BEST PRACTICE AWARDS 2020

Women inspiring action, transforming lives
This annual day out for all the family has been organised by SI Solihull, supported by their Partner the Solihull St Alphege Rotary Club, for the last 12 years. Approximately 6,000 local residents attend each year, and entertainment is provided for all. There is a large arena and stage where local children and adults perform, plus fun dog show, classic car show, children’s fairground, a variety of food and drink outlets and sixty stalls run by small businesses and charities. The Club runs a stall which features topics including domestic violence, STEM subjects, female suffrage, human trafficking and health. Performers in the arena are mainly women and girls and they have the opportunity to display their cultural, artistic and gymnastic skills, building confidence for the future. As a result, strong partnerships have been developed between Soroptimist International Solihull and District and the local Rotarians, the Solihull Council, Solihull College and University Centre and various local businesses. Since its inception, £100,000 has been raised for charities. In 2019 these included the British Heart Foundation, the UK Sepsis Trust and Action for ME. A great example of partnership working.
The Jasmine and Thistle project started when the 2017 Club President interviewed a recently arrived Syrian Refugee. Sana’a Alwadi is a clinical psychologist who offers therapy to other refugees. Touched by Sana’a’s story, the club reached out to 4 other Syrian families who had recently arrived in the area, inviting them to share their stories and helping them to overcome the language barrier.

Initially the Club offered practical help: household goods; toys and books for the children. As friendships developed, they provided a violin and arranged violin lessons for a 10 year old girl with an aptitude for music and art. Members drove her to and from her music and art classes and she progressed so well musically that when she moved up to High School she was immediately accepted for the School Orchestra.

During lockdown the Club donated £900 to help 26 families in need, providing them with culturally appropriate food and phonecards. They also donated £950 to Glasgow Night Shelter for Destitute Asylum Seekers to provide phonecards.

The Jasmine and Thistle Project is grounded in Friendship and Hospitality. One of the Syrian children recently asked a Soroptimist, “Can I call you my Scottish Granny?”
The Covid 19 pandemic created many challenges for parents and children, and their mental health was impacted. These challenges included fear, anxiety, worry, uncertainty and coping with prolonged periods indoors. SI San Fernando engaged the services of Dr Karen Moore, a child psychologist, to speak directly to the concerns of parents through an online video series, which address the following issues:

- Children’s fears
- Speaking to your child about the pandemic
- Signs of stress
- Handling concerns about exams
- Children wanting to go out

Ideas for alternatives to watching TV or playing video games were offered, such as indoor hopscotch. Former West Indies cricketer Daren Ganga, provided ideas for outdoor activities.

Positive comments received included "Thanks. I have stopped stressing about school work", and "This really helped with my daughter – she is really anxious over this pandemic".
The Luminary Bakery is a social enterprise in East London that empowers vulnerable women, who have experienced gender-based violence, trafficking or honour-based violence, through baking. They also make excellent cakes! If you are ever in Camden or Hackney why not book for afternoon tea.

The Club decided to invest in the Luminary, as a way of helping the women to realise their dreams, through training, employment and community. Women have been enabled to break cycles of poverty, violence & disadvantage once and for all. Referrals to the Luminary come from a range of agencies from across London, and the training programme has been very successful.

Club members also attend sessions and act as mentors.

The bakery said, "Luminary is really grateful to the Soroptimist volunteers who have been mentoring our graduates from our training programmes really investing in their personal and professional development and making them feel a part of community."

One young trainee said, "My Soroptimist mentor did a wonderful job. She’s like my mum and a mentor at the same time. She’s one of the pillars to my business helping me along the way. Now I’m a Soroptimist."

Prosperity Award Winner

SI London East - Luminary Bakery
In 2019, SI Liverpool joined in with a City Council-led initiative aimed at offsetting the effects of climate change. The project will run until May 2022.

This is a relatively new approach to solving environmental problems, designed to bring natural features and processes to cities, landscapes and seascapes. The aim is to improve air quality, water management, cooling features and biodiversity. These innovative solutions also support economic growth, create jobs and enhance all kinds of well-being.

The Club made contact with a Postgraduate student, who delivered a presentation of nature-based solutions at a Club meeting. During Spring 2019, members attended various workshops with local community groups and individuals.

SI Liverpool is monitoring evidence of the changes in the city landscape and amongst local communities. Wildflower planting is taking place in the most derelict of places in the city, while urban streets are being adapted to greenspaces and leisure activities. It is great to see evidence of community engagement, not only in the planning process but also in making its realisation.

To support SIGBI’s tree planting centenary project, the Club will plant 100 trees in the city in 2021.
All the projects featured in this leaflet showcase the very best of Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland, and make me very proud to be President of such an Organisation.

**SI Solihull and District's** 'Fun in the Park' is such a wonderful project for raising the profile of Soroptimists in the local area, and is a great example of working in partnership with other organisations.

**SI Kirkintilloch and District's** 'Jasmine and Thistle' is a fitting project, especially in these challenging times, which offers the hand of friendship to the people who need it most.

**SI San Fernando's** ‘Coping with Covid’ Video Series was a fantastic way of addressing mental health issues, which are an unfortunate side-effect of the pandemic.

**SI Liverpool's** 'Nature Based Solutions' addresses both climate change and economic growth, two topics that are currently at the forefront of people’s consciousness.

**SI London East's** support of the “Luminary Bakery” is particularly poignant. If the pandemic has shown nothing else, it’s that the food industry is essential, and one of the few economic growth areas. The bakery gives disadvantaged women an opportunity to learn a new trade and improve their lives.

Congratulations to all five Clubs on their well-deserved awards.
About our Best Practice Awards

Each year we showcase one project from each of our programme focus areas, currently:

- People
- Prosperity
- Planet
- Peace
- Partnerships.

Our federation database of reports is trawled in order to shortlist several projects in each category. There are criteria against which each is appraised:

- There are clear SMART objectives - specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time bound;
- The project has been researched and an action plan put in place - including reviewing and evaluation;
- The project responds to an identified need and focuses on women and girls;
- It involves club members and is inclusive of other clubs/friendship links/organisations where appropriate;
- Were the outcomes of benefit to the recipients;
- Have the outcomes promoted Soroptimist aims and objectives?

The Federation Programme Action Team discusses and agrees the final selection.

Each winner presented their project at conference, explaining:

- What they did;
- Why they did it;
- How they did it;
- Outcome;
- Lessons learned.

We trust that other clubs will be able to learn from and, perhaps, adopt information gleaned for their own projects.