

GIRLS TALK

100 girls in Lewes talk about what they want to change
and what they hope for in their lives

Wealth is no proof of
moral character; nor
poverty the want of it.
Thomas Paine 1737-1809

Let women share the rights
... for she must grow
when emancipated.
Mary Wollstonecraft 1759-1797



The
Rights
of
Woman



**VOTES
FOR WOMEN**



**WANTED
EVERYWHERE!**

GIVE WOMEN RIGHTS

LEWES

DIGNITY PURITY HOPE

GIRLS FOR CHANGE

LEWES

RIGHTS DIGNITY HOPE

GIRLS TALK

100 GIRLS TALK ABOUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEM.

When many of us think of the rights of women and girls, the image that comes readily to mind is that of women exercising their democratic right to vote, won for us by the suffragists and suffragettes in 1918 and 1928. While the statistics show that women's lives have improved, we should not be complacent.

It was an ambition of mine while I was Mayor of Lewes to understand the lives of girls in Lewes. 100 girls from all the schools in Lewes were invited to our Girls for Change Day in April 2019 so that they could tell us about their experiences, their concerns and what they care about.

This booklet reports on what they told us: they are still vulnerable to discrimination and stereotyping, they are concerned about the lack of equal pay and equal opportunities, and they still face issues of safety, confidence, sexual harassment, and a lack of respect. They are concerned with the climate emergency. And they have many ambitions for their futures. How moving and inspiring the girls' conversations are. They are our hope for the future locally and we can be proud to have such thoughtful and passionate young women growing up in the town.

I believe that every excluded girl or woman bears witness to a moral offence: the failure to secure her dignity, rights and hopes, and her right to participate equally in society. Let us all act now to remove the barriers so that girls can safely grow, attend school, and participate in all spheres of life.

I am so happy that the Girls for Change Day is being reported on here. It is my hope that schools will want to replicate what we did with future groups of girls, and with boys too. We have included a lesson plan to help teachers do just that.

Thanks to the Lewes Town Council for making this a reality, the volunteers from Reeves Archive Project, the schools for enabling the girls to participate, and all the VIP guests for coming to listen. And most importantly of all, thank you to the girls who shared their hopes and dreams with us.

Change is possible.

Cllr Dr Janet Baah

PhD - International Education Policy and Development.

GIRLS FOR CHANGE – RIGHTS DIGNITY, HOPE

The Girls for Change event on 25th April 2019 was the brainchild of Janet Baah, the Mayor of Lewes at the time, who is passionate about ensuring every girl has a chance to shine. Growing up in Ghana, she had to fight to get an education and has recently completed a PhD at Sussex University. She is the first black Mayor of Lewes and only the twelfth female Mayor. She is still a Councillor in the town.

In December 2018, the Reeves Lightbox team curated an exhibition in the Town Hall about the history of Suffragists and Suffragettes in Lewes, celebrating the 2018 centenary of when some women got the vote. We wanted to bring the message home and make it relevant to girls and young women in the town. Together, we organised a day for 100 girls from all the schools of Lewes.

The day mirrored the main slogans of the Suffragettes: Rights, Dignity and Hope, and we wanted to learn what these headings would mean to our young women. Our aim was to hold a unique event, at which girls from Lewes would meet together to develop their ideas for the changes that would improve their lives and opportunities, and to tell us what they hoped for in the future.

Our job, and the job of the invited guests, was to listen to what they had to say. Jane Foot, who designed and chaired the day, said “Our aim was to give the girls and young women in the town the chance to share their ideas about what needs to change, and to have their voices heard by the adults who have power to make things happen. From what we saw, there is a lot of energy and enthusiasm in the town that the girls can be very proud of”.

Referring to her chain of office, the Mayor, Janet Baah said:

“It’s not about the chain, but about the change.”

The Mayor invited all the schools to participate and asked influential guests to attend. We designed a logo, and used it for headed notepaper for the invitations, briefings and the programme. Each girl had a tote bag with the logo, a glossy postcard of the banner, a printed name label for each girl (which they loved), a notebook and pens. This made a unique event bringing together a cross section of young women in the town with women who are important and successful in their professional, political and civic roles: they have the power to make things happen.

Our aims for the day:

“We hope this event will help young students speak out with confidence about issues they believe in.” Our key message for the girls is that their ideas will be listened to, taken seriously, and that they can act to make change.

