

Bristol Fawcett Annual report for 2007

2007 has been a very busy year for Bristol Fawcett. This is the first year that an annual report has been written and it is intended to be a reference point for current, new and prospective members, as well as a chance for us to celebrate all we have achieved. This report provides a short overview of what we have been up to in the course of the last year.

Membership

Bristol Fawcett is an activist group, whose members seek not primarily to talk about feminism but to 'do' feminism and make a difference - however small - to awareness, policy and practice in the local area. Because of this, and because women's lives are so busy, we do not expect to have a huge membership. There are many local men and women who are members of Fawcett nationally, and who support Fawcett's work by contributing financially to the organisation. Bristol Fawcett members also give their time, their ideas and their expertise, to projects and events that we undertake. Since being founded in 2001, the group has slowly but steadily grown in number and, happily therefore, in reach.

This year we said goodbye to three members who moved away from the area and we were delighted to welcome seven new members. Our membership now stands at 30 people, of whom 26 live locally to the Bristol area and roughly half are able to attend meetings regularly.

Finance

In 2007 Bristol Fawcett opened their first bank account and elected a treasurer. Bristol Fawcett would like to thank Bristol Ladyfest for a sizeable donation following their successful Ladyfest in August. The other main source of income has been from Avon Fire & Rescue Service (AFRS) as payment for attendance at their equalities meetings. Bristol Fawcett applaud and support this good practice from AFRS which provides incentive for engagement as well as demonstrating recognition of the strain on resources experienced by otherwise unfunded groups such as ours. This income will be put to good use in 2008 to further Bristol Fawcett's campaigns. Full accounts are available on request.

Strategic Themes

In 2006 the group decided that – given the enormous scope of a remit to campaign for gender equality - Bristol Fawcett needed to be able to set priorities for achievable action. We have started to use a system of prioritising two strategic themes at a time, over a six-month period. Aims are set, time is set aside on each agenda, and we work towards achieving success (whether that is defined by raising awareness, conducting a protest, running an event) in the course of the six months. This makes progress seem more achievable but doesn't stop us from giving our attention to other issues that concern us at the same time.

During the course of the year we focussed particularly on three areas: Trafficking; Sexual Violence and the Representation of Women.

Trafficking

Bristol Fawcett undertook a review of work being done around the trafficking of women in the local area. Members met with journalists and the police, and produced a report highlighting the lack of investigative work being undertaken. Trafficking – whether for marriage, or work

including sex work - is very often not in the public domain and intelligence is not easy to come by. Proactive work in the area is rare.

In March we took part in an HTV West programme on forced marriage and trafficking.

The UK Action Plan on Human Trafficking was launched on 23rd May and members were pleased to see that some of the points they had made in their response to the consultation document had been incorporated.

Sexual Violence

Since the protest in 2006 - led by Bristol Fawcett - about the lack of a rape crisis centre in Bristol, there has been significant local improvement in attention given to sexual violence. Two Bristol Fawcett members are members of the Safer Bristol Partnership's Rape and Sexual Assault Strategic Group. This group brings together the local council, police and health authorities as well as third sector partners, to provide a strategic approach to improving prevention, confidence in the system and positive outcomes for those experiencing sexual violence. Since publication in April of the Government's Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse and, later in the year, of the new local government Public Service Agreements partners in the group have a clearer picture of their responsibilities and the group is working well. Recent focus has been on mapping services for those who have been raped or assaulted with a view to plugging the gaps in provision across Avon and Somerset. Members are working on a strategy to be published in spring 2008.

Members are also working with police, health and other partners on the launch of Bristol's SARC (sexual assault referral centre) which will open in mid-2008.

Members will be working in a sub-group of the SARC project board to develop appropriate forensic medical services for women who have been raped, and in a sub-group to improve the walkthrough experience for people who attend the centre.

We have been building support for rape crisis provision in Bristol, working with individual politicians and senior decision makers as well as with groups such as Bristol Women's Forum and the City Council Equalities. A rape crisis working group has been started and proposals have been developed for a rape crisis centre in Bristol. In December a statement was made to the City Council outlining the urgent need for a rape crisis centre to run alongside the new SARC.

