



1943  
EQUAL  
PAY

1972  
FAMILY  
PLANNING  
SERVICES



# The WI as a force for change: 100 years of campaigns

*Since its beginnings the WI has been renowned for its vigorous campaigning. You have been ahead of the time on a whole host of issues including equal pay, breast cancer screening, and banning smoking in public places...you have a formidable reputation for standing your ground and showing just what can be achieved when people come together to get things done.*

**- The Rt Hon Theresa May MP, Home Secretary, July 2014**

*You are a very powerful force for good in our country... from domestic violence to women's pay; from venereal disease in the 1920s to AIDS in the 1980s. That is a great tribute to the depth of your compassion, your fearlessness in tackling hard issues and the energy with which you further the cause of not just women but British society.*

**- The Rt Hon Tony Blair MP, Prime Minister, June 2000**

The WI was established in 1915 to ensure that women are able to play an effective part in their communities, to improve and develop the quality of life for everyone, and to influence local, national and international affairs on the issues that matter to members.

Over the past 100 years, WI members have been fulfilling that remit. They have campaigned to empower and support women within society, exerting their individual and collective influence; brought a series of controversial issues into the public domain; and brought about many changes in legislation and government policy.

The NFWI's Annual Meeting\* gives every member a unique opportunity to turn a concern into a national campaign, and the resolutions passed over the years have covered a tremendous range of issues. Resolutions become the mandates that form the backbone of the WI's public affairs work at local and national levels. With roots in villages, towns and cities across England, Wales and the islands, members nationwide get behind WI campaigns, building pressure and often maintaining momentum over a period of years until they see a result.

theWI  
INSPIRING WOMEN

1915 FOR 100 YEARS 2015



## Rights for women

### Equal pay

The WI passed a resolution calling for 'equal pay for equal work' in 1943 and was represented for many years on the Equal Pay Campaign Committee. Alongside other women's organisations, WI members kept up momentum for decades, lobbying the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the 1950s and then campaigning for equal pay in professions such as teaching. By 1970 the NFWI was backing Employment Secretary, Barbara Castle's Equal Pay Bill, which was finally passed that same year. It is now illegal to pay men more than women for work of equal value.



### Women Police

When the Metropolitan Police's Women's Patrols were disbanded in 1922 the WI passed a resolution calling for their reinstatement. Over the next 26 years WI members joined a vigorous campaign to increase the number of women police, lobbying the Home Office and winning the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The results paid off during WWII, when more women were brought into the police force including a number who were given full policing powers. By 1944, 335 policewomen were employed across the country, half of them in the Metropolitan Police Service. Women now make up more than 25 per cent of the overall police force.

### Jury Service

The WI first campaigned on jury service in 1921, urging eligible women to 'accept their full responsibilities as citizens in whatever way they may be called upon to serve their country' at a time when virtually no women met the qualifying criteria. A 1964 AGM resolution led to a decade of campaigning to implement the Morris Report, which called for jury service to be open to all. Pressure from the WI and other women's organisations ultimately resulted in the Juries Act of 1974.

### Disabled Housewives Pension

When the government introduced a Social Security Bill in 1974 including a disabled persons' pension, the WI put its weight behind an amendment that offered the same benefit to disabled housewives. As the result of pressure from the WI and other groups the government conceded in 1975 and introduced a non-contributory pension for disabled housewives.

*Its members call it the sleeping giant. There were 800 women at the conference, and I wish all the honourable Members present had been there to hear them, because they had plenty to say about their position in society and the rights of which they fear they are deprived.*

**Jo Richardson MP, Chair of the Labour Party, December 1990**

*If one person alone cannot make her wants heard it becomes much easier when there are numbers wanting the same kind of things. That is why large numbers of women organised in bodies such as the National Federation of Women's Institutes can become a real power.*

**Home and Country Magazine, July 1921**

EQUAL PAY.

(Mandate 1943) P.56.

