



# women's voice

February 2019

## Introducing your new South West Regional Women's Committee



**At the 2018 Regional Women's Conference at Croyde the new committee was elected, featuring some familiar faces but also some new ones.**

The committee held its annual planning meeting on the 9 and 10 November, which was a fantastic opportunity to get to know one another, our strengths and our particular

areas of concern for women in UNISON in the South West and across the UK.

**Tracy Cunningham** is the co-chair of the Devon and Cornwall Police Branch in Exeter. Like a lot of the Sisters in UNISON, she has many hats, including Welfare Officer, Regional Women's Committee and National Women's Committee.

**Lesley Discombe** is a financial advocate and corporate appointee for adults with learning difficulties for a Charity called Dosh. Lesley says "I believe in equality of opportunity for all, especially women, and that's why I'm a feminist."

**Sharon Foster** is another familiar face to many of us, as she sits not only on Regional Women's Committee but also Regional Black Members Committee. Sharon has a passionate belief that it's good to reach a common ground and that racism and domestic abuse towards women should never be normalised. Sharon works for Bristol City Council and is a steward in the Bristol Branch.

A new face, **Kathy Toms**, is branch communications officer for South West Devon, a new branch formed out of South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council branches.

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## Gloucestershire Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre Fundraising Event



**UNISON has always been at the forefront in developing strategies, polices and education to end violence against women, so when the Women's Committee were approached and asked to support the GRASAC Fundraising, we jumped at the chance to support them.**

This vital service, which is a rare resource following sweeping government and local council cuts, needs all of our support.

Manda Brown from SW Regional Women's Committee, together with Sue Lucas from Dorset Local Government Branch attended the event in Cheltenham, which was illuminating, powerful and also at times distressing.

We heard first-hand accounts from Survivors illustrating plainly why funding is so necessary to its survival.

The function revolved around an auction which raised a substantial amount to help the charity continue their outstanding work. UNISON's donation amounts to £500.

**Manda Brown**,  
*Regional Women's Committee  
and Dorset County branch  
joint Branch Secretary*

## Introducing your new Committee...

*continued from front page*

A small branch with a high proportion of female members, Kathy and her colleagues are determined to demonstrate that it's not the size of your branch, but what you do with it that counts.

**Manda Brown**... a face seen around and about for some time, but enthusiastic and committed to women's causes. She is Joint Branch Secretary for Dorset Branch, on full time release to cover trade union duties. Manda sits on the Regional TUC Women's Committee as well as South West Committee; campaigns for women locally, regionally, nationally and globally and does this with a lot of help from all the wonderful women around her.

**Samantha Zimble**, a new member to Women's Committee, from Devon and Cornwall Police Exeter Branch. A steward for a year, and assistant treasurer. Looking to learn more and help where I can.

**Becky Brookman** works at Dorset County Council as a Flood Risk Engineer and is also a Rep and Women's officer for her local branch. She has sat on the National Women's Committee for the last 2 years, highlighting the issues faced by women in the Southwest and is passionate about Women's rights in the workplace.

**Karen Williams**, I'm really excited to introduce myself as the new South West Regional Organiser for Women and Equalities. I have



been working for UNISON as a Regional Organiser based in Devon over the last 9 years. Before that I worked in Social Housing at Exeter City Council and as an active member of the Exeter City Branch of UNISON. My roles in UNISON included being on the South West Regional Women's Committee from 2002 until I joined the South West regional staff in 2009.

Being a member of a Regional Self Organised Group gave me the experience and confidence to develop as an activist and provided me with many opportunities to grow and develop as a Trade Unionist. I am delighted to be returning to a role within which I can facilitate these wonderful opportunities for new UNISON activists, as well as re-establish friendships with many of you who have remained active within the SOGs over the years. I look forward to working with you all.

In our next issue of the newsletter the rest of the committee – **Aniko Hadnagy, Belinda Dunmall, Jacky Owen, Linda Gardiner, Karen Smith, Tara Thomas** and NEC member **Michelle Goodman** will introduce themselves.

# Breaking the silence around stillbirth

Becky Brookman, Regional Women's Committee / Dorset Branch

**Our 2018 Regional Women's Conference fell during Baby Loss Awareness Week, discussions were had surrounding the stigma of baby loss and candles lit in memory of babies lost through miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death.**

Unfortunately, stillbirth is not a rare tragedy as around 15 babies die before, during or soon after birth every day in the UK. Sadly, this equates to 1 in 225 babies each year, yet there is little spoken of this tragedy and of the mothers' maternity rights in these circumstances.

