, nutritious food with limited resources. Similarly, a hundred years later, in 2015, Norfolk WI members were collecting their 'Pennies' for an ACWW project in the South Pacific islands of Tonga. The problems were caused not by war but by climate change.

White sands overhung by coconut palms and fringed by bright blue seas conjure up, for us, a holiday paradise. For many Tongan women, whose able-bodied menfolk are abroad, usually in Australia or New Zealand, earning money to send home, it is a real challenge to provide enough food for their families. Built mainly on the cultivable coastal areas, their homes and gardens are in danger of being washed away by rising sea levels and increasingly violent hurricanes, while foraging pigs can devastate a vegetable patch in no time.

Responding to an appeal from a local women's group, ACWW funding helped the participants raise, barricade and protect their gardens, provided them, from a nursery, with vegetable seedlings to grow on quickly and taught them how to compost and recycle 'waste' products and how to cook nutritionally balanced meals, with the methods available to them. This scheme, started in the mid 1990s, has empowered successive groups of women, 20 or 30 at a time, thanks to funding by richer rural women's organisations. For example the Tongan Department of Agriculture's kitchen, used in the training sessions,



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was refurbished with donations from the Country Women's Association of New South Wales.

While we, in Norfolk, and across the British Isles, are Walking the World, so are others from Canada to New Zealand, Malaysia to South Africa, in our efforts to raise awareness and, crucially, money.

In the last five years Norfolk WI members have donated to initiatives among women and girls in Kenya, India, Tanzania and Uganda as well as Tonga.

Now we are contributing to Sustainable Water, Sanitation and Energy projects like one to harvest rainwater in the Philippines, so as to provide safe drinking water and better toilets; while in Uganda the installation of three wells and pumps gives some 1,250 people clean water, avoiding water-borne diseases like cholera and typhoid.

So, as we Walk the World, for pleasure, and at leisure, we are happy that we can also help save girls from missing school for lack of washing facilities, or because they have to fetch dirty water from miles away. It is the best and most practical way we can extend the hand of friendship to women we will almost certainly never meet.

The Women Walk the World logo shows just that: women reaching out to women as we encircle the world. We are almost dancing together.

Why not join in?

Contact us at fedsec@norfolkwi.org.uk