



The One-in-Five Scheme

"WRVS One in Five Talk

With the full approval of the Home Office, specially trained and authorised WRVS speakers give information about:

*the effects of nuclear explosion and how they could be lessened by ordinary precautions take before and after in the home."*¹



WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/P/CD/OIF002, One in Five Introductory Talk, Headquarters, November 1958 (c) Crown Copyright.

¹ WRVS, 810/1/1, One In Five 1964 – 1982, This Scheme is in the National Interest, 1974.

The Cold War which lasted from 1945-1989, brought the fear of nuclear war and use of the Hydrogen Bomb (H-Bomb) into the homes of every Briton. As a response to what was at the time a very real threat the government formed the Civil Defence Corps (which was active 1949-1968), a civilian volunteer organisation, trained to take action in the aftermath of a nuclear attack. While members of the Civil Defence Corps (of which the WVS made up the Welfare Section) knew what to do if the worst should ever come the population at large did not have this advantage. The natural anxiety and fear people had of the power of nuclear weapons precipitated the need for information talks on how to cope in the event of a disaster.² The WVS was an obvious choice to undertake such a task and with the approval of the Home Office the One-in-Five department was established in July 1955. It was headed by Lady Lucas-Tooth, one of the of the WVS's original committee who had so successfully seen the organisation through the horrors of the Second World War. Their aim was to teach one in five women what to do in the event of a nuclear attack; the name derived from the ambition to give talks to three million women (one fifth of Britain's adult female population). Although sounding daunting this was considered a realistic goal, particularly if women who heard the talks passed on the information to friends and neighbours.

The Talks

1956-1959

To achieve the aims of the One-in-Five Scheme the WVS originally ran three talks on nuclear strikes and the actions women should take if they occurred. Each of the talks covered different topics including: *How to protect your home and your Family*; *How you would be cared for – How to be independent* and *How to care for a sick person*. They were titled talks A, B and C respectively; the first two were given by WVS members and the third by a nurse or medical group such as St. John Ambulance Service.

Talk A covered how to mitigate the effects of the H-bomb. It explained what would happen if the bomb fell and the hazards including fire, gamma radiation, fallout and blast. Audiences were informed about what to do if the hazards occurred. In the case of fire for instance it was recommended that people should “remove inflammable material from attics and shods [sheds]”.³

Talk B recapped the H-Bombs effects and then aimed to illustrate the dos and don'ts in the event of a nuclear attack. The form of help available from Civil Defence was discussed. Finally

² WRVS, 810/1/1, Publications One In Five 1964 – 1982, Memorandum, nd

³ WRVS, 809/1/1, Publications One In Five 1955-1963, One-in-Five Talks, Speakers Notes, December 1955

the speaker informed the audience on how they could be independent, as help might not be available straight away.

Talk C stressed the importance of taking a full Home Nursing Course in case help could not come straight away if a nuclear disaster ever occurred. A nursing course was not given within the talk itself as its aim was to outline the dos and don'ts when giving basic care to a patient, what records to keep on the patient and how to follow the doctor or nurse's advice.

Trailer talks were also given and lasted five to twenty five minutes. They aimed to advertise the One-in-Five scheme. WVS/WRVS members who were not trained speakers were encouraged to attend these talks as well as talks A, B and C.

1959 onwards

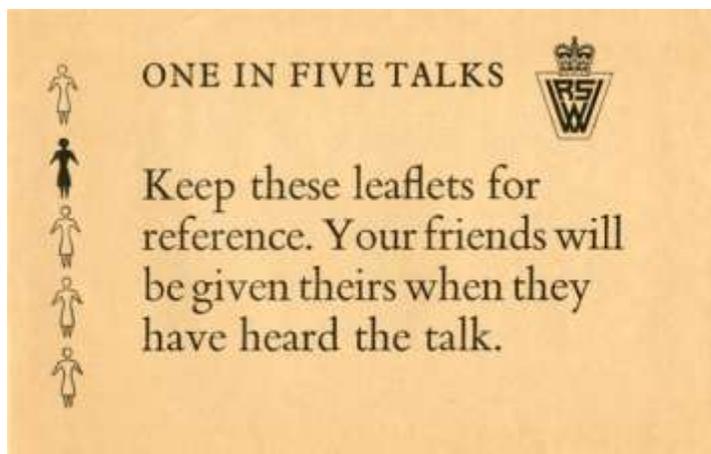
From 1959 the talks were changed into a one hour session or two forty five minute sessions. These sessions covered the information originally given in talks A and B. Talk C was given as an additional session if required though its importance was emphasised. The contents of these sessions included: indications of danger, damages, fallout and preparing a refuge room, when to take action and how to prepare. Talks could vary depending on the speakers and information available. In some cases speakers built example refuge rooms to show people and to accompany the talks. One member wrote an article in the WVS Bulletin about her success in using a refuge room to get the message across.

