



Presidential Report – 2019 -20

Well we certainly came of age in our 21st year! It started with a bang as we welcomed 7 new members (Alyson, Gwen, Delma, Louise, Nancy, Pat and Sara,) and ended with our first teleconference AGM and in between packed with lots of great service, plenty of friendship and raising an enormous amount of money for Pathways, our local domestic abuse charity.



Meeting Sue Williams' request to think about mental health we started the year with a coffee morning at The Spires care home. Louie kindly arranged for Sheila McMahon, a local counsellor and comedienne, to come and talk to us. Little did we realise that she would be singing to us and telling us a poem written by Pam Ayres about 50 shades of grey as well as talking seriously about our mental well-being.



In May we welcomed Jane W to our club and our first foray into an electronic age when Nichola provided us with a lead to connect to the TV screen. This enabled our first speaker, Sheena to present the work of the Shannon Trust and how they helped prisoners teach other prisoners to learn to read – definitely one of our 3 E's. This was also the month when we were asked to wear green to show our support for 'Think on It'. So here we are – what a lovely line up!



June saw us holding 21st birthday celebrations on a terrible night's weather with 36 ladies in the Methodist hall room. With 10 visitors from SI Stafford and Burton and two club ex presidents. Our founding President Angela inducted Pam and each previous president gave us interesting reminiscences of their years whilst we enjoyed some fizz and cake. We even had a lovely message from New Zealand when our mother club president from 1998 sent us a congratulatory message. Our charter dinner saw 89 people squeezed into Whittington Golf Club where we welcomed Christa Box from SI Kaarst, one of our friendship clubs with her husband, and recognised our 4 remaining founder members with a soroptimist rose plant.



During this month Nancy and Karen moved a refuge resident's personal belongings to a new room whilst she was in hospital after giving birth. We were both moved by the experience but glad we could help.

In July we were all wowed by the talk from Alison Briggs from Mercy Ships. Who could forget the thought of people volunteering to clean under the ship and all that dirty water! It was wonderful to see how many people they helped and all done by volunteers. We then wondered how the key doctor with his family lived on board for so many years without any payment!



6 members then went to the conference run by West Midlands Police to recognise Shafelia day- where we sold 44 spoons for Karma Nivana. We heard from survivors of forced marriage and abuse they suffered, to the hard work that the forced marriage unit carries out to get people back from countries.

Our first fundraiser was a Fashion Show within the M & Co shop and raised £255 to pay for the planters for Pathways. We were delighted to see Darcy, Amelia and Daisy twirling away in their outfits as well as Olive, the professional model and not forgetting Hazel, Jane W, Liz and Louise who modelled such a variety of clothes so well.



August saw 16 of us enjoy a trip to see Notty Hornblower in her costume museum with clothes from the 17th to 20th Century. She regaled us with the history of many of the items before we trooped down the hill to her lovely cottage and enjoyed a lovely afternoon tea.

Many of us braved a horrible night of rain to meet at the Red Lion in Longdon where we enjoyed food, wine (for some!) and stories catching up besides the lovely log fire nearby.

Work continued throughout the month by the environment team at Chapters, even unearthing a previously unseen door! Liz the lopper was in her element!

September saw the delivery of 4 wooden planters made by service users of a mental health charity and we filled them with flowers, bulbs, small shrubs and herbs for the residents of the refuge. It was a delight to see the children joining in with us and to know that afterwards mint tea was being made by the residents.



6 partners/family joined Louie's VIP table for Proms in the Park on 7th September and enjoyed a fabulous evening of rousing music and singing – and the weather even stayed fine the whole evening!

We welcomed Diane to our club this month and our speaker was DS Tracey Brookes. We were joined by 8 regional visitors from 4 clubs to hear DS Brookes inform us of the problems associated with trafficking and slavery in our county, giving us plenty to think about in terms of observation where types of problem areas are.

Continuing the theme of our well-being we met with Julie Lloyd at the Spires this month. She told us of her struggles with mental health and how vital it was for us to look after ourselves, both physically and mentally. Everyone tried the pilates exercises Julie demonstrated and we all could do more than we thought.

We welcomed Jane F, Kay and Husna to our club in October and at this meeting we found ourselves thinking about what we want to get from being a soroptimist and what we could give back. Dishi took the information and gave us feedback in the development meeting in November.

Our annual Skirting Science day was held on 11 October which saw 55 girls attending 3 of 5 workshops with 7 teachers and 18 volunteers from Stafford, Wrekin and Tamworth. We all enjoyed our new workshop presenter Gael from The Body Shop and realised how closely this company's aims are aligned to the work we do.

