

This has been another busy Programme Action year for the club and our efforts have received many thanks from the beneficiaries who have truly appreciated our time, commitment, gifts and donations.

We spent some time in August and September last year contemplating our Programme Action activity. This resulted in some clarity around how we categorise our efforts under four main headings, **Awareness raising, Advocacy/campaigning, Fundraising and Action**, and we have achieved a great deal of activity in each of these areas over the past year.

Our excellent and inspiring speakers over the past year have contributed to our **Awareness raising**, as has contact with other organisations, such as Amnesty International and Hope for Justice.

Advocacy and campaigning through petitions and consultations, and through writing to support victims via Amnesty International.

Fundraising and making donations in kind, include filling shoe boxes, supporting foodbanks, the Zisize feeding programme, Lalibela Children's Library in Ethiopia, and sponsored knitting.

Over the year, we have given gifts to the Refuges, such as trauma bears, chocolate eggs and other gifts at Easter, and hampers at Christmas.

A highlight of the year was achieving 84 filled backpacks for Mary's Meals Backpack Project supporting children aged 4 to 12 years in Malawi. We were sad to hear the Backpack Project has now closed.

Funds have also been raised through the year at social events, for example the Soup Kitchen for SATEDA, the barbeque for the International President's Appeal, the Garden Party in aid of Itarsi, the Fashion Show and Angela's Quiz Night in aid of WaterAid.

Fashion Show on May 19 with Travelling Trends raised funds for our Soroptimist charities.

Action gave us many opportunities to give our skills, experience and time to projects such as Project Hope, Carers Support through the Carers First calling out service, helping with activities for Young Carers, volunteering in the Blythwood Shoebox Appeal warehouse, working in the Sensory Garden in Rochester, tree planting, litter picking, active involvement in Plastic Free Medway, supporting Byron Primary School as a Rights Respecting School, knitting trauma bears, and promoting Brave Bear books.

Volunteering included members joining in with FoRCE volunteers to litter pick around the Rochester Esplanade as part of the Great British Spring Clean in April 2022, and then again on 16th July to mark the .SIGBI Day of Action and on 15th October.

On 27th August 14 members carried out a litter pick at the site of our Tovil tree planting as part of Maidstone Borough Council's #CleanUpMaidstone project.

Supporting Byron Primary School has led to Jane and Stella becoming involved in several practical activities, including helping with their Fun Runs and manning the toy stall at their Christmas Fair to raise money for Mary's Meals.

Jane has produced dozens of trauma bears which have made their way far and wide. Nellie presented some bears knitted in Ghana's national colours to SI Accra. Others made their way to Kent Fire and Rescue who were sending decommissioned fire engines to Ukraine via Poland and wanted some trauma bears to join the convoy.

For Blythwood Shoebox Appeal, members sourced, wrapped and filled 83 shoeboxes distributed to Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Kosovo, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine in time for Christmas.

Members also volunteered at the Blythwood Care warehouse at Lok'n'Store in Gillingham, which served as the Collection Point for shoeboxes for London and the South East.

During Carers Week in June, Angela Howe volunteered at an event in the Rochester Corn Exchange which highlighted the challenges unpaid carers face.

Lillian continues to support carers through the Calling Out service.

Stella and Jane responded to a plea for help from the Medway Foodbank in May and volunteered to help with the summer food collection at Tesco stores.

Four members got into the festive spirit by volunteering at a G4 Christmas concert at Rochester Cathedral, acting as ushers, selling event programmes and collecting donations for the Missing People charity. Donations help to keep the Missing People helpline open.

On a wet weekend at the end of November during the SIGBI 16 Days of Action, Carol McKeough and Nellie volunteered on the Amnesty International stall at Aylesford Priory promoting the Write for Rights campaign.

Sadly the Kent Association for the Blind's Talking News service came to an end last year after 45 years, overtaken by developments in technology. Eight members enjoyed KAB's celebration lunch in Lenham to thank volunteers.

Last year, members continued to support Project Hope, a letter writing project for women in prisons and made a special effort before Christmas to let them know we are thinking of them, and they are not alone.

In compiling this very brief summary of our activities, it is always inspiring to see how much our members have achieved over the past year.

All these projects need recording and we continue to be extremely grateful to Jane for unfailingly completing Programme Focus Forms for all our activities throughout the year.

Liz Duckworth and Teresa Cambell
Programme Action Officers
April 2023