WHAT WE DID

Each primary and secondary school in the town was invited to send twelve girls each, aged between 9 and 17, and all but one agreed. Different schools chose the girls in different ways: some asked for volunteers and some chose on the basis of an essay about why they wanted to attend. They were accompanied by a teacher. We had more than 100 girls.

Programme for the day



**GIRLS FOR CHANGE
RIGHTS, DIGNITY, HOPE**

**LEWES TOWN HALL
25TH APRIL 2019 10.00 – 14.00**

PROGRAMME FOR THE DAY

10.00	Assembly Room – Procession in of Honoured Guests Welcome and introduction of Guests Welcome by Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex, Mr Peter Field and Councillor Janet Baah, Mayor of Lewes
10.25-11.20	Conversation at tables. Discuss your hopes under the headings: <i>Rights, Dignity, Hope. What would you like to change in the next 10 years?</i> Agree one topic to write on the flip chart paper
11.30	Corn Exchange – Music from East Sussex College
11.45	Unveiling of the Lewes Suffragette Banrer by the Mayor of Lewes
12.00-12.45	Lunch will be provided The Edward Reeves Archive Suffragette exhibition will be on show, accompanied by photos and videos
12.45	Grace Nichols will perform a poem
13.00	Selected Guests will choose one proposal for change and say what they can do to help achieve that change
13.45	The Box of Hopes to be opened in 2028 Thank you by Violet Hancock, High Sheriff of East Sussex

In the Assembly Room in the Town Hall, we set out tables for each school – 12 girls and one teacher. We covered the tables with paper tablecloths, flip chart paper and put out a pile of coloured pens and post its. Each table had the Briefing below. The paper tablecloth and pens meant everyone could write down their ideas, even if they could not make themselves heard in the hubbub of the conversation! As one girl said “it let girls that don’t talk much speak for themselves.”

The teachers had been sent a briefing beforehand, explaining the objectives and process of the day and their role to facilitate the girls to talk amongst themselves and come up with their priority wishes for the future.



Women and girls have campaigned for more than 100 years under the slogan ‘Rights, Dignity, Hope’. What are the changes you want to campaign for and help to achieve?

RIGHTS

Rights are ‘a moral or legal entitlement to have or do something.’ We are here remembering the Suffragettes campaign for the right to vote, alongside campaigns for women to own their own property, or qualify as doctors. We have had the legal right to equal pay for 40 years but there is still a 17% gap between women’s and men’s earnings.

DIGNITY

Women are still campaigning to be treated with dignity and respect that we all deserve. For instance, the right not be bullied or ignored, and campaigns against violence against girls and women.

HOPE

We all have hopes for our futures and for changes in the world around us. What are your hopes for the future? For instance, what do you hope will happen to stop climate change?

For more than an hour, the participants talked animatedly about the changes they thought would improve the lives of girls and young women, and what they could do to help bring about those changes. These ideas were all scribbled down on the paper tablecloths, and then the girls at each table chose one idea that they thought was most important to present to everyone else.

Their ideas included more action on women's jobs, equal pay and equal opportunities; girls having more access to different sports and to schools having mixed teams; an end to stereotyping, for instance, clothes for girls being pink; feeling safe walking down the street, girls being more confident to say what they think and to deal with harassment and bullying; and of course, tackling climate change.

At the end, the girls at the table choose one of the changes/topics to write up clearly. These were written on large flip chart paper and displayed on the walls over lunch. This gave everyone the chance to see what ideas had been discussed and what were the most important messages to take forward.

The organisers then asked some of the guests to choose one issue that they connected with, had something to say and could help achieve in their professional or personal lives.

The Guests

The Lord Lieutenant of Sussex, Mr. Peter Field, welcomed everyone; he came in his full regalia looking splendidly important. Violet Hancock, the High Sheriff of East Sussex closed the event. This gave the event local significance and communicated how seriously we took the proceedings.

We are very grateful to all our guests for their time and their enthusiasm for our project.

We chose local guests because they had something to say about the likely issues of the day, and they potentially had the influence and power to advocate for and make the changes that the girls developed. We wanted to turn the usual format upside down: their role was not to make speeches but to listen to the girls' voices and then to respond with what they could do to bring about change.

