

# WOMEN'S INFORMATION SERVICE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

## Transcript of Interview with Liana Buchanan

**Interviewee: Liana Buchanan**

**Interviewer: Liz Ahern**

**Date: 13th November 2017**

**[00:00:01]**

**AHERN:** This is an interview with Liana Buchanan on the 13th of November 2017 held in the State Library. Also present with the recording equipment is Ruth Munro. This interview is part of the Women's History Project of the Women's Information Service. Please tell me your name and a brief overview of when and where you were born and grew up.

**BUCHANAN:** I'm Liana Buchanan and I was born in the early seventies in Scotland, in Dundee, and moved to Australia when I was half way through High School and after that grew up in Adelaide.

**AHERN:** Beautiful! When did you start working and/or volunteering at the Women's Information Service?

**BUCHANAN:** So I started volunteering at the Women's Information Service, and it would have just become the Women's Information Service, I think, in early 1996. I can't remember exactly how long I volunteered for, but later in 1996 I had the opportunity to apply for an Information Officer position and then started working there part-time over the next couple of years until 1998.

**AHERN:** So when you were volunteering, in what capacity? Were you a Uni. student or something in those days?

**BUCHANAN:** I'd finished Uni. and the Women's Information Service was really, now that I think about it in hindsight, really important for me. I'd finished Uni. and I'd been very involved in activism and feminist politics and student politics at Uni. I'd studied politics and law, but by the time I got to the end of my degree I wasn't all that sure that I wanted to be a lawyer. I couldn't see that many ways in which I thought that I could fit in and work in a way that was true to my values, which included my feminist values. I took myself up north and I worked on an Aboriginal community for a little while as a teacher's aide, of all things, and almost went off to study to be a teacher, but came back to Adelaide just to think things through one last time. So really at that point in time, that's when I started volunteering at the Women's Information Service. Suffice to say, I never ended up going to study education and becoming a teacher, and the Women's Information Service and that volunteering work and then that paid work really started to let me see how I could use some of what I knew, some of my skills in a way that was a good fit for me.

**AHERN:** And how do you think --- Can you remember how you first heard about the Women's Information Service or Switchboard or whatever it was?

**BUCHANAN:** I have a good, strong feminist Mum, so I strongly suspect, and I think she knew the woman who was coordinating or managing WIS at the time, so I suspect that it was through my Mum, but in all honesty I can't, I can't remember.

**[00:03:15]**

**AHERN:** Often you can't remember the details of how long. So how long do you think you worked there?

**BUCHANAN:** Look so I think that I worked there, certainly until 1998. So I think in total it was about two years that I was involved at WIS.

**AHERN:** So and where was the organisation located back in those days?

**BUCHANAN:** So when I started, as I say, I think probably just the year before, it had moved from being Switchboard to the Women's Information Service, but it was still at the corner of Kintore Avenue and North Terrace so just around the corner. I don't know what that is now, but I know with some consternation they were going to turn it into a Donald Bradman Museum after the Women's Information Service moved. So when I started we were there and I can remember that environment quite vividly, even though it's twenty odd years ago, with the phone-room and the phones set up and just a few, a few computers for people to work on. And of course whilst I was there, so during that period, the service moved to its first shopfront location which was in the Arcade that is just the other side of the train station in Adelaide.

**AHERN:** Station Arcade is that right?

**BUCHANAN:** Thank you. That's what it's called.

**AHERN:** Is that what it's called? I'm trying to remember.

**BUCHANAN:** Yes, Station Arcade. That sounds right. So yes, while I was there we moved to that location, which was a really big change. I certainly, I mean I feel like I probably came into the Service just after there had been quite a lot of change and there was still a lot of change whilst I was there. I certainly had a feeling --- I had a feeling that there had been some aspects of that that hadn't all been smooth or hadn't all been positive from everybody's point of view. I still don't know much about that, other than I can kind of imagine an organisation's shift, as many grass roots organisations have, over the years and shifted and become closer to government or more clearly a part of government, which I think was what was happening with the Women's Information Service. That's not always an easy ride. So I really --- I had a sense that certainly some of the women who had been involved had moved away, had a bit of a sense that we'd probably lost something in that, but I don't know exactly what. And for me

and the other women who got involved in WIS at the same time, it was still an incredible environment, an incredible organisation. Moving to the new shopfront location felt very, very different but I think there is no question that time it certainly got the word out about WIS to a much broader range of women. Just the very fact that women would be coming up, all ages, all demographics, coming up from the train station and they'd see this place, so I think there were certainly, there were certainly some benefits from the move. They might not have seen those for a while.

