

ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20 of the Board of Trustees



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STAFF

It has been a year of 2 halves at WI House! In December Ruth Kirk joined us in the office for 2 days a week covering for Charli Clark on maternity leave from January 2020. In March Sarah Freeman became our new Federation Secretary as Susan Miller retired. Sarah was only able to complete 2 weeks out of a planned 4 week handover, and unfortunately Susan was not able to have the farewell as planned, due to the Coronavirus lockdown.

Since March WI House has operated on a skeleton staff due to the pandemic leading to all events being cancelled and the working from home guidance in place. We have utilised government support packages in order to continue to help pay staff wages throughout this time. Anila Patel continues in the Finance office but during the pandemic her hours vary depending on workload and the latest government guidance.

Our Federation Secretary has maintained the service throughout, and continues to do so, with the phones diverting to a mobile and the use of the cloud based Microsoft 365 system to enable home working when necessary. Even though we have been unable to welcome you to WI House in person during most of 2020 you will always receive a warm welcome on the telephone and we look forward to when we can meet face to face once again.

WI MEMBERS IN LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND

There are 135 WIs in Leicestershire & Rutland and 4,020 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, Julie Judd, Clare Robertson
Smith, Gail Wooliscroft, Susan Woollard.

COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Art & Crafts: Eileen Williams
County News: Jane Harris
Finance &
House Management: Linda Martin
Fund Raising: Rita Caves
Food & Flowers Clare Robertson Smith
Leisure Activities: Maxilyn Geary
Membership: Joy Hoult
Public Affairs &
International: Glenice Wignall

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

A year like no other that will be remembered for the impact that Covid had on everyone's lives, hopefully not to be repeated.

The Board of Trustees have worked hard to react, adapt and embrace the changes that they have had to take on board this year to run the Federation. They have all learnt to take part in online meetings and continued to keep WI House and the Federation in working order for when we are able to resume usual activities. Plans that had been put into place had to be cancelled or postponed to a later date.

They have followed government guidelines regarding staff employment and furloughing and the health and safety of all members and staff have been a priority.

The Board has encouraged the other County Committees to communicate with each other in new ways and tried to keep all WIs as informed as they have been able to, on the current situation as it changed.

Board Members have had to deal with personal loss as well as some having to shield for their own health reasons. All Board Members have continued to volunteer their time and experience to the organisation to keep it running smoothly.

ART & CRAFTS

Our year began, as planned, with a variety of workshops and, for the first time in recent years, two Christmas Dabble Days, which were well attended. Our workshops included a new topic, Gold work Embroidery techniques, which went well, and to celebrate Green Hearts Day we took over the House and had a good, social time making all things to do with hearts. The Hardanger Embroidery Work shop ladies worked hard to produce a piece of finished work to take home. The Art Trophy competition went ahead as planned and the winner received the Trophy 'at a distance'.

As with other committees, our plans were awry from March and all other workshops and Dabble days were cancelled. But don't despair, we will be back with more of the same and some differences. Watch this space!

If you would like to join our committee or just see what we get up to, please contact the House and you will be invited and welcomed to a future meeting, first Tuesday of alternate months.

A big 'Thank You' goes to the committee members who work so hard to pass on their skills and, especially, a huge 'thank you' to those who have retired this year. We couldn't have managed without you.

COUNTY NEWS

County News was published and distributed as a paper copy until March 2020. Keeping members informed of upcoming events, and reporting on many WI activities each month. Advertising on the back page gives notice of local services, various events including theatre and musical productions and items for sale bringing in valuable revenue for the Federation. Since March it could only be sent out as a digital copy. WIs continued to send reports of their limited activities but with the lack of other WI news the County News team struggled to fill the pages. In October the Federation Secretary, Sarah Freeman, took over the production of the newsletter giving it a fresh new look.

FINANCE & HOUSE MANAGEMENT

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

We have carried out planned maintenance on the House and garden, including essential work on the trees and hedges in the carpark. We have also replaced the fence on two sides of the garden at the rear of the property. The House has been closed to visitors for most of the second half of the year, but we have ensured a regular staff and Trustee presence for security reasons.

The Shop in a Box scheme continued in the early part of this year despite reducing stock levels. We now have mainly WI branded items for sale.

Sales of Taylors Bulbs 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.

Because of the cancellation of the ACM we were unable to go ahead with the Monthly Draw this year. Plans for 2021 have yet to be finalised.

Our Speakers Audition evenings in September 2019 were successful but thereafter all events were cancelled. We look forward to starting the auditions again when possible, and in the meantime a list of speakers awaiting audition will be available in the Yearbook.

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

FUND RAISING COMMITTEE

The events we held in the Autumn of 2019 proved very successful. The Abba Tribute evening with the UK Bjorn four piece band was excellent and we were able to enjoy all the Abba hits which were great for dancing. Something a little different to the usual.

Our Autumn lunch at Greetham Golf Club was very well attended. Our return to this venue proved very popular and after a good lunch we enjoyed the talk by Nikki Belsher, an international choreographer. With the slides she showed and her range of costumes she gave an excellent talk.