Maria Caulfield MP and Stephen Lloyd MP, the Mayors of Eastbourne and Lewes District Councils, and many local councilors were invited. They were joined by locally-based advocates for girls and women's rights, such as Giles York, the then Chief Constable of Sussex Police, Professor Richard Jolly, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex and formerly Assistant General Secretary of the United Nations, Professor Gillian Hampden-Thompson Professor of Education, Sussex University, Karen Dobres of Lewes Equality Football Club, Baroness Olly Grender OBE and Baroness Janet Whittaker.

During the morning, these guests listened to the conversations on the tables. After lunch, they were invited to choose one of the girls' wishes that they felt strongly about and say what they could do to help them achieve their aspirations and make changes for girls.



The poet, Grace Nichols (left), energised the room by performing two poems, accompanied by Tony Kalume on the drums. She read two poems “For an environmentally friendly baby” and “Spirit Rising”. They spoke of her humour and her long engagement with women’s responsibility to be the change they want to see. She quoted the black US feminist poet Audre Lorde: “Your silence will not protect you.” “Feel the fear,” she said. “If you are afraid of something, it could be because you care deeply about it. Do it anyway.”

Hope in a box – 1928 to 2028

In ten years’ time, we will be celebrating 1928 when all women won the right to vote. What changes do we want to see happen before the 2028 celebrations? At the end of the afternoon, all the girls were invited to write down their personal hopes and dreams and seal them in an envelope, which they put in a specially prepared wood box that has been sealed for ten years until the 2028 centenary celebrations of all women finally getting the vote. They will be invited back to witness the unsealing of the box and to see what they dreamed of and how much progress has been made. This box is stored in the Town Hall.

Unveiling the banner

A highlight of the day was the Mayor’s unveiling of the Suffragette banner, made by local artist Heather Downie. The banner was made for the Reeves Lightbox Suffragette exhibition celebrating 100 years since some women first got the vote. The Friends of Lewes very generously paid for it to be properly framed and the Town Council have put it on permanent display in the Corn Exchange. This banner is the cover of this pamphlet.

Closing the event and congratulating all the girls on their participation, Mayor Janet Baah said “It will take me 100 years to stop smiling.”

GIRLS TALK

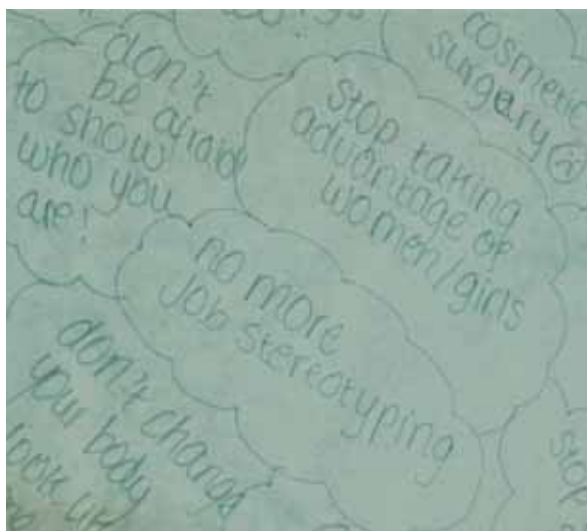
WHAT THEY SAID & WHAT DO THEY WANT FOR THE FUTURE

We collected all the tablecloths that the girls had written on, and the quotes are all taken from them. We photographed flip-chart sheets with the girls' summaries of the most important points they wanted to talk about. These sheets were hung up for everyone to read over lunch. All the text below is quotes, unless it is in italics. This is girls speaking from their hearts about their experiences and their hopes

NO STEREOTYPING

This was such a strong theme on all the tables, of all ages, that it communicated very strongly how girls and young women feel constrained by stereotypical expectations, and the limitations on what they can imagine – and are encouraged - doing with their futures.

Peer pressure on what to wear and how to behave is intense and perceived to be limiting them in their ambitions.