Then on to Bournemouth and our SIGBI Conference – 2 out of the 8 of us were new and none of us thought there could be so much excitement when dealing with the resolutions, and as to gorgeous George



3 members joined the skirting science group to review the skirting science event. As the numbers of students and schools who attended were so low we proposed the event should be cancelled for 2020 and consider other options to bring awareness to girls of careers within the STEM subjects.

Saturday 23rd November saw the first Rock Choir concert at St Anne's. 40 choir members and 22 guests. Despite the small audience it was more than matched by a lot of joyful noise and wonderful singing by Sonia, the choir leader. We raised £348.50, an amazing amount – the church were so generous by not asking for any expenses.



Then in December it was full steam ahead for the regional meeting on 7th December. It was going to be my first protest march during our break for lunch. But prior to this Louie and I visited almost all the 55 shops on the route and talked to the staff about what we

were going to do the next day and many were showing their support as we walked by. 27 club members helped swell the numbers for this event. A first meeting for our club member Regional President Margaret and evaluations showed that it went down well with everyone who attended.

11th December found 22 members enjoying our Christmas meal at The Plough in Huddlesford which included 5 new members which was great to see and much fun was had by all. Nancy's crafting skills came to the fore when she created our very own fairy at the top of the Xmas tree to go with the orange decorations that sewing bee members had made to go in the Cathedral demonstrating our desire to Stop Violence Against Women.



8th January and our first meeting of 2020. There were some nasty bugs around which our speaker and some members fell foul of. Then one member had broken her arm, another had a foot operation and our secretary was in the Carribean! But Angela and Julia C gave a very good account of both SI President nominees which made the decision for each of us quite a task. We had newer members talk about their experiences at their first regional meeting that we hosted in December and a good catch up was had by all.

Only 10 days later it was our annual quiz for Talking Newspapers for the Blind. From 8 requests for tickets at the Business Meeting the previous week saw the ticket numbers go to a staggering 105 before dropping to 101 on the night. Angela had a major job but just about managed to keep everyone quiet so she could read the questions. The quiz was ably won by Chris Corless and her team and a fantastic £857 was raised - £315 just in the raffle alone! A fabulous evening was enjoyed by all and many said they would be back for next year!

February 12th and what a busy meeting, We enjoyed two presentations from: Henna Edwards who went to both Sri Lanka and Myanmar for Project Volunteer. She taught English before the terrible bombings at Easter and then transferred to improve the English of Buddhist monks. Josie Crossley, the district commissioner for Girl Guiding in Aldridge, told us about her trip to Senegal in July helping to develop the guiding leaders from around the country. Josie then stayed with us whilst we discussed our PA work which led us to consider whether we could partner with the Guiding and Scouting movement to look at gender equality.



Friday 28th February – Royale Casino night! A blustery wet evening and lots of last minute changes to deal with but we enjoyed our entertainers and a lovely meal, had our pictures taken by the magic mirror and Carolyn won the prize for the most chips at the end of the evening. Most importantly we raised just over an amazing £12,000 with two major anonymous donations.

We recognised International Women's Day on Sunday 8th March at the National Memorial Arboretum where Nancy, Hazel and I went to the Soroptimist International plot and later talked about women who inspired us.



Wednesday 11th March and my last full business meeting. It was lovely to at last give Diane her badge and Marisha brought her mother to experience a meeting. We surprised Angela with a rendition of Happy Birthday and I presented her with a wonderful cake that Pat Elwell had made. Our speaker, Gillie Nicholls told us a little about Burkino Faso, a country that many of us had never heard much about. Then she described life in towns that do not have any electricity or water supply and food is still cooked outdoors.

She told us about the girls we had been sponsoring since 2005 and how each one of them was getting on. Each of them had run away from forced marriages and lived in the home where they were being taught to be seamstresses so they could then provide for themselves. One young lady had found herself a husband, had a small child and another was on the way and she still worked. Gillie was inspiring and we all had a laugh when remembering the time we were asked to help support the repair of the workshop roof as the mango tree had fallen on it.

Then the corona virus hit us and life changed for everyone. A full lock down for the majority of us with no social contact. So we got on as usual to make the best of it. With the great support of Nichola the Planet group held their first teleconference meeting on 23 March and a few members of the Exec got to grips (well almost!) of group Skype calls, and lots of telephone calls between members, we did what we do best – kept calm and helped each other.

As a club we have achieved so much, and I couldn't have done this on my own. From an Exec that rightly challenged me at times, but always supported me, to all of you, fantastic members who went that extra mile – I can't thank you all enough. It has been a privilege to be your President in our 21st year.