**[00:06:28]**

**AHERN:** Oh change is always tricky.

**BUCHANAN:** Yep.

**AHERN:** People do all respond differently to change and it can be quite tricky. Okay when you were working as an Information Officer, tell me what kind of things you were doing. What was your sort of normal week like?

**BUCHANAN:** Yeah. I suppose the main part of the role, certainly when I was a volunteer and still of course when I was a paid worker, was to respond to calls or contacts. When we moved, particularly, we got far more women just coming into the Service and asking questions. But a lot of the work was still answering, answering phone calls from women who had the most incredible array of questions, who were in the most incredible mix of situations and needed information or help with all kinds of things. So that was, that was a really significant part of the role.

And then certainly as a paid worker it was my role to work with the volunteers and train up the volunteers and supervise the volunteers. The whole time that I was there and as far as I can tell since, WIS has managed to attract a really kind of healthy number and mix of volunteers. I used to love the mix of volunteers. I used to love the women. I remember there

were a couple of women who were volunteering when I started as a volunteer, and they volunteered for years and years and years and then there were others who were younger, newer women coming in at the same time and that kind of mix, I have to say, continued whilst I was there. That was always fantastic. So working with the volunteers, training them up, supporting them when they were on the phones or helping women out who had walked in was part of what I did.

Some of the other things that I remember doing there --- I find it hard to imagine now, but I learnt HTML and I learnt how to do some very, very simple Internet web page design and I had to maintain the web page. It was the very early days of the ---

**AHERN:** Internet.

**BUCHANAN:** Internet And so part of our job was to work out what that meant for the Service. Part of my job was, for a while, before better people got on to it, was to keep the web page up to date and keep developing it and then also to teach or support women who wanted to come in and learn how to use the Internet, this new thing. So that was part of the job. And then I remember the other part of the job that I loved was getting out to different gatherings where women were and either talking to them about some of the issues that we would get a lot of contacts about at the Service, or just being there running stalls and so on. So whether it was a young women's music festival or actually just a music festival targeted at young people, or a rural women's gathering, I remember going out and about with other staff from WIS talking to other groups of women about some of the issues that women face.

**AHERN:** So who were the other staff who were there, roughly then? Can you remember any one?

**[00:09:46]**

**BUCHANAN:** I'm going to be terrible at this. In fact you've had me, this has had me just wracking my brain for names ---

**AHERN:** So can you think ----

**BUCHANAN:** I can remember so many faces.

**AHERN:** Right. Yes. Well you've been busy since, so it's understandable.

**BUCHANAN:** I don't know that that's an excuse.

**AHERN:** Can you remember if Switchboard, well Service, still had specific Greek or Italian or German or Vietnamese or ---?

**BUCHANAN:** There was a Vietnamese woman.

**AHERN:** Lien. Yes, that was Lien, Nguyen-Navas.

**BUCHANAN:** Yes, that was Lien. Thank you. Excellent.

**AHERN:** Was there still a Greek worker in those days?

**BUCHANAN:** Ooh!

**AHERN:** There was a series of Greek workers. Nicky [Dimitropoulos], Stella [Hellander] ---.

**BUCHANAN:** Stella. Stella, Stella, Stella had, I think she'd just, maybe she'd just finished as I started, but she was still an incredibly --- it was interesting actually, because I had forgotten her, because she didn't work there at the same time as me for long, if at all, but she had a really strong presence in the place. People would talk about her a lot and there were lots of photos of her that I must have come across, so she must have come in, or I had spoken to her. So I remember Stella.