"So this time, to make it more interesting, I decided to have a demonstration refuge room ... for two weeks. ... For the last few days the house has been full of people hearing the talks and seeing the room. So much so that my husband remarked rather sourly that it was all very well trying to save others in the future, but that in the meantime he was starving to death".⁴

The Home Office Film *Advice to Householders* was shown during talks in 1963. In some cases the talks were met with reluctance and obstacles such as language barriers. In 1963 talks were also given in French and Spanish by WVS members.

In 1968 the government placed Civil Defence Corps on a care and maintenance basis. Planning for action in the aftermath of a nuclear attack continued though training did not. The One-in-Five Scheme became the only way for people to be informed about what to do in the event of a nuclear disaster.

⁴ WVS Bulletin, *How Did I Manage Without a Refuge Room?*, No.264, January 1962



Envelope used to hand out leaflets on the H-Bomb (WRVS, 809/1/1, WRVS Publications One in Five, envelope, 1966)

Speakers

Members of the WVS who gave the talks were known as Speakers. These speakers had to be authorised by their regional or county offices before they could be involved in the scheme. To be authorised they had to attend a training school or Speakers School. In these schools the trainees were lectured on: the background of Civil Defence; an explanation of the scheme; demonstrations of talks A, B and C; hints and help on preparation for a talk and advice on how to answer questions. Finally a Card of Authenticity had to be achieved. To gain a card of authenticity the trainees had to take a five to six minute practical test which demonstrated their knowledge of Civil Defence and their ability to interest an audience.⁵

Authorised Speakers were given a number of handbooks, leaflets and other literature to aid them with the talks which included: alphabetical guides to use when answering questions. It advised women to quote the ABC for One-in-Five Speakers handbook description or Civil Defence Handbook No10 when asked questions on the warning system.⁶ A public alert system formulated by the British Government during the Cold War. It operated between 1953 and 1992 when the system was dismantled. The name derived from the approximate length of time from the point at which a Soviet nuclear missile attack against the United Kingdom could be confirmed and the impact of those missiles on their targets. The population was to be notified by means of air raid sirens, television and radio, and urged to seek cover immediately. *Hints on One-in-Five* was another booklet produced to help speakers and organisers prepare their talks to run the scheme. Each page of the booklet had small phrases at the top to encourage the organisers such as:

⁵ WRVS, 79/4/1, One-in-Five Policy 1955-1958, Annual report One-in-Five Department, 1956

⁶ WRVS, 810/1/1, Publications One In Five 1964 – 1982, ABC for One-in-Five Speakers, 1970

“Be both flexible and adjustable, Make your energy combustible”.⁷

Other information circulated by the WVS in 1959 included notes on how to give a One-in-Five talk. One piece of advice was:

“Danger of making talk too technical. Stick to the information given. If talk too technical difficult questions are invited.”⁸

The Training of Speakers was very successful and many WVRS members were authorised to give the talks. By 1956 for example 782 speakers were authorised then by 1957 there were 1,053.

Audiences

Speakers had to arrange talks for different audiences so that their centre could reach its targets. The emphasis was to advise the audience rather than to train or recruit them.

“NO RECRUITMENT – NO ENLISTMENT – NO ENROLEMENT”

“All you have to do is to collect a small group of women in your own house. Or you might interest any club or organisation to which you happen to belong. W.V.S. will send speakers to this group, be it ten people or a hundred (but W.V.S prefer the intimacy of a small group).”⁹

⁷ WRVS, 809/1/1, Publications One In Five 1955 – 1963, Hints on One-in-Five, nd

⁸ WRVS, opt cit., How to Prepare and Put Across the One-in-Five Talks, 1959

⁹ WRVS, 809/1/1, Publications One In Five 1955 – 1963, Women’s Voluntary Service For Civil Defence One-In-Five, November 1957.



