

Report Lisa Swan

Black Workers Women's Representative – Eastern Region

Domestic Abuse Policy Central Bedfordshire

As part of my role as Women's Rep for Central Beds & Eastern Black Workers I am currently working on a domestic abuse policy with the following officers. Deborah Hughes – Central Beds Unison Welfare Officer, Sam Leigh - Unison Regional Officer and Sarah Clark - Domestic Abuse coordinator for Bedfordshire. This has now been redrafted and a meeting will be scheduled shortly to start the process of implementing the policy for Central Bedfordshire.

Black Workers Conference

In January I went to the Black workers conference as a visitor. I found the conference very informative and empowering, and got the opportunity to meet delegates from other branches and hear about the work they are doing. As well as listening to the debates I attended a very informative workshop presented by Jasvinda Sanghera a survivor of forced marriage. Jasvinda explained what can happen in some cases if a woman fails to consent to an arranged marriage.

As Jasvinda went through her own tragic story of being disowned when she refused to agree to marrying a man she didn't know, and shared stories of what had happened to some of her friends and other women who failed to consent to marriage it became clear that this situation is very real in our societies and better understanding is crucial to help victims.

Just a few examples of cases included of cases included honour killings, by immediate family or extended family, with no remorse. Removal from the education system, mental and physical abuse, rape, isolation from the wider community and essential agencies. Kidnap, some women are held captive sometimes for many years or sent away to another country on false pretences to marry without the resources to return. In some cases women committed suicide as they felt unable to carry on in their situation.

Jasvinda set up a charity called Karma Nirvana that helps women in this situation and has written many books on the subject, more info on this topic can be found on.

<http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/>

This is an issue we need to have more awareness on especially as some agencies may not understand that the immediate and extended family will often go to extremes to ensure the marriage goes. Many lives have been lost due to this lack of information with agencies misunderstanding the situation.

Kemone Brown, LGBT Activist

Another very powerful speaker at the conference was Kemone Brown who is a black LGBT activist of Caribbean Origin. Kemone comes from Jamaica which is a country that is often highlighted as one of the worst places to live as a LGBT person.

Kemone gave a very powerful and heartfelt speech about how LGBT people were treated in Jamaica, and called on activists to stand together to fight against discrimination in the Caribbean. I felt empowered that she had the courage to stand up for a cause that would undoubtedly put her at high risk in her own place of origin.

Kemone also reminded conference of how far the U.K has come with improving the rights of LGBT people in this country compared to Jamaica which is decades behind, and stated that as Black people we need to remember to support the people back home.

Woman's Conference

In February I attended the women's conference which was a very good experience, one of the Eastern Regions motions, Composite A, which deals with violence against women was due to be debated, and I had the opportunity to help with distributing leaflets outside the conference venue with some of the other delegates in the Eastern Region to help spread awareness of this issue, and gain maximum support for the motion. I was pleased to find out recently that this motion has now been chosen by ballot to go to the National Delegates conference.

A wide range of motions were discussed which were very informative and set out the priorities of the National Woman's Committee for the coming year. A wide range of motions were discussed and a majority of the motions were supported without opposition.

One of the issues that stood out highlighted the need to campaign against the BNP and spread awareness of their views on women. Although the BNP's views on Black people are well documented, many people are unaware of their views on women which are equally appalling. Many women gave examples of how they have been targeted by the BNP in their areas which acted as a reminder that the threat of these groups to society is still a very real concern.

Please keep up to date on Eastern Region Women's Issues by visiting the Unison Eastern Region Women's website.

<http://womeninunisononeastern.wordpress.com/>