

## Our 36th AGM

Thank you to all who made the journey to celebrate with us on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November. If you were unable to make it you can read a round up of the years events in our 2019 Annual Report which is available in the WRDA Publications section of our website ([www.wrda.net](http://www.wrda.net)).



Eithne McNulty has made the decision to stand down from our Management Committee. All the staff and Management Committee of WRDA would like to thank Eithne for her years of service and wish her well for the future.

We also congratulated Katherine Robinson our Training and Development Programme Worker on ten years with WRDA.



Our theme for the AGM was 'Visible Force for Change' and we hope to carry this forward over the next 12 months.

## WRDA Out and About

Reach Out! A selection of where we have been promoting and delivering the BCB programme in October and November.



- ⇒ Gortrush Surestart
- ⇒ Black Mountain
- ⇒ Newry Mourne and Down Council Women's Group
- ⇒ Cliftonville Community Regeneration Project
- ⇒ The Monday Club Cookstown
- ⇒ Portaferry Mens Shed
- ⇒ Lilac Support Group Cookstown
- ⇒ Skyway Club
- ⇒ Chinese Welfare Association Senior Women's Group
- ⇒ Station Road Resource Centre
- ⇒ Versus Arthritis
- ⇒ North Down YMCA Arabic Women's Group
- ⇒ Woodlands Day Centre
- ⇒ Lisburn Deaf Group
- ⇒ Maghera Day Centre

If you are interested in the Breast, Cervical and Bowel screening awareness programme please contact our office on **028 9023 0212**.

Our Breast, Cervical and Bowel Screening Awareness Programme is funded by the Public Health Agency.

## Do Museums Represent HerStory?

In the beautiful Georgian building housing Armagh County Museum sits an object with a very ugly history. The Scold's Bridle is an iron object resembling a small birdcage, it locks at the back and has a metal spike projecting inwards from the rim. It was used to punish women, 'who had been found guilty of speaking too much, too loudly' or of being 'nagging wives' in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Ulster. The torture device was placed over the heads of convicted women and the spike held down their tongues, painfully preventing speech. The punishment was conducted in public with the intention of humiliating the victims as well as causing them physical pain. The Scolds Bridle is part of the history of domestic violence and modern museum visitors should expect the museum to reflect this. However it was brought to our attention that the museum's website described the item in a jocular and dismissive tone.



Screenshot of Scold's Bridle description from Armagh County Museum Website

### Scold's Bridle

Gossiping women meet their match!

A bizarre form of punishment reserved exclusively for women was the wearing of the iron scold's bridle. Resembling a muzzle or cage for the head it had a padlock at the rear and a projecting spike that would have been held firmly inside the mouth when the bridle was closed.

The use of the bridle was first recorded in Scotland (1567) and the 'scolds' were presumably women whose talk was inappropriate or to use a modern legal term – 'libelous'. There are also records to indicate that part of the punishment could have involved the offender being lead around the town as part of the ritual humiliation.

Why the torture was reserved for women is unclear and in the modern era of political correctness it is perhaps best not to pursue the matter further! However, on a more serious note, references to the scold's bridle being applied at the husbands request raises the whole issue of female punishment throughout the ages and into the present day.

We alerted the museum to our concerns and let them know we started a petition to require the museum to rephrase the description of the exhibit known as the 'Scolds Bridle' so that the item is acknowledged as a torture device and placed within the context of violence against women. We are pleased to report that we received a prompt reply from the Museum who accept that the description demeaned violence against women and girls. The description of the item has now been removed from the website and we will keep you up to date on any developments.

What really surprised the WRDA team was that the museum told us this description dated from an exhibition 20 years ago. The fact that no one had challenged this inaccurate and patriarchal description for 2 decades indicates how accepted and mainstream casual attitudes to violence against women are in NI. It is vital to challenging the patriarchy that museums tell HerStory too so please let us know if you see anything like this in the future because we know it can be difficult as an individual to complain to an organisation.

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WomensResource andDevelopment Agency

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## Disabled Women and Discrimination: Facts We Need You to Know

I was doing some research on women across the UK as a whole, on a wide range of issues, when I came across the [UK Women's Budget Group Briefing on Disabled Women and Austerity](#). I was so **horrified, as a disabled woman myself, about these figures that I had to say something**. So, I am writing this brief blog to highlight some of the statistics and to hopefully spread a bit more awareness on the issue.

Disabled single mothers are losing out the most. By 2021 they will have **lost 21% of their net income** if they do not have a disabled child and **32% if they do have a disabled child**.