Representation of women in the media

On 3rd July, the group undertook an action around representation of women in the media. Members each chose a topic within this broad theme to document and analyse their individual experiences and observations during that day of women's representation in the media. The results are now being collated and the group will be shaping them into an exhibition as well as a published resource which will be available on our new website.

Guest speakers

In December 2006 we invited Sue Lloyd of Victim Support Avonvale to address our meeting. We discussed the role of Victim Support and their 12-hour, 5-day helpline for victims of all crime in the Avon and Somerset area. Members have subsequently got to know Sue well, through our joint involvement in work around the SARC and Safer Bristol's strategic group on rape and sexual assault.

In January 2007 we welcomed Fawcett's Director, Katherine Rake to our meeting. An interesting and much valued discussion on the Fawcett Society strategy was had and the local members welcomed the opportunity to be really involved in this work.

In November, we invited Bristol's outgoing manager of Equalities in Children and Young People's Services, Ruth Pickersgill, to discuss the current local picture with us. Subjects such as bullying, sexual harassment, gender stereotyping, healthy relationships, female genital mutilation, and gender equality schemes were discussed. Members felt that a potentially significant role for Bristol Fawcett emerged, in terms of working to ensure a place for gender equality on the local education agenda.

Our other activities

Criminal Justice is a key policy area for the Fawcett Society and in January, Bristol Fawcett and the City Council Equalities Team hosted an expert seminar on the gender equality duty and the criminal justice system. The event was well attended by representatives from all areas of the criminal justice sector. In November and December, Fawcett's publications on women and the criminal justice system were used as key documents in meetings of Bristol Women's Forum focusing on the issue of women in custody. Several Bristol Fawcett members are active in this area, and members attended a recent appearance in Bristol by national campaigner Pauline Campbell highlighting the plight of women in prison.

Bristol Fawcett members have been invited to respond to a number of gender equality schemes including Bristol PCT, VOSA and the local police. We have asked Equality South West to look into hosting a website with links to local Gender Equality Schemes for improvement in monitoring as well as information sharing.

Members have continued to represent Bristol Fawcett at the Avon Fire and Rescue Service Equalities Group, Bristol Women's Forum and the Bristol Partnership's Equalities Action Group as well as the SARC Project Board and the Rape and Sexual Assault Strategic Group.

For International Women's Day this year we supported Bristol's international links with the Nicaraguan Women's Fair-trade coffee cooperative, Flores del Café at a local film and discussion evening.

Also in March, we took part in a panel discussion about women in society following a Bristol University theatre production exploring gender stereotypes.

In July we took part in an Equal Opportunities Panel to discuss the Gender Equality Duty with American social work students from the BICEP programme.

In August, Bristol women organised "Ladyfest", a fantastic programme of woman-centred arts and events. Ladyfest Bristol chose Fawcett as its beneficiary, and we spoke at the opening event. Many attenders were very interested in Fawcett (and the famous teeshirts!) and some signed up for membership, nationally and locally.

In September we celebrated the election of one of our members to Fawcett's Board of Trustees. She brings her many abilities to the Board as well as her knowledgeable commitment to women's equality. We know that she will be a strong voice for Fawcett's many dedicated members, and she will also provide an important link for the board with grassroots concerns, and with information about the effective implementation of policy at local level.

Members have also been enjoying making links with the new Bristol Feminist Network. The first opportunity we had to work together was during the “Women’s No Pay Day” event on October 30th, for the equal pay campaign led by the Fawcett Society and Unison. We held a well-attended protest and awareness-raising event which was covered by three local radio stations as well as an article in the Evening Post. Pictures can be seen at <http://www.thisisphotosales.co.uk/> - type 'equality301007' into the search box.

In November Bristol Fawcett was involved in consultation around Bristol’s new licensing policy statement. We worked in collaboration with other organisations - Bristol Women’s Forum and the University’s Violence Against Women Research Group - to raise awareness of the potential impact of licensed sexual entertainment (lap-dancing or table-dancing clubs) on women’s equality in the city.

Bristol Fawcett was selected this year to receive pro-bono help with information systems solutions from a team of students at the University of the West of England. Their analysis of us as an organisation, and of our communication needs, has been extremely valuable and they will be providing us with a much-needed website in spring next year. We look forward next year to using the website to raise our local profile further, and also as a way of providing useful resources and campaign information.

Bristol Fawcett
December 2007