

Spring  
2026  
Issue 91



Soroptimist International of Manchester

President: **Sophie Kennedy (IPP Fiona Spencer)**

Dear Club Members,

Welcome to your Spring Newsletter, at long last, delayed by a cruise, a fabulous weekend of Centenary Celebrations and hosting the Soroptimists of South Lancashire's Regional Conference!

So, with no more ado.....

**Sue Underwood**

### President Fiona's Reflections

As I write this, and reflect on an extraordinary year, I must say I feel so grateful to work with such a fabulous group of Soroptimists. The Centenary Charter Dinner has been the highlight of the last 3 months but without so many contributing it would not have been so successful, so a big thank you to everyone involved, though I have written more about it below too! For me it felt such a lovely evening as it was about us celebrating such a special milestone together.

Many of us got to meet and to forge individual friendships with the visitors from our friendship link clubs; Essen Victoria in Germany and Fort de France Alizes Sud, Martinique. Perhaps it helped to make us see ourselves as part of the international organisation with similar goals and ideals as other women, Soroptimists, across the world. For me it made that 'sisterhood' very real and rather special. The whole weekend was a lovely experience and a great opportunity to re-visit, or explore anew, parts of the city and greater Manchester and see them through our visitors' eyes. It was also interesting to think about how the city has changed over the last 100 years and to consider what it must have been like for those early members in 1926 as the club was first chartered. The wonderful display by the archive team was fascinating. I am sure you will join with me in thanking them for searching through the records and then designing the presentation so we need to think how we can make the most of the displays they created. Manchester must have been such an interesting city to live in with such social change and economic development, though I guess this is still true as the city shows such growth and change now.



In the week prior to the dinner I got the opportunity to hopefully promote Soroptimist International Manchester by appearing as a guest of All FM 96.9 on Don and Mike's Vintage FM slot Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March. I was asked to select some music to play and so tried to pick songs with the themes of feminism and sisterhood as a backdrop to our chat. To my amazement the hour passed really quickly and if you missed it, but can bear to listen, the link is <https://www.mixcloud.com/allfm969/vintage-fm-with-dom-and-mike-tuesday-24-march-2026/>.

Finally, as we approach the AGM and our change of Insignia I want to say 'thank you' to all the members of the club for your personal support over the last year. It has been a privilege and honour to be President in this special year and I wish Sophie a wonderful year ahead and hope she will enjoy her time as much as I have done.

### Immediate Past President Fiona

*IPP Fiona presents the President's Chain of Office to President Sophie at our AGM on 16<sup>th</sup> April*



## President Sophie

It means a great deal to begin my year as President of Soroptimist International Manchester.

Before looking ahead, I want to acknowledge the extraordinary year we have just shared under Fiona's leadership. It has been a year filled with energy, ambition, and remarkable achievements, and one in which we honoured our Centenary with pride and purpose. Fiona's dedication, patience, calm strength, and her ability to bring people together have guided us through a truly successful year. We are deeply grateful for everything she has done.

As I step into this role, I have been reflecting on my own journey with Soroptimism. I first joined twenty years ago this year, at a time when I was still finding my feet and learning what Soroptimism meant in practice. I was new to the traditions of the Club and unsure of what my place might be and how I fitted in.

When I rejoined seven years ago, I returned with a clearer sense of myself, what I was looking for, what I was able to offer and of course, I wasn't new to Soroptimism. I found myself surrounded by an amazing group of women whom I feel privileged to know and proud to call friends. Women who inspire, challenge, support, and make me laugh.

Women who remind me that what we do together is far greater than anything we could do alone.

That sense of belonging, of being part of something bigger, is what Soroptimism means to me. It is the understanding that our actions, however small they may seem, ripple outward and make a real difference to the lives of women and girls. And it is the joy of doing that work together.

As we look ahead, I want to hold onto something simple but essential:

**Kindness, respect, and compassion must guide everything we do.**

Our Club is a place of joy, friendship, and purpose. It is voluntary. It is meant to enrich our lives, not overwhelm them. One of our greatest strengths is that we are many. When one of us has more time, she can give more; when life becomes busy or difficult, others step forward, allowing that member to step back whilst still remaining part of our Club. What each of us can give will naturally ebb and flow, and that is not only acceptable, it is the beauty of a strong, supportive Club.

**Every contribution matters.**

**Every voice matters.**

**Every member matters.**

As we continue our Centenary celebrations, we have some wonderful moments ahead. We begin with **the Afternoon Tea hosted by the Lord Mayor of Manchester on 1st May at the Central Library**, held especially to mark our Centenary. It promises to be a very special occasion.

In June, we will mark the **anniversary of the signing of our Charter with a party kindly hosted by Fiona on the 19<sup>th</sup>**, a moment to honour our history and the women who shaped this Club before us.

Later in the summer, we will hold our **one major fundraiser of the year: the Race Lunch at the Novotel on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> August**. It will be a lively, enjoyable event and an opportunity to raise funds while celebrating our friendship and our purpose.

Alongside these celebrations, we have the opportunity to strengthen our **Programme Action** with new potential projects, either through speakers we have heard this year, through our friendship links - old and new, and through the ideas that members bring forward, we review the projects we support at the beginning of each year. We will continue supporting projects that change lives, and we will welcome new members into our Club, inviting them to share their skills, experiences, and enthusiasm as part of our ongoing story.

And we will do all of this best when we do it together - with warmth, generosity, and a sense of fun. Fun is not an optional extra. When we enjoy being together, when we laugh, and when we feel connected, our service becomes lighter, our ideas become brighter, and our impact becomes greater.



## My hope for the year ahead is simple:

That we continue to be a Club where every woman feels valued.

Where kindness, patience, and understanding are our default.

Where we lift each other up.

And where we remember that what we do is meaningful, and that doing it together is a privilege.

Thank you for trusting me with this role. I will do my very best to lead with care, attention, steadiness, and gratitude. I look forward to everything we will achieve - as friends, as Soroptimists, and as a team.

Let us make it another wonderful year.

*President Sophie*



## Centenary Grants

Over the past 50 years Soroptimist International Manchester has celebrated significant anniversaries by raising funds for a variety of projects.

To celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Club in 1976 an annual prize was established at the Royal Northern College of Music to be awarded each year to the outstanding student of composition or conducting. The Diamond Jubilee project in 1986 was for the NSPCC Special Families unit in Fallowfield.

To mark the 70th anniversary of the Club in 1996, £7,000 was raised to furnish and equip a multi-sensory room for children at a local assessment centre. The Club's 80th anniversary was marked by donating £8,000 to St Mary's Sexual Assault referral centre for a new paediatric room.

Act4Africa, a charity the club still supports, was the recipient of £9,000 raised for the 90th anniversary in 2016, for their HEAL project (Health, Education, Agriculture & Livelihoods)

For the centenary in 2026 a committee met regularly to plan celebrations and fundraising events, and to raise awareness of the work we do. The aim was to raise £10,000 for our charities – thanks to the generosity and hard work of members, family and friends we raised over £12,000 within six months.

