

Holt WI

This month, Holt ladies decamped from the village hall to accept an invitation from Abberley WI and Little Witley, as the three separate groups assembled to conduct the annual Resolutions meeting. A larger group lends itself to greater discussion and debate, which was indeed the case this month, and also to a pleasant social occasion.

This year's resolution, which received unanimous support from all three WIs, originated in Worcestershire, from Louise Jones, at Callow End WI. From January onwards, when we originally voted on five potential resolutions, this topped the choices by a very long way. Over 100,000 members wanted this resolution to be adopted this year. The wording of the Resolution is as follows:

Mental health matters as much as physical health. The NFWI urges all WI members to recognise the importance of parity between mental health and physical health, and to take action to make it as acceptable to talk about mental health issues as physical health issues, and to lobby government for better support for mental illness.

Much of the background to the proposal is well known to us all, but, as with other historical social taboos, it is hard to change habits. This is not only a plea to government to fund the relevant services; it is also a plea to us all to change our mind-set. Why are we happy to discuss operations for sometimes the most intimate parts of our bodies, but shy away from mentioning anything to do with the mind? Why have we overcome the taboos of addressing cancer, but not depression? Why, when one in four people suffer from mental illness at some point in their lives, do 90% of them suffer discrimination at work or in other social settings? Various studies show, as indeed do people's own experience, that 75% of those suffering from mental illness do not get the care needed. This is not a new problem. For generations, mention of "nervous breakdowns" or "nervous exhaustion" has been in hushed voices, with a strong sense that the patient is somehow to blame for their condition.

The discussion at our meeting ranged widely about what is lacking and what is needed from health professionals. Frustration was expressed at the amount of money that has been allocated by the government with little apparent effect. Also we addressed what we as individuals could do to ameliorate the situation. As one participant said, "People need people". We are in a strong position in the WI to start making a difference, not only through lobbying MPs or other bodies, but also in our daily lives. It is often the little things that matter; if someone in answer to the question "How are you?" immediately answers, "I'm fine", maybe we should not just be relieved and move on. Listening sympathetically has got to be a start. Various suggestions were made about what could be done to make members more confident in helping others: a "mental first aid" course, positive messages in publications, a concerted effort to ban cliques, the use of ice-breakers to help new members etc. But the overall message from the members was clear: this is not just someone else's problem. It is up to us to make that difference.

After the discussions and vote on the resolution, members were treated to a run-down on the actions of ACWW, a very worthy international enterprise which backs projects in impoverished parts of the world, focusing on empowering and improving the lot of women in rural communities. We enjoyed a super evening in Abberley and came away feeling very positive, and full of cake!

Back in Holt Village Hall next month, we hope to welcome lots of people to our Open Meeting with the “Pearl Lady”, Frances Benton. As an experienced speaker, she promises a fascinating and sometimes hilarious glimpse into a world of beautiful jewellery and mystery about the world’s only living gemstone. Don’t miss this unique opportunity to hear this popular speaker (who has to be booked two years in advance) and the chance to purchase some of her beautiful jewellery, in aid of charity. We would love to welcome you to Holt WI for the evening. Doors will be open at 7 pm and your ticket includes a welcome drink. **Tickets are £5 per head and may be secured by ringing 01905 621140 or 01905 621721.**

Other recent events we have enjoyed were a hilarious talk about life aboard a cruise ship and the equally hilarious, and occasionally risqué, reminiscences of Graham, father of the Walton sextuplets. Holt’s team came joint fourth in the Hanley Swan half of the county quiz, and only three points behind the winners there, a satisfying result, although we are still kicking ourselves for two silly answers which we should have known. And we are looking forward to the ever-competitive annual Shrawley Cup competition at Little Witley, lunch out at Lord Morton’s in Cutnall Green, a fund-raising coffee morning and a visit to Bonterre Farm.