**AHERN:** Yeah ok, you can't remember who was the Coordinator in those days?

**BUCHANAN:** Yes. So Margaret Porter was the Coordinator when I first came in. Yes, I remember Margaret. Look I remember there were some

other women who started around the same time as me. Helen and Gerry and I think because we started and we were trained together we became great mates for a while. There was a woman called Sarah Marshall.

**AHERN:** Oh, I remem --- I know Sarah.

**BUCHANAN:** Yes, so Sarah was there and in fact I ended up sharing a house, as a housemate with Sarah. So it was the birthplace of some really nice friendships, I recall as well. Rene.

**AHERN:** Rene was a Spanish worker. Rene Weal.

**BUCHANAN:** Rene Weal. So Rene, I have been trying to remember Rene's surname all day. Rene, just to me she really epitomized what the Women's Information Service was about. She was I rememb --- hopefully still is, I'm sure still is, but I just remember her as being so warm and so inclusive and so generous with what she knew. She just absolutely, practised isn't the right word, she just was, she was the kind of the, the inclusive, positive supportive feminist values that I think the Service tried to, tried to espouse and live up to, and Rene just lived it. She just was. I have --- I can't think of her name without getting a fantastic big smile on my face.

**[00:12:25]**

**AHERN:** Lovely. What about the Aboriginal worker? Who was the Aboriginal worker in your day?

**BUCHANAN:** I don't think there was one ---

**AHERN:** Was there one? Was Tanya Hosch there yet?

**BUCHANAN:** Tanya had finished. No ---

**AHERN:** She had finished.

**BUCHANAN:** Or maybe she hadn't started Well I don't know, I don't ---

**AHERN:** Because to my knowledge there was, Jo Willmot was there the earliest ---

**BUCHANAN:** Yes.

**AHERN:** Aboriginal worker ---

**BUCHANAN:** Yes she was there ---

**AHERN:** and then there was Dot Casey and Margaret Elliott and then Jo came back for a while and then eventually Tanya Hosch came along and she made a huge contribution while she was there.

**BUCHANAN:** Yeah, I'm sure.

**AHERN:** But I'm not sure what happened after that. I was overseas and I lost track so I just wondered, because I know Sarah Marshall and Tanya Hosch are close friends, that's why I wondered if you were there at a similar time.

**BUCHANAN:** Tanya, no. Tanya had definitely ---.

**AHERN:** So she'd gone.

**BUCHANAN:** She had gone. So Sarah was there, I don't know how long before I was, but Tanya, Tanya certainly wasn't there. In fact I don't even know that I knew she worked at Women's Information Service.

**AHERN:** Is that right.

**BUCHANAN:** She's gone on to achieve incredible things since then, hasn't she? So yes, I don't, I don't remember there being an Aboriginal worker. In fact as I was thinking of this, this project and this interview I was, I was thinking, "Why was that? What on earth happened?" So it may well have been that for whatever reason there was no Aboriginal worker at the time that I was there.

**AHERN:** Because that was one of the strengths for me, coming from a very WASP [White Anglo-Saxon Protestant] background myself, working in such a multicultural environment. And it was one of the first organisations, that

I am aware of, where there were designated workers from different multicultural backgrounds to provide specific services and those radio programs were very important.

**BUCHANAN:** Yes, they must have been. They must have been.

**AHERN:** So I wondered about that, in your time when you were there, were those radio programs still going, did you know of?

**BUCHANAN:** No, they'd finished. They'd finished.

**AHERN:** They'd all finished, okay.

**BUCHANAN:** Yes, so I think by the time I must have come in some of those workers must have finished up, but not all because I remember Rene very, very well and Lien, but I don't remember there being a designated worker after that.