We were delighted to be able to make centenary grants to six local charities – Contact Hostel, The River Manchester, Early Essentials, Manchester Women's Aid, WomenMATTER and Manchester Action on Street Health – all of which we have been involved with for some time. Please see our Local Projects page for information on how we help these organisations.

Our grants were used as follows –

**Contact Hostel** – for their Good Memories Fund which provides new experiences for homeless teenage girls.

**The River Manchester** – for their 16 Days of Activism event in December,

**Early Essentials** – to buy 50 Moses baskets for newborn babies of vulnerable mothers

**Manchester Women's Aid** – to fund an art project for their service users.

**WomenMATTER** – to provide 100 Christmas gift bags for their service users.

**Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH)** – for a hardship fund to provide individual items for their service users at their personal point of need.

*Pat Usher*

## Our 100<sup>th</sup> Charter Dinner

What a wonderful evening at our Centenary Charter Dinner. There are so many people to thank who were involved, though the wonderful atmosphere and the warmth and friendship throughout the room was down to all our wonderful club members who contributed by being there with their guests. Thank you to the dinner committee Sophie, Sue U, Sue S, Cathrine and Lorraine for their work ahead as there are a myriad of things to plan to ensure a successful evening.

The room looked stunning with the beautiful flowers, through the legacy from Yvonne Mullen (I am sure she would have been proud), and the elegant menu cards designed by Neil Redhead, and printed gratis by Denise's printer. The display from the archives was fascinating and both our guest speaker Helen Pankhurst and His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant Diane Hawkins, spent some time looking at it, so well done and thank you archives team! The cake looked fabulous with our logo on it, thank you Susan H.



The food was excellent and the service discrete and organised and the Novotel Manchester West team worked hard to ensure we had a lovely evening. At the last minute popping up a small table for all the cards from the visiting clubs. Millie Huang, who played the harp so beautifully during the drinks reception, is a student at the Junior RNCM, and astonishingly is only 14! She was delightful and I was able to introduce her, and her mother, to the Lord Lieutenant and Helen Pankhurst as everyone else entered the dining room.

Alison was a great toastmaster, of course, so a big thank you for keeping the proceedings in order and to time.

We were lucky to have His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant with us to respond to the toast to the City and Ports of Manchester as her work on His Majesty's behalf introduces her to so many groups across Greater Manchester and she was able to add to the story about how much women contribute to the successful city and surrounding areas.

Beforehand I know I was a little nervous to make sure that I didn't miss anyone in my introductions and to ensure that my interview with Helen Pankhurst went well. Despite that with the great atmosphere, the wonderful friendship in the room from our clubs around the region, the visitors from our friendship link clubs and the company of our two distinguished guests I managed to thoroughly enjoy the event.



The idea of an interview really came from Helen herself as she had not wanted to give a dry speech, so I was armed with some questions in case I needed them. I started by asking Helen how it had been growing up with the name Pankhurst. She explained that she was born and grew up in Ethiopia as her grandmother Sylvia had travelled and settled there whilst an activist against Mussolini taking over Ethiopia. So, the name was also very auspicious there but for different reasons. Coming back to school in the UK later she then realised how differently it was recognised for her suffragette great grandmother and great aunts and said it was no

coincidence that the women in the family had kept the Pankhurst name. I was then able to ask her a bit more about growing up in Ethiopia and how the two cultures had contributed to her work life. She had undertaken a PhD examining the rural Ethiopian women's life and this with her economics background helped her as she worked for a number of NGOs or agencies before becoming a senior Advisor for CARE International.

We then talked about how she had been an advisor for the film Suffragette. This followed on from having been one of the suffragettes, with her daughter, in the London Olympics opening ceremony in 2012. She was also an advocate for the film "Emmeline: the making of a militant" and at the showing in Manchester in 2018 ended up in a twitter conversation with the mayor of Manchester Andy Burnham. In that she challenged him to look, over a similar time frame to that of the suffragettes obtaining votes for women, at how lives and work for women in Greater Manchester could be improved. This led to her convening GM4Women2028, at which our club has also had representation with many organisations and educational institutions to look at and measure several different aspects of life for women in order to achieve gender equality. They have learnt that overall some metrics don't change much but that within it there are clearly more disadvantaged groups but that bringing together the network to look at this may itself be generating change.

I also asked her about her role models, and she mentioned Jacinda Ardern and who she would like to interview now if we were to swap roles! I was able to ask her more about her work as Convenor for GM4Women. Helen is also Convenor for Centenary Action which aims to ensure we have a parliament that truly represents gender equality and that it is important that we talk to young people today to help them understand the importance of equality in creating a harmonious society. It was wonderful to have her with us for the evening and to hear her thoughts and enthusiasm as an activist continuing the work of the Pankhurst name.

I am looking forward to seeing Catherine T's photos to commemorate the evening and to inviting my friend Rosana, a specialist calligrapher, to show you how she renovated our charter and added all the presidents names up to date.

### **IPP Fiona Spencer**



### **President Fiona's Toast to the City & Ports of Manchester (& The Women!)**

*My Lord Lieutenant, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:*

*Manchester was the world's first industrial city. From its towering mills, bustling warehouses and crowded streets new ways to live, work and think were developed. Science and industry interacted to develop powered machinery, create global networks to sell, and built the Manchester Ship Canal and port to transport, the fashionable cotton cloth it produced. Already by 1926 when our club was chartered, it was a city of many firsts; the first public reference library in the English speaking world, at Cheetham's, the first artificial inland waterway in the Bridgewater Canal, the first steam boats and steam powered machinery, the first gas lights, the first meeting of trades union congress and the foundation of the militant Women's Social and Political Union by **Emmeline and Christobel Pankhurst** in 1903 made it the home of the women's suffrage movement.*



Perhaps it is not surprising that it was women who sought to highlight or change social order from **Mary Fildes**, injured at the Peterloo massacre to one of the great 19th century novelists, **Elizabeth Gaskell**, who wrote about the new industrial age from the view of both working- and middle-class backgrounds and was considered so controversial that many banned or burnt her books.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds started here as the Plumage league in 1889, **Emily Wilkinson** campaigning against the use of wild bird feathers in fashion.

to create the stunning John Rylands library and collection was built in 1899 by **Enriquetta Rylands** used her husband's fortune.

**Marie Stopes** became the first female academic at the University of Manchester in 1904 she was a women's rights campaigner who became a family planning pioneer.

The Women's Citizens Association in Manchester was founded in 1914 by **Lady Shena Simon**; a prominent politician, educational reformer; who chaired Education Committee and championed rights for poor women labourers.

By our charter in 1926 this major industrial hub was already marked by civil unrest, political campaigns and civic pride. In May that year there was the 3-week General Strike where workers joined the national demonstrations and the trams were at a standstill. Manchester City reached the 1926 FA Cup Final, though they lost to Bolton Wanderers, at least a greater Manchester team.

