



Norfolk Federation of WIs

Charity Number: 227411

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Elizabeth Barker Chairman Norfolk Federation of WIs Public Affairs Committee

No more violence against women

One Wednesday at the beginning of October something remarkable happened in the House of Commons. Instead of the usual shouting and abuse MPs listened in silence as Rosie Duffield, the MP for Canterbury, delivered an emotionally charged speech about the domestic abuse she had suffered at the hands of a former partner. Rosie was able to convey the horror of the abuse in a measured and calm way which earned her a round of applause and much admiration. Her account showed that domestic abuse can happen to anyone and it is difficult to escape when it is happening to you, even if you have a successful career and all seems to be going well. We are only now beginning to realise the extent of coercive control as well as physical violence to which many women – and men – are subjected.

Violence against women has long been a method of control whether within the household or the state. I have recently read “The Silence of the Girls” by Pat Barker (no relation, although my late mother-in-law was also a Pat Barker!) which takes us back to Ancient Greece and the Trojan Wars. When a city was conquered the women were all captured and taken as slaves to lives of misery, while the men were killed. History has a habit of repeating itself unfortunately and we have all witnessed this recently – remember what happened to the Yazidi people.

On 25 November it is White Ribbon Day when we are not talking about historical violence but real and immediate violence. Last year, an estimated 1.3 million women across the UK experienced violence, including domestic violence, rape, forced marriage, sexual exploitation and other forms **of** abuse and harassment. The WI in Norfolk highlighted this recently when we encouraged our local WIs to decorate white ribbons with messages about violence against women and these were all joined together to make a huge white ribbon which was displayed at various locations around the county to draw attention to this issue.

The WI has long been concerned about domestic violence and has campaigned for the funding of refuges for survivors and their children, for adequate legal definitions so that women and children in the home are protected and to make sure that domestic violence survivors are able to access justice through the courts. Whilst progress has been made, much more action is needed to achieve a society where men and women are free from the fear of violence and abuse, and survivors are able to access specialist support services, wherever they live. It is still a fact that in the UK 1 in 4 women will experience domestic abuse.

We should all be aware of violence against both men and women. Has someone you know started to turn down invitations to join you for a coffee or a drink in the pub? There may be physical signs – a change which you cannot define but which you feel is wrong. In Wales, since 2012, NFWI-Wales has campaigned to inspire



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more men to speak up publicly to challenge the attitudes, behaviour and gender inequalities that contribute to violence against women. Nationally the WI is asking men in England to do the same.

This year the WI is encouraging members to take action to end the scourge of violence against women by pledging to take part in 16 days of action. Spearheaded by the UN, 16 days of activism against gender-based violence runs from 25th November 2019 (International Day to End Violence against Women) to 10th December 2019 (Human Rights Day). One of the ways in which we can all participate in this action is to wear orange which is the UN colour for the 16 days of action. What will you wear?