

Vourneen (Jo) Darbyshire D.L. Jo was born in 1945 into a farming family inland of the Fylde coast and was educated at Elmslie Girls School, Blackpool. After completing her 'O' and 'A' levels she was articled to a Solicitor's Practice, completed two years at the College of Law, Guildford and was admitted to the Roll of Solicitors in 1970. Jo continued her chosen law career and moved to work in her husband's family firm of solicitors, retiring from the Practice after almost 40 years. During these years as a solicitor Jo had the opportunity to join and assist local voluntary organisations and use her law qualifications and extensive experience to assist and support when problems arose.



In 1981 Jo was invited to join SI Blackpool and has served as club President on 3 occasions. (1986- 1987; 2002-2003; 2014-2015). In 1990-91 she served as President of the SI of North West England and the Isle of Man as well as serving as inaugural Chair of the Regional Programme Action committee. Elected to SIGBI Federation Executive Council in 1991 Jo chaired the steering committee for 3 years and was elected President of SIGBI in 1997. Jo attended International Board meetings as an observer from 1989 and became a voting delegate in 1997, appointed Chairman of the International Constitution Committee in 1999 for 4 years and became Procedural Consultant to the International President until 2007. Jo's involvement with the International Board spanned 18 years.

She served her local community as a member of Blackpool Citizens Advice Bureau for 7 years and chaired the Bureau for 4 years (1989-1993). Jo was appointed by the Secretary of State for Health on no fewer than three occasions to serve the NHS. The first appointment was to the Board of the newly formed Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde Community Services Trust, 1993-1997, the second, from 1997-2001 as Chairman of the North West Lancashire Health Authority to commission National Health Services for North West Lancashire and thirdly in 2001 to establish Lancashire Care NHS Trust to provide specialist mental health in patient and community services for residents of Lancashire. The Trust became a Foundation Trust, one of the first hundred in England, Jo retired in 2010 after 9 years' service.

In 2007 Jo was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant to serve the Lancashire Lieutenancy. Deputy Lieutenants carry the post nominal D.L. Since her appointment Jo has had the honour and pleasure to welcome men and women and their families to the Citizenship Ceremonies which established them as British citizens. From 2010 to 2019 Jo served as the Chair of the Lord Lieutenant's Lancashire Assessment panel for the prestigious Queen's Awards for Voluntary Service taking the number of awards to a total of 63 for Lancashire organisations by 2019. Jo says " my life has been greatly enriched by being a Soroptimist and it must be THE international organisation to belong to, it's local and global, giving service and friendship, providing opportunity and satisfaction, to ensure progress for women and girls everywhere."