In October a Civic week was held. This involved the whole community, institutions opened up, buildings were illuminated, there was a manufacturers parade of over 350 vehicles, a textile industry exhibition and a magnificent historical pageant involving over 2000 performers in Heaton Park.

Since then, women in Manchester have continued to shape both the city and wider society.

The prime motivator in the creation of the Royal Northern College of Music was **Dame Kathleen Ollerenshaw**, a university lecturer and gifted mathematician and politician who became Lord Mayor, then High Sheriff, and government advisor from the 1940s

Sushi would not be such a worldwide phenomenon without the work on seaweed in the 1950s by **Kathleen Drew-Baker**, a university botanist's work which led to a reliable production process for the food industry, the Japanese revere her as the mother of the sea.

Fast forward and the leadership contributions of women to the City and Greater Manchester are legion. The first city to have a majority of female councillors, and now with **Bev Craig OBE** the dynamic leader of the council.

**Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell**, a neuroscientist who was President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manchester for many years.

Now **Esme Ward** is the Director of the Manchester Museum and **Sally Macdonald OBE** of the Science and Industry Museum both having presided over multimillion pound refurbishments.

Women with honours abound in arts and culture, media, sport, business and innovation and in driving change in the community like **Professor Erinna Bell MBE**; a peace campaigner who co-founded CARISMA in Moss Side to tackle gun crime, the first living woman to have a statue commissioned of her in Greater Manchester, the bust crafted from 50 confiscated guns. And like **Figen Murray OBE** campaigned successfully for Martyn's Law to strengthen the security at public events and venues, in memory of her son one of the 22 victims of the Manchester Arena Attack in 2017.

The symbol of Manchester, the worker bee, is of course female so we can celebrate that in this city of radical thinking, social change and cultural innovation, women are indeed able to play pivotal roles.

### **The City and Ports of Manchester.**



## Centenary Dinner

Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> March was the date chosen by Soroptimist International Manchester to formally celebrate our Centenary, marking 100 years of dedicated service from women improving the lives and status of women and girls and also celebrating friendships that stand the test of time both country and world-wide.

Months of meticulous planning from our Centenary Committee and club members culminated in a superb evening of celebration and friendship at the Novotel Hotel, Manchester West. SI Presidents and members from 19 clubs, along with family and friends, were joined by Friendship Link sister Soroptimists from SI Essen Victoria in Germany and SI Fort de France Alizes – Sud, Martinique. Special guests included Yemisi Opanye, President of our mother club SI Greater London and Molly Byrne Robinson also from London, Helen Gazzard and Hannah Martin from the Contact Hostel in Chorlton and the Lord Lieutenant of Manchester Diane Hawkins. Guest of Honour was Helen Pankhurst CBE.

As the evening got under way we were most ably entertained by a young Harpist, Millie Huang from the Royal Northern College of Music.

Speeches and toasts followed a delicious dinner.

President Fiona delivered an interesting and informative speech based on the history of Manchester, a city of firsts with women at the forefront of social change throughout. The Lord Lieutenant again focussed on women and Soroptimist's support for women over the last century. Helen Gazzard from the Contact Hostel (one of the beneficiaries from our Centenary Fund) complimented SI Manchester and our work with them saying "You don't just talk of change, you make it happen". Yemisi, despite having lost her voice, praised our club and wished us well!

Following the cutting of an impressive 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary cake, our guest speaker, Helen Pankhurst was the subject of an informal interview with President Fiona with questions ranging from what it was like to live and grow up in a Pankhurst household to her current work with Care International UK and Greater Manchester for Women 28 (GM4Women28)

An informative display of archive material from the past 100 years of SI Manchester included the Charter and a list of founder members, illustrations of memories from the past alongside our current projects and a look into the future.

At the end of the evening, Club member Rosemary Stevens' husband, Gus – a proud Scot, resplendent in kilt and full attire led us all in singing Auld Lang Syne. A highly appropriate way to round off an evening of celebration, reflection and positivity for the years to come.

### *Hilary Dodd*



## Flashback to Our 90<sup>th</sup> Charter Dinner.....& Guests at our 100<sup>th</sup> Charter Dinner!



From left to right:

**Molly Byrne Robinson**, President Elect of SI Manchester at our 90<sup>th</sup>, now a member of the Greater London Club



**Yemisi Openye**, President of SI Greater London, our mother club, for both the 90<sup>th</sup> & 100<sup>th</sup> Charter Dinner

**Sue Underwood**, President of SI Manchester for our 90<sup>th</sup> and now South Lancashire Region President. Sue stepped in for SIGBI Federation President Gillie O'Rourke who had to cancel through illness. (& Yes it is the same outfit for 90<sup>th</sup> & 100<sup>th</sup>!)

**Margaret Emsley**, SIGBI Federation President for our 90<sup>th</sup>, member of SI Warrington.

**Ann Garvie**, Immediate Past Soroptimist International President and guest speaker at our 90<sup>th</sup>, member of SI Glasgow

