

Kirkintilloch and District

"The stories we can tell can be the messenger that brings complex global issues into focus and aligns them with the programme work of our Federations and clubs."

Sharon Fisher, International President



#SoroptimistVirtual2020


Women inspire action,
transforming lives

Kirkintilloch is a small Scottish town that sits by the Roman Wall, and we're the Canal Capital of Scotland.

"The stories we can tell can be the messengers that bring complex global issues into focus and align them with the programme work of our Federations and clubs", as Sharon Fisher, our International President has said.

But the stories we hear of senseless acts of racism as well as blatant violence against peaceful BLM demonstrators and attacks against freedom of speech are all depressing and sickening, so Sharon's Open Letter is a powerful response to that.

Today's story is one about SI Kirkintilloch & District's Project for Peace and international goodwill: Jasmine and Thistle



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In June 2017, member Melanie was President of Scotland South Region and for her theme 'REACHING OUT' she interviewed Sana'a AlWadi, a recently arrived Syrian refugee. She is a clinical psychologist, and despite being a refugee herself, she had offered therapy to trauma victims in the Jordanian Refugee Camp through the Charity, "Syria Bright Future". This exceptional woman in her late thirties had arrived alone with five children without her husband who was overseas. Melanie very gently and sensitively helped Sana'a overcome the language barrier and supported her to tell a little of her story. It soon became clear that Sana'a's vision fitted in many respects with the aims of Soroptimism, made feasible by the arrival of 4 Syrian families in our area. This created the potential to put into practice SI's principles of Human Rights, Social and Economic Justice, Equality, Peace and International Goodwill and to transform the lives of women and girls. It enabled us to form partnerships with local agencies, such as East Dunbartonshire Action for Refugees, Action of Churches Together, East Dunbartonshire Council, and Citizens Advice Bureau. The aims of Jasmine and Thistle are to achieve 3 objectives - Peace promotion, Justice, Healthcare and Education.

Peace through friendship

"Integration is the very back and forth, the give and the take of HOSPITALITY when it's in full flow. It's a place at a table, with food as part of the common task of making a new society, together."

Professor Alison Phipps, UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts, University of Glasgow



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Professor Alison Phipps, Unesco Chair of Integration Through Languages and the Arts at the University of Glasgow says, "Integration is the very back and forth, the give and the take of Hospitality when it's in full flow. It's a place at a table, with food as part of the common task of making a new society together.

The Jasmine and Thistle Project is grounded in Friendship and Hospitality. Our Club founder Alice Mackenzie MBE invited Sana'a into her home and offered hospitality, and together they formed the Vision for Jasmine and Thistle. The Project is led jointly by Alice, Sanaa, and her eldest daughter Hiba. We share food, storytelling and culture so that we get to know each other better. By letting friendship flourish, peace will be promoted, mental health and wellbeing will be enhanced and we will be educated in each others' culture. Sana'a and Hiba were included in the Club's celebration for Alice's 90th Birthday.

Alice generously donated £10,000 for our Club's Education Fund which greatly enhanced the Club's ability to be proactive .



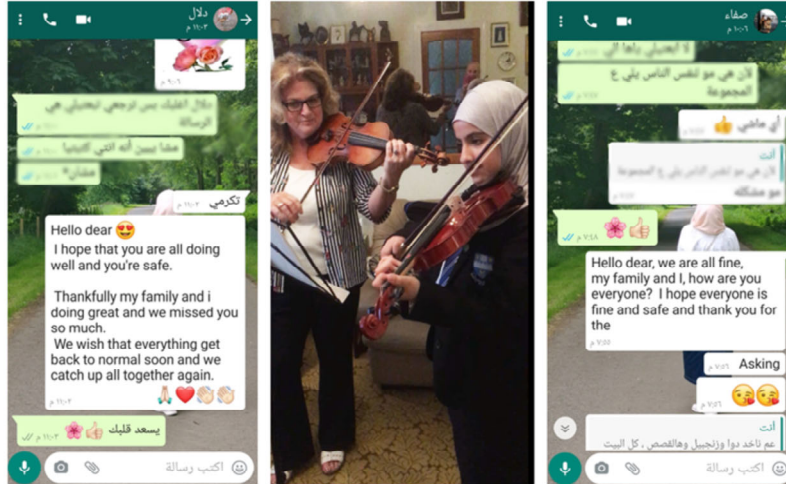
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Initially the Club reached out with practical help; household goods; toys and books for the children and as friendships developed, the Educational Fund provided a violin and arranged violin lessons for a 10 year old girl with an aptitude for music and art. Members drove her to and from her music and art classes and she progressed so well musically that when she moved up to High School she was immediately accepted for the School Orchestra.

Friendship is the basis of all our other achievements: members provided lessons in Scottish Country Dancing. The project provided educational support by funding college materials and books, driving lessons and advanced English language lessons needed for the 'licence to practice' Examination required for medical professionals working in our NHS.

During lockdown the project diverted £900 to reach out to 26 families in need, providing them with culturally appropriate food and phonecards. We donated £950 to Glasgow Night Shelter for Destitute Asylum Seekers for phonecards.



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One of the Syrian children asked Alice, “Can I call you my Scottish Granny?”
So, Kirkintilloch & District SI says to all Soroptimists, “Let Friendship Flourish”.