

Bristol Women's voice (BWV) has been funded by the government Equalities office (GEO), and has engaged with 530 women in Bristol, asking them:

"What stands in the way of you reaching your aspirations?"



HOUSING

"Even though I work, if I lost my job it would only take a month before I wouldn't be able to pay my rent"



"The only thing I miss living here, is my local Somali community and shops. We've never had a problem, but it lacks a community feel, somewhere where families can come together and socialise or where children can learn about their culture or religion"

Recommendations

Further investigation to understand the relationship between a lack of affordable housing and gender inequalities and to ensure this informs future policy decisions.

Central government should invest in social housing

Local housing allowance rates should be restored to the level of local average private rents

"When I was bidding for a house, we were hoping to stay nearby our previous home. When we were offered this house, I felt scared and worried. But thank God we settled well into the area"

CARING FOR SEND CHILD

"I kept on saying there were changes but they wouldn't take it seriously, the health visitor told me not to label him. Luckily I spoke to my community nursery assistant who works in the GPs, she believed me and made the referral. I'm so glad she did, we're getting that support now. I knew there was something wrong as his mum, but I wanted it confirmed. He still needs a proper care plan. If he was getting the right support, it would make such a difference to us. I'd be able to feel at ease"

You have to keep battling for your children, no-one else is going to. You have to just carry on"



Recommendations

That BCC commission a review into the gaps in SEND services, working with local organisations to ensure the review reaches more marginalised and harder to access communities.

We would like to see a targeted campaign reaching BAME families with SEND children. Our research has highlighted how a significant number of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali women with children who require SEND services have no idea where to begin in accessing support.

CHILDCARE

"I'm trying to have a career but have not been allowed to go part-time in order to juggle childcare. Therefore I'm having to change my career plans which means I might end up working for less money because my employer wouldn't accommodate part-time"

"I was referred for counselling for sexual assault but couldn't access it as there were no evening, weekend slots or a crèche"

"If you get a job you can't travel far because you've got to be able to get the bus back in time to do the school run"

Recommendations

Commissioning a review of existing childcare practices within local authorities - with a specific focus on identifying innovative approaches to delivery. We would recommend looking specifically for examples of flexible childcare services, culturally sensitive childcare, and childcare for SEND children. Any review should seek to learn from best practice.

Extending the free hours offer to cover all women seeking work or training, those currently able to work fewer than 16 hours due to childcare responsibilities, and those whose work extends beyond school hours.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

"Services are not there to support you to make long-term change which takes account of people's histories in order to bring about long-term change"

"No-one understands how systematic the illness is - it affects every bit of your being"

"My GP put me forward for a counselling referral I got an initial online assessment after four weeks, now five months later I'm still waiting for an appointment.. Nothing at all no group or counselling.. Nothing at all"

Recommendations

Ensuring that PIP assessors better understand the fluctuating nature of some chronic conditions (with the longer term goal of greater consideration of chronic illness in the welfare system)

Ensuring that GPs are aware of the range of mental health services available, including those provided by community or third sector organisations. Whilst we recognise the importance of professional mental health support, we are also aware of the valuable resources being delivered in community and peer-led settings. These services offer a lifeline to women who may be required to wait up to a year for NHS treatment.

*Yes please!
More wellbeing
Services*



WOMEN'S SAFETY

"I get harassed a lot by men (...) Men have been the plague of my life. I can't even enjoy going to comic conventions anymore because I got groped and the staff didn't do anything about it"

"I got to the stage where I believed I deserved it – if I didn't get hit that week then something was wrong"

Recommendations

The need for a more joined-up approach in understanding how to support victims of domestic abuse. Our research reflects much of the existing findings that highlight how domestic abuse support must be considered alongside other factors such as substance use, citizen status and homelessness. We have highlighted examples where women remain with the perpetrator because they fear being unable to find alternative accommodation.

Support for women with insecure citizen status and additional support for women who have recently arrived in the UK. Our research revealed the experiences of women who had fled to the UK believing they would be safe, only to find themselves isolated with no financial or language support.



EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

"Going to college one or two days a week would benefit me a lot but I always ask myself, it will nearly be time to pick up the children or I might be late for them (...) So I think I can only go to college when my children are old enough to go to school on their own and are responsible enough. I also need someone that I can rely in case anything happens such as I'm running late for school"

Recommendations

Ensuring childcare services are provided at the times and locations required by women who want to attend courses. A significant barrier to women undertaking education was that they could not find childcare services to cover the duration of the course and the associated travel. Additionally, this childcare must be affordable in order to ensure all women can benefit from education and training.

Investing in physical and social infrastructure including: a range of childcare provision, public transport, training courses and social care services – with particular attention on promoting accessibility for women.





WELFARE BENEFITS

"A more flexible approach to getting benefits that understands that people with chronic illnesses might be able to work part-time but that their health could change from one week to the next"

Recommendations

Reviewing and reforming the social security system. We share the concerns of many organisations that highlight the disproportionate impact of changes to social security systems on women (WBG, 2020). Our research heard specifically about the impact of Universal Credit and the structures of childcare systems that keep women in precarious employment and poor living conditions.

DISCRIMINATION

Recommendations

Listening to organisations supporting migrant people who are likely to be adversely impacted by Brexit to both understand and act upon concerns and to improve the dissemination of information.

Reviewing existing qualification comparison processes to identify how migrant women's skills can be better recognised. This may include the provision of a short top-up course for women arriving in the UK.

"The Home Office have played an integral part of my life, as it has refused my children's father to be reunited with his family. For eight years, I spent over £3,000 (unsuccessfully) appealing the decision"



Government
Equalities Office

For the full report please visit
www.bristolwomensvoice.org.uk

