

## **Rita Sandford - wiba's September speaker "Taking a Mid-Life Gap year"**

During a remarkable 12 month period Rita threw caution to the wind and pursued her long held ambition to travel the world, throw herself into charity work and set up her own business.

Three years ago Rita Sandford, a gutsy, down-to-earth Irish woman, living in the UK, made a momentous decision to quit her secure and well paid job to travel the world and "find herself" along the way. She called it her "Mid-Life Gap Year" and decided there would be only one rule for her year out "*She would follow her intuition and only do what felt right.*" Terms like "Should", "Must" or "Have to" were not allowed!

In the early stages of her trip, she was guided to the New Life Centre, in Johannesburg, South Africa which helps women escape prostitution. She was so moved by the Centre's work that she immediately offered her services as a volunteer. She initially committed to a month, but kept extending her stay as she just couldn't leave. After three months, she dragged herself away to travel solo across continents and countries including Africa, South America and New Zealand.

Rita returned to the UK and despite being financially challenged after her travels, she kept the promise she had made to herself in a Buenos Aires' café to set up her own business. This was something she had wanted to do for a long time, but had been too fearful.

With twenty years' experience in her field, but no business experience, she established Inside Out Learning. She embarked on a huge learning curve and remains on it two years later. Inside Out Learning is the learning and development consultancy which she had always wanted as it enables her to do work that she loves. She provides personal and professional development programmes and undertakes research and evaluation. In the last 2 years, she has presented at three international conferences, in the UK, U.S.A. and India.

As if setting up a new business was not enough, Rita also set up a charity to support the work of the New Life Centre in Johannesburg. The aim is to raise £100,000 for a shelter to house young girls at risk of falling into prostitution. With no prior experience of fundraising or charities this is a huge challenge into which Rita is throwing herself with vigour and commitment.

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