



Report For 6'0'

February 2021

Meetings

In spite of COVID 19 the Soroptimists in the UK have managed to keep going and produce a lot of support and maintain some of their projects. This has had to be virtual in the most part and meetings have continued in this way – although supporting those without access to the technology either by lack of equipment or knowledge has been a steep and challenging learning curve for members. The drawbacks are numerous and all are now fed up with the lack of friendship in face-to-face meetings, but there have been advantages which we have celebrated. The virtual platforms have allowed people from far and wide to attend meetings and join up with those they only knew by name previously and those who otherwise would not have been able to attend meeting have been able to engage. We have all learned about time zones in a much more meaningful way, and learned to arrange meetings that will allow Soroptimists from around the world to attend meetings without getting up at 3 in the morning!

Conference October 2020

We held our annual conference virtually for the first time. This was based in Belfast, but people from all parts of our Federation attended and it was a different but certainly enjoyable experience. Our new President, Johanna Raffan MBE was inducted with her theme “Believe to Achieve” and had us all believing we could really achieve the improvement post pandemic of the terrible situations some women and girls find themselves having to endure. The conference was held on 2 afternoons, and the speakers were inspirational. Lady Hale and Professor Susan Black on Friday and Dr Alison Gardner from the Rights Lab of The University of Nottingham speaking about raising awareness of Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking and Jane Garvey from Radio 4 Woman’s Hour, with a session on “Speaking Up.”

We are already looking forward to our next virtual conference based in Llandudno in October 2021. This is the centenary year of Soroptimist International, so we are hoping for a wonderful celebration.

COVID-19 Response

In the UK we have had to put some of our projects on hold but this hasn’t stopped Soroptimists being busy. Many Soroptimists have been busy **making PPE** and sending it to hospitals, care homes and other front-line workers.

Many have been involved in **food banks** and some innovative projects have emerged. Usually, people visiting food banks choose their ingredients but in the pandemic parcels were delivered to many. Some did not know what to do with unfamiliar ingredients and so Soroptimists set up virtual cooking demonstrations, helping not only with recipes, but also with language.

The work supporting **refuges** and those suffering from domestic abuse continues, albeit with a lot of the support being on-line or by telephone. Donations to refuges continue to support those organisations whose work load has increased during the pandemic.

Lobbying

Our project work involving direct contact with people has had to diminish, but our **lobbying** work has continued and much effort has been expended in supporting amendments to the Domestic Abuse Bill going through Parliament at the moment. We are particularly pleased that Non-Fatal Strangulation is to become a separate offence, but dismayed that the proposed coercion amendment clause seems unlikely to be passed. We will keep up our lobbying and hope that other women's organisations will join the campaign.

We continue to support work to raise awareness of **Modern Day Slavery** and Human Trafficking and to support the victims of this heinous crime as well as projects helping asylum seekers.

CSW65

The arrangements for CSW 65 this year mean that many more Soroptimists are able to attend CSW and some have become advocates for the NGO CSW as well. SIGBI will be holding a **parallel event** on March 19 2021 at 2.00pm GMT, entitled "Combatting trafficking/slavery throughout life's course using education, awareness and action." We have been busy preparing and joining with NAWO and CSWA in making preparations and statements for this event. We will be involved as much as possible in trying to influence the negotiations, championing civil society participation, and working against the roll back of women's rights, reproductive rights and the surge in violence against women both in the home and by social media and in other public forums.

Centenary Celebrations

For our centenary year we are **planting trees** all over the world – for a brighter future. Clubs all over the world are inspired by this project and some wonderful work is being undertaken. As the UK government is hosting **COP26** in Glasgow later in the year we will be getting involved in some way to show our commitment to a greener, brighter future and tackling climate change.

All in all it has been a challenging time, but we have seen the very best of women in this crisis and members are now planning their next projects.

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