**AHERN:** OK. Fine. So tell us about the sort of --- the ethos ---

**BUCHANAN:** Yeah

**AHERN:** And the cultural, you said it was a feminist sort of approach, of feminist values.

**[00:15:01]**

**BUCHANAN:** Yeah it was clear --- you know it was --- as I say when I came in it was clearly an organisation that had --- what is the best way to put it? It had begun some changes and I think the impression I had was that there'd been some pretty robust conversation about what it meant to be a feminist organisation. So I knew that and I knew enough, I mean I been ---I had been around feminist activists and grass root feminist organisations enough to understand what some of that controversy, or contention might be about. So I remember having that in my mind. For me going in very fresh, and I was only twenty four or so I think, I still found it a really, really positive environment. So it was clearly still an explicitly feminist

organisation, there composing and consisting just of women, there to help women and I found it very --- I found it very, I found it very supportive, very very inclusive for everyone who was there and certainly it was still an organisation that I think went to great lengths to try and make sure it was inclusive for all kinds of women coming to the organisation.

**AHERN:** So trying to reach out.

**BUCHANAN:** Absolutely.

**AHERN:** To a great range of women.

**BUCHANAN:** Absolutely. Absolutely. It was fun. I remember having a sense of it was an organisation where often we were talking to women who were having a really difficult time, so there would be some really difficult days, or difficult calls. I remember that it had been very clear about understanding that part of our job, whether we were volunteers or workers, was to support the others working there after they'd had a difficult call. Or even when they were on a call and they were struggling. So it was very, very clear that if you were struggling to work out how to really support a woman on the phone you could just talk to her about it, put her on hold and then reach out to your colleagues, cos your colleagues might have come across this before or they might just know a bit of information you didn't have. So that was --- there was just no question about that. That was absolutely understood it was the way that you worked. So yeah, so so just, you know we, we dealt with some really hard, hard issues and talked to women in sometimes very awful, and for them frightening situations and we could also have a laugh. We could also have you know a bit of fun and you know have a good giggle at something silly as well.

**AHERN:** You need to do that. To break that tension sometimes don't you?

**BUCHANAN:** You do. You do. Yes, I think that's right. I think that's right. So that's what I remember of the ethos. It was an absolute given that it was a

feminist organisation, but as I say, I think I came in at an interesting time when the organisation was just kind of re-establishing its own view about what that meant after a fair bit of change.

**[00:18:35]**

**AHERN:** Who was the Director of the Office for the Status of Women then? Have you any idea?

**BUCHANAN:** Yes. It would have been Carmel, Carmel O'Loughlin.

**AHERN:** OK. So that was Carmel's time. Yes.

**BUCHANAN:** Yes and I think that she was still the Director when I finished at Women's Information Service. And indeed, I ended up, some years later for a little while, working at the Office for the Status of Women while Carmel was still there, a few years later.

**AHERN:** Yes, I thought I remembered you being in Policy there for a while.

**BUCHANAN:** Yes, I was.

**AHERN:** OK. What about the relationship between the Office for Women and WIS? How do you think that worked? Looking back now from both your perspectives of having worked in the Office and having worked at WIS.

**BUCHANAN:** That's a good question. I remember some of, I remember some of, some of the, some of the women who had been involved with WIS for a long time. There was part of the concern about the change and part of the concern about the relocation was that we were going closer to what was then the Office for the Status of Women. And again I wasn't in all of the conversations, so I don't, I don't know that I know what the specifics of that were, but it was clearly a concern about would this involve government, presumably in an unhelpful way, trying to exercise more influence over the Service. In fact, in practice and again I was pretty low in

the food chain, so there'd be a whole lot of, I'm sure discussions and decisions and dynamics maybe that I wasn't aware of, but actually from my point of view working at WIS back then, we you know we kind of ran the Service just as we did around the corner, but in a very different environment with the shopfront with more space to work with women on the computers and so on. So I certainly had no sense that there was influence or interference. Certainly not negative influence or interference.

**[00:20:39]**

**AHERN:** And did you find when you went to being a Policy Officer that your experience at WIS informed your policy views?

