

Our club AGM draws closer, and it is time to review another Soroptimist year. We can ignore the awful weather and look back on a large number of successful and enjoyable events with pride, led by our President, Marietta.



Most notable was the arrival of the Gift Box to Cirencester for two weeks in July. Marietta had seen this unique project launched by Stop the Traffik and The United Nations when she visited The House of Lords, and she was determined that we should host one in Cirencester to raise awareness to human trafficking. The logistics of transport, security, erecting the box and organising a rota of volunteers were all overcome, and we gained great publicity for both the cause and for Soroptimists. This knowledge was then passed on to other S.I. clubs and several have in turn since hosted a Gift Box successfully. With a President who is also an artist cards showing the gift box, which now sports our Soroptimist logo, will shortly be on sale, and this month, April, we have had a two page spread of publicity in the glossy Cotswold Life magazine, and were also featured in "The Soroptimist" magazine in February.

Other outstanding events have included our annual literacy event for primary schools, now run by member Margaret M. This year 15 primary schools took part, and we had over 1,000 scripts to judge. Quite a task! The award ceremony was attended by author Tracey Corderoy who read one of her own funny stories and awarded the prizes to the 20+ winners, and the event, which was also attended by our Mayor, was featured in several local papers.



Cirencester S.I. club continues to grow - we now have 34 members. We welcomed Georgina back to our club whilst Trish, Sheila W, Sheila F, Jennie B and Jenny H all joined as new members. Wow! What a year!



We are known as a particularly friendly club, and we often have joint dinners or events with Inner Wheel and Rotary. In February, hosting Rotary, we had Juliette, Graham and Star from Signpost, and were updated about the great work they are doing. Our hamper raffle raised an enormous £266 for their funds, and many of us are involved helping at their Monday night 'drop in' free meal, or collecting food at Waitrose for their foodbank.

The club has also supported several Inner Wheel events

- a Bridge afternoon, a charity soup lunch and their fantastic Indian meal in aid of The Churn Project.



President Marietta chose two main charities to support this year, Gloucestershire Deaf Association and Cirencester Housing for Young People. In April The 'Dinner for 36' was the first event, and, as Jackie's husband Vin had died the previous



day, this was turned into a celebration of his life and his time as a bomber pilot during the war. The evening ended with a singalong of wartime songs, and with matched funding from two banks nearly £2,500 was made.

Next came the Wine and Puddings evening chez David and Anne C - another sell out and great fun, with a profit for CHYP of £1,000. In May it was Deaf Awareness week and two members helped man a stall in Cheltenham Arcade whilst in September our Last Night of the Proms was again a sell out, and GDA benefited when the profit of £1,123.50 was banked, with an additional £500 promised from HSBC.



Our 20s and 30s Sheunique fashion night in March, once more organised by fund raiser supreme Anne C and team, was another fantastic event and another £1,700 was added to the President's charity fund.

Cirencester members are all allocated onto different committees, and new members usually join the Programme Action committee first, this year led by Past Regional President Shirley. P.A. being at the very heart of Soroptimism it is important that our new members understand that they haven't just joined a social club.

We marked The International Day of Peace, raising awareness of the United Nation's work by giving away night-light candles and distributing information about our club ahead of Peace Day on Saturday 21st September. We are fortunate in having Cirencester's Charter Market Manager, Anne B, as a member of our club - so on Friday 18th October we manned another stall at our Charter Market. This time it was to highlight the issue of human trafficking where we had a rolling PowerPoint presentation showing information and photographs of 'Stop the Traffik's Gift Box. We also gave information about trafficking including Purple Teardrop Campaign leaflets. Two more stalls were also booked, on Friday 28th February we had a stall promoting Fairtrade, with a raffle of Fairtrade goods which raised £110 for Oxfam, this, and other fund raising across the land will be matched by the UK government. Unfortunately yet again the weather was cold, wet and miserable so that Soroptimists were frozen and packed up at lunchtime - but it was a great effort nevertheless!

See Solar - Cook solar, the International President's appeal for December 2013, was supported with a cheque for £232; this was donated by members instead of exchanging Christmas cards. Likewise the new Cirencester hub of the Chernobyl ChildrenLife Line was given a donation of £112 - the proceeds of the book exchange that we do at club meetings. Water Aid is a charity that we have supported for many years, and the Coffee Morning with Lent Lunch at Jackie's house raised an incredible £524. This amount was increased by £212 when the proceeds of a Water Aid 'wine or water tombola' to mark World Water Day, once again held at our Friday market:- and guess what - it rained, it hailed and blew a gale - but not until lunchtime!



