**Report on 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence Events 2017**

Between 25 November and 10 December 2017 the Perth & Kinross Violence Against Women Partnership hosted a number of coordinated events to mark the international campaign against gender based violence.

**Saturday 25 November Seminar - Poverty has a Womans Face - St John the Baptist Church, Princess Street, Perth.**

This event was the first of the local VAWP activities marking the 16 Days of activism against gender based violence, supported both by secular and faith based communities.

Kathy Galloway, the keynote speaker, formerly Head of Christian Aid, Scotland, buttonholed the attention of forty people, women and men. She reminded us that the UN Strategic Development Goals (SDG) need to be addressed both collectively and individually. Gender intersects many aspects of women’s lives: not only the obvious reproductive health - the practice of FGM, the fact that rape in war is not persecuted; that 80% trafficked people are women vulnerable to sexual exploitation. It impacts men’s as well as women’s health. But also the less visible: the UK’s austerity regime has transferred resources particularly away from women; in some countries, women and girls risk rape as they shoulder the burden of water collection.

A Panel of speakers then spoke challengingly of different approaches to raising awareness & activating gender justice. Miriam Weibye explained her faithful ongoing commitment to *Thursdays in Black,* the World Council of Churches initiative seeking a world without rape and violence. Rachel Coleman fervently outlined the outstanding impact of the important work of the local Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre (RASAC). Wura Ogunrotimi explained the work of Kenyan Women in Scotland against FGM (KWISA). Lis Burke shared her experience of a Bible Study toolkit focusing on gender.

We left empowered by a desire to help create a fairer, more inclusive culture. To do so, we need to share the hidden and silent stories (only 8% of news stories challenge gender stereotypes); we need to challenge religious and cultural practices when they are used to justify inequality - gender should never become a weapon of oppression.

We will do this best when the secular and the religious move forward collaboratively.

*Elaine Cameron*

*Perth Action of Churches Together (PACT )*

**Monday 27 November Film Screening -Resilience – Birks Cinema, Aberfeldy**

About 40 people from a wide variety of backgrounds attended the showing of the documentary film Resilience which explores the subject of adverse childhood experiences (ACE’s), the long-term health effects that can be triggered and how they can be overcome by building resilience.

Following the showing of the film there was an informal discussion on the impression it had made on the individuals in the audience and how they would take what they had learned forward into their professional/personal lives.

**Tuesday 28 November Drama Presentation - Kaleidoscope Naomi Breeze– Perth Art Gallery & Museum**

Over 80 people – employees of Perth & Kinross Council and associated public and third sector partner organisations - attended a drama presentation by Naomi Breeze in the theatre of the Perth Art Gallery & Museum. “Kaleidoscope” explores the issues of coercive control within an intimate relationship and follows the life story of Nina which is a construct of several women’s experiences developed from the research carried out by Naomi.

The audience was held spellbound as the story unfolded and was challenged in the widely held view that physical violence is the only, or most destructive, form of violence against women. Everyone left with the almost universal desire to be more sensitive, sympathetic and supportive of the needs of clients.

**Thursday 30 November Seminar/Lecture - Understanding Offender Behaviour – Dr Graham Hill - AK Bell Library, Perth**

In excess of 100 people – social workers, police officers, teachers, health staff, third sector - seeking a better understanding of offending behaviour attended the seminar given by Dr Graham Hill, a visiting research fellow at the school of law at the University of Leeds and founder and first head of Behaviour Analysis at the UK Child Exploitation Online Protection centre (CEOP). Dr. Hill challenged and encouraged attendees to put themselves in mind set of a sex offender and to see the world as they do in order to better understand their actions and thereby help to protect vulnerable children.

Dr. Hill discussed many common misconceptions about child sex offenders including the fact that many offenders focus on the vulnerability of their victims, not gender, so many will abuse male and female victims of all ages – the key factor being availability. Throughout the lecture Dr. Hill remained fully engaged with his audience using many personal examples and filmed interviews to illustrate his points.

**Friday 1 December Seminar - Making Partnership Work, Civic Hall, 2 High Street, Perth**

This seminar was for front line staff – housing, police, RASAC, Womens AID, Barnardo’s etc. – who deliver services to women affected by violence on a daily basis and for whom working in partnership is an essential part of their activities. Three key speakers addressed the delegates from the perspectives of organisational needs in partnerships, the value of individual contributions and the daily realities of partnership working.

**Emma Rich** – Chief Executive, Engender spoke of the importance of both formal and informal partnerships to organisations and introduced the concepts of “radical kindness” and “radical integrity”. She left the audience with several key points

* In partnerships the default position should be “yes” not “no”
* Never be afraid to admit and apologise for mistakes
* Every day is a school day – partnerships should always be learning and developing.

**John Carnochan** – founder of the Violence Reduction Unit spoke of personal contributions to partnerships - not an entity in itself but is about people and relationships. People, not organisations, make effective partnerships and there is no magic lever to pull – they require to be worked on. Key messages were

* Start where you are and do what you can with those who share your commitment
* Work with people, not organisations – personal contact is key
* Be a thoughtful, engaged, kindly presence.

**Mhairi McGowan** – ASSIST domestic abuse advocacy service shared some personal reflections on the daily realities of working with partners. Language is important and understanding each other should be relatively straightforward but its not – it sometimes seems that we are divided by a common language and obstructed by shared goals. Key messages were

* Spread the message and reinforce it
* Confidence, relationships and respect are built one conversation and one case at a time
* The need to link organisational strategy and theory with operational practice

The event was positively evaluated by attendees who found the contributions made by the speakers relevant and thought provoking.

**Thursday 7 December Leaflet Distribution -Thursday in Black – High Street, Perth**

The *Thursdays in Black* campaign protests began in the 1970s and its roots lie in groups such as Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina. These women began wearing black sashes in honour of their friends and family members who were disappearing, being raped, and abused. They would gather every Thursday in silence to protest the loss of loved ones under the military dictatorship, with the aim of raising the government's awareness that these acts of violence were happening in their homeland.

In the 1980s, *Thursdays in Black* became an international human rights campaign supported by the World Council of Churches as a peaceful way of saying "I support the human right of women to live in a world without violence, rape and fear." The focus of the WCC campaign was a peaceful protest against rape and violence, the by-products of war and conflict. The campaign focused on ways that individuals can challenge attitudes that cause rape and violence.

On Thursday 7 December about a dozen members of the PKWAWP met at noon in the High Street Perth to make their contribution to the campaign outlined above and to hand out leaflets to passers by explaining the activity.

**Wednesday 6 December RASAC Networking Lunch – PKAVS South Methven Street, Perth**

Staff from the Rape & Sexual Assault Centre, Perth & Kinross held a networking lunch for partner support agencies in Perth. This provided an opportunity to meet with fellow workers and to share knowledge and experience in a social setting.

There was also an opportunity to view the film “Resilience” and thereafter have a discussion on the issues raised.

**Thursday 7 December Reclaim the Night, Perth City Centre**

Reclaim the Night is an international movement against sexual violence. Supporters organise vigils to remember those affected by sexual violence and march to demonstrate their right to walk the streets at night. The aims of Reclaim the Night are to educate about consent and violence against women and to eradicate the myths that surround rape and sexual violence.

This is the second year the event has been held in Perth with the support of the Provost and Perth & Kinross Council. The march with about 150 participants, including women children and men, left the Council Offices at 2 High Street at 6pm and returned there some 45minutes later having taken a circular route around Perth city centre. Participants heard speeches form the Provost, Rachel Coleman, RASAC, and were entertained with singing and a piper.

John Evans

Violence Against Women Coordinator

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