

Why women gain from being part of a women's organisation

Membership of BPW facilitates access to consultative status at the UN and the European Commission, writes BPW Galway President, Moyra McMahon

We might ask ourselves whether the women's organisation continues to have a role in modern Ireland in an era of smashed glass ceilings, with Facebook friendships, tweeting and all manner of cyber interfacing.

Business & Professional Women (BPW) grew out of a need for women to lobby for better rights when, for the first time ever during WW1, women entered the workforce in significant numbers.

We have come a long way from the experience of the working woman of the 1920s but the clear message from BPW Clubs throughout Europe and here in Ireland is that women continue to enjoy and benefit from collaborating with other women within the structure of a club.

I asked our own members why they join year after year and the reasons

were as varied and interesting as the members themselves. There are a few common benefits delivered by membership, which particularly appeal to women. BPW clubs provide a safe and nurturing environment to hone valuable life skills, such as public speaking, team work, event management and business meeting etiquette, which translate well into real-life settings in business, the professions and in public office.

We are age-streamed from when we start school and our business and social networks can narrow as we become busy with motherhood and in our working lives. Most of us have to move away from home and forge a new life in a new city at some stage and will need to build a new business and personal network. However, one of the joys of a broad based women's group like BPW is that we interact with

women in various walks of life, in their 80s and in their 20s and all decades in between. So, with wisdom and a healthy disregard for the unimportant things in life that we see in our older members and the youthful enthusiasm and fresh ideas of the younger, the BPW experience is never dull and provides a broad introduction to the business life of the city.

Membership is good for growing your business through developing new associations but also through developing trust. Whether it is receiving mentoring from a seasoned business woman, a business introduction or an opportunity to showcase a product at a meeting, the business contacts made within the club are valuable and enduring. BPW encourages friendships first and out of that comes business support and word of mouth sponsorship, which remains the

life-blood of business in this city.

Women working in the SME Sector in Ireland are typically working alone or in small organisations. Many are attracted to women's organisations for this very reason and find the interaction with other women in similar circumstances to be healthy and good for developing ideas and collaborations. It can also stave off isolation and sometimes loneliness, which can be a feature of working alone. This is neither good for business or for the business/professional person.

To many members, BPW begins and ends with the local club. To others, the global reach of BPW is the key reason for joining. One small voice in the West of Ireland, when added to the might of 50,000 members world-wide, has a better chance at being heard at the decision making tables.

Membership of BPW facilitates access to consultative status at the UN and the European Commission, and members are encouraged to participate fully in the organisation at national, European and international level. The



BPW Galway President, Moyra McMahon. Photo: Declan Monaghan / Galway Focus

chance to be a part of significant move to improve the world is particularly satisfying and beyond what could ever be achieved alone.

In May 2019, BPW Galway will host over 500 delegates from across Europe here in Galway, which will provide our members with the experi-

ence of planning, managing and delivering a significant business and social event of importance to BPW International and to Galway City itself. It is an exciting opportunity to build skills and experience and to showcase the West of Ireland, and we look forward to welcoming BPW members from

around Europe and beyond.

Women are busy and expected to excel at all of their various roles. BPW-time is for setting aside all of the other roles and meeting bright, fun women with similar experiences in a social setting - for the joy of it. When asked, this was by far the main reason that women sought out a women's club and the reason that they stay year after year.

Yes, the glass ceiling may well be shattered but the statistics, although an improvement on previous decades, are certainly not in women's favour. Of the 197 heads of state, only 22 are women. Women hold just 20 per cent of seats in parliaments globally and, in the world of big business, a meagre 18 of the Fortune 500 CEOs are women. So, the job is not yet finished. However, we know that with collaboration and mutual support, women can make huge strides. So, long live the women's organisations and the women who thrive within them.

Moyra McMahon is the President of BPW Galway, which welcomes EU Commissioner, Máire Geoghegan Quinn as the guest speaker at the annual BPW Summer Lunch on Friday, 16 May at the Ardilaun Hotel. Tickets and tables can be reserved by email at bpwsummerlunch@gmail.com, at www.bpw-galway.ie or by phoning 086 8337133. For further information on BPW, see www.bpwgalway.ie.