

ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21 of the Board of Trustees



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STAFF

It has been an unusual 12 months at WI House. At the start of the year only Sarah Freeman, Federation Secretary was working (from home!) with Lauren Saunders, Ruth Kirk (office staff), Denise Ainge (cleaner) and Anila Patel (Accounts assistant) on furlough due to the ongoing pandemic and Charli Clark on maternity leave. We have said goodbye to Charli, Ruth and Denise this year. Charli did not return from maternity leave in January in order to spend time at home with her family and Ruth's temporary contract came to an end at the same time.

Denise retired in April 2021. Anila returned on a part time basis and her hours increased as the needs of the business required. As events picked up and we started to become busier so in February 2021 Lauren returned to the office one morning per week and this continues. We were delighted to support the organisation and running of online events for members from January—June 2021 notably the Annual Council Meeting in March which was very well received. However, we were thrilled when some face to face events and meetings resumed in July 2021. Microsoft 365 has enabled us to maintain a service to WIs throughout and we have ensured that the upkeep of the house has continued. The exterior of the building was painted in August 2021 with some repairs to the sash windows in order to keep the house smart, well maintained and welcoming as you are able to visit us once again.

WI MEMBERS IN LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND

There are 124 WIs in Leicestershire & Rutland and 3,400 members

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Chairman: Janet Kirk
Vice Chairmen: Glenice Wignall
Heather Roythorne-Finch
Treasurer: Linda Martin
Elected Members:
Anne Allison, Rita Caves, Maxilyn Geary,
Mary Hobbs, Clare Robertson Smith, Gail
Wooliscroft, Susan Woollard.
Co-opted Members:
Beverly Blackburn, Anne Spanswick

COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Art & Crafts: Eileen Williams
**Finance &
House Management:** Linda Martin
Fund Raising: Rita Caves
Food & Flowers Clare Robertson Smith
Leisure Activities: Maxilyn Geary
Membership: Mandy Cutler
**Public Affairs &
International:** Glenice Wignall

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Board of Trustees have worked through another difficult year impacted by Covid. All the Trustees have given many volunteer hours in performing their primary function of running the Federation and ensuring that all WIs follow the guide lines of the Charity Commission to the best of their knowledge. They have held on-line and face to face Board meetings to enable them to ensure the smooth running of the Federation. They have overseen the information from NFWI passed onto WIs and offered advice when needed.

The Board has a good representation from all our Sub Committees and encourage the Committees to put on activities and events for the Membership. Although some events have had to be curtailed or cancelled at short notice due to circumstances, the events that have been able to take place have been warmly welcomed and supported by the Members. Very few visits to WIs have taken place due to the current situation and it is hoped to resume these shortly.

An election was held for Trustees and Anne Allison and Rita Caves stood down from office. We thank them for all the effort they put into being a Trustee and wish them well. Beverly Blackburn and Anne Spanswick were co-opted onto the Board as no new candidates came forward. Clare Robertson Smith has since decided to resign from the Board and we also wish her well and thank her for her input. We also said farewell to staff members, some long serving, and are planning new ways forward to fit the most efficient way of running the County Office.

Changes are having to be made and, although not always popular, the Board are spending time to make sure the Federation will not be adversely affected by any decisions they make. It has been a challenging year but the Board are determined to emerge from Covid streamlined and ready for the next challenges that face the Federation.

ART & CRAFTS

As with most committees we have been unable to plan any workshops or dabble days during the year. The one plus side has been that we have been able to meet via 'Zoom' for our bimonthly meetings and that we have gained two new members. Our meeting in August 2021 was held at WI House when we were pleased to see each other face to face.

We remain dedicated to passing on any skills that are required by the members and we are always open to suggestions. It has been a difficult time for us all but we are looking forward to seeing you all soon.

FINANCE & HOUSE MANAGEMENT

The Committee has continued its work to maintain WI House and garden in good order.

We have continued to maintain the House and garden in good order, with external painting, minor roof repairs and squirrel and pigeon defences being our main priorities. The House has been closed to visitors for most of the year, but we have ensured a regular staff and Trustee presence for security reasons.

The Shop in a Box scheme did not operate due to a lack of events and visitors to the House. We do still have some, mainly WI branded, items for sale.

Sales of Taylors Bulbs again went well despite the difficulties in distributing the catalogues and our thanks go to all who supported this scheme. The new catalogue will be available on the website in the Spring.

We have been very glad to be able to restart the Monthly Draw this year. We have had over seventy participants and are once again awarding three prizes each month, though there will be no Christmas bonus prizes this year.

There have been no Speakers Audition events this year but we look forward to starting again in Spring 2022. Lists of speakers are available in the Yearbook.

We thank you for your continued support of our committee and the Federation.

FUND RAISING COMMITTEE

Reading through the Fund Raising Report for last year we had scheduled in a mid-summer lunch during 2021 but this was not possible. So overall 2021 has been a very uneventful year in keeping with other Federation committees.

However, now that the Covid regulations have eased, in September we are planning to return to Greetham Golf Club for a lunch and entertainment. In October there will be a fashion show and hair demonstration with supper in Hinckley.

Hopefully 2022 will give us more opportunity and we are working on two Jubilee events in May so far. Looking forward to seeing many of you again soon.

FOOD & FLOWERS

A large proportion of our committee year involved regular Zoom coffee chats and committee meetings providing seasonal gardening tips, including a Sunflower Competition, and recipes for County News.

