



**Soroptimist
International
Edinburgh
news
notes
anecdotes**

Issue 168 February/March 2018

Raising Aspirations

SI Madurai

Latha Abiruben, a Past President of SI Madurai, spent some time in Edinburgh in February. She was visiting her daughter, Navya, who is studying at The University of Edinburgh for her masters. In addition Latha visited other parts of Scotland and, in between, some members of our club met with her and confirmed that we wished to have a Friendship Link with her club. The application has been progressed and we have received confirmation from Zarreen Babu, Friendship Link Coordinator, SIGBI that the Link has been officially recognised
See next column letter to Anna.

Letter from Navya

Hello Lindsey,
It was a pleasure to have attended the meeting* with Sam. It was eye opening to meet the 3S fund candidate and thrilling to be a part of the raffle. I am sure that the club will be able to work through the problems and move forward and help women everywhere as you are already doing. I hope to meet you soon again.
Best,
Navya

*relates to 14/3/18

Dear Anna,

**REF: Friendship Link of SI Madurai
SI Edinburgh**

It gives me great pleasure to confirm your requested Friendship Link as stated above. The link has been officially recognised and registered on March 13th, 2018. I enclose a Certificate of Friendship for your records. As the requesting club please Sign and forward this Certificate to SI Edinburgh for their signature.

Once you receive the signed certificate of SI Edinburgh you may each keep a copy for your records.

Henceforth please keep me informed of any joint projects, or interesting visits you may undertake. I report Joint projects in the Friendship Link page of the SIGBI magazine, and all other news in the online Friendship Link Newsletter, in January, May and September of every year.

Please remember that regular communication is the key to successful Friendship Links.

Please accept my good wishes for a long and beneficial Friendship Link. Do let me know if I can be of further assistance to you.

Good luck and kindest regards.

In Soroptimist service
Zarreen

Zarreen Babu
Friendship Link Coordinator
SIGBI Federation
www.sigbi.org

Women inspiring action, transforming lives.

President Anna met with Ann Thanisch of Edinburgh Direct Aid and has since received the following letter:

Dear Anna,

I am very grateful for the opportunity you gave me at the reception at the City Chambers on Wednesday to tell you about the work that local charity Edinburgh Direct Aid does for Syrian refugee women in Arsal, Lebanon, which is exactly in line with the aspirations of the Soroptimists to achieve 'the best for women in the world'. I am now writing, as you suggested, to give some more details.

Edinburgh Direct Aid was founded by Denis Rutovitz and Jeanne Bell 25 years ago to help civilians under siege in the Bosnian war, quickly developing into an all-volunteer charity of individuals taking aid to those suffering from war or natural disaster. Such direct contact with the recipients of aid is regarded as crucial not only to ensure that their most urgent material needs are being met, but also to give a hand of friendship, being willing to be with them in circumstances that are at best uncomfortable, and at worst, dangerous.

In 2013 Maggie Tookey, EDA's overseas project director, and John Home Robertson identified an area of great need as a result of the Syrian war - Arsal, a small town about 25 km from the Syrian border in north east Lebanon. It is high in the mountains, at an altitude higher than Ben Nevis, a poor town of 35,000 inhabitants making a living from orchards and quarrying. Thousands of refugees escaped here from Syria, and at least 60,000 still remain, surviving freezing cold winters of heavy snow, and scorching summers, crowded into flimsy dwellings made of only wood, plastic sheeting, and canvas, in small camps scattered about the straggling town. Until this summer, when the army cleared out militants hiding in the surrounding countryside, security was uncertain, movement of all was restricted by army checkpoints, and unemployment was high.

For the refugees, the chances of moving on into Lebanon or beyond, or returning to Syria, in the near future, remain very slim. They are now facing their fifth winter in Arsal.