**Sue Underwood**

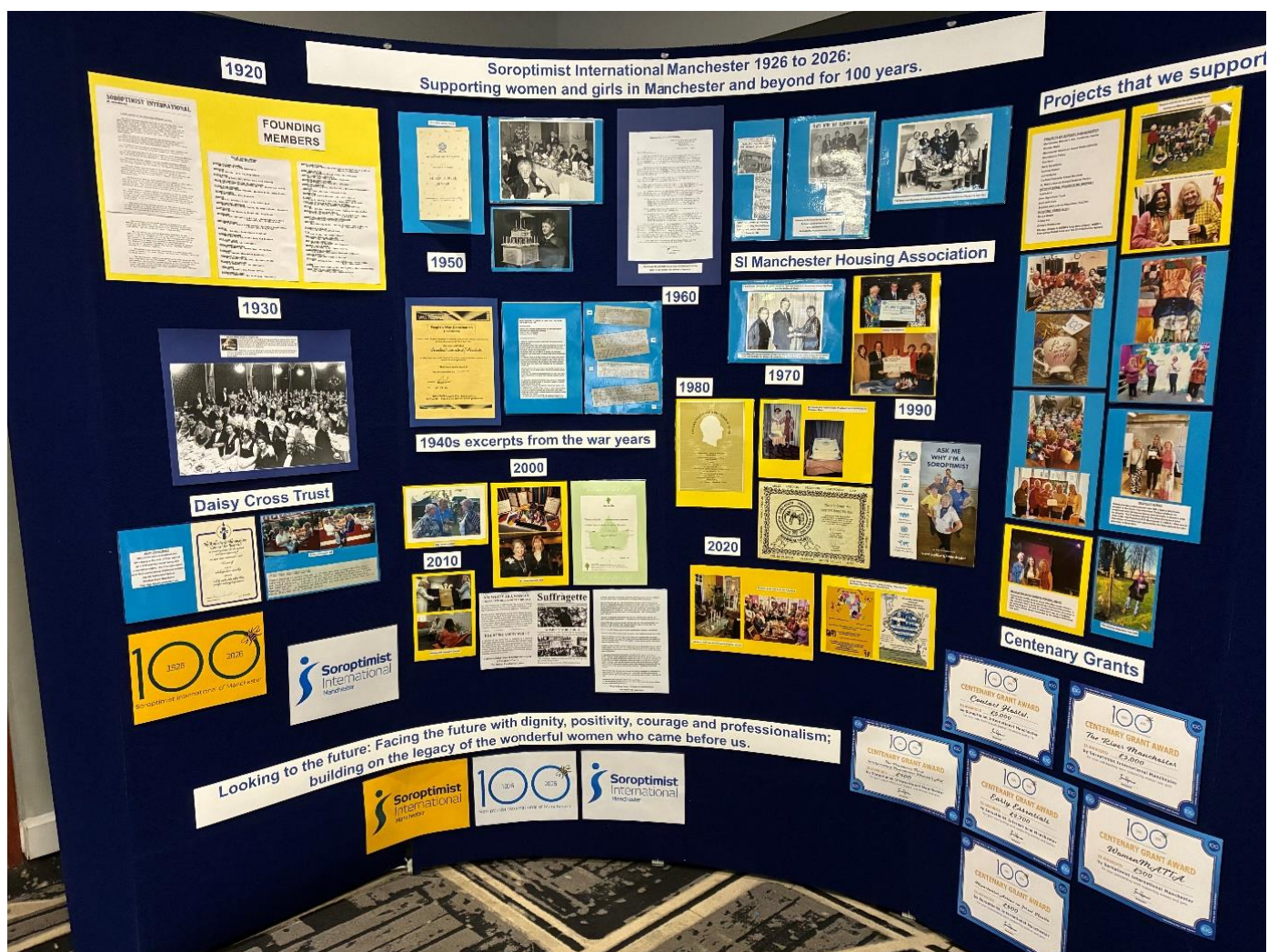


## & a cutting reporting our 50<sup>th</sup> Charter Dinner:

*We thought you would be interested to see the following excerpt from a 1976 edition of Lancashire Life. Happily both Yvonne and her friend Nan were there to celebrate our 90<sup>th</sup>.*



## Centenary Display from the Archives



A collection of material from the SI Manchester Archives in the Manchester Central Library and the personal photographs and memorabilia of past and present Manchester Soroptimists was displayed in the room where our Centenary Dinner was held at the Novotel in Worsley on Saturday 28 March. This gave the people attending the dinner the opportunity to look at examples of material through the decades, from the first meeting of SI Manchester to the present day.

Some key activities were also highlighted; the SI Manchester Housing Association which started in the nineteen sixties and ran until the mid-nineteen eighties; wartime activity which was sustained throughout the Second World War and beyond; The Daisy Cross Trust and our current activity and special Centenary Grants.

We have had a lot of material to sort through in order to whittle it down to a small number of exhibits that exemplify the organisation. This has included a total of three days spent looking through large boxes of materials that are in the official SI Manchester Archive. This was undertaken by Hilary, Val, Susan H and I before Christmas. The group had three afternoon meetings to decide on how we were going to do the project, look through past photographs that were taken from Sue U's personal collection including material from the late Yvonne Mullen and of course we have many photographs of current projects and social activity.

Lorraine and I made the final selection. We then set about mounting, laminating and labelling it ready for the display. I engaged the services of a local graphic designer and printer to provide some labels to make the material easier to navigate.

We will now have to decide how else we can use this display material to showcase the work of SI Manchester and perhaps engage some new members.

**Sue Silk**

## Centenary Weekend Friendship Supper



*Rose & John, your hospitality was fabulous, thank you so much, and to everyone for the amazing food, and to Sue Silk for her great organizing!*  
**Fiona Spencer**

*Thanks Rose & John for your hospitality and hard work which made the evening a real success! Hopefully the clearing up wasn't too onerous. Thanks also to everyone*



*who supplied the food. It was a fantastic spread and we gave our overseas visitors a really warm welcome.* **Sue Silk**

*Thank you Rosemarie and John for a fabulous evening of fun and international friendship....so much delicious food and a great atmosphere.* **Rosemary Steven**

*It was such precious experience to spend time with you last night all Manchester SI Ladies and all the visitors. My relationship with SI Essen Victoria and my connection with my father is unforgettable and meeting with SI Martinique with whom I corresponded as your Friendship Link Coordinator has been precious. The complete and generous hospitality of Rose and John is remarkable and always has been and the energy and commitment of Fiona is just brilliant. You mean so much to me and I hope that this is not the end but a beginning of a new stage. Thank you for your warmth and Friendship and see you all tonight. Our lovely chats and perspectives on life and future UK friendships links will continue. Wish you all the best. You are All making a wonderful contribution to Women of Manchester history, wisdom and Friendships. Malgorzata with love 🍀 **Malgorzata Kmita***

## **Soroptimist International Fort-de-France Alizés Sud**

The Soroptimist International Fort-de-France Alizés Sud club is the third club in Martinique. It was founded on the 21st April 1978. We have 24 members. Our presidencies last 2 years, this is my second year. We are delighted to have been invited and welcomed by the Manchester club, as it celebrates its 100th (centenary) anniversary. For us, this evening is a living testament to the sisterhood that binds us together.

An idea of our main activities, based on the 5 themes of the French Union.

### **AUTONOMY AND LEADERSHIP**

Our main project here is LA MYRIAM, a structure housing women with mental health issues, out of hospital, but not able to look after themselves. It's a stepping stone towards them returning to their families or moving into usually sheltered housing.

We offer the residents weekly singing classes, which staff confirm are very positive for their morale and mental well-being. Every New Year we organize a party, starting with a morning activity, recently traditional dancing/ flower arranging/potting (some of our members also join in). This is followed by lunch in a restaurant, with music and dancing, and individual gifts for each resident. They love it!

### **EDUCATION**

Following a suggestion of the French Union we award a prize every year to the best female third year student in French at a chosen secondary school in a deprived area. Some members are always present at the school prize-giving, gaining visibility for our movement with students and parents alike.

To encourage the ambitions of local girls, we rebaptized this prize (originally the Suzanne Noel Prize all over France) the "Marie-Alice Andre-Jacoulet prize" after one of our founder members, a past President who was a locally renowned barrister, President of the Bar and novelist!

### **ENVIRONMENT**

Each year we take two stands in a Car Boot Sale, an excellent form of re-cycling. The funds are being put aside to create a garden for LA MYRIAM, which will be moving to a new site, so the residents can plant fruit and vegetables for their kitchen and flowers for their enjoyment!

Our visit to RHS Bridgewater gave us some new ideas for this!

### **HEALTH and HEALTHY FOODS**

Amazones is a breast cancer charity for which our club organizes workshops making heart shaped "Coussins du Coeur" with pretty materials, often donated. The cushions are cleverly designed to ease pain, protect scars, and provide comfort after breast surgery. We present hundreds every year to the hospitals concerned.

(I must also mention that we take part in events organized by ENDO 972 (Endometriosis), because on the first ever ENDOWALK.... we were accompanied by Rosemary!)

