

Step up, Lead the Way



My Blog this month is dominated by my trip to South Africa to visit our Soroptimist Clubs and some of their projects. I was joined by fellow Soroptimist from SI Cwmbran, Nerys Lines.

Suffice to say that it is a trip that I will never forget!

This is because of the wonderful welcome that I received from fellow Soroptimists, but mainly because of

seeing so many wonderful projects first hand. I was humbled to see such wonderful programme work, but equally so proud that all that I saw simply told everyone who we are, what we do and why we are still relevant today.

I wanted to bottle what I saw and experienced and came back wondering why we have not got thousands of members when our project work simply sells itself because of the positive impact that it can have on women and girls.

Over thirteen days, I visited Soroptimist Clubs in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, Durban, Pretoria and Johannesburg, and attended the South Africa conference. It was just a shame that Mafeking and Kings Sabata Dalindyebo were simply too far away to include on this trip.

The rest of my blog will be photos, and simply descriptions of the projects we visited.

SI Cape Town

Saartje Baartman Home for Abused Women and children where we visited the Garden of Serenity-created and maintained by Soroptimists. The Club is now using succulent plants due to water shortage. Weaver birds had made nests in the trees and the garden was a lovely haven.

House Morea Senior Citizens Home – this house has 57 elderly residents. Members of Cape Town Club received a donation of chairs for the community room. Their next job is to get the kitchen cupboards and shelves. On the day, we visited the Home, a Club member arranged for 4 of her pupils to play their violins (as a group and solo). The Residents enjoyed the music and recognised some of the tunes. The Residents enjoyed the tea which was prepared and served by the Soroptimists.

SI Port Elizabeth

Van Stadens Reserve Farm School where we met the Head Teacher, a teacher and her primary class. Two mothers prepare food for the children – one meal for the whole day. Children from lower grades played outside whilst the higher grade took their lesson. The Teacher often teaches two grades at the same time in the same class room. A gardener is employed to maintain the vegetable garden, and help the children learn about growing vegetables which is used by the school.

Thuthuzela Care Centre which is based inside a hospital. It is a one-stop shop facility for rape survivors. The Centre is self-sufficient with a Reception, Counsellors, Care Givers, Detectives, access to a doctor & medical assistance, which includes the gathering and testing of evidence. Club members facilitate the provision of Care packages for the personal needs of the clients. The Kitchen

facility, including the table seating for 12 people was refurbished by the Club, and the Centre is currently receiving a lick of paint paid for by the Club to make it more welcoming.

In the evening, we enjoyed the company of SI Port Elizabeth members at a meal, and I was asked to induct a new member, and present an existing member with her honorary member certificate.

SI Grahamstown

Hobbiton Association which is an outward-bound Centre for children. This was high on a mountainside and had been in place for several years. This outward-bound Centre helped children to work as a team to find solutions. Children came from different schools around the area.

Crisis Rape Centre 'White Door' which was based inside a police station. The Head Care-person went through the process when people arrive at the Centre and the importance of a safe house for Women.

SI Durban

Lake Haven Secondary school – creation of a school library, and the Club has restored all broken Ablution facilities.

Cornerstone, a school for children with special needs e.g. autism. The Soroptimists had built a Sensory Garden for the children. The children were with us in the garden and the teacher asked them what the garden meant to them. One boy said that when he became angry or low he could go to the garden. Teachers and children gave us all a warm welcome.

Victim Empowerment Centre at the Aryan Benevolent Home (ABH). We visited the building which is used for women and children – they are given a safe room of their own. The children had a nice area to play in undercover outside. The Club project entails the refurbishment of the facility including the bathrooms, and the establishment of a skills development Centre for the ladies.

In the evening, we visited the **Duffs Road Primary** for the opening of the school library. We met family members and school representatives including school governors. Soroptimists decided to support the school in obtaining books for the library by phoning around for books (discounted) and obtained 685 brand new books. SI members prepared the area and obtained sponsorship from companies for the shelves, tables, chairs, carpets. The event included a speech from a young girl who spoke confidently on being a learner and what the library meant to her and fellow pupils.

South Africa Conference

Over the weekend, we travelled to the Tala Game Reserve for the 52nd SI Annual Conference and AGM organised by SI Durban. We were taken on a Game Drive immediately after our arrival and managed to see Rhinos, Hippos, Antelope, Wildebeest, Zebra, Ostrich, Warthog and Giraffes. The day ended with my presentation about "Looking to the Future" – certainly the most unique start to a presentation.

The weekend was a great opportunity to meet members and hear about all their project work. On the last night, we enjoyed a gala dinner and danced the night away

SI Pretoria

Mapula Project – This is a long-standing project of some 25 years. It involves teaching embroidery skills, and selling the items made to earn a living using their skills. Their work is fantastic and the project has simply gone from strength to strength. The women manage a lot of the project themselves with the aid of members of the Club. They recently received an order for 40 bags.

Travelled to **St Francis Drop in Centre at Marmelodi** to see the Library and the children. The library was created by donations and donated books. After seeing the library – the children came out to see us and to sing.

SI Johannesburg

On our last day, we visited the Sithabele Children and Youth Care Centre, which looks after 40 children overall. It also supports others through a outreach programme at the nearby informal settlement. The children go to local schools and some children go on to higher education.

The Centre is run by Thabisili Msezane with her husband Solly & daughter Nandi.