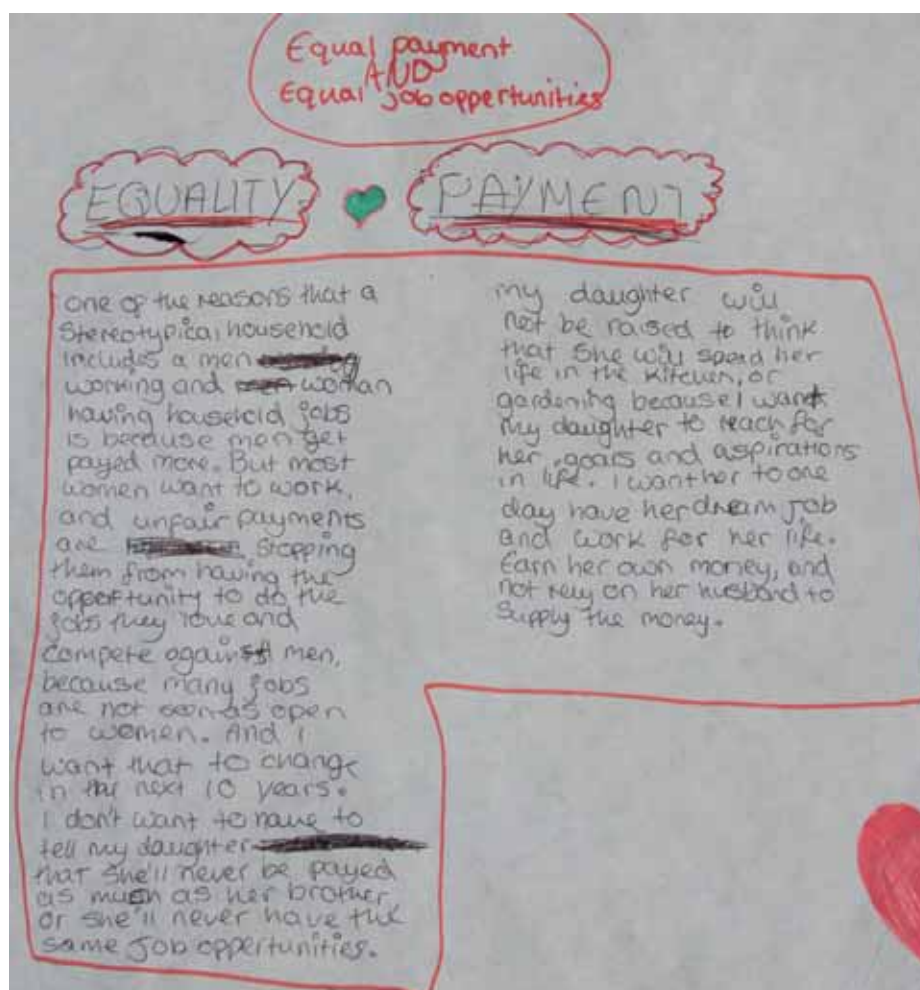


- Ditch the pink
- No princess t-shirts
- Stop sectioning shops for boys and girls clothing
- I'd like to see dinosaurs put on girls' clothes and rainbows on boys' clothes
- More tolerance for fashion choices
- Girls should be allowed to wear what they like no matter how short or long
- Women should not have to shave off their hair

- Stop objectifying women's bodies
- Equality in school
- Mixed gender friendships
- Stop single sex schools
- Women should not be seen as the weaker gender. No more expectations for women to be overly feminine
- Courses that teach men and women the same practical skills
- More female role models
- In all countries, lesbian women can get married and not be punished
- Be the first country to achieve gender equality
- It is good for girls to go anywhere, not with fear, but with pride
- No women should be afraid to try out something new

In reply, Professor Gillian Hampden-Thompson, Head of the School of Education and Social Work at the University of Sussex related the story of Maggie Pocock, the black space scientist and TV presenter of *The Sky at Night*. While at primary school she told her teacher that she wanted to travel to the moon. Her teacher replied by suggesting that she became a nurse instead because that involved science too. At the University of Sussex, they train hundreds of teachers a year and it is important that they can be relied on to challenge stereotypes, not just in girls, but boys too.

