

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT - 9th JUNE 2010
LINDA CARR

As the saying goes, 'All good things must come to an end'. And this is particularly meaningful as I come to the end of my three year term as your Chairman. I said when I first took office that I would do my utmost to emulate the high standards set by my predecessors and would always use my best endeavours in all that I undertook on your behalf. This has been at the forefront of everything I have done yet I still very much feel that I have received back far more than I have given.

Ours is a unique organisation and I have always found Council meetings a real pleasure to chair. We bring together under one roof representatives from all the major Jewish Women's Organisations in the UK, to share information and to co-operate on topics of mutual interest. However, I consider that the best thing about AJWO is the fact that it is a cross-communal organisation and we all come to it from different backgrounds and with differing views. This has never hindered our commitment to work for the good of all our organisations and all the women in the wider community. We do this gladly and with good heart.

One of the great pleasures of being Chairman is the opportunity it affords to represent our organisation at various events and to meet with people from all different walks of life. On your behalf both I and other members of the Honorary Officers team have again accepted a number of invitations, both within and outside the Jewish Community.

The first event I attended this year was the AGM of The League of Jewish Women. Their guest speaker, Sister Margaret Shepherd, gave a fascinating talk and I was honoured to have been asked to conclude the meeting by giving the customary Vote of Thanks to the League.

In July Penny Conway attended Wizo's Rebecca Sieff Day when the guest speaker was Vivien Wineman, the then newly elected President of the Board of Deputies. And more recently I attended the launch of Jewish Women's Week – Jan Shure from the JC being the guest speaker on that occasion.

I was invited to a reception to launch the 2009 report of the Women's Review Task Force headed by Rosalind Preston. This was a follow-up to the 1994 review on Jewish women commissioned by the Chief Rabbi, and was based on responses from focus groups across the country and from more than 700 replies to an online questionnaire.

Two of our Council members, Cynthia Drapkin and vice-chairman Sharron Phillips, are very involved in the Northwood Holocaust programme and they represented us at the opening ceremony. This annual event is a wonderful example of two synagogues, one Orthodox and one Liberal, working together to promote Holocaust education amongst their local schools.

The London Assembly's Holocaust Memorial Day Ceremony at City Hall proved to be a most moving experience. One of the participants was the violinmaker Amnon

Weinstein. Fifteen years ago he set out to find the violins that were once played by Jewish musicians in the ghettos and camps and he now lovingly restores the instruments, bringing them back to life. We heard three of them beautifully played by three very talented young violinists.

We continue to support the Women's Interfaith Network and our members regularly enjoy the visits they organise, the most recent being a tour of Southwark Cathedral. I also participated in a meeting held by WIN to profile its membership and to discuss the needs and views of its members. I always appreciate the opportunity to meet with interesting women from all different faiths and different walks of life. However, we usually find that we are all facing the same challenges in our daily lives and our shared experiences and views are really very similar. Their next visit is to the Jewish Museum.

The Women's National Commission held a 40th Anniversary Conference during which I attended the Economy Workshop. There was serious input from delegates representing a diverse number of women's organisations and the discussion centred on how to achieve equality in the workplace. The two guest speakers were Shami Chakrabarti, Director of Liberty, and the Solicitor General, Vera Baird. As a partner of WNC we receive numerous questionnaires which we always endeavour to complete. Topics recently have included single sex services, the conditions faced by widows and a consultation on the Beijing Platform for Action.

During this past year we have also taken up affiliation to NAWO (The National Alliance of Women's Organisations) which works to ensure that women's voices are heard – not only nationally but also in Europe and internationally. NAWO also works to ensure that all women gain access to their human rights – and to make equality between women and men a reality.

We continue to give loyal support to the National Council of Women and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our Policy Committee Representatives for the excellent in-depth reports they bring to our Council Meetings. And a special thank you to June Cowan who always gives us a most interesting résumé of the proceedings at the NCW Annual Conference. I have continued to attend all NCW Affiliate Meetings and am currently part of a small sub-committee working to promote intergenerational dialogue between NCW members and 6th form young women. Our first London conference has just been confirmed and we are hopeful that one of our Jewish secondary schools will participate in this initiative and become linked with the new National Council of Younger Women.

During the past year we have received various individual requests for co-operation or assistance which we always endeavour to respond to favourably. These have included lobbying our MPs to speak up for Israel and additionally in regard to the Law of Universal Jurisdiction. At the request of Charter, we wrote to the Minister of State for Borders and Immigration regarding the conditions faced by female asylum seekers. And, on a more personal level, two of our affiliate organisations were also able to offer assistance to a young Jewish female asylum seeker.

We are grateful to Louise Freedman who continues to represent us at the Board of Deputies and keeps us fully updated with all its bulletins and reports. I continue to

email Council Members with bulletins and newsletters from all those organisations to which we are affiliated including the monthly bulletin from the London Civic Forum.

I attended the AGM of Jewish Women's Aid. I was also invited to be the guest speaker at the AGM of US Women when I gave a short talk about AJWO - who we are and what we do. Most of the women present knew the name but didn't really know very much about us. They are now much better informed! I was also delighted to have been invited as a guest to the US Women's Annual Dinner and to have another opportunity to hear their guest speaker, Lorna Fitzsimons of BICOM. For those of you who may have forgotten, Lorna was one of the speakers at our Seminar in 2008.

Which brings us on nicely to our Annual Seminar, an event which continues to be as popular and successful as ever. Last year's topic 'Away with Depression – Is Laughter the Best Medicine?' was obviously a subject of great interest, especially during a period of moral and financial recession. We were most fortunate to have an excellent panel of speakers. Consultant Psychiatrist, Professor Gill Livingstone, Agony Aunt and Doyenne of Fleet Street, Virginia Ironside, Comedy Scriptwriter, Ivor Baddiel, and the Actress Tracy-Ann Oberman, addressed the topic from all angles and on many occasions had us in stitches. There was certainly no depression in the House on that occasion. In fact, the Seminar proved so popular that regrettably we were unable to accommodate everyone who had wanted to attend.

We hope to continue our success with this year's Seminar 'Creative Women'. Details will shortly appear on our website together with a downloadable booking form. In view of our past experience, may I suggest that you buy your tickets early to avoid disappointment. This may sound like a cliché but I think you will agree with me that it is sound advice!

During my period as Chairman I have worked hard to raise our profile. Most of our affiliate organisations are now fully represented on Council and our publicity flyer, which I introduced at last year's AGM, is to be seen on many notice boards around the Community. Louise Freedman recently volunteered to update and reprint our publicity leaflet and copies are now available today for you to take away. We also have a modern and regularly updated website. And ladies, please don't forget about our very attractive AJWO badges – please do buy one and wear it with pride!

I must take this opportunity to thank the League of Jewish Women for allowing us to use their address as a post-box and for their assistance in forwarding mail and taking telephone messages. I should also like to thank all those affiliate organisations who have hosted us so admirably during the year. It is how we pull together that makes AJWO so special.

I have always been supported by a strong team of Honorary Officers. Firstly, by Louise Freedman, Joyce Rose and Rita Adler, and during this last year by Penelope Conway, Sharron Phillips, Helen Reisman and Marilyn Lehmann. We started out as a team of colleagues but, as is commonplace within AJWO, many of us have ended up as friends.

It has been a great privilege to have served as your Chairman for the past three years and my hope is that I have made some small contribution to the high esteem in which AJWO is held. I thank you all for your unfailing support and encouragement and, as I hand over to Penelope, I'm confident that under her leadership we will continue to grow as a vibrant and modern organisation for all women across the Jewish spectrum.

Thank you