

Be Bold

&



MIND THE GAP

A massive thank you to all Clubs in Midland Chase Region for sharing the work currently being done and for responding to requests to provide information to be shared in this newsletter.

Although we continue to operate under the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, clubs in Midland Chase Region are making significant progress towards the achievement of President Margaret's goals of 'Be Bold and Mind The Gap'.

There are so many gaps in society and, in this newsletter, we have looked at projects our Clubs are working on which help to bridge the following gaps:

Poverty, Period Poverty, Knowledge, Equality, Green and Mental Health

We may get the biggest return for our efforts, and make the most real impact, if we collaborate and work together wherever we can. We are already seeing that where clubs within the Region are consulting each other and working together on some projects.

Alone we are invisible, together we are invincible!

Poverty Gap

Britain has a poverty gap. Alarming, in one of the richest countries of the world, levels of food insecurity in Britain are among the highest in Europe. Even before the onset of COVID-19 many families and people had to apply to food banks for all their weekly food or to supplement the food they were able to buy. Since the onset of lockdown the situation for many has worsened.

UNICEF estimates that 2.5 million children in the UK, or 19%, now live in food insecure households. One in three children, or 4.1 million, are living in poverty in the UK. Hungry children do not thrive in school. Ofsted's GCSE data from 2019 showed that over a third (37%) of disadvantaged children fail to achieve the average attainment score at 16. This limits their opportunities post-16 to go into training, employment or further education - thus perpetuating economic disadvantages.

According to the World Bank, nearly 2 million people in the UK are undernourished. Poor diet is linked to coronary heart disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes and some forms of cancer - thus putting strain on NHS provision, undermining quality of lives and reducing longevity of many fellow citizens.

Even before the pandemic, applications to food banks had increased by 78%. Since its onset, organisations have reported a 175% rise in the number of 3-day food parcels distributed in April 2020 compared with April 2019. The Trussell Trust warns that, with mass unemployment predicted to increase during 2021 on a scale not seen since the early nineties, there could be an additional 670,000 people classed as destitute.

SI Stafford

To help mitigate the hardships referred to above at a local level, SI Stafford made reverse Advent Calendars. Instead of opening a window or eating a chocolate during advent, members donated food and toiletries to support a range of local organisations and charities including:

- Sanctus, supporting refugees in Stoke on Trent
- Stafford's House of Bread
- Staffordshire Women's Aid
- Salvation Army

Members collected over 900 items to help bridge the food poverty gap locally. We'll continue our support over Lent. Instead of 'giving something up', we are going to donate items into 'Lent boxes' to give to our local charities that support food banks.



SI Cannock & District

Our local foodbank was thrilled to receive an abundance of food items over the Christmas period and has no immediate need for more. BUT – families are in real need of shower gel, shampoo and liquid soap. Cannock Soroptimists have organised a collection of these items.

SI Burton on Trent & District

We support Burton YMCA, a charity with a particular interest in young people who are homeless. They have a food bank, places for homeless people to live and a furniture shop where they sell second hand furniture and can supply people who need it with basic furniture. We support them with donations to the Food Bank, toiletries when required and money.

Paul Laffery, the chief executive, has been to talk to us and is speaking at our Zoom meeting in February and one of the other officers has been to talk to us. We try to communicate with them to find out what we can help with.

SI Sutton Coldfield

Members have continued to support our local community by donating to the Food Bank run by Food4U. Members were very generous with a Christmas theme in December. Several large bags of food were collected.

SI Sutton Coldfield

As the only clinic open in the area, our Clinic in Manila is extremely busy. What was a weekly clinic is now open 4 days per week. To support those unable to attend Clinic our workers have made home visits. Jane Walker, CEO of Purple Community Fund (PCF), was the speaker at our Zoom meeting in October and a speaker fee was made to support the Clinic during this difficult time.

Many families are not able to work and have no income, especially leading up to and over Christmas. They rely on the PCF for food donations. Following Jane's talk the Club made a donation together with a personal donation (to enable GiftAid) which enabled 35 families to receive food parcels.



A hunger-free
future – how
can we create
long-term
change?

SI Stafford

SI Stafford's main charity this year is the DFN, formerly known as the Dalit Freedom Network, raising awareness in the UK to help alleviate issues negatively affecting poor and marginalised communities in India. It aims to support programmes already being run among these communities.

DFN UK is part of a global response to issues encompassing education, healthcare, economic development and trafficking prevention in India. The work is directed and led by Indian nationals.