What else have we done? Well we continue to support The Stroud Refuge with sponge bags and 'home start' packs, and The Family Haven in Gloucester regularly collect good used clothes for their needy clients. At Christmas we decorated a tree in the Parish church - blue and white with the SIGBI logos and Soroptimist information - the 3rd year we had done this to raise awareness. We also filled our usual 40 stockings for Swindon social services, 12 for Stroud Refuge and 25 for the children who attend Cirencester Deaf Children's Club, which is mainly run by a Soroptimist team. We have had several bric-a-brac stalls and a chalet at The Phoenix Music Festival when we raffled a patchwork quilt - this event is organised by young people and was so successful that it will take place again this summer, and we have already booked our pitch.

Not all events can be supported by more than a few members - but working with the Girl Guide Association many of us helped to clean out their holiday accommodation in Macaroni Woods, several attended GDA events, visited Isis Woman's Centre with Swindon Soroptimists, celebrated the 30th anniversary of Gloucester Rape Crisis Centre held at The Guildhall and the Christmas Party of South Cotswolds Memory Club. Between us our members support a very wide range of local activities.



Friendship is what often drives a club successfully, and apart from working on projects together we have enjoyed many of the fund raisers and several purely social events. A shared Christmas meal, an evening in a canal barge, the past members garden party and indeed our annual charter lunch have all



been events based on food and friendship, and much enjoyed. Additionally several members now meet at Marietta's house for an

afternoon of drawing and painting - often taking place in the garden. This was also the venue for a party to celebrate the 80th birthday of one of our members - the sun shone whilst we feasted.

S.I. Cirencester is unique in having the Minnis Trust - this was due to the foresight of one of our founder members, Dorothy Minnis, who left us a bequest which now brings interest of about £2,000 a year. Meetings to consider applicants are held three times annually, and this year several groups have benefited including a youth festival, our drop-in centre for the homeless, first aid courses for parents, our Opportunity Group for pre-school children and the Guitar Ensemble. We also helped two individuals with money towards courses and training.

Friendship between clubs is also greatly important and we have official links with four. We see most of Kath from our Bury friendship link as she journeys down to us several times a year, not only attending our Charter Lunch, but also meetings and helping at events.

Seven of us attended the Bury Charter Dinner and stayed overnight with their members, being entertained on the following day. Contacts with Durham and Itzehoe are mostly via email and Christmas cards, although some of us hope to attend Durham's Charter Dinner on May 9th; but with our Latvian link in Ogre Kegums we have supported their programme action in the past and four of us will be visiting in May.



Kirsten from Sweden visits us shortly yet again and I was thrilled to be entertained by her club in Stockholm last August, and also to host Nisha, our

SIGBI Friendship Link Organiser, who was over for the Gateshead conference in October. Most of the Tsunamika dolls, brought over by Nisha, have now been sold. These dolls, made from cotton waste, contribute to the livelihood of the widows and children left in poverty in 2004 after the fishermen along the Indian coast drowned. With both Kirsten and Nisha we were involved with S.I/Es Bread Calendar which was sold at Congress in Berlin, the money going towards children in St Petersburg.



As our club grows it seems that our programme action also expands - maybe because we have more willing (or press ganged) helpers. Annie and Muriel still organise the primary schools nature quiz for the area and many of us supported the magistrate court mock trials - another competition between primary schools which teach citizenship. Cakes were baked for President Elect Margaret's Open Village weekend, and also for our past member's garden party in August - the sun shone whilst we caught up with the lives of our former members (and one rejoined after nearly 20 years!)

Pictures and information of many of these events appear on our website so professionally managed by member Anne B, who is also web master for our region. www.sigbi.org/cirencester is kept very up to date - well done Anne.

Cirencester Soroptimists is a club that I am proud to belong to. We wish our President Elect Margaret every success in the forthcoming year - I'm sure she will have our support, and we hope for a warm sunny day when we look forward to seeing many of you at our Charter Lunch - Sunday 1st June at The Royal Agricultural University. On a personal note I should like to thank all members for the love and support they have given me over the last 18 months following 3 operations and the death of my husband.

