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Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

KEY: Unable to decipher = (ia + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** = (ph + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode).

Moderator: It's Friday 20th December 2019 and I'm with the Vivienne Hayes. Vivienne is the chief executive of the Women's Resource Centre. The Women's Resource Centre is the leading national support organisation for the Women's sector in the UK. Vivienne is sharing her experience of working in the women's voluntary and community sector and campaigning for women's rights. For the sisters doing it for themselves archive. Viv if we can begin with you saying how-, what influenced your decision to work in the sector?

Vivienne Hayes: So, I think the key point is that, I mean, I'd already been involved in activism around the national abortion campaign in the late 70's. So that was my kind of entry into getting to know about women's rights if you like, and I was a teenager then. Actually getting involved in organisations came a bit later when I moved to London with my four year old daughter having escaped an abusive relationship with a man and basically I had to get out of my city of origin. I was not in a good way and was looking for some support and eventually I found a tiny little women's organisation called Lambeth Women and Children Health project. I think I'd say that saved my sanity. After being a service user there I was then asked to join their management committee which I did. From there I became more involved in women's organisations, understanding what they did. And it all started there really. Then I was involved in Lambeth Women's Aid, then Wandsworth Women's Aid, so that was really my kind of entry, if you like, into the organisations.

Moderator: As a service user initially?

Vivienne Hayes: As a service user, absolutely. I think, I mean I don't know scientifically, but I think that's really common, well it was very common in women's organisations. I think that's partly why they work so well because they're actually-, you know this whole idea of the profession or the professionalisation, they historically have been rooted in the reality of women's experiences and very much about, as this projects says, sisters doing it for themselves. I think that is the critical thing about why they work so well for women. It's never been an us and them, it's always been a 'we'.

Moderator: So why the women's sector in particular?

Vivienne Hayes: Well, because the women's sector is the only place of safety for women who've had often quite traumatic experiences, who've been stripped of their confidence and sometimes their very essence. That's quite a hard thing to understand in terms of the impact of it and also the need for absolute safety for women in a space that really can understand and

hold that so that women can begin, you know, to rebuild their sense of selves and, what I call, fix the holes in their souls.

Moderator: One of the first examples of women's collective action was the opening of the Chiswick refuge. Did that have any-, was that-, have any significance on your decision making?

Vivienne Hayes: No, it didn't have any significance at all. That was not my trajectory. Mine was about being a service user in a little tiny women's org. Then wanting to kind of give back and support what I see as a critical and life saving set of organisations.

Moderator: Who inspired you in the beginning and who inspires you now?

Vivienne Hayes: Well if I go back to Lambeth Women and Children's Health Project I have to honour one of the women there called Patricia Agana who was just completely pivotal in my ability to recover. Who also probably when I didn't really believe in myself and she did so I have to honour her massively. Who inspires me now is a hard question because I think there's hundreds of women who inspire me who nobodies never heard of really. Obviously there are more famous women, mostly authors, that I would always pay homage to in their writings about women's oppression. One of my favourites who has seemed to become very popular is Audre Lorde and Patricia Hill Collin as writers. But I think also, you know, I have to remember that my mum actually was an inspiration to me because she was unusually open-minded for a woman of her generation and her community of origin and allowed the idea that you could think differently. Also one of my mums sister, an aunty, who nobody liked in the family because they all thought she was really selfish because she completely transgressed the kind of gender-stereotyping roles of what a woman was. So she didn't really want to be a mother, she ended up almost by default adopting children but she was very insistent on having her own life and her own interests. For me as a ten or eleven year old I just loved that because the rest of my aunties were just-, I mean I didn't have that language then, but oppressed and very controlled by those very strict gender assigned roles if you like.

Moderator: You talked about, well you mentioned, the less famous women who inspire you. Can you maybe name some of them and say how they've inspired you?