### **VIOLENCE against WOMEN and GIRLS**

We have two main projects:

Le Nid (the nest) is an association we accompany, working to help those trying to escape prostitution in Fort-de-France. We've financed various things for them, including a kitchen at their base, where women can come for cookery lessons. We've also showcased the designs of their sewing workshop at one of our events.

The period 25 November until 10 December is extremely important to us. We organize radio clips, television interviews, articles in local papers and magazine, workshops on violence against women in secondary schools, in companies like EDF, FRANCE TRAVAIL (JOB CENTRES) and even the REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY, during which there is a presentation, and more importantly real discussion around different forms of violence and how to recognize them.

A cinema presentation of a film on the subject, chosen by vote among all French clubs, is an annual event organized by all Martinique Clubs together.

We sell orange ribbon knots made for us by LE NID for 1€ throughout this period, to raise visibility and to help fund our actions.

***President Brigitte Leger***

## Friendship Links Weekend

The weekend of activities with our Friendship Links Centenary Dinner guests really was Friendship, Food and Fun in action. Alison, Brigitte and Michelle had made the long trip over from Martinique arriving on the Wednesday. Their close previous connection with Rosemary meant that some of their time was spent with her. Our German guests from one of the Essen clubs, Felicitas, Alexandra, Angelika and Katharina with her husband arrived either late on Thursday evening or during the day on Friday. They all participated in all of the activities that we had planned for the Friday, Saturday and Sunday of the Centenary Dinner weekend.

Once we had decided on the itinerary and circulated it, and our visitors had given it the seal of approval, we set about devising who was going to support it and make sure that everything went according to plan. The only thing that we couldn't plan for was the weather which was at times quite cold and wet but it didn't put us off, even though at times it must have been a challenge particularly for our visitors from Martinique.



Friday started with a visit to RHS Bridgewater and lunch there. We walked around the gardens and, after a slightly drizzly start, the sun even put in a brief appearance. The spring flowers were really lovely and the visitors were impressed with the scale of the gardens and how they were being managed. Val and her friend Pat came to join in with Rose, Fiona and myself.

Friday evening was a relaxed and convivial buffet supper at Rose and John's house with twenty four of us enjoying a really lovely evening getting to know our guests and welcoming them to the SI Manchester Club.

We all contributed food and the array of hot and cold food which exemplified both traditional British fare: Lancashire Hotpot, a huge cheeseboard of British cheeses, Bread and Butter Pudding and Manchester Tart as well as spicy meat and chicken casseroles, dips, vegetarian dishes, coleslaw, rice dishes, meringues and fruit and a cheesecake was truly impressive. Club members transported our guests to and from the hotel for the evening.



Saturday morning started with a Guided Walk in Manchester 'Suffragettes, Significant Women and Manchester' followed by lunch at Mr Thomas's Chop House and a taxi back to the hotel for a rest before the evening dinner. This was organised by Rachelle and Rose,

Helen and Fiona accompanied the visitors on the walk.



Sunday was wet and dreary but, undaunted, Catherine T, Sophie and I transported the visitors to The Lowry where we met Sue U, Jeff, Fiona and Paul for a coffee break and then a visit to the Lowry 360 exhibition and the Lowry Gallery which the visitors and we really enjoyed. Rachelle had earlier picked up Katharina and her husband for a swift visit to the Pankhurst Centre before joining us at The Lowry. We then had lunch at The KargoMkt before going our separate ways – Alexandra and Angelika back to Germany, the Martinique visitors to Rosemary's for a farewell

dinner and Felicitas, Katherina and her husband joining Fiona, Paul, Mike and I at our house for a good chat, dinner and a few drinks.

Learning about each other and our shared commitment to the aims of Soroptimism made this a really special experience although it may take a while for our waistlines to recover! We hope that we will be able to find ways of working together on some projects now that we have really cemented these Friendship Links. We have so much in common and we share the energy and commitment to make an impact in our communities together.

**Sue Silk**

## Suffragettes, Significant Women & Manchester



On Saturday our guests enjoyed (despite the cold weather!) a guided walking tour by [www.jonathanschofieldtours.com](http://www.jonathanschofieldtours.com) on 'Suffragettes, Significant Women and Manchester'.



We heard about the Pankhurst family, Lydia Becker, Annie Kenney and many more heroines of the female suffrage movement in Manchester who are commemorated in this stroll around interiors, buildings and landmarks where women fought for representation. There are stories of reasoned argument, attacks on paintings, arrests and the raising of the Votes for Women banner on 13 October, 1905.

We also learnt about some exceptional and eccentric women that have featured prominently in the Manchester story from Ann Lee 'the bride of Christ', through Ann Bland, Elizabeth Raffald, Mary Fildes, Elizabeth Gaskell, Shena Simon.

We warmed and enjoyed a traditionally British lunch, fish & chips in the main, in Mr Thomas's Chop House which was established in 1867.

On Sunday morning Katarina enjoyed visiting Susan at the Pankhurst Centre and made a very striking Suffragette!



**Rachelle Manders-Ratcliff**

## Afternoon Tea with the Lord Mayor of Manchester

As part of our Centenary Celebrations members of S I Manchester were invited to afternoon tea with the Lord Mayor of Manchester Cllr Carmine Grimshaw. As the town hall is still undergoing refurbishment the civic and ceremonial team had relocated to the central library which was the venue for this very special afternoon.

President Sophie and guests were warmly welcomed by the Lord Mayor, and we were introduced to the Lord Mayor's consort Cllr June Hitchen. They are colleagues in the Miles Platting and Newton Heath ward, and it emerged that Cllr Hitchen had previously attended a Manchester dinner when she was Lord Mayor.



Both the Lord Mayor and Consort were interested to know the history of our club and the many projects we support especially during our centenary year. We found some common interests in that they also support a girls football team and the Consort had secured donations of Revlon beauty products for Contact and had visited the hostel.



When the doors of the banqueting room were opened we all gave a gasp as the table was beautifully decorated and laden with delicious looking food. We were not disappointed. After much chatter and partaking of the delicious sandwiches, pastries and cakes the Lord Mayor asked each of us to give brief details of our own Soroptimist journey and the reasons why we became Soroptimists.

The Lord Mayor then moved to the head of the table and thanked us for our support for women and girls in Manchester and beyond. President

Sophie responded with our thanks for a truly enjoyable and memorable occasion in this our Centenary Year which was the perfect way to conclude a lovely afternoon.



I think Susan Hollick summed up what we all thought as we left; we were proud of one another and proud to be a Soroptimist

**Carole Swarbrick**

## Congratulations to The Tigers!

Following the successes of the England Women's football team known as the Lionesses S I Manchester decided to explore the possibility of sponsoring a local girls football team.

Eventually the club formed a partnership with Ashton on Mersey's under 12 team called **The Tigers** and it was agreed to sponsor both the home (blue) and away (orange) kit. The football shirts are therefore emblazoned with Soroptimist International Manchester and the dynamic S on the front and one sleeve.