During this time EDA volunteers, primarily Maggie Tookey, have made regular visits whenever possible, building up a team of refugee volunteers in the town to maintain and

develop their projects. The work is broadly in the following categories:

- distribution of aid donated in Edinburgh and sent out in shipping containers. The 17th such container is due to leave before Christmas. The contents so far have included winter clothes, shoes, bedding, toiletries, women's sanitary products, stationery & other supplies for schools, medicine, medical aids such as crutches & wheelchairs, an ambulance, toys, tools, sports equipment, and supplies for the workshops described below.
- emergency funding eg for urgent medicines, kidney dialysis supplies, or new shelters after tents were flooded.
- building and running schools for refugee children. The local schools cannot cope with their numbers; EDA has so far funded the building of 2 schools, and supports their running costs as far as it can. Thousands of children still remain without education.
- giving short part time courses of vocational training - mainly to Syrian refugees, but the courses are also open to unemployed Lebanese. The subjects available are chosen to be of equal interest to men and women, and are intended to develop skills of most benefit in the camps and local community. They include sewing, weaving, computing, motor cycle maintenance, electrical supply, mobile phone maintenance, literacy, English, mosaics, camp administration, plumbing, solar panel heating, hairdressing and First Aid. Where relevant students are provided with a toolkit on their successful completion of the courses, to allow them to use their new skills to make and repair items for their families, teach others, or start small businesses.
- running sewing and knitting workshops.

It is the last 2 items - vocational training and workshops for women - which would be of most relevance to the Soroptimists. Having proved to be of great value, since their development in spring 2016, continuing and expanding them to reach as many women as possible is a major priority.

Imagine being a refugee woman in Arsal - trying to raise a family, or growing from

adolescence into adulthood, in a crowded inadequate tent, year after year. The difficulties are innumerable. Maintaining basic hygiene, privacy, a balanced diet and adequate exercise, finding occupation, and keeping in touch with relatives - all simple aspects of life that we take for granted, present endless problems in these circumstances. Electricity is only available for a few hours a day; the use of oil stoves for cooking and heating are a safety hazard. The young men growing up in the family are a constant source of worry, being idle and restless - easy prey for crime, violence, and propaganda from militant groups. Family savings have dwindled; food vouchers from the UN are constantly being cut as western governments do not live up to their pledged contributions. Healthcare is minimal.

Attending vocational training courses and spending time in workshops means that women escape the confines of the tents and have the opportunity not only to learn new skills, and earn income, but also to meet with each other and share their worries. The importance of providing opportunities for women has been recognised, not only in ensuring that as many training courses are run for them as for men, but also by devoting half the space in the new EDA training centre, which opened in spring 2016, to a women's workshop. The day to day management of the centre is in the hands of refugees, all of whom bar one at present, are women.

At this centre, approx 350 women have now successfully completed 2-month part time vocational courses, run by appropriately skilled refugee women, the most popular subjects being sewing, computing, First Aid and hairdressing. In addition local doctors use the centre to give very popular free talks on women's healthcare & hygiene, and a local charity has provided courses to help staff support victims of domestic violence.

Those who have completed the sewing course can then make use of their new skills in the sewing workshop. To supply the training courses and the workshop sewing machines, fabric, patterns, and haberdashery, as well as knitting wool and needles, and knitting machines, have been donated by women in the UK, and transported to Arsal in the shipping containers described above. Skilled instructors are available among the refugees. And a small grant from funders in the UK has paid for a few industrial sewing machines. Thus at minimal cost women are learning new skills, and working for themselves and their

families. Moreover, the workshop has gained several contracts of work, which include the production of hospital aprons & drapes, uniforms, backpacks, and children's thermal underwear. And when EDA volunteers visit, they collect small hand-made crafts such as crocheted brooches to sell at the One World Shop in Edinburgh. All this provides the women producing the goods with much needed income.

When Maggie Tookey visited last month one of her main concerns was the setting up of small outreach workshops in the more far flung camps, so that women who had completed the sewing courses could teach others in simple tented areas, using a few donated sewing machines in each. Seven of these have been set up so far, with another five due soon.