Vivienne Hayes: Well I've mentioned my mum and one of my aunties. I think women that I work with and who I meet and have met through my work. One that I work with, Sarbjit Ganger from Asian Women's Resource Centre who I think holds the heart of the women's sector in a way that she does her work. Very inspiring, and amazing and integrity. Just really so many women that I don't even know all their names I've met over the years who refuse to give up and refuse to be trodden on, really. (TC 10.00) In all walks of life. I think that women who will speak out even when it's a risk to them. I think that also always reminds me that I have the privilege of a lot of platforms because of my job. I have to make sure that I honour that privilege and speak the truths that I know and not shy away from sometimes saying things that people don't want to hear.

Moderator: As a leader how would you describe your approach to leadership?

Vivienne Hayes: I think again what I just said about recognising the relative privilege that that gives you, being very mindful of that and for me as a northern working class woman is to honour those women. Poorer women, more marginalised women. Speak up and carry their messages. I think that's really important.

Moderator: Can you give an example of your leadership in practice?

Vivienne Hayes: I think collaboration and collective action is really, really important in my understanding in how we achieve social transformation for women. I think I live those values by trying to promote collaboration and sticking with things that are difficult like the London Violence Against Women and Girls Consortium which has achieved amazing things and has maintained a diverse set of organisations doing the work in London rather than a few larger organisations doing the work and probably nowhere near as well as they could. So my resilience in sticking with that in, you know, challenging times. Getting 28 organisations to work in a way that speaks to power sharing. I think in my own organisation so our policies that we have around leave, so carers leave that could be for your relatives for your children, for anybody. It's about recognising that women's lives have many demands and that most women have disproportionate caring responsibilities. So what do we do in our organisations to have gender specific, if you like, employment practices. That is really important. Working from home, flexible working. I would think we are probably one of the most flexible organisations that I've ever worked in. We, you know, we've had women work in term-time only. Women doing only school hours. Whatever. I think the other thing about my leadership and what I believe in is to develop women who work at the organisation and give them opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge. I think also it's about encouraging them to have a dialogue and air their views on things. Also to support them in developing their assertiveness. I think for me it's also about having a really clear analysis of oppression and discrimination and having one that is rooted in a structural analysis of sexism and also racism.

Moderator: Earlier you mentioned your role in power sharing for the London VAWG. Can you describe how you achieved that? The processes that you used.

Vivienne Hayes: Well the processes for the consortium have been built over, well it's been in existence for about nine and a half years. So it's been done together collectively with everybody in it. That's a way of power sharing. Also to support the establishment within that now of what we called Black and Minoritised led by a for Council of Members. Unfortunately issues of racism are in the women's sector. The women's sector isn't immune from those things. It's really important that bringing diverse orgs together, that we just don't replicate issues of power and privilege across race within that. So we take note and actually do things to ensure that the voices of Black and Minoritised women are central in the consortium and provide a place for them to speak freely and influence how the consortium goes forward.

Moderator: How do you think- well what motivates you as a leader? How do you think women's leadership might be different from men's or is it different from men's?

Vivienne Hayes: I think feminist women's leadership is different than the traditional patriarchal styles. I think-, I don't know if women and men per se are different, sort of, naturally. I don't think I believe that. I think all women have the possibility of doing things differently if they're willing to reflect and think about women's position in society and the structures within which they work. That's not always the case. If you want to be a leader in an organisation that addresses women's human rights then you have to do it differently because you cannot work towards achieving women's rights if you simply replicate patriarchal leadership styles which are linear, oppressive, hold power imbalances and are silencing. I mean, it's a challenge because the women's sector has moved from initially being collectives to being hierarchical like any other organisations. So, it is a challenge to constantly think of ways to usurp that. You know, I think what we do constantly in the sector if we are addressing that is we tread this kind of very thin line of operating within oppressive structures whilst trying to disrupt them and undermine them. I think that is really important in your mind and imagination all the time. I think the women's sector, women's rights defenders and movements, we don't have a blueprint to follow for what it looks like because nobody has either a living memory or can understand a historical time when women weren't oppressed and what that system looked like. We are constantly charting new territories, you know new waters. We have to be brave and bold. For me, I trust my instinct (TC 20.00) On things. I don't always know why something isn't okay, but I certainly know when I feel that it isn't.