As an action from conference, the South West Regional Women's Committee have submitted a motion to National Women's Conference asking for a revision



of UNISON's Maternity Guidance to ensure that women know what their rights are after having a stillbirth and to signpost them to the relevant charities; to provide training and guidance to welfare officers in supporting members, and to encourage branches to negotiate improvements in workplace maternity policies.

We have also asked for UNISON to lobby politicians to improve bereavement care and mental health services for women that have experienced stillbirth as this is still badly lacking.

The motion has been accepted and will now be discussed at National Womens Conference in February which will really help to break the silence surrounding stillbirth.

If you have been affected by this issue or know someone who has there are a number of Charities such as SANDS (Stillbirth & Neonatal Death Charity) that offers support and advice:

[www.sands.org.uk](http://www.sands.org.uk)

**Becky Brookman,**  
*Regional Women's Committee /  
Dorset Branch*



International  
Women's Day



[www.internationalwomensday.com](http://www.internationalwomensday.com)

# UNISON South West Regional Conference and AGM Croyde Bay 12–14 October 2018



## Louise Whittle, first time delegate, Bristol Branch

**After a tiring train journey with connections out of sync due to the weather I eventually got to Croyde Bay. I had never been before and was really impressed by the friendly welcome I received at reception.**

Saturday started with an upsetting but vitally important report back about the refugee crisis in Northern France (Dunkirk & Calais). Becky Brookman and Amanda Brown visited the Grande Synthe refugee camp between 12 – 15 Jan 2017. At the time there were 1,400 men, 200 women and 200 children.

The welcome UNISON volunteers received was immense, children talked about the terrible things they had witnessed. UNISON volunteers brought along a social worker who works in mental health and is part of Workers Without. UNISON also

visited the 'Jungle' (Calais) – April 2018 – the people who live there are from Afghanistan, Syria, & Eritrea. Around 12 girls and women lived on the site.

One of banners on show at the conference was made with the hand prints of women and children.



### What can we do?

- Campaign and lobby MPs to allow more unaccompanied children to the UK
- Raise money and donations for

the Centre and other charities

- Follow Dunkirk Refugee Women's Centre and raise its profile: [www.dunkirkrefugeewomenscentre.com/](http://www.dunkirkrefugeewomenscentre.com/)
- Volunteer/sponsor a volunteer
- Raise awareness of all the charities involved

### Workshop: Menopause – a workplace issue

This was more of an interactive workshop breaking into small groups to discuss the symptoms of the menopause and look at practical solutions in supporting women in the workplace.

It was a safe and supportive environment to be open about personal experiences regarding the menopause. As a woman pointed out in the session rather like periods the menopause is part of life. Women make up almost half of



**Workshop –  
100 Years of Suffrage**

Becky Brookman and Manda Brown gave an overview of achievements made by women's suffrage movement 100 years to this date; from the Suffragists and the Suffragettes to the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928. There was a discussion about continuing demands we make as women.

Final session of the Conference included election for one rep to serve on the National Women's Committee, Amanda Brown was elected.

It was agreed to take motions to National Women's Conference on Endometriosis and Adoption pay. There was the election of the Women's Regional Committee and just towards the end a reminder about National Women's Conference in February 2019 – Bournemouth.

Just finally I did get to go on the beach...

the workforce yet the menopause is just one of those things that's underestimated and ignored by employers. Women are therefore likely to hide their symptoms and less likely to ask for adjustments that may help them.

**What can we do?**

- Put forward a motion to Branches on the menopause.
- Promote adjustments
- Look at Health and Safety policies and Attendance policies – Do they reflect menopause symptoms? Can there be a separate reporting mechanism?
- Raise with management that there should be a supply of sanitary products
- Raise awareness in the union about the menopause
- Organise a meeting for women around the menopause
- It is about building awareness and solidarity with women. Making women feel less isolated more supported and overall demand changes in the way the menopause is understood.

**Back to the agenda...**

Regional Women's Committee Report was accepted. After lunch feminist activist Finn Mackay (Senior Lecturer in Sociology UWE) spoke about the position of women in society, continued oppression and

discrimination. Power relationships between men and women. Patriarchy and how empowerment is commercialised. But with the advent of the Me Too this has rocked the foundations with women coming forward and speaking out.

Feminism is the key to highlighting and fighting oppression. And certainly the trade union movement has a pivotal role in being part of the struggle.

After dinner there was a performance by *Tan Teddy Folk Culture Group* (pictured above). I think this was one of the highlights of the weekend. A wonderful performance by these women culminating in us all taking part in a conga around the dining area!