After months of "Can we, can't we?" an afternoon of Tour and Tea at Leicester Botanic Gardens went ahead on Tuesday 20th July. The volunteer guides were very helpful and informative and the ladies enjoyed their time there, not realising that localised thunder storms were very nearby.

In September Kirby Muxloe kindly hosted a Taste and Try in their meeting hall. To reduce the risk of Covid transmission we replaced our normal self-service buffet presentation with individual food boxes which were well received.

Sadly the majority of members of the committee withdrew at our annual meeting, so the forthcoming 'Cocktails, Mocktails and Canapes' and 'Festive Florals' will be the final events presented by Food & Flowers.

Thank you for supporting our events in the past. We hope you have enjoyed them and that you will continue to support the fund-raising efforts of the Federation committees.

LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Well, the year didn't start off with a bang as we had hoped. At the beginning of 2021 we were still in COVID lockdown, therefore our monthly committee meetings continued via Zoom or Teams, this was a shame as not all our committee members could access these virtual meetings.

In June we arranged our first event which was a walk to Abbey Park in Leicester. We started from Birstall and although it was a really hot day it was well attended and ladies enjoyed it. This was followed by three further walks to Cossington Meadows, Aylestone Meadows and Rocket Round Leicester.

Other events have been the Bowls Taster evening with a fish and chip supper, again ladies enjoyed catching up with friends and just getting out.

Margaret has been busy arranging the Skittles competition which starts in the Autumn and is due to finish before the ACM. Hopefully we will be able to arrange the Darts competition next year.

Other forth coming events are three walks in Leicester 'Myth, Legends and Ghosts' and Belvoir Regency Christmas and Light Trail. Fingers crossed these go to plan and 2022 makes life easier for us all.

Anyone that has any ideas of events they would like please get in touch with a committee member or better still come and join the committee.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS & INTERNATIONAL

The Committee has maintained an active role on Zoom meetings and for the last 3 months face to face at WI House.

In addition, through the Resolutions Advisor, the Committee maintains for the Federation, the annual cycle of Resolutions selection. It was very encouraging to see how many members voted. The Committee organised an expert speaker via Zoom, which many of our members attended.

This Committee, as a whole has responsibility for promoting the Federation links with ACWW. This year over £2,000 was donated.

We hope next year to be more proactive and start organising events again.

MEMBERSHIP

Another extraordinary year for us all. The pandemic, and accompanying government regulations, explain the 3 face- to- face visits by advisers this year. However, we have been kept busy, making numerous phone calls and emails to our allocated WIs. Support has been given on using Zoom and guidance issued on holding online Annual Meetings and procedure when WIs could neither meet nor use Zoom.

Indeed, Zoom has proved an invaluable tool – advisers attended two Annual Meetings online and, sadly, some suspensions, a total of 9 to date. In many instances, these were the result of a lack of volunteers for officer roles. We encourage job shares and training was provided in March 2021 - a total of five online sessions for Presidents, Secretaries and Treasurers.

Membership across the federation has decreased by approximately 15%. Initiatives are in place to encourage retention and recruitment. In addition to the 3-month extension to the 2020 subscription, the NFWI introduced a new rule in April 2021 allowing former members to get pro rata rates after a year of lapsed membership, instead of the previous figure of 10 years. This will support WIs wishing to reach out to their former members and invite them back.

Flexibility with the WI portion of the subscription for 2021/22 and following years also enables WI committees to reach a decision, mindful of the long term future of their group.

Our committee regularly include items in County News to advise on constitutional matters and update members on NFWI news and initiatives. The new WI Constitution, issued in March 2021, makes provision for the use of virtual methods for AGMs/AMs and allows for these meetings to be cancelled or postponed where required. On 23rd August the new WI Handbook was launched, covering everything you need to know about the WI, being a member, and setting up and running your WI.

The LRFWI Spring Group Meetings were cancelled this year and two Autumn Group Meetings - of Avon and Bardon Hill – take place in October 2021. Sadly, some groups have disbanded. The group structure offers the wider opportunities that arise from pooled resources, as well as access to federation group competitions.

The LRFWI put together an exciting programme of ten free online events for members to enjoy across January to June 2020 - including the ACM. This was a great opportunity to see WI members from around the Federation and enjoy a range of speakers and topics.

The 2021 NFWI Annual Meeting took place on the 8 June online with a lower link delegate ratio. Thanks to all LRFWI members who took part and reported back to their local WIs. Retired President of the Supreme Court of the UK, Lady Hale's speech was inspiring in her emphasis on diversity and women realizing their potential. True to the 'Inspiring Women' aim of the WI.

For those WIs who now wish to offer a bursary, an information bank of alternative providers of educational opportunities is available on the LRFWI website. This includes Denman at Home. Some of the courses are interactive so you can cook, create or exercise along with the tutor. This platform has reached out to over 90,000 people since its launch in May 2020.

In July many WIs took the opportunity to organize garden meetings, picnics and walks, and in the August and September there were reports in 'Around the Counties' of a return to 'normality' for some with village halls, parish rooms and bars hosting, once again, WI members glad to see each other again and celebrating in style.

The Membership Committee would like to thank all members for their adaptability and inventiveness in the past year.

This year, on the 16th September, the WI celebrated its 106th birthday and it was great to see LRFWI members uploading their messages onto the 'Happy WI Birthday' card. Contributions, to name a few, came from Barkby & Beeby, Broughton Astley and Medbourne cum Holt WIs. A common theme - recognition of the WI as a force to promote friendship and achievement amongst women.