Moderator: Can you give an example of where you have trusted your instincts and done something differently, and what you did that was different, and the success that it lead to?

Vivienne Hayes: Yes I think the thing that I know, well I know some things about myself. One of them is that I'm very vocal and I have strong views. I understand that not everybody is like that in a group of women. Some women find it difficult to speak unless it's in small groups and in larger groups I've followed my instinct to be quiet sometimes. I didn't really know why but that was a good thing. That was a very good thing. Sometimes you have to let things unfold even if you can see them, they have to unfold so that everybody can see them. Then they can reflect and have the opportunity to give their points of view.

Moderator: You've touched on this, but what motivates you as a leader?

Vivienne Hayes: What motivates me is that I don't want to die thinking that I didn't do anything to try and change what is an extremely racist and sexist society. Then I would feel that I've wasted my life. Money is not a driver for me, obviously otherwise I wouldn't do this work because it's not the best paid job in the world. But I feel great when we have small successes and I am an optimist. I believe that we can change things if we all just do something. I think it's honest to say that I don't like being told what to do so because of that I have to be a leader really.

Moderator: What issues were and are dear to your heart? How do you think you've influenced change?

Vivienne Hayes: What issues are dear to my heart? Well I am-, I think you know like a lot of women who work in women's human rights and the women's sector, you know, we have both

a rage and a passion for change. What is really dear to my heart is women and girls human rights to dismantle patriarchy and white supremacy and for women and girls to not be violated, battered and murdered really. Probably that's the biggest thing for me is to stop that really. To see women believe in themselves and just fly. When women have the-, are empowered you know, they don't have all the holes in the souls left from the trauma it's quite amazing what women do. I mean it's still amazing that women actually survive the trauma that they do. It's staggering that so many women are still alive actually, when you hear their stories. So I guess that's what motivates me.

Moderator: How have you influenced change?

Vivienne Hayes: Yes, it's always hard, isn't it to pinpoint things because change is rarely the result of one occurrence or one individual's action. I think my role is often to facilitate collaboration and again, you know I'm not the only one in the London VAWG consortium but I have certainly worked very hard for it to continue, and for it to continue in a way that is appropriate for women's human right orgs. Also, I work very hard for the recent oral statement to the CEDAW committee to get a collective position from the delegates that went. I think in an organisational level, all the younger women that come to work at WRC for who it may be their first job, they and volunteers as well, they leave here with masses of experience and improved confidence in themselves and progress their careers which is great, that's what we want. Assertive, knowledgeable women going out there doing their thing. That's what we want.

Moderator: What do you think are the specific characteristics of being a leader in the women's sector?

Vivienne Hayes: I think the most important one is a really good analysis of structural oppression. I think that's critical and think that's also not spoken about enough because of the kind of, neo-liberal, postmodernist, theoretical environment that we live in. So, it's really important to talk about that. And to have a strong analysis because once you have that you understand everything. It's like having almost like an equalities lens or some people call it a gender lens or a race lens. So, what you see is interpreted through that framework. I think resilience is absolutely critical because not only are you leading an organisation and-, we're charities so you've got the whole fundraising part of that work constantly and worse than it's ever been now. But you're also dealing with what I think is a war on women. So resilience is crucial. I think human love is also critical to keeping your empathy. Humour for me is a big thing. And a real desire and commitment to try and do things differently. I think a good strategic mind is important and a real willingness to collaborate and to accept that we all don't agree on everything but we've got to keep our eye on the prize. It's about transformational change for all women, not just the women who you know or who look like you. I think having anger and rage is actually really important because that's a massive energy that you can harness for positivity.

I think you need to be able to listen well and not be afraid to be challenged and hear that as something that helps you to develop rather than take it as a personal affront, and reflect and say, 'Yes I did get that wrong'. There's nothing wrong with being wrong. Nobody knows everything and nobody's perfect and if you move into that space you're actually a fool and not

really being your best or doing what needs to be done in my view. So I think those are the key things to be anti-sexist and anti-racist and to honour (TC 30.00) women's right to self organise.