During this pandemic, the situation for hundreds of thousands of Indian's poorest communities is desperate. People living in overcrowded slum areas cannot easily socially isolate. Many cannot access clean water and may already have compromised health due to malnutrition or pre-existing issues such as diabetes, prevalent amongst the poor in India. All these are factors that increase the probability of catching the virus and having a more severe response. Those in poor communities also have an increased likelihood of being turned away from overstretched hospitals and clinics - thus exacerbating the contagion more generally. In June 2020 Coronavirus cases multiplied at an alarming rate in India, with over 2,000 deaths in one 24 hour period.

In May 2020 SI Stafford donated £500 to DFN's 'Our Covid-19 Emergency Appeal'. This Appeal aims to help:

- provide essential food parcels for destitute and starving families whose 'daily-wage' breadwinners lost their jobs due to lockdown in India
- purchase PPE for frontline medical and healthcare staff
- enable medical and healthcare staff to educate thousands about recognising Covid-19 symptoms, preventing transmission and when to seek hospital treatment
- support medical diagnosis and prescribing via telemedicine (remote consultations)
- combat stigma and fallacies associated with coronavirus.

SI Bilston

Following two generous donations from James Beattie Charitable Trust and with the generosity of members, the club has been able to support a number of good causes during the second lockdown.

- **Di's Kitchen**, which provides meals for vulnerable people on a regular basis, received many items of food, donated by members. We have provided food stuffs for the Kitchen previously. After an urgent call from the Kitchen for toilet rolls, members generously donated a 'stacker' toilet rolls.



- **Changing Lives**, a charity that works with vulnerable women, and a charity Bilston has previously supported, received much needed clothing, toiletries and items of food.

- A charity, **Let's Play**, which works with children with disabilities, has received a sensory projector.
- Large quantities of bed linen were supplied by members to **Strengthening Family Hub**. In addition, school uniforms were provided to the same charity.
- A family, who experienced a house fire, have received a large quantity of second-hand clothes. Help has been given to a young pregnant woman in the form of clothing and baby resources.



SI Tamworth

Number 8 Tamworth is a local registered charity providing supportive accommodation for young mums and their babies and pregnant young mums-to-be. Members donate bedding and household items that can be sold in the shop in Ankerside, Tamworth.

When it reopens, donated items regularly pile up on the back seat of a member's car as donations are collected ready for delivery to the shop.

SI Staffordshire Moorlands

The Krizevac project is helping a village called Chilomoni in Blantyre, Malawi. There is a School, a library, health centres and workshops. We in the Moorlands have collected sewing machines and school books kindly donated by the school next door. We will deliver the goods as soon as lockdown permits.

Period Poverty Gap

Period poverty affects women and girls all over the world. Access to sanitary products, safe, hygienic spaces in which to use them, and the right to manage menstruation without shame or stigma, is essential for anyone who menstruates.

But for many, this is not a reality. This is not just a potential health risk - it can also mean women and girls' education, well-being and sometimes entire lives are affected.

SI Lichfield & District

For some time now, we have been making Days for Girls kits – washable personal hygiene kits.

Through our work with the Baraka charity, we heard about the importance of these sanitary packs to the girls in the schools in Zambia which they support. Without sanitary supplies, the girls use leaves, newspaper, etc and miss days at school each month.

The Days for Girls packs will enable the girls to continue their education in spite of their periods and will enable them to maintain their dignity.

The charity, Days for Girls, devised a kit design based on the feedback of women. Every washable feminine hygiene kit gives back up to 6 months of living in just 3 years of use - that's the life of each kit with proper care. That's 180 days of education, health, safety and dignity for each girl over 3 years.

So far, we have sent 225 kits to Zambia, Nepal and Uganda and have a further 50 kits ready to go – that means the girls who receive them can have c50,000 additional days in school.

As we know, education can empower girls for life and the effect is long-lasting. Children – especially girls – born to educated mothers are more likely to attend school themselves, resulting in opportunities that extend across generations, for years to come.



SI Tamworth

Members of the club have supplied toiletry products to support Tamworth Hygiene Bank. This group get regular calls from Tamworth schools for sanitary products and to supply donations for the night shelter and the food banks. Money has also been pledged by the club so purchases of essential items can be made in bulk at discounted prices to keep supplies of these items readily available.

SI Sutton Coldfield

Cherished (a charity focussing on girls), SI Whitefield & SI Sutton Coldfield are working in partnership to provide a menstrual health programme to girls in Bengaluru in India.

Hannah Simnett, CEO of Cherished and member of SI Sutton Coldfield, has extended her programme to include Period Packs to girls in 15 care homes in & around Birmingham. The packs include sustainable sanitary products together with myth buster cards about periods and other comfort items.

