

CONFERENCE 2019

For this year's annual conference, on October 11-13, we returned to Woodland Grange, an attractive conference centre on the outskirts of Leamington Spa. We had been here two years ago and were happy to return to what had turned out to be a very suitable venue. There were 32 residential conference attendees, but our numbers were greatly enhanced by members of our National Council of Young Women, who participated enthusiastically in the Friday and Saturday sessions.

This year's theme was "Women and Justice: Towards a Fairer and Safer World" and the conference speakers gave us a fascinating insight into some of the ways in which the justice system impacts particularly on women. As in previous years, the Friday morning session, under the leadership of Barbara Maddison and her team, was given over to NCYW, and the speaker was Helen Measures from the Department of Justice, who gave an inspiring account of her career and in particular her role within the Ministry of Justice. Her message, that a woman can manage both a career and family, and can rise within the ranks while doing so, was particularly encouraging to our young women facing important decisions regarding their futures.

On Friday afternoon, Dr Kate O'Brien, from Durham University, described a programme, following on from American examples, that she has initiated in North East prisons. Known as the Inside Out programme, it offers prison inmates the opportunity to study university course modules in prison, alongside undergraduate students from the local university. She gave moving examples of the way in which these courses, and the contact with 'regular' students, has affected the attitudes and aspirations of the prison inmates, while at the same time broadening the understanding of the university students.

This was followed up by a lively and informative presentation by Claire Wiggins of the Ministry of Justice, who has responsibility for the probation service, but whose career has included particular responsibility for mother and baby units in prisons. In the evening, after a buffet dinner, there was a showing of the film, "On the Basis of Sex", which relates the story of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the Jewish girl from the Bronx who rose to become only the second woman on the US Supreme Court and whose career was focused on obtaining equal rights for women under the law.

Following a welcome by the Deputy Mayor of Leamington Spa, Councillor Susan Rasmussen, on the Saturday morning, and the reading of a message from the Queen, conference considered four resolutions, three of which were passed. These concerned the rationalisation of recycling procedures throughout the country, the protection of children from online pornography, and dealing with delays and conditions during the asylum-seeking process. A fourth resolution on the banning of pavement parking in England and Wales was withdrawn due to the complexity of the issue and the need for further research.

The afternoon session was given over to NCW member Coralyn Burge and two of her colleagues from the St Giles Trust, all of whom had themselves spent time in prison but who are now dedicated to preventing young people from getting involved in drugs, gangs and knife crimes. In a riveting and sometimes harrowing presentation, we were given graphic

descriptions of this bleak underworld and the likelihood of young people without hope, purpose and support being drawn into a life of crime and possible early death.

In contrast, the last session of the afternoon was a presentation by Immediate Past President Gwenda Kibble, who is extensively involved with our 18+ 'graduates' from NCYW into full membership. Gwenda detailed the setting up of an NCW Network 18+, which connects our young women, five of whom attended the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations in New York in March, by social media and brings them together to plan and work for NCW.

Conference dinner was held on Saturday evening, and was a convivial occasion. On Sunday morning the Annual General Meeting took place, during which the officers and members of the Management Committee were confirmed, and the resolutions of the previous day ratified. Also on the agenda were four items proposing changes to the constitution. These were that Individual Members should be able to be elected to any post within the organisation, including full membership of the Management Committee, that all paid-up members of NCW should be entitled to vote as individuals at the AGM, that Affiliated Societies should henceforth be known as Associates, and that resolutions passed in the Resolutions session need only be ratified at the AGM and were not to be voted on a second time. All of these were agreed resoundingly.

The finale to the conference was a presentation by four of our five young members who represented us at CSW63 at the United Nations in New York. We were deeply impressed by the seriousness with which these representatives tackled a plethora of meetings, covering a variety of topics close to the hearts of NCWGB. They all had the opportunity to meet and discuss with representatives of women's organisations from all over the world and all agreed that it had been a deeply impressive experience. We are very grateful to Kajal, Helena, Varthani, Georgia and Jonelle for, first of all raising the money themselves to cover the cost of the trip, and for representing us so splendidly.

At the close of the AGM Dr Andrena Telford, who had completed her two years as President of the National Council of Women of Great Britain, passed on the baton, and the President's chain of office, to her successor, Mrs Elsie Leadley.