Bookmark used to advertise One-in-Five. (WRVS, 810/1/1, Publications One In Five 1964 – 1982, Bookmark 1964)



WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/P/CD/OIF007, One in Five Talk at home Office, 3/11/1961, (C) Crown Copyright.

Women

The original target audience for the talks were housewives and women not in groups, work or other organisations. The target audience was then expanded to include: groups of women in their own homes; women's organisations, clubs, guilds and institutes; factories, offices and shops as well as government and local government employees. Men did not count in the figures taken by members for attendance numbers however by 1963 it was reported there had been an increase in male attendance. In one region in 1963 10% of the audience attending the talks were men.

In 1957 the WVS Bulletin encouraged members to arrange One-in-Five meetings through a competition. There was a prize of £10 to the member or centre who got the most original or ingenious group together. The winners were Barnsley WVS for "ingenuity plus courage". The speakers had gone to a laundrette at the same time on three Tuesdays to give the three talks to women waiting for their washing.¹⁰

The WVS/WRVS also aimed to give the talks to girls leaving school. In the North East district of Scotland one member reported in the Bulletin that when she had asked a group of senior school girls what might be needed in a refuge room one girl replied:

*"One male preferably tall, dark and handsome to carry on the race."*¹¹

Narrative Reports and the Bulletin included information on the numbers of people who had heard the talks and which regions, counties and county boroughs had reached their targets. For instance Bootle was the first centre in the North of England to surpass its One-in-Five target of 5,174 by over 300 in 1960.¹² In 1962 the Borough of Westminster reached its target of 8,584. Certificates were awarded for these achievements.

In 1957 across the country 10,000 women had heard all three talks which had been given in 69 counties and 88 county boroughs though no talks had been given in 22 counties and 56 county boroughs. By 1969 1,537,287 women had heard the talks; this was 51% of the WRVS's target audience of 3,000,000.¹³

¹⁰ WVS Bulletin, *One-in-Five Competition*, No 210 July 1957, p.7, No 215 November 1957, p.23

¹¹ WVS Bulletin, *The Survival of the Handsomest*, 1961

¹² WVS Bulletin, *Well Done Bootle*, No 246, July 1960

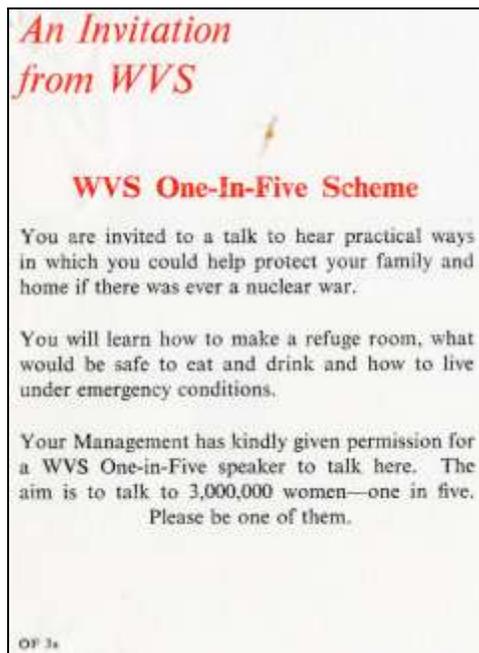
¹³ WRVS Bulletin, *The Outline of The WRVS Work in 1968*, No356, September 1969, p.4

Women's Institute (WI)

The WI's position was that they would give out notices of meetings for talks but they would not arrange them. The WI's constitution stated they could not make preparations for war. Members of the WI however could attend talks arranged by the WVS/WRVS at other meetings. This caused some confusion in October 1958 when the Derbyshire Times published the article *CD Lectures Barred at Meetings*. It claimed that some WVS talks were given at some WI meetings which were not allowed by the WI.¹⁴ It was not made clear however if these actions had broken the premise of the WI's constitution.

Industry

A number of women including those who were married were now working in industry after the Second World War. ICI, the National Coal Board and Unilever were some of the industries which asked for talks to be arranged for their workers. The organisation tried to get bosses to allow the talks to take place during working hours, extended breaks or lunch hours. Speakers tried to avoid having to hold talks after hours. It was thought women might have needed to go straight home after work to take care of their family. Even when talks could be arranged during working hours there were difficulties with getting workers to attend. In 1964 invitations were used to try and increase audience numbers.



