On the 15th August we were pleased to host a Soapbox event with Ken Skates AM. This was part of Welsh Labour’s “Wales you Want” events that will help to shape their manifesto for the Welsh Assembly elections in May 2016.

Ken Skates is coordinating the manifesto and joined us to hear about the issues that matter most to women. Here we set out some of the key issues that were raised.

“Governments don’t create great countries, it’s people that create great countries”

Ken Skates AM

Childcare remains a barrier

- Our discussion confirmed that for many women access to appropriate childcare remains an issue. Specific issues raised include:
  - Cost: cost is rising faster than wages; half your pay packet is gone just on childcare
  - Provision is not consistent; there are different funders with different requirements; there are issues around access to care being linked to hours worked.
  - Breakfast clubs are used but don’t start until 8:15 making it difficult to get to work, especially if on public transport.
  - Provision is not flexible enough; 8-6 does not work for all; can’t purchase short term care.
  - This impacts on women’s ability to work; they drop hours, change jobs, moving to lower paid work and face greater risk of poverty.

“Childcare settings are inflexible. They don’t support shift patterns and it isn’t possible to purchase short term provision.”
How do you solve a problem like childcare?

- A number of possible solutions to address a lack of childcare were suggested:
  - There was support for a not for profit model of childcare
  - Make the regulatory framework more reasonable
  - Use schools or “community hubs” as childcare settings
  - Ensure that childcare is viewed as being important as transport
  - Raise the status of childcare workers

Maternity Discrimination

“I was made redundant twice when I was on maternity leave. ReAct was really positive though. Being able to access a course really boosted my confidence after having a baby.”

- Maternity discrimination was also highlighted as an issue with some women being subject to restructures and redundancies while on maternity leave.
- It was also highlighted that women can be dealing with low confidence when looking to return to work and the ReAct programme was seen as a positive intervention.

Other common themes

A number of other topics were discussed. These included:

- The workplace: there are not enough part time jobs at more senior levels; need greater use of flexible working; men can find it hard to access flexible working; need a change in employer attitudes so that care is seen as something for parents not just mothers; public sector should lead by example on delivering shared parental leave.

“Men struggle to ask for flexible working and employers need to remember that men have children also.”

- Disabled women: more likely to be unemployed; not enough jobs for people with learning difficulties; disabled people can feel trapped in the benefit system; need more support to navigate benefit system and find employment; easy read guidance needs to be produced; barriers to accessing education need to be addressed.

- Social care provision: commissioning is preventing social enterprises or small organisations from being considered.

- Women and the green skills agenda: need a green skills strategy that is gender inclusive; needs to be equality impact assessed; a move to a low carbon economy must deliver for women as well as men.

- Women and enterprise: for some setting up their own business can be the only option following redundancy; women face more barriers; informal support is filling gaps.

“There aren't enough jobs for people with learning difficulties. We’re not seen as capable which makes us trapped in the benefits system.”