Moderator: How has your leadership style developed in the years that you've been a leader?

Vivienne Hayes: I mean I've been quite fortunate because I have been to university a few times and I've done training in management. And so, a lot of those things I know. But I think actually, what develops you is the doing of it and experience of it and making mistakes and learning. I think most things are down to reflective experience really.

Moderator: How has your involvement in the sector impacted on you personally?

Vivienne Hayes: I think it's been a positive thing for me. It's enriched my life by the women that I've met and it's given me great satisfaction to be part of resisting oppression in society. I think it also wears you out and so it's important to look after yourself as well as everybody else. It's for me, an enriching experience.

Moderator: How has WRC and the sector as a whole influenced and changed women's structural position? This is a big question.

Vivienne Hayes: It is a big question. I think it's got a big answer because actually, the women's sector and the women's collective action has been pivotal in the changes for women and our rights. If you look at abortion, access to abortion, access to contraception, the Sex Discrimination Act, the Equal Pay Act. More recently, coercive control being recognised as a form of domestic violence. The work on no recourse to public funds and the changes in that. They're just some of the things that the women's sector has achieved. That's part of why I'm so committed to the sector is because it is the driver of improving women's rights and their lives. Absolutely.

Moderator: Can you talk about a campaign that WRC has been involved in that you're particularly proud of?

Vivienne Hayes: Well, there's a lot of things I'm proud of for WRC. I think the one that's most tangible with an outcome was our work with Rape Crisis England and Wales. And a piece of research that we launched some years ago now, the next day I think it was Harriet Harman back then, announced an emergency one million pound funding for rape crisis sectors off the back of that piece of work. and ever since then, there has been some kind of rape support fund available for sexual violence. So that's had a massive impact. Our work through what was then the Women's National Commission and having access to the then minister of the MOJ and talking about women's specialist services being at risk which they still are massively, probably more than then. And again another million-pound fund from the Ministry of Justice for women's centres, one specific part of the sector and of course the massive thing that WRC have coordinated is the first-ever unique London Violence Against Women and Girls Consortium which has brought in I think nearly 25 million in eight years in extra funding. And also strives to build this power-sharing model that I don't think any other partnership or consortium has achieved. So that's massive. Also, we did the Why Women campaign years ago which raised again the issue of women specialist services and we've

recently launched the Tampon Tax campaign. Obviously we're yet to see the outcome of that but I think that is a great vehicle for all the sectors to get behind and for us to speak with one voice on.

I think WRC is often the invisible leader of the sector in the work that we do behind the scenes around collaboration and trying to pull the orgs together. We've had lots of different projects so, the women's commission and support unit. We were also pivotal in getting the 2019 women and girls manifesto as an agreed set of asks. That was WRC that pushed for that and I doubt that would have happened without us being there. I think we are an organisation that holds the corner and is an ally to Black and Minoritised women's organisations and also to raise the issues of class as well which are kind of, not that often talked about these days.

Moderator: What do think are the greatest achievements of women's collective action?

Vivienne Hayes: Women's collective action has really achieved everything that women have today. I don't think you could say that they haven't been pivotal in any of the gains that we have. And some of the things that I've mentioned are examples of that. Women's collective action is just critical actually, to making a better place for not just women, but women, children, families and communities and society. I firmly believe that a blueprint for achieving all women's human rights is the blueprint for an equitable society.

Moderator: The women's voluntary sector is pivotal to women's collective action. Where do you think the sector is heading?

Vivienne Hayes: Where I hope it's heading because it's difficult to say. I think there's been a lot of problematic challenges to our survival as a movement for change through the commissioning landscape which pits women's organisations against each other. But again, that's about thinking differently. So, the system is saying we should compete. What can we do instead? I think that's something that we have to remember, that we don't have to just go along with what the system is saying. We've always found ways to usurp that and disrupt it. So I think that's something that we really still have to do. I think the current political climate (TC 00:40:00) is the most challenging that I can remember really and also the rights of women are declining. The World Economic Forum's report that I think is out this week, showed that the UK is slipping down the table in terms of achieving women's rights or what they call gender equality, I call it women's rights. I think gender equality is problematic language. So we've still got a long way to go. Also, the CEDAW committee's recommendations to the government often have the same things in year after year after year so the government is not really improving women's rights the way that they should.