SI Sutton Coldfield provided funds for the start up of the programme and established the link with SI Whitefield who had run previous menstrual health programmes with the provision of sanitary products and menstrual health education. There were initial finance problems re transferring funds to India but this has been resolved by working with Ecofemme in India. The Period Packs are available on Cherished's online shop with all proceeds generated being used to fund the project.

Knowledge Gap

Many pupils will have gaps in their knowledge and understanding after an extended period of remote education. These gaps could be between pupils in the same cohort (for example, a disadvantage gap or gender), or it could be one that relates to the curriculum at whole-cohort level (Dept. for Education).

SI Cannock & District

The Pandemic has brought into focus the 'Digital Divide'. Closure of schools, classes having to return home to isolate, and the need for on-line learning has highlighted the gap in education and opportunities between those children who have access to a device and the internet and those who do not.

Cannock Soroptimists have researched how they can be a part of bridging that gap and they are working initially to provide devices to one local Primary School which has an urgent need. Devices are being donated by members, friends and colleagues; they are then wiped using an approved programme to ensure no information remains on the device which is then ready to be used as a Chromebook. When the school receives the devices, their IT support again checks the device to ensure it is clean and completes the transition to Chromebook. The first devices have now been sent out to pupils!

It is intended that the devices (labelled as being donated by SI Cannock) will belong to the school, not the individual. We see this as an ongoing and growing project – and one which other clubs within the Region could also take on.

SI Bilston

Very recently we have provided 20 dongles to a Bilston primary school for pupils to support home schooling.



SI Wolverhampton

DFN (UK) (formerly known as Dalit or Dignity Freedom Network) is an organisation that supports the poor, the marginalised and the outcasts in South Asia. As part of their work, they provide an education programme for Dalit children and, following a talk about the charity in 2018, SI Wolverhampton decided to sponsor a girl through her education.

Although we were given the opportunity to choose who we supported, we asked DFN to decide for us and that was when we were introduced to 12-year-old Meenachi Siva Kumar. We will be supporting Meenachi until her basic education has completed at age 16. We are unable to contact Meenachi direct but do receive regular pictures of her and progress updates, some of which are written by Meenachi herself.

Annual sponsorship costs a little over £200 which seems a small amount to make such a huge difference to a girl's life. SI Wolverhampton has also made separate donations to DFN which are used to buy school uniforms for children who are not sponsored as individuals.

Coronavirus has
intensified the
UK's digital
divide

SI The Wrekin

Educating ourselves so we are better equipped and prepared in the work we do supporting women and girls in crisis.

The Holly Project is a free service for survivors of Child Sexual Exploitation. National publicity made us aware that this was actually happening here in our own community, so we made donations to the project and for the launch of our Christmas Helping Handbags campaign 2019 we had two CSE survivor speakers - two very brave and amazing young women who spoke of their exploitation in Telford. We asked where we could get more information and they signposted us to a training opportunity in Telford. Then COVID-19 stopped training; eventually it moved to virtual training so a few of us enrolled. The training is funded by John Campion, Police Commissioner, West Mercia and is without cost to any requesting organisation.

Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults is everybody's responsibility. This course raises awareness of a wide range of areas where there is exploitation of vulnerable children and people including: Child Sexual Exploitation, Criminal Exploitation, Modern Day Slavery, Organised Crime Groups, Victim Blaming Language.

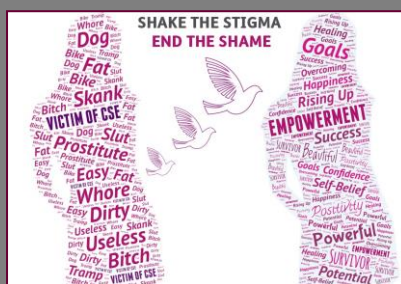


Image taken from hollyproject.org

SI Lichfield & District

Educating ourselves to enable us to help others.

We started a sub group for Advocacy in October 2020. Timing was perfect – UKPAC were asking clubs to write to our MPs for their support for the 'non-fatal strangulation' offence which Dame Vera Baird had worked on with the Designate Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

We sent letters to two of the MPs in our area and, after receiving standard Government replies, we wondered if there was a way to improve our voices being heard.

SIGBI's guidance to clubs in this area included the option of attending a workshop run by UK Parliament called "Are you being influential? Get your voice heard in the UK Parliament". The short workshop includes:

- how to develop a deeper understanding of how to raise issues,
- how we can take action,
- what tools help influence debates, decisions and legislation, and
- how we can build relationships with MPs and Lords.

