

COFFEE *Talk*

By **Patty Pizziola, ROSE Program Manager**

Recently, I have heard a lot of talk about communication and the importance of information getting to WI Members. I found myself in many interesting and insightful conversations, in which I was conveying the same message. "FWIO is communicating with WI Members more than we ever have". We work hard to ensure clear, consistent messaging is transmitted to all Members. We send out more information, more frequently than we have in the past, yet many WI Members are saying they're not getting the message.

I asked "where is the communication breakdown?" The answers varied among Members I spoke with – geographic challenges, unclear definitions of roles and responsibilities, different expectations around what information needs to be passed along and volunteer exhaustion were at the top of the list. If this sounds like your Branch, it is time to take things into your own hands! Host a brainstorming session and talk about your own communications strategy. Come up with a plan that will work for your own Branch.

Another area of concern is e-mail. Why do we need it? Just like the television and the telephone before them, e-mail and the Internet are here to stay. According to a study (Internet Use and Social and Civic Participation) I just read on the Stats Can website, "many are using the World Wide Web in ways that facilitate social and civic participation, such as making contact with others and finding out about their communities." As we think about the future of WI and the women we want to recruit, we need to recognize that many of these women have been working outside the home, they are computer and internet savvy. They are also busier than ever and need things to be done efficiently. If we can't meet those needs, they will find another organization that can. In a recent article on Canada.com, Shannon Proudfoot states "Boomers, defined by Statistics Canada as those aged 45 to 64, are more likely than their older counterparts to surf for fun or download music, but more seniors age 65 and up play online games." She also notes that "e-mail is by far the most popular online activity for both groups, with 88 per cent of Boomer Internet users and 90 per cent of online seniors using it."

E-mail messages and the Internet allow FWIO to reach people easily and immediately. There are times when information needs to get to you before the next meeting – so we send you an e-mail. It saves the cost of purchasing paper, envelopes, postage and the human resources required to do a paper mailing to 500 Branches. And what about the environmental impact of sending all that paper in a hard copy mailing? (Remember the Going Green challenge issued to Members after the last provincial conference.)

I recognize not all WI Members are comfortable or even able to use e-mail, which is why we strive to maintain a combination of traditional communication methods like hard-copy mailings, letters, and newsletters mixed with new technologies like E-Updates, and website posts. With such a large group of Members with varying skill levels, we are constantly looking for effective ways to address concerns while meeting the needs of our Members. As technology continues to change and new opportunities arise, I am sure WI Members will try to adapt and develop new and exciting ways to communicate with each other. If your Branch is interested in improving communication, here are some questions to get your brainstorm session moving: Who will share the information received? How will it be shared? How will we determine what needs to be shared? How can Branch Members access information that is not shared at each meeting?

Need help? Have questions? Patty can be reached at the FWIO Provincial Office or via email at roseprogram@fwio.on.ca.