EQUAL PAY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES



- More gender-neutral jobs
- Equality in outcomes i.e. what girls are capable of in their future
- Women as engineers
- More women in politics
- More women in parliament to help make important decisions
- Absence of women in Supreme Court
- Not many policewomen

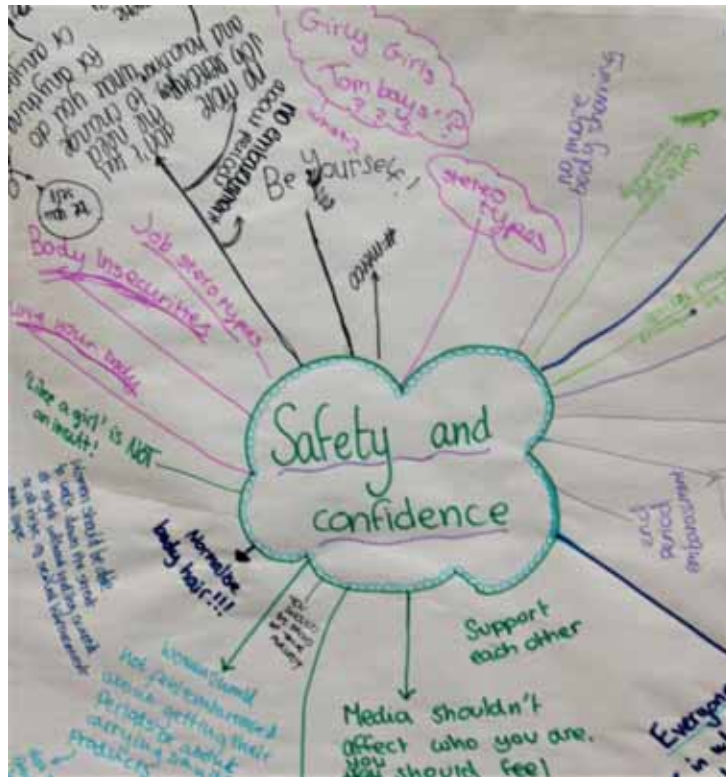
- Stop suggestible names: milkman, dustman, fisherman, dinner ladies, lollipop ladies
- Helping women achieve higher roles in jobs and sports
- Fines for companies with gender pay gaps
- More gender-neutral jobs. More gender-neutral uniforms.
- Education about discrimination
- Not many women do jobs like building or electricians because they are seen as jobs for males.
- Votes at 16
- Less of a patriarchal society
- Equal pay should be enforced
- Shared parental leave
- Stigma of young mothers. Stop shaming them. They have enough responsibility than to listen to people's hate.
- More support for cheaper day care
- I would like to be in a fair world and no one [is] embarrassed because the only reason for that is that people aren't treating others the same - for short we are all equal and different

Maria Caulfield MP responded to this topic. She acknowledged that women were not yet being fairly paid, and that legislation was there to make firms publish pay rates by gender. She said that something to be addressed was the fact that typically female careers tended to be lower paid - nursing (her first career) and teaching were examples of this. She spoke directly to the girls present when she said "I heard what you said today. I will lobby for better pay for these professions." She returned to her own background, when she said that she didn't have the opportunities today's girls have, and exhorted them to use them. Go into politics, she said, to empower those present to make a difference locally and nationally. "You hold the keys to your future."



SAFETY AND CONFIDENCE

This theme was linked to the stereotyping, but also communicated how girls and young women in Lewes do not feel safe. This ranged from sexual harassment, cat calling, the fear of rape.



It's a basic human right to respect that women should be able to live freely without fear

- Men shouldn't rape - women shouldn't have to be taught to be safe
- Teach men that cat calling is wrong
- Girls should not be embarrassed about themselves
- Respecting refugees
- Less pressure on girls
- Educate about female masturbation
- Schools should be a safe place
- Support for Me Too
- Awareness about sexual harassment in educational institutions and the workplace.
- Believe her
- Less victim blaming
- Women should not be afraid to speak out
- Support for victims
- Drugs and date rape
- Cat calling
- sexual objectification.
- Checkups yearly (for STDs)
- Reduce stigma
- Education about sexual assault and abuse in schools
- Harassment in workplaces (from customers)
- No means No
- Rape should not be taken lightly It is called a form of assault for a reason.
- Respect those who choose to become transgender - it doesn't hurt anyone around them (physically). Should be accepted as their decision choice

The girls are also concerned about how boys and men suffer

- *Stop idolizing men as predators and realise men can be victims as well*
- *Men are still men but it's OK to do certain things e.g. house husbands, crying, certain colours, things they like. It's not wimpy to like cooking*
- *It goes both ways. It helps women not to be [the] only carers*

Giles York, the Chief Constable for Sussex, responded to this topic, and he used the opportunity to discuss policing as a career for women. He said that about 34% of police officers are women and that police forces across the UK are looking to increase this number. He said that if today's women want to change things, they had to be part of it.