**For the full report go to:**  
[southwest.unison.org.uk/equality/women-members](http://southwest.unison.org.uk/equality/women-members)

# Sanitary products and menopause

## June Symonds (Bournemouth Branch)

Half of the donations of sanitary products brought back from the fabulous regional women's conference in Croyde were presented to the **Kinson and West Howe Foodbank**. They were gratefully received. Very friendly staff but the men refused to have their photo taken with the sanitary products?!

The other half has been donated to **Hope for Food**, another charity in Bournemouth.

## Lyn Gardiner (Bath Health)

Fabulous conference, a box of sanitary products was taken to the Women's refuge in Bath. I originally made contact at a car boot sale, as they try to make funds where they can which prompted me to think of them. The box of sanitary donations was accepted with tears which was very humbling and I promised to send thanks to everyone. I was told the products would make a huge difference.



## Period Dignity/Poverty

Many women, including those menstruating for the first time are unable to access or afford sanitary products. This can have a major impact on women's and girl's physical, mental wellbeing and confidence. It is widely reported that girls and young women are missing their education thereby reducing their life chances as a result of this.

Many women face period poverty having to choose between food and sanitary products, particularly those relying on food banks. Period poverty is a national shame in a wealthy country in the 21st century.

Dorset County branch have distributed sanitary products in women's toilets within their council offices, there has been a tremendous positive response by way of comments financial donations and donations of items.

## What can you do?

Raise awareness in your branch and workplace and encourage employers to provide sanitary products in toilets, for more information on how to get this of the ground, please contact Amanda Brown.

## Menopause and Work – Raising Awareness

At the planning meeting weekend on the 9 and 10 November, the committee felt very strongly that we want to focus on raising



awareness and ending the stigma which surround the menopause.

Menopause will affect all women at some point in their lives, and as retirement ages increase, more and more women are finding themselves disadvantaged in the workplace by a perfectly natural occurrence. It is time that we treated it, like pregnancy, with all the seriousness and care that it deserves.

We can start by breaking the silence and ending the stigma which surrounds it. It is frankly ridiculous that in the 21st century, a health issue which will affect 52% of the population is still so misunderstood, stigmatised and occasionally completely ignored because a minority find it "embarrassing."

UNISON believes that employers have a responsibility to take into account the difficulties that women may experience during the menopause.

A simple change that can be made swiftly by all employers is to remove menopause related absences from work out of attendance monitoring. At the planning day, we heard stories of menopausal women attending work despite being clearly too unwell to do so, because of fear of their absence levels.

At National Women's Committee in February, the South West Regional

Committee will be supporting a motion brought by National Women's Committee which seeks to work with branches and regions to provide workshops to enable union reps to represent and negotiate suitable working conditions for women going through the menopause, and work with Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) to produce training materials on menopause to branches and regions.

If your branch is interested in training, or needs support with negotiating, get in touch and we will be happy to support you. If you're currently going through the menopause and finding life difficult, get in touch for support and help.

**Tracy Cunningham,**  
*Regional Women's Committee and Chair, Devon and Cornwall Police and Justice Branch*



## DATE FOR YOUR CALENDAR

# REGIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE 2019

Saturday 21 September  
Taunton  
*Further details to follow*

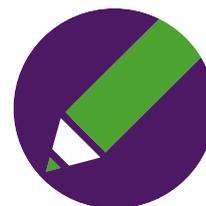
## Reading this but not a member? Here's three simple ways to join UNISON



Join online at  
[joinunison.org](http://joinunison.org)



Call us FREEPHONE  
**0800 171 2193**



Contact us and return  
an application form

# International Women's Day 2019

Friday 8 March



The campaign theme is #BalanceforBetter

Are you doing anything in your branch or workplace to celebrate International Women's Day?

If so go to [www.internationalwomensday.com](http://www.internationalwomensday.com) to order your events pack. Send in photos and we will publish pictures and any articles received in our next edition.

## Courses for women this year

- **National Women's Conference pre-conference training (for delegates and visitors)** Taunton, 2 February
- **Pathways into UNISON for women**  
Croyde Bay 15 to 17 March
- **Branch Officers Training: Women's Officers**  
Croyde Bay, 9 to 12 May
- **Confidence for young women members**  
Taunton, 5 and 6 September
- **Confidence building and assertiveness for women members** Croyde Bay, 4 to 6 October
- **Pathways into UNISON for women**  
Croyde Bay 8 to 10 November
- **Women's Lives** – venue and dates to be confirmed

There are also many other courses available, so take a look at the programme and if you have any questions, contact the regional education and equalities team at [unionsweducation@unison.co.uk](mailto:unionsweducation@unison.co.uk)

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