

WEN Café: What are young women looking from the Senedd elections?

26th March 2021

Summary of discussion

Chair: Catherine Fookes, Director, WEN Wales

Speakers:

Beth McSpadden, Youth Advisory Panel
Elena Ruddy, Youth Advisory Panel
Sandy Ibrahim, Welsh Youth Parliament
Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales

During this session, we were joined by Elena Ruddy and Beth McSpadden of the Youth Advisory Panel, Sandy Ibrahim of the Welsh Youth Parliament, and Sally Holland the Children's Commissioner for Wales. This pertinent in-depth discussion focused on what young women across Wales view as their priority issues as 16- and 17-year-olds take to the polls for the first time.

The speakers made clear the benefits that engaging in political activities and political discussion can have on young women. As Sally highlighted, the Welsh Youth Parliament is far more representative of Welsh society at large than any other elected body in the country. The challenge is in retaining talented young people and empowering them to seek election in the future. Much can be attributed to the determination and hard-work of young people – including the global Youth Climate Strikes.

All speakers acknowledged the profound effect that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on young people, and in particular young women with disabilities and young women of colour across Wales. Sally highlighted that some 40% of 17-year-olds had felt lonely 'most of the time' in January.

Sandy made the case for greater mental health provisions to deal with the social and psychological impact of the pandemic on young people and called on the Welsh Government to reduce the delay in access to services. Beth too called on the next Welsh Government to renew the effort to reduce period poverty by investing in re-usable menstrual products such as period underwear. This is another example of how measures in Wales can address green and gender-related areas in tandem.

Discussions also moved on to the murders of Wenjing Lin and Sarah Everard. Beth and Elena highlighted the fact that women continue to feel scared on the streets, while Sandy made clear that those claiming it is 'not all men' should refocus their energy on listening to women's concerns. All speakers agreed that the answer lies in education and bystander training for boys and men.

Themes of mental health, education, inequality, and poverty were frequently brought up during this discussion. With these in mind, our **priorities for the upcoming Senedd election** are as follows:

- Successfully rolling out the new curriculum to ensure that young people are educated on issues such as consent, sexism, and how to call out misogyny.
- Ensuring that young people have access to comprehensive mental health services.

- Guaranteeing that the climate emergency is treated as a crisis and is dealt with as such.
- Ensuring that young people have information readily available to them in order to inform their political decisions.
- Creating a system which challenges health, gender, and social inequalities which have been exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Encouraging schools to take a holistic approach to learning and 'catching' up on work and hours lost as a result of COVID-19. Young people should be commended for their courageousness during the pandemic.