We completed the online form and the Midlands office contacted us and put a date in the diary for a one hour 'teams' session for our club in early February. The UK Parliament Education team know about our work and have given this workshop to other clubs throughout the UK. It will seem all the more relevant as we follow the Domestic Abuse Bill in its passage through Parliament to help so many victims.

Equality Gap

According to the Office for National Statistics (2019):

- Almost one in three women aged 16-59 will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime
- Two women a week are killed by a current or former partner in England and Wales alone
- In the year ending March 2019, 1.6 million women experienced domestic abuse

As we know, Domestic Abuse has worsened during Covid-19. However, as Domestic Abuse is often a hidden crime that is not reported to the police, data held by the police can only provide a partial picture of the actual level of domestic abuse experienced. Many cases will not enter the criminal justice process as they are not reported to the police.

SI Midland Chase

Dame Vera Baird, Victims Commissioner and also a Soroptimist asked for the support of Soroptimists to advocate for 'non-fatal strangulation' to be added as an offence in the Domestic Abuse Bill.

A number of clubs within Midland Chase Region wrote to our MPs asking for their support and to forward a separate letter to the two Government Ministers involved in this Bill.

The Lords debated the Bill on 5th January and Baroness Williams, in ending the debate, commented that 'non-fatal strangulation' was the biggest issue of the day. She said that whilst the Government believes there are enough existing offences to cover this area already, it will be kept under review when assessing the evidence and look at what other countries are doing. She also commented that there were already existing offences to cover the threat of posting intimate images online. However, it was recognised that they may not be as effective as needed so the Law Commission are reviewing this. A consultation process will be starting shortly and she asked their Lordships to assist in this process.

Without the research and our involvement with other interested parties in asking for non-fatal strangulation to be included, this issue may not have been raised, known about or discussed by our lawmakers.

This Bill was read for the second time and will now be returned to the committee of the whole House to be reviewed.

Our voices can be heard!



SI Lichfield & District

Through Big Momma's Housing, Saidah Sultana offers urgent support and protection to abused women and girls. Her work has grown from when she first saw a need to help mainly Asian women, to now where anyone in an abusive relationship can contact her. Saidah owned a florist shop in a suburb of Birmingham and began by listening and hearing stories from young women who were trapped either by forced marriage, interracial problems in a household, grooming and the many underlying issues that go on behind closed doors. Her work has grown and she now has a number of flats offering safety and empowering vulnerable women to have a future.

This Christmas was different for all of us with the pandemic preventing much of our usual work. We wanted to do something to support Saidah and were able to deliver 18 boxes containing seasonal gifts for her ladies. We met in a wet and windy park to give them to her, socially distanced of course.

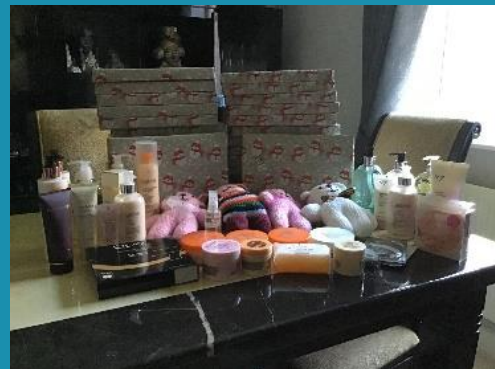
Saidah speaks from her experience as an English woman who suffered many years of abuse from her first husband, eventually leaving him and marrying again and converting to Islam. If you would like to know more, Saidah is one of the speakers at our Domestic Abuse Conference on 27th Feb.



SI Burton on Trent & District

We have been supporting the Buddy Bag Foundation (BBF), in partnership with SI Lichfield, by knitting teddies to go in the backpacks which are provided by BBF to children entering a refuge.

Almost one in three women will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime



SI Sutton Coldfield

Our tradition of delivering Christmas presents to the ladies and children at local refuges was not prevented by COVID or lockdown. We donated to both our local refuge and also to the refuge managed by Black Country Women's Aid. Items included diffusers, toiletries and pampering luxuries and selection boxes for the children.

In addition, Joint President Pat was delighted to present a generous collection of items donated from her neighbours including a monetary donation during our 16 Days of Activism.



SI Bilston

Many women have suffered domestic abuse during lockdown and have left home with their children but nothing else. The club has been in a position to provide nappies, toys, kettle & toaster and even a bed.

This month, January, we have had two speakers from the Black Country Women's Aid at our Zoom meeting and as a result we have started a collection of welcome bags for the women entering the Refuges that will contain useful toiletries.