On March 12th a deputation from the Equal Pay Campaign Committee, on which the N.F.W.I. was represented by Dr. Powell-

The Equal Pay Campaign Committee is holding a Mass Meeting on 'Justice for Women' at the Central Hall, Westminster, on Friday, May 9th, at 7 p.m. The speakers will be Dr. Edith Summerskill, M.P., Miss Irene Ward, M.P., Mrs. Clement Davies and Mrs. Thelma Casalet-Keir. Admission free. Reserved seats.

“Whether it is the environment, food labelling or women’s rights, the root of your campaigning is always the same: driving out ignorance and changing people’s minds through education, information and better understanding.

**Annie Mauger, Chief Executive, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2011 AGM**

*The WI does not flinch from the more difficult issues that face society. This NFWI resolution [on AIDS] is a good example of this.*

**Terrence Higgins Trust, 1986**



## A fairer society

### AIDS

The NFWI was one of the first organisations to talk about AIDS and used its unrivalled network of local organisations to educate the public and get people talking about the issue. WI members were involved in a government awareness raising campaign, and took up the BBC’s challenge to ‘Face up to Aids’ by organising public meetings.

### Smoking in public places

The WI passed a resolution to ban smoking in public places in 1964. Members were among the first to debate the dangers of smoking and help change the climate of public opinion: starting with legislation on advertising and health warnings in the 1960s and 1970s; going on to a 1984 ban on smoking on the London Underground; and finally seeing a ban on smoking in public buildings in 2007.

### Fair Trade

In the early 1990s, the NFWI joined with CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Traidcraft

and the World Development Movement to become a founding member of the Fairtrade Foundation. Today, the Fairtrade certification mark is on over 4,500 products in a market worth over £1.7 billion, which includes the UK’s top-selling fruit, the banana. As a result, over 1.4 million farmers and workers have been supported in improving their lives and their communities.

### The Great Milk Debate

In 2007, in reaction to the critical situation facing the dairy industry, the NFWI launched the WI Great Milk Debate to raise awareness of the challenges faced by dairy farmers and the importance of the dairy farming industry. With almost three farmers a day leaving milk production, the WI Great Milk Debates examined how best to safeguard the future of the industry. Working with the National Farmers’ Union, 100 debates took place involving 15,000 people. While the challenges faced by dairy farmers endure, the years that followed saw several

major retailers invest millions of pounds in establishing dedicated relationships with the dairy farmers that supply them with milk, encouraging retailers to enter long term partnerships, and take greater responsibility for the fortunes of their producers.

### Care not Custody

In June 2008, the NFWI passed a resolution calling for an end to the inappropriate detention of people with mental health problems, after the son of a Norfolk WI member tragically took his own life while in custody. In partnership with the Prison Reform Trust, the Care not Custody campaign aimed to bring an end to the use of prison as a ‘default option’ for people with mental health needs or learning disabilities. It has succeeded in securing government backing, and a total of £75 million for schemes to ensure that people with mental health problems that come into contact with the criminal justice system get the treatment and support they need.

*Women's Institutes have awakened the members' responsibility towards the community. It has led them to realise their power and to exert it for the improvement of conditions of rural life.*

**WI Handbook, 1953-1954**

*The Keep Britain Tidy organisation was created 35 years ago in 1954 as a result of a resolution of the annual conference of the Women's Institute...appalled by the increasing levels of litter, rubbish dumping and bad community hygiene in England's green and pleasant land. They demanded that something should be done about it on a national scale*

**Lord Parry, National Chairman of the Tidy Britain Group, 1989**

## Sustainable development

### Antarctica

In 1990 the NFWI teamed up with Greenpeace UK and WWF in a campaign to preserve the natural state of Antarctica. The alliance succeeded in getting the UK government to back a 50-year moratorium on mining in Antarctica, which was enshrined in the 1991 Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty.

### Keep Britain Tidy

A resolution in 1954 to 'inaugurate a campaign to preserve the countryside against desecration by litter' led to the formation of the Keep Britain Tidy group, which was run by Lady Brunner of the NFWI Board (Chairman from 1951-1956) for 19 years and which is still going strong today. The 1958 Litter Act was attributed largely to Keep Britain Tidy, and MPs thanked the WI for the role it played in transforming litter policy.

