**Women’s Rights: from winning the vote, to healthcare, Hooters and beyond**

**Workshop Facilitator:**

* Nickala Torkington (Flourish)

**Panel Speakers:**

* Tandrima Mazumdar (HerStory Salford)
* Deb Drinkwater (Hysteroscopy Activist)
* Gemma Aitchison (YES Matters UK and Womanchester)
* Allison Taylor (Salford Women’s Centre)

**Introduction**

Nickala welcomed everyone to the workshop and was delighted to introduce the panel speakers who are a force for social change. They would be sharing their experiences, backgrounds and how they achieve change in the community.

**Tandrima Mazumdar**

Tandrima is of Indian origin and came to the UK seeking sanctuary with her 2 daughters. She realised that women migrants do not have a voice and that there are systemic structural barriers to these women and no-one is listening. There are barriers to them getting education and work which impacts on their worth and value.

Women seeking asylum don’t have a choice where they live and are often left isolated, scared to go out because no one has told them it is safe to do so. Tandrima went down the volunteer route during lockdown and took women out for walks– often the first time they had visited the park. She believes strongly in helping women find their space, voice, rights and worth, reminding them that they can ask about or object to things.

They now meet in groups to talk about some of these issues including, study, and work, dealing with trauma and hostile environments and what their rights are.

She believes we need to come together to fight the kind of oppression that women face and to group together to get their rights back.

**Deb Drinkwater**

Deb shared her experience of living with endometriosis and how her journey to be diagnosed highlighted a problem with how women’s pain is treated in the health system during the course of their investigation.

It took over 10 years for her to be diagnosed and during one of her hysteroscopies, she experienced the most excruciating pain that left her shaking and traumatised. 25% of women will experience this kind of pain and yet there is no offer of pain relief or sedation from the medical staff to alleviate the suffering it causes.

Following this experience, Deb got in touch with a group that campaigns for painless hysteroscopies, taking this to parliament on a regular basis and slowly trying to get the system changed.

 During lockdown she was offered another hysteroscopy and this time she insisted on having it with pain relief. It was a simple thing and doesn’t cost the earth but doesn’t seem to be offered when it could make such a difference.

Deb felt very passionately that there are people in Salford (and the UK) that are suffering and is in contact daily with those that are too embarrassed to speak about it. She reflected on one lady in her 70s that was extremely grateful that someone is raising this issue as she herself has been traumatised from this kind of pain.

Deb will carry on with campaigning group because shared experience gives power. An overarching belief is people should have dignity and support.

It is a reminder of what women’s inequality look like and is a problem in all of the UK.

**Gemma Aitchinson**

Gemma describes herself as a feminist, single mum who lives on a council estate and makes no apologies for being from Bolton. Apart from her work at Womanchester and YES Matters UK, Gemma wanted to raise the issue of a new Hooters’ restaurant that had been given the green light in Salford Quays. Hooters is a family restaurant chain that originated in the USA and is slang for a woman’s breasts. They employ scantily clad teenage girls and young women which sends the wrong messages regarding sexual empowerment and is reflected in violence against women. Women should not be advertised in this way as a ‘sexual’ object. Women are not objects.

Gemma has actively protested Hooters coming to Salford in line with policies addressing women and girls. She has met with Salford Council who despite the evidence presented, still gave the restaurant the go ahead.

Gemma is very passionate about woman and girls’ rights and worth. We tell girls that they look pretty from birth which links their worth to how they look or being a decoration. Girls are people and not just pretty. They are also fierce and intelligent. Our children deserve better.

The fact that the restaurant is located near a school is a further cause for concern and the school itself has sent over 91 strong objections.

Gemma would like people to get involved in fighting against Hooters and is happy for anyone to contact her at YES Matters UK or over social media

**Allison Taylor**

Allison is from Salford Women’s Centre which exists for the wellbeing of woman and children in Salford.

Today she wanted to offer a personal opinion about women’s rights. She started by highlighting some important dates in history which the group may or may not have been aware of.

1918 – First time women were granted the vote. This was restricted to women over 30, who were white and middle class but it was at least a start.

1928 – All women over 21 got the right to vote.

1970 – Equal pay act – women were entitled by law to receive the same pay as men.

2003 – Rape became illegal in marriage, Domestic violence had been illegal for a long time so this is particularly shocking given how recent this legislation came into force. In some countries however, rape is still legal in marriage. This is absolutely shocking.

There is a report about how women who survive rape have their records missing from police archives in this country.

Allison went on to speak about how it was only in 2018 that women from Ireland were allowed to receive a termination in the UK. 10 years ago, a lady had died in Ireland because she was not allowed to medially terminate a foetus that had died.

Gemma wanted to highlight these dates because it makes us aware of the inequality in women’s rights. We don’t always know our rights or are too polite to ask. We need to know our rights.

Gemma described how she was bullied, harassed and abused when she was younger and didn’t do anything because she didn’t know there was a law against it. She didn’t know her rights.

Gemma wants to be identified as a woman but also respected as one. She wants to stop categorising our gender and work together across the board, to not be dismissed because of different backgrounds or political affiliations.

**Nickala Torkington**

Due to the size of the workshop and as time was limited for Q&A, Nickala proposed that the panel members sit at each table to have a chat and agree some actions.

**Actions**

Get involved in a campaign and fight against the location of Hooters in Salford. Organise a parade or campaign outside the CIVIC.

Call to action – Women’s Centre. More awareness around women’s rights, including domestic violence, rape and abortion. If the UK can’t protect women – who can!

Campaign in the local area using case studies and evidence where hospitals have changed their policies in providing pain relief to women. Campaign to end painful hysteroscopies, starting in Greater Manchester.

Get involved in March of the Mummies on the 29th October in Manchester to stand up for the rights of working mums, dressing as ancient mummies to represent the archaic legislation that is currently in place.

The Energise Centre in Salford have started a new project. A women’s group meets at 11.00 am on the first Tuesday of every month to address assertiveness. Some women are less confident in certain situations so the women’s group comes together to talk about self-esteem and build confidence. Promote the group to those that need this.

Look at more education and conversations with men over sexualisation of women and young girls.

There is a lack of funding to overcome barriers with cultural change. We need help for asylum seekers so that they don’t need to explain themselves. More support to allow them to talk about their experiences until they are ready to move on.

More education of women to know their rights

Promote Intersex Awareness Day on the 26th October. Disenfranchised and less well known minority group of people, who often struggle accessing services and healthcare. It would be good to raise awareness of this group and event.

Potentially run a longer event on women’s rights as the hour was not long enough.