**BUCHANAN:** Absolutely. Look absolutely. I mean I think, I think that's right. And in fact I was at the Women's Legal Service between WIS and the Office for the Status of Women when I was in a policy role, so both of those experiences informed my policy views, but there's just there's no --- but again there's no question that what I'd experienced from talking to such a range of women over a couple of years on the phone often, sometimes face to face, about what was worrying them, what they needed help with, what they were trying to work out, there's no question that that helped me. It put, it put real women's situations, real women's lives and stories into my mind, in a way that then when I came to think about policy questions I couldn't ever forget that policy questions that you were turning your mind to for the purpose of briefing on a Cabinet submission or whatever, every one of those policy decisions, every one of those pieces of policy work, ultimately impacted real women and sometimes in a really significant way. So I had their voices and sometimes their faces in my mind as a result.

**AHERN:** Yes, I found that too. OK. I just wanted to ask you about the Legal Service. Was it still on a Saturday afternoon in your days or had Saturdays gone, or was it an evening service? There used to be, back in my day when

it began, there was a Saturday afternoon legal time and lawyers from all over Adelaide used to come in and volunteer their time ---

**BUCHANAN:** So I yes ----

**AHERN:** and provide legal advice, and there was a specific time that was when you rang in for legal advice, because that's when we knew we had lawyers. So was that still happening in your time or had it changed?

**BUCHANAN:** I think it might have changed, because at around the same time the Women's Legal Service had begun. So it had, it had opened probably in 1996, I'm thinking, or thereabouts, so I think that it might have already --- I honestly can't remember. I certainly can't remember any specific sessions at WIS. That might be just because I've got a bad memory.  
[Laugh]

**AHERN:** So your legal training wasn't sort of seized upon as an advantage at that time, or you are not sure?

**BUCHANAN:** I don't know. I don't know if anyone felt that's useful that someone has a bit of legal background. Although, as you would know Liz, when you've come fresh out of Uni. and you haven't done any practice yet, your legal knowledge arguably isn't worth very much to the women who are calling in. I do remember, so what I do remember really clearly is that a really high number of the calls that we would get from women were women who knew that they wanted legal help and just didn't know where to get it, or who ultimately had legal issues. So I do remember that a lot of the work that I did on the phone with women was about teasing out the issues that they had. They might not know what was a legal issue and what was a non-legal issue, but I remember spending a lot of time trying to work through what they were describing, so that I could give them good information about which were the legal issues that they might need to speak to a lawyer about and where they could go to for that, and how I

could help them with that and which were the non-legal issues. So in hindsight maybe some of my legal training helped with that, maybe not, but I do remember a huge number of the phone calls were actually legal issues.

**[00:24:32]**

**AHERN:** Me too.

**BUCHANAN:** A huge number. So certainly, given where I went on to work, that was an incredible, incredible benefit, because of course I ended up working at the Women's Legal Service, where we had telephone advice lines, we had ---.

**AHERN:** Where the phones used to get switched through, I believe.

**BUCHANAN:** That's right. You've got better knowledge than I have and a good memory, Liz. I've forgotten.

**AHERN:** I remember, I only remember that because I was at the meeting that set up the Women's Legal Service.

**BUCHANAN:** Ah, there you go.

**AHERN:** Then I was at the Legal Service Commission and I went to the original meeting saying, yes there should be such an organisation and we knew, because of the needs of, and I knew from my past experience at Switchboard that those women needed an outlet and there needed to be a women's service because Community Legal Services, wonderful though they were, couldn't specify that they only were working for women. And there were some domestic violence perpetrators out there who went to every single service across South Australia to provide a conflict situation so that their ex-partner, or current partner could not get any free legal advice. And that was one of the reasons why some of us felt that it was vital for a

Women's Legal Service to get set up. So that probably happened around the time that you were---

**BUCHANAN:** It was about the same time. I think that's right. I think the Women's Legal Service opened around the same time that I started at WIS. So I think that's right, I imagine, because certainly Women's Legal Service had lots of fantastic women lawyers helping out in a volunteer capacity on the phones, after hours as well as sometimes during the week, and so I suspect it was --- there was an arrangement to move over with that. It's interesting though that the issues around perpetrators going to every single community legal centre and every single legal service and if it's in a country town every lawyer, private lawyer to conflict out a woman so she can't get help. But that hasn't changed.