For context, in the UK as a whole, 14 million people have a disability. Roughly 20% of those people are men and 23% are women. Out of those 14 million people, only 7% are employed – often in low-paying jobs. This is where things start to become even more alarming.

- ⇒ Disabled women earn 22.1% less than able-bodied men, and 11.8% less than disabled men.
- ⇒ 26% of households with a disabled person are in poverty, compared to 22% of in the overall households across the UK. Although this is likely an underestimation, as it does not take into account the estimated £570 per month of addition costs associated with a disability.
- ⇒ The scope of disability benefits have been drastically reduced in the UK, with one of the biggest changes being the replacement of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) with Personal Independence Payment (PIP).
- ⇒ Women make up 55% of claimants for disability benefits and have been disproportionately impacted by the narrowing of scope in disability support entitlements. As a result, benefit sanctions, degrading PIP assessments, lost income and the removal of any independence has been a reality for many disabled women.
- ⇒ Disabled people, in general, have been disproportionately impacted by austerity cuts since 2010. Disabled women are set to lose 13% of their annual income by 2021 due to austerity and cumulative tax-benefit changes.
- ⇒ Disabled single mothers are losing out the most from these tax and benefit changes since 2010. By 2021, they will have lost 21% of their net income if they do not have a disabled child and 32% if they do have a disabled child too. 1/3 of this loss is due to a shift to Universal Credit.
- ⇒ Disabled people experience domestic violence at TWICE the rate of non-disabled people. ONE IN TWO disabled women experience it and face many additional barriers in seeking support.
- ⇒ Spending cuts to adult social care and housing support has also disproportionately impacted them.

The above issues are really just scratching the surface of the daily discrimination disabled women face in their homes, educations, workplaces, healthcare facilities, government institutions and society more generally. Below are some real life examples of how disabled women have been treated as a result of the change from DLA to PIP:

- ⇒ A woman who is blind, had to sell her belongings in order to live due to the delay in outcome of her PIP appeal.
- ⇒ A woman who was sexually assaulted and left incontinent as a result, was humiliated by a PIP assessor and had her disability benefits removed.
- ⇒ The woman who was called a 'lying bitch' by a member of DWP staff.
- ⇒ Capita, the private company responsible for PIP assessments, had to pay damages to the family of a woman who died after being denied her disability support.
- ⇒ A woman who is paralysed, was denied her disability support and stated that the PIP assessment removed all her pride.
- ⇒ Capita had to close a PIP claim after initially trying to use a 25-year old report against a woman in which a government contractor called her "aggressive".
- ⇒ The woman who suffered brain damage, waiting over two years and still had not received a decision about whether she was entitled to the disability benefit PIP.
- ⇒ Legal costs, as of June 2019, had rose to £5 million due to the number of PIP applications in Northern Ireland that needed to be reassessed.

These are just some of the cases that reached the news about the mistreatment of disabled women applying to support that they were entitled to. **Disabled women are losing their independence, are living in poverty and are being actively discriminated against, abused and underpaid. We need to ensure that our feminism is accessible and inclusive of these voices**, as disabled women are already facing many more barriers each and every day. **This is the discrimination we want you all to know about.**

By Women's Sector Lobbyist, Rachel Powell

## Ballet for Movement

East Belfast Community Development Agency worked in partnership with The Grand Opera House and the Birmingham Royal Ballet to deliver the opportunity for people living, working and volunteering in East Belfast to attend a workshop with the Royal Ballet of Birmingham on balance and movement. The teachers showed everyone dance steps set to music from well known ballets such as the Dance of the Knights from Romeo and Juliet (also the theme tune to the TV programme The apprentice). There was also a pianist who was able to adapt the music to fit the ballet steps. At the end of the class the teachers from the ballet were able to tell us how they had got interested in joining a ballet company. It sounded that it was a challenging role to take from a young age.

Everyone who attended got a ticket for the ballet at the Opera House on Saturday night. The theme for the ballet was short pieces from well known ballets including Swan Lake, The Nutcracker and Gisele. It was a very memorable evening and hopefully people will be interested in attend ballets in future.

WRDA have run a number of sessions of our Breast Cervical and Bowel screening awareness Sessions in East Belfast in partnership with EBCDA which have been well received and we welcomed getting involved in this opportunity.

Thanks to Linda Armitage EBCDA's Health Development Director, for arranging this event as well as The Royal Ballet of Birmingham and The Opera House Belfast.



**Christmas  
Closure**



**Closing Friday 20th**

**December**

**Reopening Monday 2nd  
of January**