

WFP UK Young Women's Speech Contest regional Contest in Birmingham

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The WFP UK Young Women's Speech Contest has been held in London each year since 2015. This year, it was decided to hold regional contests in several UK branches, with the regional winners going to London for a national final in October.

Seven young women presented their speeches in Birmingham, in front of an audience of around 90 women, which included a panel of 4 judges. Zahraa, Wiam, Viola, Batool, Ravi, Bahja and Celina each had 8 minutes to present their thoughts on the topic in question: Career, Marriage, Motherhood and I.

Some of the main points in their presentations are as follows:

Zahraa spoke of marriage, family and motherhood. She highlighted the sexualisation of our western society, and how this is linked to 3 of the most common mental health issues in girls and young women: eating disorders, low self-esteem and depression. She compared this to the situation of South Lebanon, a relatively conservative, religious society, where she spent three months, and where women are much more productive and valued members of society, and where marriage is also highly valued.

Wiam, married with 3 children, said she felt fortunate with her career, grateful for her marriage and blessed with her children, partly as a result of being encouraged by her own parents to stay positive, be honest, transparent, and compassionate. She has found balancing career and marriage to be tough, and getting support from her husband, family and close friends a key factor. Also, not expecting perfection from her husband, and humbly admitting to her own faults. She described the topic as being at the core of what makes her who she is today. "Happiness isn't always getting what you want, and need, all the time; it's about loving what you have, and being grateful for it."

Viola, single and a student, confessed to being at the start of her career, and having no experience yet of marriage or children. But with several "amazing people" who have already been an inspiration, including her own mother, who sat by her bedside day and night in hospital when she had to have back surgery. She hopes to have a career in music, find her "Mr. Darcy," and build a family together. She also recognised the need to love oneself sufficiently, in order to be able to invest love into her marriage, family and career.

Batool spoke about the central importance of marriage and family in a healthy society, and the negative impact on this of celebrity culture, sexualisation and divorce in our current society. She discussed the crucial role which women have in raising their own children, and on future generations. While believing that women are essential in the workforce, she felt that her career should never come at the expense of family welfare and stability, that raising children is an art, and the role of both mother and wife is one that no-one else can fulfill.

Ravi saw her 2nd generation Sikh parents achieve success at College and University level, and break free from the cycle of manual labour. She followed in their footsteps, becoming a solicitor - through imagining her future, always preparing well, and persevering to realise her vision, things she would emphasise to any aspiring young woman. In thinking about having children, and balancing family life and career, she spoke of the urgent need to close the gender pay gap, and for the state to better support new mothers.



Bahja, our youngest participant, highlighted the great sacrifices which her Somali parents had made, and how their pursuit of work, and their struggle to maintain a strong family had then allowed her to pursue her education, career and path in life, with a sense of value and gratitude. She spoke of the love, compassion, care and kindness she had received from her own mother, her role model, and the most blessed relationship which exists between them.

Celina, as a result of her father and mother both having serious illnesses, became their carer while in her mid-teens. This meant she had to give up her dreams, and any thoughts of career or marriage, and even her own identity to some extent. After her mother died, and her father went into full-time care, she quickly married and found purpose in caring for her husband, in-laws and 4 children. After divorcing nine years later, she finally found the need to care for herself, and could forge a career while looking after her 4 boys, realising that we can only properly give to others when "our own cup is full."

Following the 7 presentations, there was a 20 minute musical interlude while the four judges discussed together and made their decision - Maureen, a lay preacher and hospital chaplain; Mitty, the UK President of WFWP; Noshaba, a lawyer and retired headteacher, and Nila, a senior social worker and youth mentor in her Hindu temple.

Nutan Dulai, our excellent MC for the evening, called the meeting back to order, and handed over to the judges who announced third prize (£30) to Viola Dirnhofer, second prize (£50) to Celina Hanif, and first prize (£70) to Ravi

Basra. After presenting these three with their certificates, runners up certificates and vouchers (£20) were presented to Batool, Bahja, Wiam and Zahraa. All the speeches were well thought out, and nicely presented, so it was not easy to choose the winners, but as the overall winner Ravi will travel down to London to speak in the national final on October 5th in London.

Everyone seemed to enjoy the evening, and all went well, considering this is the first time we have held such an event of this nature in Birmingham, We would like to thank all the contestants for their efforts, the judges for their contribution, Nutan for being such a good MC, and everyone who supported this wonderful occasion.

Reported by Patricia Earle
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