

An interview with Ceri

Josephine Middleton meets Fawcett's new Chief Executive Ceri Goddard

You have hit the ground running, attending Fawcett's AGM less than a week in to the job. How are you settling in?

Having the AGM in my first week was a real bonus – it was great to hear about the work and ideas of the many people that make up Fawcett – from the staff and trustees to the local groups and members. It was a powerful and early reminder about not only how much we already achieve but also what we could become. My first priority has been to hear from my team and our supporters and partners about our current work and their ideas going forward. Fawcett has an impressive but broad spread of activity going on at any one time but what has really struck me so far is the level of energy, commitment and creativity in the organisation – a new CEO couldn't wish for better starting point than that.

You are taking over as Chief Executive from Dr. Katherine Rake OBE, after a period of huge growth and success within the organisation. What do you consider to be the key achievements of the Fawcett Society in recent years?

Well the first one that comes to mind is that Fawcett is still here! Not only that but it has grown in terms of activity and profile in what has often been a challenging environment. Fawcett has not only kept women's rights on the media and political agendas but continued to get people on board in taking action or making change. This has supported real progress in areas such as pensions, justice, tackling discrimination and sexism in the workplace, reforming licensing of "sex encounter" establishments and funding for rape crisis provision. Seeing Double has been an important initiative to bring together often separate strands of work on sexism and racism, and femocracy for acting as a basis for further work on women participating meaningfully in our democracy as well as giving us valuable ideas about how to strengthen our work with and links to grass roots organisations.

What are your priorities for the organisation over the next three years?

These achievements provide a great basis for us going forward so my priorities will be build on these successes. Retaining and widening our high media profile and keeping up the quality of our commentary and policy work will be key. But I'm also keen to keep growing our campaigning clout as well as the voice and influence of the women's movement as a whole. This will mean exploring ways to increase and improve support for our own local group network but also widening our alliances with others. Of course an overriding priority will be to keep building the resources and health of the organisation so it can continue to grow.

What does being a feminist mean to you personally?

For me being a feminist is being part of a movement that believes in realising equal rights and freedoms for all women - both to improve our everyday lives but also as part of a wider movement for equality and social justice for all. Progressing women's rights and freedoms is important in itself but I also think we won't see wider social change or human beings come anywhere close to our full potential until women are free and able to participate on an equal

basis with men. But for me being a feminist is not only about my beliefs: it's about taking action, challenging the status quo with a different vision and leading change.

You joined Fawcett from the British Institute of Human Rights (BIHR) and have also worked for Ireland's Combat Poverty Agency and chaired the Women's Resource Centre. What skills and experience have you gained from these jobs that you feel will add value to your role at Fawcett?

At BIHR I led work promoting the relevance and value of human rights for social change here in the UK – in particular in tackling inequality. I'm keen to explore how greater use of human rights could add to Fawcett's influencing, practice development and empowerment work. My work at Combat Poverty focused on empowering and engaging people in influencing national policy change but also situating this in wider EU and international movements – something that Fawcett could also maybe draw more on. Chairing the WRC – an umbrella body for voluntary and community women's sector - has given me good links into and an understanding of the wider women's sector that will be valuable in building further alliances. And across my work I have been involved in growing organisations and bringing together ideas and people perhaps not done before. I hope I'll be able to bring this ability and creativity to Fawcett's continued growth.

What do you consider to be your greatest achievement?

The work and campaigns that I'm most proud to have been a part of are the ones I feel or could see making a real difference. Whilst at BIHR it was wonderful to see healthcare workers and service users, teachers and school children and equality and poverty community groups using human rights in their everyday work. Whilst I was Ireland it was great to see a range of equality, rights and poverty groups form coalitions that got the voice of the least powerful to Government and here in the UK I was very proud to have been part of the growth of the Women's Resource Centre. What all these examples have in common is that they made a difference through collective ideas and action.

A year from now Britain will be the other side of a general election. What changes would women be likely to see under a Conservative government?

The first thing I would say is that the election result is not a foregone conclusion – Fawcett will work across all parties to ensure they consider in their policy making how these will further and not row back on women's rights. It's hard to predict what the changes that a Conservative government might make – not least as I think there are still discussions going on within the party – on women and on the wider direction of their policy. That said early indication from the Tories that they would reduce the role of the state and cut public spending do not bode well for women. Their focus on the family will be welcome as long as the their policies don't support only certain kinds of family and/or represent a backwards move for women.