I'm hoping that this current devastating place that we're in with austerity, killing women and children, starving them, making them homeless and also already this week we've seen threats to rights. We've seen a massive spike in racism which is frightening actually. So I think that the tide's changing for the women's sector and I think that there's a fresh realisation that it's not business as usual for us anymore and the kind of traditional methods of influencing change that have developed over the years in the women's sector which are kind of around lobbying, they're not working. We're getting crumbs if we're lucky and crumbs are not enough to keep women alive. I think the state of poverty and the women who are actually if they're lucky just about

surviving and many are not. We know that the welfare changes have led to deaths of disabled people. The Windrush scandal has led to deaths and women are included in all these. And I think we have to centre our campaigns and our work around those issues which means we have to bring the voices of those women into the centre of the women's movement rather than what often I see, especially in London, is a policy arena dominated by white middle-class women who don't always bring those issues to the table. And it's about shifting that really and who gets to decide what the agenda is.

Moderator: So, how would you shift things? What do you see as being the way forward?

Vivienne Hayes: I think there's a number of things. One is to bring, not just to bring, but for people to actually listen to the voices of women at the sharp end of discrimination. And not to silence them either intentionally or unintentionally. I think we need a coordinated movement in the sector which organises itself in recognition of women almost being in a war. So what does that mean, how do we respond to that? I think also is to stop almost colluding with the oppressor by saying, 'They're not going to do that so we'll ask them to do this'. I think we've got to go back to what our agenda is and what we want and in some ways, be bolder, be more radical and to hold onto the fact that if we don't ask for the things that we want, we definitely won't get them. I think a good example is the Domestic Abuse Bill that obviously didn't go through because of the recent election. But, all the women's front line organisations said it should be a Violence Against Women and Girls Bill because the Domestic Abuse Bill treated violence as gender neutral when we know it's predominantly men violating women. It also completely ignored the needs of migrant women. I think the only mention in the draft was that migrant women should consider returning to their country of origin if they experience violence. So it's highly problematic and the front line orgs said it's got to be a VAWG Bill. But we didn't see that represented in the lobbying that took place from the organisations that have the resources to do that work. I think that's a mistake. Just because you think the government won't do it, I don't think you should not say it needs doing. But I sense a shift in, just this week, in some women I've spoken to and I sense the urgency is becoming more real in people's minds and I'm very hopeful that we are going to get much better organised and get more radical.

Moderator: Finally, what are your thoughts on the future for women's rights?

Vivienne Hayes: Well, the future without any campaigning or really massively visible action is not looking very good at all. So, that's why it will only look better if we get better organised, coordinated and agree to focus on the things that we agree on and work on that rather than paying too much attention to the things that we don't agree on. But I really think the work on anti-racism as well as anti-sexism has really got to be stepped up massively. But I feel very hopeful that that is starting to happen and I think our Tampon Tax Campaign is a really opportune vehicle for building solidarity because I think solidarity is what we desperately need right now because we know the government rarely makes the changes we want and they only do it if they feel that they have to and so, we have to make them feel that they haven't got a choice.

Moderator: And finally, is there anything else that you would like to add that you haven't?

Vivienne Hayes: Change needs to happen across all our institutions. I have a bit of an obsession with schools. And to change the trajectory of our society is about bringing up children in a different way and them having access to different information and I think the school (TC 50.00) curriculum needs rewriting based on a framework of human rights and political and civic participation. Because I don't think people always understand the way things work and, knowledge is power. Having knowledge and understanding it is definitely powerful. So I think I'd really like to see that happen as well as a million other things. And I'd like to see women with a great analysis of oppression, ruling the world and saving the planet as well as humanity.

Moderator: And on that positive note, thank you very much, Vivienne.