**AHERN:** No. I know. But having a Women's Legal Service does help a little bit.

**BUCHANAN:** It does. No, no, absolutely I agree entirely.

**[00:26:51]**

**AHERN:** Yes, it's interesting isn't it? It does make you think that things haven't changed and the fact that you are here for a talk on domestic violence, when domestic violence was such a huge part of WIS's work always from the very earliest days ---

**BUCHANAN:** From the very beginning ---

**AHERN:** right through to now I'm sure. It's still a big topic there today and although it's more clearly spoken about in the media it's still a huge issue to be overcome, isn't it?

**BUCHANAN:** Look I think that's right. You know again when I think about the kinds of issues that women would call in about twenty years ago, we are talking about, I don't know, I don't know that they are any different

than the issues I imagine women call in today about. Certainly they are absolutely consistent with the issues that I know are still pressing issues for many, many women, far too many women and domestic violence is, as you say, it might be more recognized as a problem, but there are still many, many, many, many women who are only just finding themselves able to reach out and get some help.

**AHERN:** Yes. There are still some of them quite trapped still. I was thinking that the Women's Legal Service is one of the services that grew out of WIS. The other one that's really clear to me, that you may or may not have had an experience with, was the Welfare Rights Centre. That grew out of WIS too.

**BUCHANAN:** Aah. I didn't know that. I didn't know that.

**AHERN:** Yes. One of the workers, Maggie Martinelli, she later set up the Women's --- the Welfare Rights Centre, so that grew directly out of the services she was providing at WIS and her specialist knowledge about dealing with Social Security. And sadly the Welfare Rights Centre has now closed. I think it's going to be taken over by one of the charities, but I haven't heard any more details on that. So I think that's very sad.

**BUCHANAN:** I had heard that. I watched some of what was happening to Community Legal Centres in South Australia from Victoria. I watched and I was worried for a while about Women's Legal Service, to be honest. I am pleased that that has survived but I think the loss of some of the specialization is indeed a great loss.

**[00:29:21]**

**AHERN:** I do too. OK. So we've covered a lot of different topics. Can you --- what are the kind of women's organisations, community organisations that you had contact with? I know I was on lobby groups of various sorts and

inter-agency committees. Were you doing that kind of work in your role as a paid staff member?

**BUCHANAN:** I don't know that we called them lobby groups when we were there, on behalf of the WIS. By the time I started I suspect not. But there were lots of inter-agency groups. I remember, I remember having a lot to do with different women's health centres. I remember partly through my work at Women's Information Service and partly in a volunteer capacity, being involved in different organisations or collaborations of organisations that were getting together, say to campaign against the end of violence or violence against women and so on. I remember we had a lot to do with Working Women's Centre. The Working Women's Centre of course was kind of a fantastic referral point for all of these incredibly complicated employment law and industrial relations law issues that women would call up with, that for all my legal training I had absolutely no idea how to answer. So yes, I remember, I remember the sense of there was a good strong network of different women's organisations there to work with on both specific women's issues, in terms of the issues that were affecting individual women, but also on some of the bigger policy issues that were affecting women more broadly.

**[00:31:15]**

**AHERN:** Were you involved with any of the phone-ins?

**BUCHANAN:** I think they were before my time.

**AHERN:** They were before your time too.

**BUCHANAN:** Yes, I think so. I think so. I missed out on some of the good bits I think. I had some good bits. Don't get me wrong.

**AHERN:** Some of them were fun. Yes, some of them were fun.

**BUCHANAN:** Don't get me wrong. I had some of the good bits as well.

**AHERN:** So have you got any other comments about the importance of WIS as an organisation and what impact you think it had on you and your career and your --- where you've ended up and what's happened in your life? Do you think it had any effect? Is there anything you would like to sort of talk about in terms of your experiences of working there when you were quite a young person?

**BUCHANAN:** Oh look I just, I really do think, I described before that I was, I was at a bit of a crossroads. I'd finished Uni., I knew I didn't want to be a lawyer in the way I saw lots of my former fellow students being lawyers and that was the point at which I went to volunteer and then work at WIS. WIS really gave me, first of all it gave me skills. It gave me experience in communicating with people and working with women who are in all different states of distress, or not, and working in a way that could support those women with some information that they needed and enough for them to work out what next steps they needed to take. So it really, it really helped develop some of those really practical skills that you need if you are going to go out into the workforce, whether as a lawyer or working directly with people in any other way.

