

IWA CONFERENCE 2019

7/2/18 9:14 am

It is so good to be back home, where I feel quite at ease saying 'Goodday!' knowing that most of you will understand me.

And I am honoured to have been asked by President Robyn to open the 2019 IWA Conference in magnificent Cairns, —but then Robyn lowered the boom -for you and for me- by requesting that I also address you about my year as IAW President, so the bad news for you all is that my address comes in 2 parts.

But for now I am delighted to declare this 51st IWA Conference open, acknowledging with gratitude those who have worked so hard for a year or more to create each event on this busy Conference calendar and who will continue to guide us seamlessly through the next few days.

May we all make the most of the Conference sessions, revel in the always outstanding fellowship ...and still have time for shopping.

During 2018-19, I travelled to many countries and had the privilege of visiting many strong and vibrant Clubs and Districts that are transforming their communities and building their IW profiles as a result. In some countries you could not only feel the energy of the members and see the fantastic results but it was also possible to recognise the impact of their work.... And such success is sure to generate greater enthusiasm and acknowledgement both of Inner Wheel and for the work of Inner Wheel.

As President, it was important to me to try to visit those smaller Districts who had invited me as well as those who had never been visited by an IAW President and it was a privilege to witness pockets of IW in action in such far off places as Macedonia, Israel, Hungary, the Ukraine, Slovenia- I found the members are essentially the same everywhere so it has been fantastic to be among them, to learn from them and for them to know they are truly appreciated as an important part of our organisation.

Throughout my travels, I was proud to witness the fulfilment of the 2018-19 International theme : Empower and Evolve.

Empowerment has always been a central feature of the United Nations' efforts to address social, economic and political challenges across the globe in relation to gender parity- and leaving no one behind is the particular focus. This focus - leave no one behind- should be the essential ongoing emphasis of IW as well.

Empowerment is one of our most powerful tools to build and strengthen each member, each club and in turn, each community. It encompasses the education of and mutual support for all members and the wider world. Leadership development, involving others, bringing value to our members by giving them reasons to participate are so important for IW because:

Goethe said 'Knowledge is not enough, one must apply it; Intention is not enough, one must act.'

IWC Bursa, Turkey has over many years supported a special school where students are taught such skills as bookbinding, pottery, overlocking, gardening, cloth weaving, beadwork. IW provides the necessary equipment and funding for extra staffing.

Each student is productive to the best of their abilities.

IWC Bursa arranges ongoing commercial and market opportunities to sell the products with profits divided between the school and the student. So these students are empowered to a semi skilled productive life and, as a consequence, they are regarded with a greater respect within their own families and communities - and develop a greater self esteem. Now, they not only contribute to the family purse but have developed skills that may enable their employment after they leave school. It is a massive change.

Similarly, in Chennai, India, I celebrated with over 20 very excited ladies their achievement in becoming Trishaw taxi drivers. IW not only arranged the purchase of each vehicle, but also arranged tutoring in the necessary business accounting, the driving lessons, the mechanical maintenance and even self defence classes. There are now a fleet of very distinctive pink IW Trishaws on the road to safely transport women and children in Chennai. The sense of achievement among these new business women was palpable as was the respect for them in their family life and community.

Closer to home, Our near IW neighbours, NZ- take cancer sufferers- women at their lowest point - and empower them in friendship to Look Good Feel Better. It is another powerful and successful project.

Of course, if we hope to EVOLVE it is necessary to respect our history and plan positively for the future.

One thing seems certain: Evolution will not occur automatically -and certainly not without education and the equally important willingness to adapt.

And Yes:

Any change IS hard, and truth be told, is rarely without its problems, but it is essential for any organisation that wants to grow, stay relevant and move forward in a positive direction.

To EVOLVE well, it means respecting our history and planning positively for the future. For us, as members of IW, this is about adapting to today and improving.

In Johannesburg, IW supports an AIDS orphanage and hospice that has grown exponentially as the treatment of this disease has improved since children now survive to a much greater age. When I visited the first group of young adults were about to graduate from High School, so IW's support has been adapted from the basics for just the hospice for very young orphans and evolved to now include life provisions for a number of group homes, assisting in solving the issues and needs of growing teenagers as well as their educational requirements.

I'm sure Margarete Golding would not have imagined that in 2019 her IW has been successfully undertaking these diverse projects or other fantastic initiatives such as:

*Arranging public seminars on Bullying and Hate Speech in Skopje, Macedonia and also Italy.

*Vital ongoing support for a Forensic Rape crisis centre in Cape Town where 1000 cases per month are treated.

*installing solar lights in many isolated communities without electricity in Philippines.

*Financing the purchase and training of Sniffer Dogs for Customs in both Finland and Sweden.

*Providing Myoelectric limbs in the USA

for young people who are limb deficient.

*Arranging free cataract laser surgery and consultations to impoverished elderly Mexicans.

*Working in GB& I to provide adequate sanitary protection in schools, universities, to women's

refuges, refugees, asylum seekers, the homeless, and those in shelters, prisons and police cells.

And here, we provide the wonderful grants into cord blood research -most important in itself- but also valued for allowing our researchers to undertake their work in Australia.

These are all Empowering and Evolutionary projects -and just the tip of the iceberg- but they cater, as they should, to our times and our societies' needs.

I just wish we would brag more about what we as a Club, a District, a NGB, achieve. To show the world and prove to ourselves that like President Phyllis says this year:

TOGETHER WE CAN.

I believe that a part of my task as President was to encourage our members of the need to empower and evolve to secure IW's future.

Ensuring IW's success is not only about membership strategy or public image or even worthwhile projects- it's about all these elements uniting into an enviable organisation that like minded women WANT to join: we remain women supporting each other and making a difference in the world and the simplest gift we continue to offer is friendship.

BUT along with French philosopher and political activist Simone Weil I believe that Friendship is not to

be sought, not to be dreamed, not to be desired - its to be EXERCISED'.

In IW I assure you it IS there, being exercised, and I have been humbled to receive it in spades from our members all over the world.

Now, in the immortal words of Winston Churchill

'It takes courage to stand up and talk. Just as it takes courage to sit down and listen.'

And I propose to do this very soon.

BUT (there's always a but) before I do just that I wish to thank you, the members of IWA for your amazing encouragement and support right through my term on the IWA and IAW Executives. It continues to mean a great deal.

I also acknowledge with more than gratitude those wonderful individual members around the world who have always readily made themselves available to me in my times of need/coffee/advice/ just plain friendship,

I am especially grateful to those brilliant women from my Club, Sydney Inner West, some of whom are really just starting to 'get' IW but others who are IW through and through- they are my rocks.

And may I also thank my District Chairman, Lesley Byrne, who always willingly shares the IW message. Lesley lives the IW objects and it was listening to her in my early IW years that encouraged my understanding of and greater interest in this organisation. I am forever grateful.

Of course, my journey would never have been possible without the love and tireless support of my ever patient Robert- no, he cannot quote me on that because not one of you heard me say it- and our terrific children and grandchildren.

It is this man and our family, even our little people, who inspire me most and I cannot sufficiently express to them the depth of my absolute love and appreciation.

My friends, I hope you both benefit from and enjoy our Conference and that, like Tilly, you will continue to stick your necks out in order to enable IW to go forward.