

After the Ball Study Day

A round up of thoughts and comments on the day.

The latest UKPAC Study Day in Belfast is now over, and comments on the day are very positive – it was “an excellent day”. The word excellent appeared a multitude of times on the evaluation sheets – applied to the speakers, the stewards, the food and the day in general.

One evaluation said they “wanted to listen to the speakers for hours!”

The day was designed to update delegates on the progress of work we have all been engaged in around the UK, both on the situation of women in prison and the Prison Reform Trust and the work we did for them on “Transforming Lives” in particular, and on Modern Slavery and the results of that survey. The general feeling seems to be that we were well served with “Informative Keynote speakers and good breakout sessions.” “Interesting and Inspiring” “Some extremely knowledgeable women and men and very thought provoking.”

The speakers dealt with Women in Prison in the morning session.

Dame Vera Baird DBE QC talked knowledgeably and informatively about women in the Criminal Justice System from her position of Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria. She particularly mentioned our work with the Prison Reform Trust and how powerful and influential that was, especially combined with their follow up report on the effect imprisonment of women has on their children. She also talked about the fact that large numbers of women offenders have suffered domestic abuse and coercion leading to their offending, but this coercion is not recognised as a defence.

“The coercive control held over a victim of modern slavery is comparable to that over a victim of Domestic Abuse who may well commit crimes under this coercion - is there a need for a new defence?”

She was followed by Peter Dawson, director of Prison Reform Trust, who emphasised the things she had said about our joint work and looked forward to a continuing partnership. He stated that “working with Soroptimists has:

- Helped enable the Prison Reform Trust programme to reduce women’s imprisonment to reach across the UK
- Helped improve understanding and policy responses to the links between domestic abuse, coercive relationships and women’s offending
- Been influential with Ministers in all the nations of the UK”

These keynote speakers were followed by breakout sessions.

Prof. Nancy Loucks OBE spoke about her work supporting children and families affected by imprisonment.

“About half of men and two-thirds of women in prison have children under the age of 18.

An estimated 20 – 27,000 children in Scotland have a parent go to prison each year.

This means that about twice as many children each year experience a parent’s imprisonment than a parent’s divorce.”

Sofia Buncy, researcher and co-author of the first ever report into Muslim women in British prisons, discussed how the “failure to understand the particular issues and experiences at play for Muslim female prisoners leads to their invisibility on multiple levels: in policy, research, family and communities.”

Restorative justice was considered in an interactive and lively session with David Merrington. The group used the YouTube video “The Wolf Within” as a catalyst for part of their discussions. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1s6wKeGLQk>)

After lunch the topic for discussion was Modern Slavery and Trafficking, starting with Justice Teresa Doherty CBE talking about the moves on legislation surrounding the exploitation of children, in peacetime and war. She spoke of some of the difficulties surrounding the cases of children being trafficked in cases of fraudulent adoption, with pressure being applied to try to have children sent for adoption from Africa to the USA under the pretence that they were orphans, when the truth was that they had families but were being “traded” for the money American adopters were willing to pay.

The UKPAC Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Survey was presented, along with analysis of the results, and accompanied by a new handbook for use by clubs to help address some of the issues highlighted by the results of the survey. Both of these documents are available on the UKPAC website, <https://sigbi.org/ukpac/our-work/trafficking/modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking-report/>

In the following breakout sessions there was continued discussion on the report and handbook by KimAnn Williamson MBE. At the end of her session she asked “What 3 things will you now do differently?”, an important consideration once knowledge has been obtained.

Unfortunately Allyson Davies from Barnardos was unable to attend the study day, but instead we heard from Richard James whose presentation related to the trafficking of children, the specific rules relating to them and the nature of the ICTA service provided to them in the three early adopter sites of Greater Manchester, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and Wales. The ICTA service generally provides advice and guidance to professionals and support to each young person identified as a potential victim of trafficking in a broad range of ways. “The government’s commitment to a national roll out of the scheme in the future will be a big step in the right direction for both battling modern slavery/trafficking and providing appropriate support for its victims.”

Justine Currell from Unseen informed us about the work done by Unseen on the UK-wide Modern Slavery Helpline – (08000 121 700)

In their first year they took almost 4,000 calls and over 700 online reports. These numbers are growing. As a result they make referrals to police and safeguarding, covering all police forces in the UK. It has to be remembered that “The physical shackles and chains may have gone, but the psychological ones that have replaced them are much stronger.”

There were many compliments on the Northern Ireland stewards, they were “particularly friendly and helpful” “such friendly delightful people in Northern Ireland!”

To summarise from the evaluation sheets.....

“Excellent Venue.

Good Food.

Good Food for Thought”

“Long may they continue!!!”