This is the second season of sponsorship and we are developing a positive relationship with the parents, coaches and of course the girls.



Congratulations to our girls football team The Tigers who are having a run of good results winning 3-2 on January 24<sup>th</sup> against the Snow Leopards. A brilliant start to 2026.

I was therefore inspired again today (Jan 31st) on a bright but cold morning to watch the girls play Urmston Meadows. It was a really enjoyable game especially as the girls won 3-0. It was so exciting with our team having most of the chances and even hit the post. The third goal was thought to be offside by the other team but in the absence of VAR it was given and well deserved.

I did ask a parent for her thoughts as to the reason for this good run of positive results and she pointed immediately to the coach Ian who I was standing alongside. Ian was reluctant to accept the credit emphasising the commitment of all the coaches, parents and of course the girls who are working together as a team whilst having fun.

I did speak to 3 mums who asked me to thank members of the club for our sponsorship. They are very appreciative of our support. They also described the reasons they love their daughters playing football which include many physical and social benefits.

Girls football is one of the fastest growing sports globally so our partnership with Ashton on Mersey club is special as together we seek to empower the girls to develop confidence, leadership and teamwork whilst hopefully raising the profile of Soroptimist International Manchester.

**Carole Swarbrick**



## Manchester Women's Aid – Steps to Safety



*Rose (second from right) – all with sore feet but delighted to finish*

Manchester Women's Aid (MWA) organised Steps to Safety – a 15 km walk from Manchester City Centre to Altrincham to reflect on the one woman killed by an abusive partner or ex every five days.

Our club has supported MWA for many years and chose to sponsor this event to mark International Women's Day. Rose completed the walk (27,000 steps!) and took the opportunity to speak about the work we do. £610 was raised.

## News from New Hope, Orissa, India

*It's very hot!*

*Eliazar has let Maureen know that Sunitha, the young girl whose nurse training we are supporting, has passed her first year with distinction. He says, 'she was born to be a nurse'.*



*Eliazar and his wife, Ruth, are well. Finances are a bit easier as they have a well established vegetable garden and can sell their surplus bananas.*

**Pat & Maureen**

*(We've sent £650 to support Sunitha's second year & we have funds 'ringfenced' for years 3 & 4)*

**'A Global Voice'** by Trond Henriksen was played at the SIGBI Conference in Birmingham and SIGBI have now made it available on YouTube:

SIGBI – A Soroptimist Song created for SI Norway

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KFO3sQYRTo>

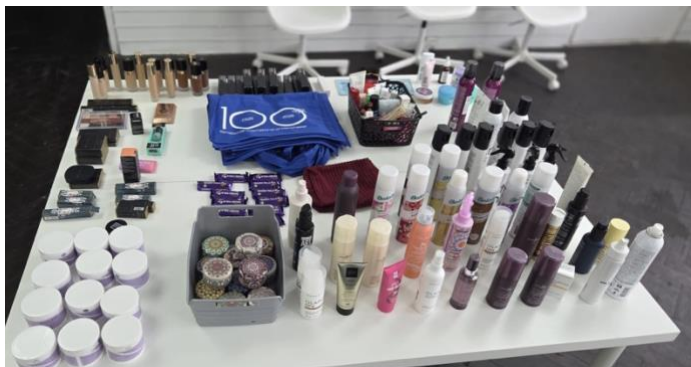


Soroptimist – a voice that is strong.

## Empowerment Through Care: Highlights from the Hair & Wellbeing Event

On Monday 18th May, Soroptimist International Manchester partnered with Naomi Brooks of Ascend Co Studio to host a truly uplifting **Hair & Wellbeing Event** for women supported by the domestic abuse charities that we work alongside. What unfolded was a day filled with warmth, confidence-building, and genuine care, a reminder of the power of small acts delivered with great kindness.

Twelve women attended across the day, each welcomed into the salon for a **90-minute pampering session**, some stayed much longer. Every guest received a professional cut and style, refreshments, and a beautifully curated goody bag to take home. These bags were filled with makeup, skincare, hair products, chocolate, scented candles, and other treats, all presented in a Soroptimist International Manchester tote bag. For some of the women, this was their first visit to a salon in many years, making the experience especially meaningful and, at times, emotional.



The event was made possible through the generosity and enthusiasm of many people. We are deeply grateful to **Naomi Brooks and her team at Ascend Co Studio**, whose skill, warmth, and generosity created a safe and welcoming space for every guest. Their commitment to giving back to the community was evident throughout the day, and we are delighted that this may not be a one-off collaboration.

A special acknowledgement must go to **Liz**, whose organisation, persistence, and calm handling of bookings, cancellations, and last-minute changes ensured the day ran smoothly. Her presence at the event helped every woman feel welcomed, valued, and cared for. Although she insists it was a joint effort, her leadership was central to the event's success.



The feedback from the women who attended has been deeply moving. For some, this was the first time in many years they had been able to sit in a salon chair and be looked after. For others, it was a rare moment of peace, confidence, and self-care. The smiles, the conversations, and the visible lift in spirits made clear just how worthwhile the day was.

This event reflects the heart of Soroptimism: **supporting women, strengthening confidence, and building community through kindness and practical action**. We are proud of what

was achieved and grateful to everyone who contributed.

And with Naomi already exploring the possibility of future sessions... **watch this space**.

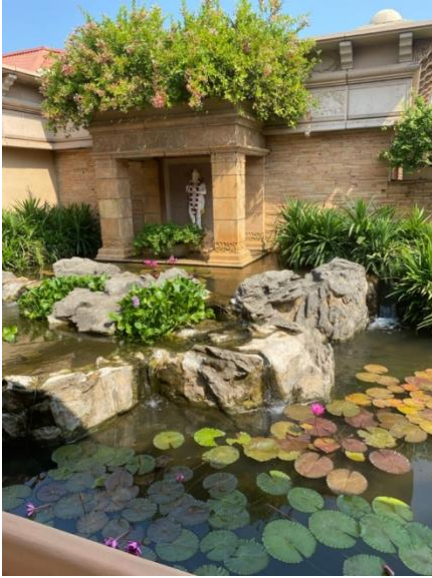
**President Sophie**



## Return to Goa

Twenty years ago, my son Tom was travelling the world and his itinerary included India. Knowing that India was on my bucket list surprisingly he invited me to join him.

We visited the Golden Triangle of Delhi, Agra and Jaipur finishing in Goa.



Another surprise was when he asked me, all these years later, to return to Goa along with his family. Of course, I immediately accepted the offer as it was a wonderful opportunity to return to a beautiful place with family based in Dubai and who I don't see often enough.

The emerging down sides were that I would be away for the club's centenary weekend and the war in the region as my plan involved time in Dubai either side of Goa.

I decided that if my Emirates flight was not cancelled then I would be a passenger and so after weighing up the risks outlined by the foreign office I went even though I knew it was perhaps a little reckless.

