

CROSS PARTY GROUP ON WOMEN IN ENTERPRISE

Minutes of Meeting held Wednesday 6 March 2019

Scottish Parliament Committee Room 5

ATTENDEES

Gillian Martin MSP (Convenor); Bill Bowman MSP; Lyn Batchelor, Napier University; Heidi Carroll, Meerkat Works; Hermine Kinkela, Mbikudi; Chrissy Mackay, BeYonder; Sasha Moran, BeYonder; Monica Martens, WomenBeing; Mary Jane Browsers, LINC; Mandy Bailey, Plant n Grow; Anne Meikle, WES (secretary); Carolyn Currie, WES; Lynne Cadenhead, WES; Pheona Matuvo, Radiant and Brighter (speaker); Clair Bryan, MS society (speaker); Karine, MS society (speaker); Sarah, MS society (speaker); Ann Henderson, Assistant to Elaine Smith MSP; Mairi Macleod, consultant; Criona Courtney, RBS; Paula Ritchie, RBS; Hailey Hannigan, Parliamentary Assistant to Maurice Corry MSP; Andy Nicol, Abstract; Elaine Smith MSP.

APOLOGIES

Catriona Stewart, SWAN; Jackie Baillie MSP; Tracy Black, CBI; Karen Moore, consultant; Lisa Thomson, Purpose HR; Evelyn McDonald, Scottish Edge; Rhiannon Sims, Oxfam; Mairi Damer, Word Up communications; Gill Lawrie, Council of Rural Advisers; Wendy Edie, ECom; Lisa Wardlaw, YES; Julie Hall, WEvolution; Sara Raeburn, Raeburn Construction; Wendy Laverty, Equity Gap; Joyce Campbell, Council of Rural Advisers.

1. Gillian Martin welcomed everyone to the meeting and in particular, the speakers, who were attending to speak on the key theme of, 'unlocking economic potential'.
2. Pheona Matuvo from Radiant and Brighter made a presentation on issues that she faced personally and also professionally as a woman from Uganda moving to Scotland –
 - Trying to find work was very difficult if not impossible. Having been unemployed for five years, Pheona and her partner decided to set up their own support by developing a company – Radiant and Brighter.
 - Pheona engaged with WES as she realised that the kind of business support that she was looking for was not readily available for her type of business.
 - Radiant and Brighter focusses on the diverse needs of communities. They provide diversity training; employability support; and a women's group which has been a huge success with more than 100 women through programme last year.
 - There is a need for a more 'culture specific support'. We also need more inclusivity of people who understand the issues involved in the design of the support systems.
 - Partnerships can be very useful, but they can be a barrier too. Partners who have different desires and ideas as to how things should work can often work against each other.
 - Structurally in Scotland there is an issue about how BME people are supported, but are we acknowledging this?
3. Clair Bryan from the MS Society then gave a brief introduction to the work of the society -

- Around 100,000 in UK are living with MS. Also, around 11,000 in Scotland. People are affected very differently by MS. 2 in 3 people affected are women.
 - Supportive employers can make a huge difference but unfortunately, this type of support at work is not usually available. Many people with MS are made to change jobs or withdraw from employment altogether. A recent APPG report outlined how MS people are supported at work – and has some key statistics and information.
 - Ideally, we want to reduce the number of years that people lose in terms of work. Employers have a significant role here and the MS society are calling on UK and Scottish governments to support methods to develop this support. 80% of those with MS have to retire within 10 or less years of their diagnosis.
4. Karine then gave a personal story of how her life has been affected since diagnosed with MS - about how she worked; tried to keep her job; and the difficulties with this. Karine was then looking for other career developments and has now trained as a Samaritan, and also holds a number of volunteer roles. At no stage has she encountered anyone who said that she wouldn't be able to do any of these volunteer roles – unlike in her paid employment roles.
 5. Sara also made a presentation based on her personal story. Sara was made redundant when Karine was diagnosed, and also had to retrain, as a result of financial strain. However, the benefits system does not allow for people to be able to work (can only work 10 hours a week) and claim a carer's allowance, so Karine and Sara found themselves in a bit of a Catch 22 situation. Sara and Karine are now using their skills to develop and grow their own marketing business through Etsy and hoping to support themselves that way.
 6. General discussion raised the following –
 - Work programmes should be flexible enough to enable people with long term health conditions to stay in employment. There are similarities with a number of groups whose needs are currently not met by the mainstream labour market.
 - The gap in service provision for different types of business support for diverse groups is not being addressed. Some stereotypical attitudes are still prevalent and discouraging many people from not setting up in business.
 - There were clear parallels across the experiences of all speakers which showed that a one-size-fits-all approach for business advice and support just doesn't work. Often it is not about a special kind of support – but a support that listens to what clients are saying.
 - Flexibility in employment and flexible work contracts is a key issue.
 7. Gillian Martin closed the meeting by thanking all present and in particular the speakers whom had given such personal stories. Gillian mentioned that both she and Elaine Smith MSP are speaking in the International Women's Day debate in Parliament tomorrow. Attendees were all encouraged to attend and / or listen / watch on Parliament TV – from 15.20 – 17.00

WES

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