An example of the invitations sent out to workers to notify them of One-in-Five talks at their place of work. (WRVS, 810/1/1, One In Five 1964 – 1982, An Invitation from WVS)

¹⁴ The Derbyshire Times, *CD Lectures Barred at Meetings*, 31 October 1958.

The Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE)

Other audiences of the One-in-Five talks also included teenagers and young adults. In 1956 The Duke of Edinburgh Award for Boys was established, The Duke of Edinburgh Award for Girls was then piloted in 1958. The WVS/WRVS had responsibility for helping participants to complete the service section of the award. The organisation provided a syllabus for the voluntary service and help in an emergency section. Girls completed this section by taking part in WVS training and welfare work. Three hours of the service section could be completed through the One-in-Five Scheme. The three hours comprised of two talks and a question and answer session which allowed the WVS/WRVS speaker to engage with the audience asking and answering questions about what to do if there was a nuclear disaster.

Publicity

The One-in-Five Scheme was heavily publicised by the WVS/WRVS through the use of a large amount of literature and ephemera. Outside publicity was also sought though this did not always positive.

WVS/WRVS Advertising and Promotion

Between 1955 and 1982 the WVS/WRVS used a number of methods to advertise the One-in-Five Scheme. These included the Yellow Door Poster which had the original wording:

"Gone to W.V.S. 'One-in-Five' Talks. Back with some idea of how to cope if nuclear war comes"¹⁵

This slogan was later changed after objections to the wording. Stickers to go over the posters read;

"Please come in the W.V.S. needs your help"¹⁶



Stickers used by WVS for the scheme (WRVS, 809/1/1, One In Five 1955 – 1963, Stamps 1961)

¹⁵ WRVS, 85/2/1, Publicity One In Five 1958 – 1965, David Langdon poster 1960

¹⁶ WRVS, 85/2/1, Publicity One In Five 1958 – 1965, Letter Yellow Door Poster, August 1961



A flyer which was used to advertise the One-in-Five Talks, (WRVS, 809/1/1, One In Five 1955 – 1963, Flyer 1961)

Other forms of promotion included a regional One-in-Five Week 8th-13th November 1965. In Region 10 this included sending out letters, letting local industries know and getting members to hear talks. Advertising was done through posters and bookmarks as well as displays of fallout rooms, exhibitions and displays in Gas and Electric showrooms.¹⁷



WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/P/CD/OIF001, Dinah Sheridan, One in five, c.1950, Copyright Unknown.

Dinah Sheridan (actress, Genevieve 1953, The Railway Children 1970) helped to promote the campaign starring in the One-in-Five film *Flash*. The film lasted about 30 seconds, in it she gave a brief explanation of the scheme and asked the audience to contact their local WVS for more information. Dinah Sheridan was also a member of the WVS and a One-in-Five speaker.¹⁸ In April 1960 it was reported in the WVS Bulletin that she had given a talk to the Rank Organisation (a

¹⁷ WRVS, 85/2/1, Publicity One In Five 1958 – 1965, Autumn Campaign, 1965

¹⁸ WVS Bulletin, *On the Cover*, No241, February 1960, p.3

British entertainment company). Also in that issue was a picture of Hylda Baker (comedy actress) and the One-in-Five organiser for Liverpool. It stated that Hylda Baker had “Promised to help One-in-Five anywhere with her pet Chihuahua”.¹⁹

In 1962 a poem was written about the scheme to encourage members to promote it and reach their targets.

Sound Advice

A parody on the poem *To the Virgins to make much of Time*, by Robert Herrick (1591-1674).

Gather your hearers while you may,
Old time is still a-flying
If you don't get them day by day,
You'll be forever trying

For you, unless you look alive
And have your talks in plenty,
Will never get your One-in-Five,
Or even one in twenty!

So be not coy, but do your best
Your backlog to diminish,
For if you once should lose your zest
You'll never, never finish.”²⁰

Press

The WVS/WRVS sent out statements and reports on the work of the One-in-Five scheme to the press from 1956. In November 1961 the Daily Herald reported on the work of the WVS to prepare women for a nuclear disaster, if it were to happen. The Article was titled *Women's Role in the H-War*.

