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Report: Chair Report 2004

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Founding Chair, LeicestHERday
On behalf of all the people who volunteer
their time to LeicestHERday

With 1,000 participants, women, girls (and men) at LeicestHERday 2004, we have grown amazingly in this conference for women by women.



This year, with the related events of the Women of Achievement Awards and Her Story..., the impact of International Women's Day programme in Leicester can be felt through the city, the county and the region.

We thank our partners, volunteers, committees and the participants on the day for making LeicestHERday 2004 so powerful and empowering.

We look forward to the future supporting women in their lives, in their families, in their communities and in their workplace.

Check out our website www.leicestherday.org.uk for continuing exciting news of women moving forward.

In our third year, it is also good to look back at the last three years and to our roots to see how and why we got started and how we came along the path. We have had exceptional success but we also have a long way to go to realise all our dreams and to provide advocacy for women in all walks of life, home, community and business.



In 2001, the Rt Hon Patricia Hewitt, the Minister for Women, as well as all her other portfolios, brought a dynamic group of women together in Leicester to see what more could be done in her own constituency to make a difference for women. Several people at that initial meeting mentioned my name. (Dee Martin and Angela Lennox, among others, have a lot to answer for!) By the next meeting, I was present and co-chair of a project that would grow from strength to strength.

The idea was initially to celebrate and challenge us on International Women's Day, around 8 March every year. We chose to hold a conference for women by women (and to include all women and girls) and we chose not to exclude men. As well, we put our thoughts together on the challenges that face women in our diverse and flexible lives and how we could challenge organisations, structures, companies and government to give women a better role in decision making in Leicester. Even in the first conference we enlarged that to Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

Conference planning was short, sweet and intense. We chose our subjects, brought in experts for three searching panels, asked Patricia to be our keynote speaker* and set to work to find partners to make it happen. From the very earliest, we divided into task groups that still exist in similar but improved format today.



It was a dynamic mixture of women from business, community, women's groups, and more that made up our task forces. In three short months, we turned the project into a successful first conference held at the old Leicester City Football Stadium.

We chose our name and rallying cry early on. It was serendipity between Patricia Hewitt and myself with applause from the group, and we came up with LeicestHERday- a day about women in Leicester.... Shire.

We managed to raise £17,500 from partners, government and corporate, sold out 40 display stalls, prepared for 40 workshops and promoted the event through our media partners and with the help of flyers and posters we produced.

From the very beginning, although all of us were volunteers, we kept a professional balance to the project. We prepared delegation packs printed with our logos and outlining our programme and project acknowledging our partners and ourselves.

We waited at the door on the day of the conference with some trepidation. We had only a hundred or so pre-registrations but expected about 300 women.

Sarah Brack, Patricia's constituency office manager, and our Chair of Registrations Year 1, had several sleepless nights worrying about the turnout. Registrations opened and Sarah and Hasu Joshi and Claire Forrest with others were there at the desk when the women started ascending the stairs to the conference room.



The numbers stretched down the stairs and outside the building. Instead of 300, a total of 500 women (plus three men) showed up.

Sheila Jones and Mina Gadhia were busy backstage setting up the sound systems for our entertainment. Angela Lennox was working on her Challenges speech.

*Rosemary Conley who had stepped in at the 11th hour when Patricia had been called to Chequers for a Cabinet Meeting was sitting calmly in the front row going over all her tasks. She was also set to be on a panel and to lead us in the first ever LeicestHERday exercise session in full plenary, a tradition that we honour each year.

I was doing the mike check as the compere for the day and finding time to chat with as many people as possible. Our goody bags and registration packs were fast disappearing as the women came into the conference room.

Rajinder Bhuhi and her team were registering the last minute arrivals into workshops as well as checking to make sure that all the workshop rooms (the Football Club's boxes) were ready.

Claire Forrest, Margo Moore and other volunteers were organising the display area in the Gary Lineker Room and people were already milling around the various stalls.

It was 10am and we were about to start. People were still coming in. We heard from Patricia- she would be with us shortly after lunch and be able to chair the final panel and do the summing up for the day. (Sighs of audible relief from the Committee!)

It all came together and suddenly I was giving the health and safety rules for the day. We had hearing loops and large print programmes. We had access for all abilities. We had a signer for the hard of hearing.

I was welcoming Ross Willmott, Leader of the Leicester City Council who welcomed us to the event. Rosemary Conley presented the keynote speech and we were away.

There was a buzz in the room that lasted all day and in fact has lasted throughout the three years of the event and I am sure that it will continue to buzz so long as we are LeicestHERday.

It has been my extreme honour and privilege to have co-chaired and chaired LeicestHERday since that time right up to the present year, when I stepped aside to let a new generation of women and girls take on the tasks and earn the plaudits.



Throughout those three years, we have progressed from an earnest and small group of volunteers to a group of over 200 volunteers and a part time paid administration for Years II and III (thanks initially to the support of emda). We have put together a mission statement and worked through our Challenges in Year I, II and III.

We now have a Board of Trustees of 12 (See Page 33) representing the wide constituency of women in our area, and are waiting for the Charities Commission to grant us charitable status.

We are looking at applications for funding from a variety of national and international organisations to continue our work of challenges in employment, education and the community. Our theme for this year is gender balance in employment and we have an ambitious plan to link with existing research. See Page 33.

We have a website (in operation since Year I) with the site donated by Business Link of Leicestershire. Check it out at www.leicestherday.org.uk

In Year II, with the assistance of De Montfort University, we were



able to host a videoconference link with the United Nations Conference on the Status of Women- we hope to do this again in future years carrying our message across the world. We produced a video from the conference to relay Leicester's message to the UN.

In Year III, we created a partnership with Leicester City's Museum event, now called Her Story... and with a totally new and exciting recognition event, hosted by Business Link for Leicestershire and called Women of Achievement Awards. Reports on both of these events are included in this Report on Pages 28 and 30.

Year IV promises even more exciting challenges as we look at the possibility of holding a week long event throughout the City and Counties, starting off with Women of Achievement Year II and ending with LeicestHERday Year IV. In between, we will encourage other groups to host satellite events of a wide description throughout the area. LeicestHERday has a lot to be proud of. We have created and are continuing to make a difference for women and girls and the places we live, whether home, work or community. We have been acknowledged as pioneers and leaders and are held up as examples for the rest of the country. There is even one organisation taking our message to the rest of the world.

Videos and DVD records of Years II and III exist and can be obtained from LeicestHERday office now located at Charnwood Court (Business Link for Leicestershire). Check out the back inside cover of this report for details on how to purchase a copy. Back copies of past reports are also available, Years I, II - at a cost of £2 each.



Thank you all for your help to making LeicestHERday a phenomenal success. My best wishes to all of you for future LeicestHERdays to come. There are a lot of people to thank. Many of them are mentioned throughout this report as members of committees as volunteers. We put together as complete a list of thanks as we could as part of the delegate pack. We put as many faces as we could on our presentation screen. Over the three years of our events and related projects, over 500 women, girls and men have been involved in putting on our conferences. There is a core group of 12 on our Trust and over 40 who come to our general meetings. THANK YOU on behalf of all of the participants over the three wonderful years