Some fundamentally important aspects of this work are as follows:

- the activity provided is hugely beneficial to ward off depression and a sense of isolation and hopelessness among the refugee women
- the refugee women themselves are developing and running the courses and the workshops; thus, while developing valuable planning and management skills, they are fully engaged with achieving their own potential, and ensuring that it is appropriate to their circumstances
- at the same time, for women in the UK, it is providing much worthwhile voluntary work, from collecting, sorting and packing donations, to visiting the camps themselves.
- a sense of solidarity and understanding develops between all the women involved. An elderly lady in Edinburgh who regretfully gives up use of her sewing machine as her eyesight fails can get great pleasure from seeing a photograph of it being busily used by a refugee woman who can at last be occupied again. Another photo of a knitting group at the centre in Arsal makes us smile - the women may be dressed differently, but their gossip and chat about their families will have much in common with ours - and we recognise the receptacle of their knitting needles on the table that we donated - it used to contain a bottle of Glenfiddich whisky!

Of course all this needs funding. Edinburgh Direct Aid is entirely dependent on donations and grants. Costs are kept at a minimum by all UK staff being volunteers, and as many supplies as possible being donated. But the full cost of getting every shipping container delivered, including local Lebanese charges, is £3,500. The cost of instructors' relatively modest salaries, and supplies, including toolkits provided on courses such as hairdressing, for each training course for 20 women ranges from £1,000 to £3,000. The running costs (rent, management and utilities) of the main centre providing training and workshop space is £900 per month.

If you think the Edinburgh Soroptimists would be interested in learning more about (and perhaps supporting) EDA's work with refugee women in Lebanon, we would be happy to send photos or leaflets, or give a talk to the group. The website address is www.edinburghdirectaid.org.

Thank you very much indeed for your interest,

With best wishes,

Ann Thanisch
Edinburgh Direct Aid

Editor's Note: 'Scotland on Sunday' dated 25/03/2018 has published an up-date by Ann Thanisch following her recent visit to Lebanon.

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Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI)

I recently attended a meeting hosted by Christine Jardine, MP for Edinburgh West with members of the Edinburgh WASPI group.

WASPI women born in the 50s, including me, are fighting to gain compensation for changes to pensionable age which left them unaware that they would have to wait up to 7 years longer for their pensions than they had believed. In Edinburgh West alone over 6000 women are affected. MPs from all parties support the campaign, which has had 13 Parliamentary debates.

WASPI is making a legal case and is asking individual women to submit their grievances by personalising proformas on the WASPI website, with an aim of gaining compensation. The DWP (Department of Work & Pensions) has declared a deadline of 31st March for starting this process; it is unclear if possible compensation would be paid to all affected women or only to those who had claimed. WASPI advise sending claims with proof of postage. Women are also urged to write to their MP asking that their situation be raised with Guy Opperman, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary at the DWP.

Some clubs have submitted Programme Focus Forms regarding the WASPI campaign.

Christine

SIE Business Meeting held on 14 February 2018 at Edinburgh Central Youth Hostel

Present President Anna (in Chair) plus 10 members plus Melanie (IPP, Scotland South) plus Saskia and Hannah (3S Fund applicants).

Apologies for absence were received from 4 members.

3S Fund

Ishbel introduced Saskia and Hannah, both of whom will be starting out on year-long projects with Project Trust in summer 2018. Saskia spoke about her planned trip to Guyana, where she expects to be teaching maths and science in a secondary school, while Hannah described her planned trip to Malawi, where she will be teaching in a primary school and possibly doing some social care work. Both girls have already raised a substantial part of their funding targets. Members agreed to support their applications to the 3S Fund.

SI Vision and Mission statement

This was read by Alison.

Melanie (Scotland South Membership Officer)

President Anna invited Melanie to talk about putting into practice “Growing Our Brand”, the SIGBI membership initiative.

Melanie advised that Scotland South had produced 3 new fact-sheets on Soroptimism, which would be available for clubs at the Region meeting on 3 March. She emphasised the importance of finding out what members were thinking, and reacting to that, so that members feel involved in the process. She suggested ways in which clubs might make contact with schools, with a view to starting a school club. Personal contacts are always useful, if available, but 3S Fund could provide a useful source of contacts etc.

She recommended the use of membership open evenings, but indicated that clubs should think about what suits them best, in their own situations.