Unfortunately, as for everyone, this year has not been good for the committee. We hoped to run an event at the end of March but unfortunately this had to be cancelled as did the rest of our plans. With the vaccine on the horizon lets hope 2021 will prove a much better year for everyone and we hope to be able to offer members some events. The committee is planning two Autumn events and maybe a mid-summer lunch. Let's keep our fingers crossed. Looking forward to seeing many of you again soon.

FOOD & FLOWERS

Our autumn all-day event took place in October, had a harvest theme and was titled Grow It, Cook It, Eat It. June Norris created a beautiful Harvest display from her own garden, then demonstrated how to make the most of it in delicious recipes. Sue Lobb enlightened us with her wine talk, and while she was speaking we realised that our afternoon flower demonstrator had let us down. As luck would have it, Margaret Lawrence had just joined our committee and was observing the event to familiarise herself with how we work. Thanks to years of experience in the floral business she produced a number of arrangements out of thin air (with the help of the nearby Churchyard and Tesco store) and saved the day. And as a bonus Sue gave a second talk, this time about Champagne.

Fortunately, our Festive Florals day went without a hitch in December, and everyone went home with a lovely door hanging or table centre.

When lockdown was announced in March we formed a committee WhatsApp group to keep in touch. Very soon we held video calls which became weekly informal catch-up Zoom meetings.

We returned to our more formal committee meetings in July, interspersed with 'coffee chats', and are now concentrating on providing gardening ideas and recipes for County News until normal service resumes.

LEISURE ACTIVITIES

We began the year with lots of events planned – sporting and day trips. Things didn't go quite to plan and cancellations started due to COVID and social distancing.

Our October 2019 Leicester City walks were very successful as well as our Christmas outing to Kew. This was a brilliant display of lights in Kew Gardens and we arranged for 220 people to go from Leicestershire in four coaches.

Unfortunately, it has been downhill from there with Behind the Seams being postponed and Malvern Spring Festival cancelled. We then had to cancelled all the other events that had been arranged in 2020. Hopefully if things return to normal, we will be able to arrange sporting activities and day trips in 2021.

The Darts and Skittles competitions have been cancelled in 2020 but again they will be organised in 2021 if venues are available.

Planning has started for 2021 however our committee is very small, therefore we do need more volunteers to join us.

MEMBERSHIP

In this most unusual of years, as advisers we have been kept busy. We enjoyed a total of 18 visits to WIs across the county, each with their individual character and way of delivering meetings; there is a rich diversity of additional events on offer from Nordic Walking to Virtual Produce Shows. Nine Annual Meetings were attended by advisers during October and November 2019.

Unfortunately, four WIs have been suspended. A shortage of committee members and getting volunteers for officers' roles can be issues holding WIs back, as well as recruiting new members. We encourage job shares and open evenings to which friends and neighbours can be invited. The Try the WI taster membership is available until the end of March 2021. In June of this year, the first awards were made of the Federation WI Bursary, worth £100, aimed at assisting WIs to recruit and retain members.

Members of our committee attended two promotion events – at Oakham in October 2019, where there was much interest in WIs operating in Rutland, and at Leicester College in early March as part of International Women's Day.

The Spring and Autumn Group Meetings were cancelled this year: once again, there seem to be fewer people prepared to fulfil the group secretary's role; this is a task that can be rotated. The group structure offers the wider opportunities that arise from pooled resources, as well as access to federation group competitions.

Whilst the training sessions for WI officers could not go ahead this year, the Membership Committee are looking into the possibility of online training in 2021 - should the context require it.

The blight of Covid 19 has demanded that we all prove both adaptable and resilient. Our committee meets on Zoom and each adviser is now linked to nineteen WIs: we have ensured contact with all via email or phone. The unprecedented situation has taken us into uncharted territory and we have been collaborating with NFWI to cascade policy and directives, when available, or frame our own guidance as necessary.

We regularly include items in County News to advise on constitutional matters and update members on NFWI membership news and projects.

Our committee would like to acknowledge the resourcefulness of WI members across the federation in keeping WI activities going during lockdown and beyond. Some are using social media, WhatsApp groups or platforms such as Zoom; others send out newsletters and/or goody bags or make phone calls.

LRFWI members have been keeping communities connected and doing their bit to support the NHS by answering the call for PPE.

Our new NFWI website, along with the updated LRFWI site, was launched in February of this year; we hope that members are finding these and the federation Facebook page useful tools to help stay connected.

The NFWI want to build a more Inclusive, Flexible, Bold & Inspiring, and Growing & Relevant future. Our committee would like to encourage LRFWI members to complete the Count Me In! Survey. This will help the NFWI better understand its membership and ensure that everything is developed with members in mind.

Finally, the committee would like to thank Linda Wood, who has retired in June of this year after serving as an adviser since 2016.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS & INTERNATIONAL

The Committee has maintained an active and interesting programme of events, keeping abreast of current issues, in local and national life.

In addition, through the Resolutions Adviser the Committee maintains for the Federation the annual cycle of Resolutions selection.

It has been very encouraging how many members have voted overall the last few years.

This Committee, as a whole has had responsibility for promoting the Federation links with ACWW, we do appreciate your donations!

Also thank you to those WI's who offered to bake for LOROS, we hope that next year we can get back to doing this again.

Thank you for your support for this Committee.