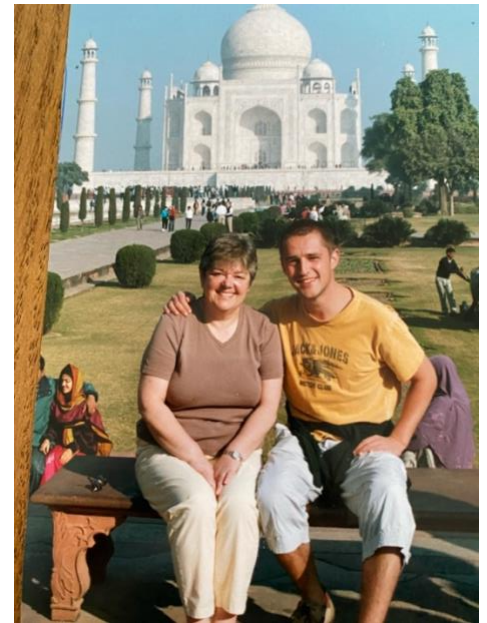
Goa was wonderful and a lovely trip down memory lane although this time it included a baby and a four year old and spells in kids club!

One very sad unintended consequence of the war is the impact it is having on the extremely hard working people who are involved in the hospitality and tourism sector in Dubai and send money back to their home countries in order to support their families. A taxi driver told me he wasn't earning enough to pay the rental on the car! Whilst life in Dubai seemed to be business as usual, although the schools were closed, I did hear explosions, see the jets flying overhead and had many notifications throughout the night warning of drone attacks.

Now back home I think less about energy costs and food shortages and more about the families plunged into poverty and those whose homes are being destroyed whilst they live in fear.

I hope by the time the newsletter is published a diplomatic solution has been agreed, the war has ended and people can begin to rebuild their lives.

**Carole Swarbrick**



## Birth Aid in Uganda – Dr Fiona Reid



*Dr Reid – and our President Fiona chairing the meeting from Spain.*

Dr Fiona Reid, consultant urogynaecologist, spoke at our February meeting. Fiona and colleagues established **Birth Aid** in Uganda 15 years ago. The charity aims to improve the health and well-being of women by repairing injuries sustained during childbirth. Initially teams went to Uganda to carry out the procedures – now they provide training to local healthcare professionals.

We were pleased to be able to give a donation to this very worthwhile charity.

*See <https://www.birth-aid.org.uk> for more*

## Didsbury Good Neighbours

Hilary, Pat and Elaine received a warm welcome from Didsbury Good Neighbours on Monday 27th April.



Didsbury Good Neighbours is a community facility set in Didsbury Park. It's primary function is as a day centre for elderly people, with lots of activities run by staff and volunteers. They also have a cafe next door that's open to the public.

The centre manager Jamie organised a lunch so we could get to know their Monday Gardening group. It was a very pleasant afternoon, with a surprise birthday cake for the group's facilitator Jan.

After lunch Hilary got stuck in with some dead-heading!

Our associated charity Daisy Cross (Sorooptimist) Trust has donated £3,500 and we've started discussions with Jamie as to how this will be used.

**Elaine Loader**



## Quilt Raffle

Who knew that quilting and the art of patchwork would become such a beloved hobby when I took it up again in COVID, after a 20+ year gap. It was not too surprising then that I thought I could make a quilt to raffle. Having pieced the top I sent the quilt off for professional longarm quilting to have a beautiful stitched pattern all over it and then I hand finished the binding.

Last year we took out a small society lottery licence, as this is a legal requirement to be able to print and sell tickets ahead. So, at the end of last year, members started selling the tickets my son Alex had designed, and the raffle was drawn in January. Overall, we made £1535 which is fantastic, and the quilt was won by our President Elect, Sophie's parents. Thank you all for selling and buying tickets.

Having taken out the licence, we can renew it each year for only £20 and then can print and sell tickets ahead for any future raffles such as at the Race Lunch in August. We also made up hampers for our Afternoon tea raffle and again could do something similar, selling tickets ahead to maximise the amount for our charities fund.

**Fiona Spencer**



## My Life as an Intern with Act4Africa

### Introducing Myself.

My name is Isobel, and I'm the current events intern at Act4Africa. Since August, I have had the opportunity to intern with Act4Africa as a part of my university course, where I study Sociology at York St. John University. My work at the charity involves supporting both community fundraising and charity-led events.

No two days are ever quite the same!

### Life as an Intern.

As an intern, I've had the chance to get involved in lots of different parts of event planning. My days can include researching event ideas, support the planning and organisation of upcoming activities, and exploring ways to

connect and support those who choose to fundraise for us. It's been a great opportunity to learn how much work happens behind the scenes to make fundraising events possible, and to see first-hand how important every donation and fundraiser is to the charity.

My days aren't always spent working from my laptop though! I've had many opportunities to get out into my local area, networking, spreading the word and raising funds. In November, I attended a local Christmas fair on behalf of Act4Africa, where I hosted a tombola and shared information about the charity with visitors. It was a fantastic opportunity to introduce the charity to my local area, and the tombola proved to be a success - raising nearly £150 in just 2 hours!



### Events.

From my work at the charity so far, I've had valuable opportunities to get involved with the planning and organisation of a number of different charity-led events.

Last November, I organised a virtual challenge, where participants got involved by completing 25 miles over the month of November. This challenge was a success and participants were a great sport. I'm excited to share that Miles that Matter is making a return this May! This time, participants get the chance to set their own challenge - choosing how many miles they decide to walk, run, swim or cycle over the month, while fundraising for Act4Africa.



For those who prefer an in-person event, we are also hosting a Quiz Night on Friday 1st May 2026 at All Saints Church in Hale Barns, Altrincham. The evening promises to be fun, lively and a great chance to test your knowledge, enjoy some friendly competition, and raise funds for our vital projects at the same time. Tickets are on sale now and can be purchased through our Eventbrite page or by contacting [fundraising@act4africa.org](mailto:fundraising@act4africa.org).

All fundraising and efforts from these events go towards supporting our mission of empowering women and children in Uganda, giving them the opportunity for a brighter and poverty-free future.

*(Sadly this event had to be cancelled due to lack of support, maybe due to the bank holiday weekend – so Isobel also gained experience in cancelling an event! Sue U)*

### Thanks

I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity to be part of Act4Africa's mission and to contribute, even in a small way, to the life-changing work being carried out every day. Interning with the charity has been a valuable experience and it's been amazing to gain hands-on experiences while supporting a cause I'm truly passionate about.

### Isobel Harrison

*Isobel with Barbara & Zohra looking after the Act4Africa stall at the recent South Lancashire Regional Conference*



<https://act4africa.org>

## 'She Leads' - Justine's Journey of Courage and Growth

Despite resistance and disappointment from family and community members who doubted her potential, Justine refused to give up. The confidence and resilience she built through Act4Africa's *She Leads* programme gave her the courage to push forward and become a better version of herself.

Starting small by frying and selling samosas and mandazi, Justine saved diligently and eventually opened her own shop, an achievement she proudly calls a major milestone. She didn't stop there. By packaging her mandazi to last up to three days, she added value to her products and stood out in her community.