It also gave me that sense that no, there are organisations where I can work in a particular way, whether giving information or as I went on to do, giving legal advice, without me feeling like I'm compromising my values and in fact, in a way that I can feel like I'm absolutely living my values and contributing to something that I want to be part of. I've been really lucky in the work that I've been able to do since then. I've done a lot of work reviewing the family violence legislation in Victoria for example with the Law Reform Commission. Getting some of that new legislation enacted when I worked for the Victorian Attorney General for a while. I've been able to draw, in lots of those later roles, on some of that, some of that knowledge that I gained, some of that experience I first gained at the Women's Information Service. I do think some of that grounding in issues

that impact women right across, in this case, South Australia, and understanding what that means to individual women, I think that grounding really, really helped me. It certainly helped confirm for me that whatever I do in my life I want to go on to try and improve not only the laws but broader systems, not only for women but for anyone who experiences disadvantage and discrimination, or who doesn't have a voice in this community and that's taken me on an interesting journey and as I say I feel lucky to have had the journey I've had and now I'm Victoria's Commissioner for Children and Young People, really getting to speak out on behalf of some of the people in our community who really have least voice.

**[00:35:24]**

**AHERN:** Thank you. The other question I wanted to ask just before we finish up, is for me, when we started, because I'm an original volunteer, training was really important and we used to go off on these wonderful training camps. What kind of training was provided in your time?

**BUCHANAN:** So we didn't have training camps but I do remember there was a really strong focus on training. I think, I remember the sense that the whole Service, the people who were managing it, all of the paid staff and all of the volunteers, we knew that picking up a call from a woman was no small thing and that women who were going to be on the phones, receiving those calls, needed to have really good information about how to work with the women on the other end of the line. They needed to have good information about how to work through those issues and needed to have access to information about what the other sources of support might be. So I remember there being quite a lot of training modules, I'm sure they weren't called modules, but training sessions about different aspects of the work and then I remember for a long time after we started volunteering, we were initially listening in to other paid workers as they were on the

phones and then we would take calls with someone else, sitting literally sitting next to us helping us out.

**AHERN:** So there was a mentoring sort of program.

**BUCHANAN:** Absolutely. Absolutely. So I remember, you know again I was twenty four or so, and I knew that it was a significant thing that I was doing, but I remember feeling very, again supported, very, very supported by the people around me so that when I was going to pick up the phone and start talking to a woman about whatever help she needed, or whatever she was calling about, if I was struggling with that at all, or if I just had any doubt at all that what I was about to say was the right thing for that woman then I could just check with a colleague.

**AHERN:** Yes, that's very important. So are there any other things you wish to comment on, because I know an interview like this raised a whole lot of issues for me afterwards. I thought of all these other things I could have said. Is there anything else you'd like to say about your time at WIS?

**BUCHANAN:** It was, I remember my time at WIS really fondly. That's why I was really, really pleased to get the contact about this project. Compared to some women who've worked or volunteered at WIS for years and years, I think my contribution is small and I know that, but anything that I could do in that time, whatever that was, I think I benefited tenfold because I really do remember learning such a huge amount, both from the women on the end of the phone or the women contacting us and also from the other staff and volunteers and I feel like if I were advising myself at twenty four I'd say absolutely get in there and do it. It's one of the best experiences you will have.

**[00:39:05]**

**AHERN:** Thank you. So I think that covers what we'd like to talk about and if you want to send us some photographs we would be truly grateful.

**BUCHANAN:** Sure. OK. Very good. I will do what I can.

**AHERN:** Thank you very much Ruth for managing the equipment.

**BUCHANAN:** Yes.

**[00:39:21]**

**END OF INTERVIEW**

**NOTE:** In the interview the Women's Information Service and its earlier name of Women's Information Switchboard will be referred to by the acronym WIS.