She warned that clubs should be prepared to encounter problems and disappointments – no matter how well something is planned it will not always produce the required result. We can learn from experience, though.

News of members

Margaret is now home from hospital. Mary has sent best wishes to the club.

Matters arising from minutes of meeting held on 10 January 2018

The minutes were agreed.

Treasurer (Ishbel)

Ishbel reported that she had settled all bills relating to the 90th anniversary celebrations.

Programme Action

- Alison will make inquiries of Marine Conservation Society re possible beach cleans in May, June or July, in which members might wish to participate.
- Five club members will be involved next month in collections for Marie Curie.

Scotland South meeting – Saturday 3 March

President Anna has been asked to give a 10-minute presentation on the involvement of SIE with “Scottish Superwomen of Science”.

(Frances Lynch has advised that there will be a report soon on the impact of her project on schools. She had indicated that SIE had been her most active backer).

Correspondence

- A request for funding has been received from a Scottish charity – School Lunches for Kamulai – which sponsors school meals in Uganda. It was agreed that President Anna should reply indicating that we would defer any decision to the AGM.
- A request for funding has been received from someone at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary who is funding a female law student in DRC. It was agreed that Alison Stevenson should make contact and explain that we would defer any decision to the AGM.
- SI Glasgow City – International Women’s Day walk on Sunday 4 March. Start 12:30 for 1pm at Kelvingrove Art Gallery. Walk to last about 1.75 hours.
- SI Paisley – annual dinner on 8 March. Cost £35.
- Conference on Thursday 8 March. 140 years of best practice, supporting survivors of gender-based violence. Cost £20.
- SI Falkirk – McGonagall Night on 9 March. Cost £25.

Joint Conference

This is to be held in Stirling on Saturday 14 April. Registration forms are now available.

Membership

Anna has spoken with Dorothea, a PhD student who is working at UN House and is interested in joining SIE. However, she is too old to qualify for the student capitation fee of £20. It was suggested that if she were to join she should be asked to pay the student fee, but that the balance of fee for her could be paid by SIE out of the Legacy Fund. Ishbel was asked to check that the Legacy Fund could support this, before Anna extends an invitation to Dorothea to join.

Growing Our Brand

President Anna indicated that as there is no club meeting on 28 February, she hoped that Friendship Groups might take the opportunity to meet and to take forward an element of the work towards achieving some of the targets set under “Growing Our Brand”. The following was agreed:

- Club Poster – the West group (Murrayfield, Ravelston etc) will take responsibility.
- 5-year Plan – the North group (Mountcastle, Bellevue etc) will take responsibility.
- Club leaflet and RBS event – the South group (Newington, Alnwickhill, Midlothian etc) will take responsibility.

Anna reported that she would like to include a questionnaire in the next SIENNA to obtain members’ views on certain aspects of the club, eg meeting arrangements. It was agreed that this should be done.

Miscellaneous

SIE meeting on 28 March There will be a speaker on the gardens at Saughton. We hope that our numbers will be expanded by visitors that evening. Members should advise by 14 March of the number of any guests that they will be bringing.

Mary Isobel Wood A great-niece of Ms Wood, who designed the President’s chain, has been in touch to obtain information about her great-aunt.

Visitor from SI Madurai Gari and Lindsey are meeting with a Soroptimist visitor from SI Madurai on 15 February. (See previous meeting minutes re the possibility of a friendship link between SIE and SI Madurai).

Visiting Soroptimist from Queensland, Australia An Australian Soroptimist has made contact with Anna, who hopes to meet up with her.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be on 14 March 2018 at Edinburgh Central Youth Hostel, at 7:30pm. (NB There will not be a club meeting on 28 February.)

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SIE Business Meeting held on 14 March 2018 at Edinburgh Central Youth Hostel

Present President-Elect Gari (in Chair) plus 13 members plus Toluwa (3S Fund returnee) plus Dorothea and Marion (visitors from UN House – they are interested in joining) plus Navya (daughter of Soroptimist Latha from SI Madurai) and her friend.