### Honey Bees

The SOS for Honey Bees campaign was launched after a resolution calling for increased funding for research into honey bee health was passed in 2009. Members formed a nationwide



network of 'bee ambassadors': raising awareness of the plight of the honey bee; transforming patches of derelict land into bee-friendly gardens; training as bee keepers; and calling on local authorities to take into account the need for a wealth and diversity of food for bees when planting. Concerned that despite improved public awareness, the outlook for bees remained bleak, the NFWI also joined with Friends of the Earth to campaign for a more comprehensive policy framework for tackling pollinator declines. The government launched the National Pollinator Strategy, a major action plan, in November 2014.

### Care of our environment

Protection of the natural world has long been a priority for the WI. As far back as 1927, WI members lobbied for action on pollution in the seas. In 1988, the WI added its voice to the debate about CFCs and their effect on the ozone layer, pressurising the government and manufacturers to take action. The UK government signed up to binding international targets the following year. A 2005 resolution on protecting natural resources inspired a nationwide action day that saw WIs return excess packaging to supermarkets,

encouraging retailers to reduce waste. WI members have shown that individuals can make a difference. The WI Carbon Challenge, launched in 2008 saw 10,000 members sign up, pledging to reduce their carbon footprint by 20 per cent. The savings achieved were equivalent to filling the Royal Albert Hall 108 times with CO<sub>2</sub>.

*Women's Institutes... have a unique and unrivalled opportunity to help in cancer education... doing away with fear and ignorance, obtaining early diagnosis and saving thousands of lives.*

**The consultant physician at St Bart's Hospital, London, 1951**

*We are so grateful for the Women's Institute's Time to Talk about Organ Donation campaign... sadly it has already had a life-saving impact.*

**Sally Johnson, Director, Organ Donation and Transplantation NHS Blood and Transplant, 2014**

## Health awareness

### Breast Cancer Screening

In 1975 the WI started informing members about the importance of breast examination and lobbying the government to set up screening clinics, which eventually resulted in the introduction of the national screening programme in 1988. Today, breast cancer screening saves around 1,300 lives every year.

### Family Planning Services

In 1972 local authorities were permitted to provide family planning services but did not have an obligation to do so, prompting the WI to pass a resolution calling for mandatory services and launch into action, mobilising county federations behind the issue. Under the NHS Reorganisation Act of 1973, family planning services were enshrined in law and by 1974, were a normal part of the free NHS. The WI undertook extensive campaigning during the course of the parliamentary debates, helping to establish the case for free contraception, irrespective of age or marital status.

### Organ Donation

In 1952 the WI joined a campaign to educate the British public about corneal grafting – an eye surgery technique that had been possible since 1905 but was still

not permissible in the UK. The Corneal Grafting Act in 1952 laid the foundation for the 1961 Human Tissue Act and the wide acceptance of organ donation among the public and within the law. Today, around one in three people are on the NHS Organ Donor Register.

### Visiting children in hospital

In 1953, three years after a WI resolution on permitting family hospital visits for sick children was passed, less than a quarter of hospitals allowed daily visiting. In 1957, the NFWI sent evidence to the Platt Committee on the Welfare of Children in Hospital which, in its report the following year, said that parents should be allowed to visit sick child in hospital whenever they can, and to help as much as possible with the child's care. Platt's report is considered highly influential in the development of modern hospital practices.

### Midwives

The More Midwives campaign launched after the 2012 AGM. Working with parenting charity, NCT (the National Childbirth Trust), the NFWI talked to 5,500 women about their maternity experiences and used this information to push for improvements in care for pregnant women and their families and



action on staffing gaps. The findings informed an inquiry from the House of Commons Public Accounts Select Committee, and were highlighted in the new NHS Chief Executive's plan for the health service, the 'Five Year Forward View'. Since the launch of the campaign, the Department of Health and NHS England have commissioned new guidance on safe staffing for maternity and the Labour Party has committed to 3,000 extra midwives, which, if implemented, would end England's shortage of midwives overnight.





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*\*Until 2013, the NFWI Annual Meeting was known as the Annual General Meeting*

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