

Valerie Jean Evans CBE (1931-2015)

Valerie Jean Evans, distinguished educationalist and campaigner for women's rights, SI Central Birmingham (SICB)

Valerie joined SICB in 1978, was President 1983/84, and chaired its Lobby Group. She was committed to the objectives of Soroptimism, specifically improving the status of women and girls, through the active promotion of gender equality and her advocacy of women's empowerment through access to education worldwide. Both Midland Arden Region and SICB recognised her contribution with Honorary Membership.

Between 1952 and 1967, after graduating from Bedford College, London University, with a science degree, followed by a postgraduate teaching qualification from Bristol University, she taught in secondary schools in England and Canada. During the 1960s she played a leading role in the development of the Nuffield Science Curriculum. For 23 years from 1967, Valerie was a member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools, holding posts in different locations. At one time she was the sole female divisional staff inspector at the former Department for Education and Science. Adding to her OBE, she was awarded the CBE in 1990 (out of the 95 awarded, only 9 were given to women).



Valerie's passion for education and its role in improving gender equality continued into retirement, resulting in her active participation in local, national and international educational fora and women's rights organisations, including membership of the Council of Warwick University and the Education Committee of the Fawcett Society. She was elected as the Soroptimist representative on the Women's National Commission (WNC), the principal government advisory body on key issues relating to women, serving as Co-Chair (with a Government Minister) for two years from June 1997, and later becoming sole Chair. Her successful advocacy for the WNC during a review of its work ensured that it remained to undertake vital work on behalf of women with an enhanced role, with the office of Chair becoming a public appointment. After stepping down as Chair, Valerie continued to work for the WNC, including serving on its international committee, sharing her extensive knowledge of government processes, particularly education, drawing on her experience as a senior schools inspector and chairing the Gender Statistics Users' Group.

As a member of National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO), she was involved with Government departments on gender equality issues, and the first recipient, in 2015, of its Elder Award as a tribute to a lifetime dedicated to the advancement of women's opportunities through learning. Valerie attended the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing when governments confirmed their commitment to the UN Platform for Action for Women and Girls. She was committed to following up on the actions, and was an active participant at the annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York, making her presence and efforts for gender equality for women and girls well known to governments, non-governmental organisations and all attendees. At CSW Valerie, as WNC Chair, was noted for her democratic leadership, the UK earning widespread admiration amongst the CSW community as one of the best organised civil society groupings. The reputation that SI has at the UN owes much to Valerie in those years.