Apologies for absence were received from President Anna plus 4 other members.

3S Fund

Toluwa spent 3 months on a project in Tanzania, and was partly funded by 3S Fund. She was involved in helping young people develop employability and entrepreneurial skills, and told us how the project had changed from being primarily aimed at schools to including young people in prisons and detention centres. She thanked SIE for assistance in obtaining funding and indicated that she intended to pursue a career in development work.

SI Vision and Mission statement

This was read by Dorothea.

News of members

Margaret attended a recent friendship group meeting and hopes to be at the next club meeting.

Matters arising from minutes of meeting held on 14 February 2018

The minutes were agreed.

Matters arising from the minutes that will not be covered elsewhere

The Scotland South meeting which was due to have been held on 3 March was cancelled due to bad weather. It has not been possible to rearrange it.

Re the friendship link with SI Madurai, this has now been ratified. Myint Su will be the correspondent for SIE. (Latha, member of SI Madurai and mother of Navya, met with Gari, Edith and Lindsey while visiting Edinburgh recently).

Treasurer (Ishbel)

Ishbel indicated that once she knows how many meetings to budget for next session she will calculate the required subscription.

Correspondence (Christine)

Christine reported that she has circulated via email all correspondence received from SIGBI and Scotland South.

- A request has been received from a female student at Edinburgh University asking for help with a project. Christine is obtaining further details.
- The Joint Conference is to be held in Stirling on Saturday 14 April. Registration forms are now available. The deadline for applications is 30 March.

Press& Publicity (Christine)

Christine was successful in getting three items into the last issue of the Soroptimist magazine. She mentioned that she has sent a photograph, taken on a visit to the National Memorial Arboretum, which she hopes might be included in the next issue.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held on 25 April. The first notice has been circulated this week. Members were asked to consider the vacancies and think about how these might be filled. Nomination papers, completed, are to be returned to Edith by 11 April 2018.

- Myint Su indicated that she would be willing to be nominated as Treasurer but would need back-up for the occasions when she is away.
- A nomination is required for President-Elect.
- Marjory is willing to take on the role of 3S Fund Liaison, after briefing from Ishbel.

Programme Action

- Isabel reported that Craigmillar Park Church may not be a collection point for Blythswood shoe-boxes this year, so it may not be possible for us to spend an evening assisting there.
- Christine suggested perhaps decorating/sponsoring a Christmas tree at St Andrew's and St George's Church. Clephane will obtain further details.
- Some club members are collecting for Marie Curie this month.
- Lindsey has made contact with Kids Love Clothes to indicate that we would like to assist. She will try to arrange a sorting-event later in the spring or early summer.

Growing Our Brand

The following items were circulated for comment:

- A leaflet drafted by Isabel for use at the proposed RBS event (or other recruitment activity);
- A poster drawn up by Marjory, also for recruitment.

It was agreed that a small team (Kathleen and Trish with Isabel) should be formed to edit and develop the leaflet further. Marjory's poster went missing during circulation but she will bring further copies to the next meeting.

Miscellaneous

- Lindsey reported that she had attended the Scottish Women's Conference for International Women's Day at the Parliament on 10 March.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be on 28 March 2018 at Edinburgh Central Youth Hostel, at 7:30pm, when there will be a speaker from Saughton Garden Project.

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Membership up-date:

Gari Donn:
Delete: Faculty of Education info.
Add: *UN House,*
4 Hunter Square,
Edinburgh EH 1 1QW
Tel: 220 6870
Email gari_donn@msn.com

Items for SIEnna 169 should be sent, by Friday 20th April 2018, to Edith Elliot, tel 0313 337 3313 or email edith.elliott37@gmail.com

Dates for Your Diary

2018
Apr 11 Business Meeting
14 Joint Region Conf, Stirling
25 AGM
May 9 Business Meeting
23 Friendship Meetings tbc
June 2 SISSR, Polmont
Oct 5-7 SI Kiev, 25th Anniversary
25-27 SIGBI Federation Conf.
Liverpool

SI Edinburgh: www.sigbi.org/edinburgh