Addressing the safety issue, he said that the police will take seriously all reports made to them and that women should be confident to report. He encouraged anyone to contact the police if they had concerns over their safety, whilst encouraging those attending to work together to make a safer environment for everyone – "...be that difference yourself."

BODY CONFIDENCE

Period poverty was a common strand: the fact that sanitary products were taxed as a luxury item but were essential (VAT on these products is now due to be scrapped)

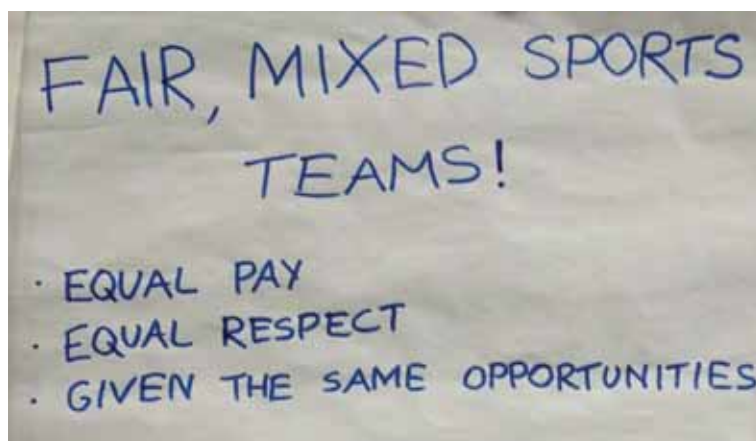
- *Remove tax on sanitary products*
- *Sanitary products should be available to all*
- *Stop period shaming - there is such a stigma. Why? It's natural - get over it*

Baroness Olly Greener is a long-standing advocate on the issue of period poverty and encouraged the girls to consider using 'moon cups' which are reusable silicone cups to replace tampons. She got the whole audience of girls to wave their hands in the air and chant "I am amazing! I am confident!" She was keen that girls talk about periods openly, as normal, and not see them as embarrassing or shameful.

MIXED SPORTS TEAMS

Lewes is very proud of Lewes Football Club, particularly for its gender equality initiative.

It's the first club on the planet to pay its women players the same as the men, giving them equal access to resources, and having both teams play on the same pitch. The players and the Club spend time in schools talking to young women and men about the value of sport.

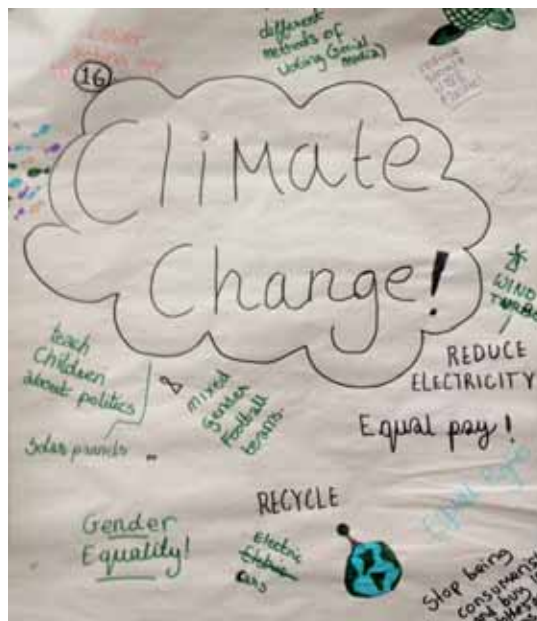


- More support for women's sports
- Mixed sports teams so girls can play with boys in cricket and football and other sports
- They want to play more sports
- Female bowling
- Female golf
- And they want to play in mixed teams and to have the same opportunities to play different sports to the boys
- "run like a girl" - stop the derogatory expressions

Karen Dobres, elected director at Lewes FC, spoke to this priority. She said "Sport is a really important activity for young women: it teaches them to play as a team rather than compete with each other; they can get hot and sweaty rather than worrying about their appearance; it gives them physical confidence in their bodies." These lessons have been very influential in how young women in Lewes see themselves.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Awareness of climate change and the changes we will all have to make in our lives was a key theme. They are conscious of being the generation that will have to cope with the impact of climate as they grow up. Alongside that, there was an urge to prioritise care of animals.