Some press reports were less positive. In December 1961 the Daily Express printed an article titled *Lecturer Frightens Old Folk With Talk About Bomb*. The article claimed that a Darby and Joan Club had heard the talk in East Suffolk and some had been “so frightened they can hardly sleep”.²¹ This may have been exaggerated as a letter from 4 December 1961 states that the WVS member running the Darby and Joan Club had not heard of anyone being frightened till the article was published. In fact the members of the club were “most indignant at the idea of

¹⁹ WVS Bulletin, *One-in-Five Again*, No243 April 1960, p.18

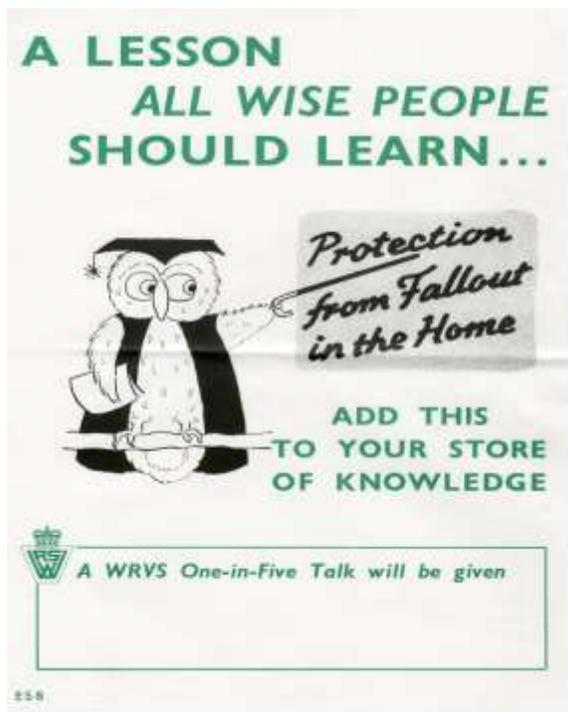
²⁰ WVS Bulletin, *One-In-Five*, June 1962, p.14

²¹ Daily Express, *Lecturer Frightens Old Folk With Talk About Bomb*, 1 December 1961

being scared".²² Other negative press came from groups which opposed the work of Civil Defence, claiming it was preparing people for a nuclear disaster and promoting war.

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)/Ban the Bomb Campaign

During the One-in-Five scheme the WVS/WRVS came under attack from groups such as CND which claimed the organisation was preparing the nation for war. The WVS/WRVS campaign however stressed the use of IF rather than WHEN in the talks members gave. It did not aim to recruit or train people for Civil Defence but to inform the public and mitigate suffering if the worse should have happened. CND and the Ban the Bomb campaign tried to prove that the talks were scientifically inaccurate. Articles were published by Stephen King-Hall in *Reynolds's News* and *The Tribune* arguing against the scheme.²³ Letters were also sent from his supporters asking the WVS to stop the scheme. One letter asked for the talks to stop as they promoted the use of violence to settle disputes. It demanded that One-in-Five was stopped and replaced by a scheme "that will help women to abandon their traditional belief that dispute can still be settled by violence".²⁴



A poster used to advertise One-in-Five talks in local areas. Later posters had space for the Centres to write the dates and places talks were to take place. (WRVS, 810/1/1, One In Five 1964 – 1982)

²² WRVS 85/2/1, Publicity One In Five 1958 – 1965, Letter 4 December 1961

²³ WRVS 85/2/1, Publicity One In Five 1958 – 1965, Letter 18 September 1959

²⁴ WRVS 85/2/1, Publicity One In Five 1958 – 1965, Letter 20 June 1960

Conclusion

The WVS One-in-Five Department was established in 1955; its aim to inform a fifth of women in Britain about nuclear attacks and the precautions to take if such an event occurred. Through the use of specially trained members (who had to attend speakers schools and gain a card of authorisation) WVS/WRVS delivered talks to audiences of women from various organisations and backgrounds, for over 30 years throughout the cold war. While each centre had a target for the number of women it was to talk to only some reached their very ambitious targets. However in the first fourteen years of the scheme the WVS reached 50% of its target audience, some 1.5 million women and the organisation received much good publicity for its work. The success of the scheme though was not universally applauded and there was a negative response to One-in-Five from groups such as the CND. They and others campaigned against the talks and asked the WVS to stop the scheme. Thankfully the nuclear war for which the One-in-Five departments was preparing never came, but in the greatest traditions of WVS/WRVS the knowledge and training was in place if the disaster ever did come. It would no doubt have saved many lives.