Moved by her progress, Justine invited the Act4Africa team recently to visit and witness her growth firsthand. Nearly in tears, she shared, *"None of this would have been possible without the encouragement, training, and support I received."*



## In Celebration of International Women's Day – Shamim's Story of Strength



As we mark International Women's Day on 8th March, we are proud to celebrate the strength, resilience, and determination of women like Shamim.

Shamim is a young mother of two who joined Act4Africa in 2022 as a beneficiary of the Adolescent Mothers Programme. Having been married at an early age, she faced significant challenges while navigating motherhood and adulthood at the same time. Despite this, she remained determined to build a better future for herself and her children.

Through the programme, Shamim received training in practical livelihood skills, including soap making and other income-generating activities. These opportunities equipped her with the tools, confidence, and independence she needed to move forward. What began as support during a vulnerable period became the foundation for lasting change.

Her dedication and growth did not go unnoticed. Today, Shamim proudly works with Act4Africa as a member of the support staff—a powerful transformation from programme beneficiary to valued team member. Her journey reflects not only personal resilience but also the impact that opportunity, skills, and belief can have in transforming lives.

This International Women's Day, we celebrate Shamim — and every woman striving to create a brighter future for herself and her family.

*By kind permission of Act4Africa*

## South Lancashire Regional Conference 2026

As delegates we were welcomed to the Novotel Hotel Worsley by the South Lancashire Regional President, Sue Underwood, with the following words: *“Today we have a variety of speakers to inform, educate and inspire us, as we explore Why? When? Where? Soroptimists may be of service, making a difference to the lives of women and girls at home and abroad. May the spirit of enquiry keep us aware, relevant and ready to respond to our changing world.”*

A number of delegates had stayed overnight at the hotel and thoroughly enjoyed the Friendship Supper. They were joined on the Saturday by day delegates. All were welcomed by the stewards who, with friendly smiles, directed them to the facilities including the very important tablet where all cars had to be registered.



The programme had been planned to be varied and interesting but included plenty of time for questions and socialising.

The day started with Barbara Jeremiah JP, MSc and Dr Kay Linnell OBE outlining their work with sub post masters who had been affected by the Horizon Computer Scandal.



Barbara Blaber, a fellow Soroptimist, described the current work with Act4Africa's 'She Leads' project.

Jaz Siuda, founder of Therapy First, led chair based exercises to help delegates loosen up from a morning of sitting.

Lunch followed with plenty of time to eat the delicious food and chat.



Dr Charlotte Badescu GP opened the afternoon session outlining the work of the Dianne Oxberry Trust.

Then Arvid Woods offered a practical interactive session “Inspired Lives - Making the Pieces Fit”. Where he asked us to think about ourselves and how we would like to make changes.





Alison McMath, Photographer, explained about “Finding Focus at 50” how she had moved into a new career including some stunning photographs of her ‘MastectoME Beauty Project’.

( <https://www.mastectome.co.uk/donate> )

South Lancashire Regional President, Sue Underwood, brought the conference to a close wishing safe journeys home, thanking everybody who had helped with the conference or attended it. By the amount of conversation throughout the day it was evident that we had entered into the spirit of the conference and enjoyed the day.

**Val Jenkins**



**Save the Date for the next Regional Conference!**



Saturday 15 May  
2027

**Brockholes Nature Reserve  
Conference Centre**  
Preston New Road  
Preston  
PR5 0AG



**2027 Regional Conference  
Finding Our Future Voice**

Save the date to join us at this event



## Donations & Deliveries!



March:  
22 hats, 7 blankets, 5 cardigans, 5 mitts 2 bootees to Early Essentials plus two bags of beautiful clothes collected by Ann Thomas.

Plea to all knitters & quilters:  
Blankets to be 70cm x 60cm please.



April:  
12 blankets, 4 cardigans, 15 hats,  
5 mitts, 2 bootees &  
2 bags of reloved clothes  
& 4 hats, 8pairs mitts & 5 bootees & socks

22 hats (probably 8 for Orissa,  
1 cardigan & 3 blankets

All for Early Essentials.  
**Fiona Spencer**



April:  
Clothes, including brand new bras,  
and toiletries dropped off at  
WomenMATTA.  
Hannah thanked us for our  
generosity. Hannah was our speaker  
at the May Club meeting



May:  
Brand new underwear (in lieu of Speaker  
Fee) and pre-loved clothes delivered to  
WomenMATTA.  
Hannah sends her heartfelt thanks, and  
she commented on the very high quality  
clothes. She says the items we donate  
always get snapped up first!

**Elaine Loader**



Fabiola delivering clothing donations from Liz to The River.  
In each black bag there was another white bag with kid's items.  
All in total I delivered 6-7 bags.

Some items were brand new with labels and prices.  
Liz says the clothes were from 'The Wardrobe' in Sale

**Liz & Fabiola**

## Our Trees in Didsbury Park on 18<sup>th</sup> April



## Our Centenary Merchandise is now Available!



Mugs @ £6 each

Tote Bags @ £4 each

Tea towels to follow!

**Dates for Your Diary**

Tuesday 2 <sup>nd</sup> June	6:30 for 7pm	Club Meeting Speaker Hannah Priest from Pankhurst Centre
Saturday 6 <sup>th</sup> June	From 10am	South Lancs Region PAC & Council Meeting + <b>Stall</b>
Saturday 6 <sup>th</sup> June	From 10am	Manchester Histories Festival
Tuesday 16 <sup>th</sup> June		100 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our Charter being granted.
Tuesday 16 <sup>th</sup> June	7pm	Executive Meeting on Zoom
Friday 19 <sup>th</sup> June	7pm	Charter Celebration Supper hosted by Fiona.
Tuesday 7 <sup>th</sup> July	6:30 for 7pm	Club Meeting
Tuesday 21 <sup>st</sup> July	7pm	Executive Meeting on Zoom
Tuesday 4 <sup>th</sup> August	6:30 for 7pm	Club Meeting
Sunday 16 <sup>th</sup> August	TBC	<b>Race Lunch</b>
Tuesday 18 <sup>th</sup> August	7pm	Executive Meeting on Zoom
Tuesday 1 <sup>st</sup> September	7pm	Club Meeting
Tuesday 15 <sup>th</sup> September	7pm	Executive Meeting on Zoom
Saturday 26 <sup>th</sup> September	From 10am	South Lancs Region PAC & Council Meeting

Further information & Social events – Watch for emails! - See <https://sigbi.org/manchester/meetings-and-events/>

**Copy** for the Summer edition of the Newsletter by **Friday 31<sup>st</sup> July**, please.

Looking forward to articles from each of you!

Tell your story ... Review your Soroptimism ... Newer Members please introduce yourselves!

Anything else you would like to share? Personal anecdotes always welcome

*Sue Underwood* [sueuhome@sky.com](mailto:sueuhome@sky.com)

Last Words ..... from Women, a Man & a Dog who could/should have been Soroptimists!