- Encourage less driving, or electric cars
- Stop chopping down trees
- Reduce pollution from big brands and rich companies by being less consumerist
- Solar power
- Beaches, cleaner seas
- Less plastic
- Ban the use of plastic straws and make single use products illegal (find alternatives)
- Healthy food cheaper

Professor Richard Jolly, who had worked with the UN, responded first to this topic. He spoke about the first conference on Climate in Stockholm in 1972, and how things had changed since then, but not enough. He said we needed to take the 'long view' as it takes time to get people on board. That international action depends on the success of national actions.

Cllr Susan Murray also took up the topic. She said it is not just an issue for us, but for generations yet to come. That it can be overwhelming. Lewes Council had agreed that action was needed, that we are in a state of crisis. She reiterated that we can all make a difference - and that everyone should use their Council, and make sure they are doing what they said they'd do - "Keep on our backs!"

RESPECT

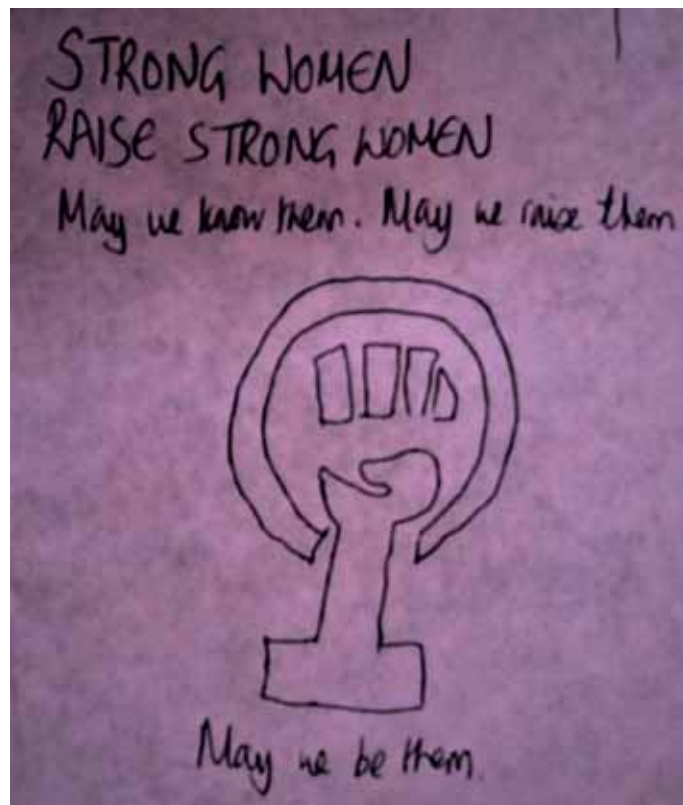
This theme had two parts: one respect for people in other countries and cultures. And strong support for a similar event for boys.

- *"this is a debate about women's relationships with men but how is it possible to have this debate without men"*
- *Respect women equally regardless of their culture and race*
- *I'd like to see a day when everyone respected each other no matter their gender, culture, anything. Women being equal no matter their culture. I'd love to see that*
- *Stop FGM*
- *Ending child marriages*
- *All women to receive free education.*
- *I want girls around the world to have the same education as boys*
- *(Allow) abortion in Northern Ireland*
- *Encourage men to be more open about mental health - young men have the highest % of suicide*
- *Get rid of stereotypes of feminism.*
- *Men should be taught the true meaning of feminism*
- *Feminism doesn't favour women it favours equality*
- *Make everyone want to be a feminist*
- *Boys should be aware*
- *"it's just boys being boys" should never be an excuse*
- *reduce toxic masculinity - allow men to show emotion*
- *Both men and women should change their attitudes to each other*
- *Stop double standards*
- *Dignity: not to be seen as vulnerable. No patronising*
- *The important people to not just focus on this country but others because the more we have the easier it is to fight*

Cross-party peer Baroness Whitaker attended, not in her robes, but dressed in the colours of a suffragette, wearing the sash and rosette of the suffragette movement. She exhorted the girls to use their votes, because politics makes change. Democracy empowers all of us, she said. One school had wanted votes at age 16 – and she was all for it. She donated her sash and the rosette to the Mayor.

