

Holt WI

Our monthly meeting for May focused on the two resolutions that are to be presented at this year's national AGM. Both represent causes close to many lives and indeed have relevance in one case to the whole planet.

So let's start with that one. As a race, human beings are creating "plastic soup" in our seas. Not content with discarding plastic bags and bottles which break down into microscopic form to be ingested by all sea creatures, there is a hidden menace in the behaviour of the most ecologically aware of us all. Every time we wash any of our clothes that have even a modest amount of man-made fibre in them (i.e. most of them) we are washing hundreds of thousands of microplastic fibres into the world's oceans. They are too fine to be filtered out in any existing system so the whole lot ends up in the sea. Polyester cotton sheds 140,000 fibres per wash, acrylic 730,000! A recent study looking at fish sold in Indonesia and California found that a quarter had plastic fibres and debris in their gut. Another study found microfibrils in drinking water, beer, honey, sugar and table salt. Ironically, the recycling of plastic bottles, to make fleeces, may cause even more damage as their shedding is potentially more damaging to the environment. Research into how to collect and then safely dispose of these fibres, without just polluting the environment elsewhere, is in its infancy. The government has already committed to banning microbeads – a type of microplastic commonly found in cosmetics and toiletries – but this is relatively easy given that there are natural alternatives. Man-made clothing is strong, versatile and cheap. Banning it is not an option, so the WI resolution is to work with environmental charities to raise public awareness of the issue and to press government and industry to carry out greater research and find solutions to this problem.



The second resolution is to do with loneliness. This is not necessarily an issue to do with isolation, given that 15% of working age people report feeling lonely. Personal circumstances, such as bereavement, poor health, living alone, living away from family, a lack of transport, becoming a carer or living on a low income can make someone more vulnerable to feelings of loneliness. Many council services which went towards alleviating the problem have been cut. The costs of loneliness are not just to be measured in emotional distress, as can be seen in a pilot scheme in Gloucestershire, which, having identified the most isolated and lonely in the community resulted in savings of £1.2 million in health and social care services, with every £1 invested in the scheme seeing a return in investment of £3.10. The WI resolution aims to shine a spotlight on the issue and to encourage health and social care providers to help organise dedicated activities to reach out to these people. Initiatives such as Silverline and other befriending schemes are

working well, but need massive expansion and support if they are to alleviate the problem.



All serious stuff and worthy of support as are so many WI Campaigns, such the one currently running on food waste. Waste has not been eliminated, but the results of pressure are encouraging: more supermarkets joining forces with food banks and hostels / homeless outreach services to use food that would otherwise be discarded; more supermarkets selling “wonky veg”; more innovative packaging helping store food longer; less multi-buy offers discouraging over-purchasing. There is more to be done on food labelling and sell-by dates, but the work is going in the right direction.

So this is what we have been involved in this month. Next time we will report on some jollies: our annual coffee morning, plans for an away day plus the mysterious “Talk with a Difference”. New members are always welcome. First Thursday of the month, 7.30 pm at Holt Village Hall.