One girl summed up the aims of the day as being to preserve and promote the opinions that young girls have of themselves, for example:

- The capability to do anything
- To run as fast as she can
- To stand up for herself
- And not let anyone stop her



RIGHTS, DIGNITY, HOPE – Outline Lesson Plan

The plan is in response to the Girls for Change event in April 2019 in which over a hundred girls took part. They shared their views on the things they would like to change and the result of their discussions will be kept for 10 years in a sealed box.

The girls expressed a view that boys should be included in these discussions. The lesson plan below is based on a mixed group and it is anticipated the sessions will be a mixture of mixed and single sex groups. The plan can be adapted for a single sex group.

The process/ session(s) should be hosted by a female and male teacher/facilitator and, if possible, there should be a female and male speaker, who would ideally be available for the whole session(s).

The focus of the session is change and the speakers should ideally have a lived experience of change and/or a knowledge of the practise and history of change. They could be local MP/Councillor, member of a campaign group, member of a women’s group/men’s group, an academic with an expert knowledge of change.

The ideal time would be for a half-day session. The sessions could have a particular focus, e.g. Sex and Sexuality, Environment, Young People and the Law etc. The session(s) can be part of Citizenship education in schools or a tutorial programme in colleges, drawing on this booklet and the links in the Resources section of www.Vote100Lewes.com

Teacher	Students	Mins	Resources
Introduce session Introduce speaker(s)	Ask questions	25	
Set up activity on each table of 5. They can be mixed or single sex groups. Give examples Circulate to ensure all participate	Write heading “What do you want to Change” Discuss All put post it notes on flip chart paper	30	Flip chart paper on each table Pens Post it notes
Display flip chart paper on walls	Feedback from each group. Collate responses	25	
Break and refreshments		10	
Introduce second part of session. Bring boys and girls groups together Ask students to think of one thing they could do to bring about change	Feedback from both groups. Discussion on outcomes and agree on priorities Individual students write one thing they could do to bring about change. Place in envelope to be reviewed at end of year	25 10	Paper envelopes
Conclusion and thanks	Students complete feedback form on session	10	Feedback form

Thanks to the schools who participated

Kings Academy
Lewes Old Grammar School
Western Road CP School
East Sussex College
St Pancras Catholic Primary School
Southover CE Primary School
Wallands Community Primary School
Priory School

Thanks to the guests who attended

Mr Peter Field Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex	Sir Richard Jolly, IDS University of Sussex
Mrs Violet Hancock High Sheriff of East Sussex	Professor Gillian Hampden-Thompson
Mr Tim Hancock	Professor of Education, University of Sussex
Cllr Janet Baah Mayor of Lewes	Vanessa Gebbie,
Cllr Susan Murray Deputy Mayor of Lewes	Chris Gebbie Past High Sheriff
Cllr Roger Murray Deputy Consort	Councillor Gill Mattock Mayor of Eastbourne
Heather Downie Maker of Banner	Karen Dobres Press Officer Lewes FC Women
Grace Nichols Poet	Cllr I Makepeace
Tony Kalume Drummer	Cllr R Burrows
Cllr Stephen Gauntlett Chair Lewes District Council	Cllr Dr G Mayhew
Chief Constable Giles York QPM Sussex Police	Cllr M Chartier
Louise Crawford Sussex Police	Cllr A Barker
Baroness Grender MBE	Julia Blake Past Mayoress
Baroness Janet Whitaker	
Maria Caulfield MP for Lewes	
Stephen Lloyd MP Eastbourne & Willingdon	

Thanks to the volunteers and Town Hall staff who helped make it happen

Brigitte Lardinois Senior Research Fellow Acting Director Photography and Archive Research Centre University of the Arts London / Reeves Archive
Jane Foot Reeves Archive
Diana Wilkins Reeves Archive
Caroline Pick Reeves Archive
Lizzie Zeyfert LTC Staff
Fiona Garth LTC Staff
Lee Symons LTC Mace Bearer
Mick Larkin LTC Staff

Special thanks to Vanessa Gebbie for her notes of the day, especially of the guest contributions.
Many thanks to Fiona Garth for organising the Girls Day event and Sue Porter for the lesson plan.



Many thanks to all the volunteers, teachers and Lewes girls who made this event possible.

This report is available to download at:
www.vote100lewes.org.uk/resources

Credits:

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