SI Staffordshire Moorlands

Just in time we managed to do a collection for the local refuge of knitted jumpers, hats, scarves and school uniforms (donated to Grandma as the children had grown over the summer!). Some of the knitted items were donated by a 90-year-old lady who loves knitting and wondered if anyone could use her talents. The refuge were so grateful as they had 25 children at that time.

One in seven (14.2%)
children and young
people under the age of
18 will have lived with
domestic violence at
some point in their
childhood

SI Sutton Coldfield

Members embarked on an "Orange" campaign across social media, posting on our website and Facebook and from within our homes. Our local Town Hall supported us as it was lit up during this time and they set up a display indoors with information about their partnership campaign with us. We thank Rosemary Walton, one of our members and a Trustee of the Town Hall, for working with the Trustees on a campaign to Orange the Town Hall. You can read the Town Hall blog together with photos at <https://www.suttoncoldfieldtownhall.com/blogs/9122>

We also drew the attention of members from Down Under who approached us to adopt images from our campaign. We are very grateful to Connie Borg (a 17-year old graphic and media design student) for her creativity of the images and help with the campaign.



SI The Wrekin

The Christmas Gift Bag Campaign raises awareness of Women and Girls in Crisis because of homelessness, abuse, poverty etc. We have developed a strong local community who actively support this annual project both as donors and as organisations who work with women and girls to educate, empower and enable.

This annual event usually starts with an official launch with a speaker to highlight the plight of women and girls in crisis. COVID 19 and lockdowns meant this was not possible; however, this project was now needed more than ever as many more women are escaping domestic abuse. This is a whole community project which reaches out to others less fortunate - something that resonates with many during this unprecedented time. The main issue was how to manage such a project in a COVID 19 situation and to keep everyone safe. However, the unanimous decision was that this must go ahead.



The first task was a risk assessment in order to keep everyone safe which meant doing things very differently. Gift/tote bags needed to be unused, items were restricted to essential and desirable. A tick list was provided and this had to be put into each bag. Communication was through social media. Organisations who work with women and girls were contacted to assess their advocacy for this project at this time - all wanted to be involved. Previously we had a central collection - now we developed a 'satellite' system with small groups working across smaller areas. These groups collected, checked and distributed their bags to a prearranged organisation and COVID regulations were strictly adhered to. It was very successful with many more people involved.

A total of 256 gift bags were distributed to refuges, hostels and charities such as Women's Aid. The bags collected were filled with an even bigger selection of toiletries and sanitary wear than before. Everyone was very appreciative and expressed their gratitude saying these gifts will make a difference.

It was very successful with increased awareness particularly concerning domestic abuse during this pandemic. A gift from one woman to another.

Of those women
living with their
abuser during
lockdown, 61%
said the abuse
had worsened

SI Burton on Trent & District

We marked the 16 days of
Activism by posting on
social media, wearing
orange to Zoom meetings
and, if we were able to,
when we went out.

Green Gap

In relation to SDG 12, Responsible Consumption and Production, the COVID-19 crisis is an opportunity for a profound, systemic shift to a more sustainable economy that works for both people and the planet.

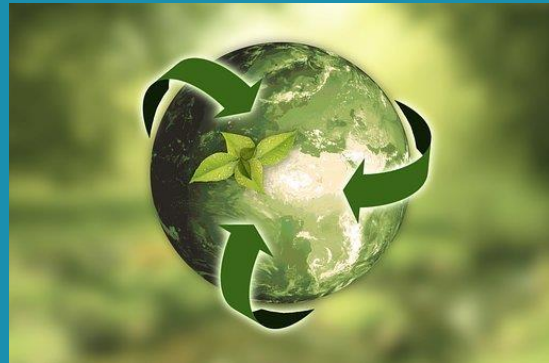
The emergence of COVID-19 has underscored the relationship between people and nature and revealed the fundamental tenets of the trade-off we consistently face: humans have unlimited needs, but the planet has limited capacity to satisfy them. We must try to understand and appreciate the limits to which humans can push nature before the impact is negative. Those limits must be reflected in our consumption and production patterns.

COVID-19 can be a catalyst for social change. We must build back better and transition our production and consumption patterns towards more sustainable practices.

SI Lichfield & District

Waste Savvy Staffs (WSS) launched just at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. It's a campaign to encourage Staffordshire residents to reduce, reuse and recycle more. Here are a few reasons why:

- The average family of 4 can save £60 a month by reducing their food waste.
- Around 40% of the contents in an average household rubbish bin can easily be home composted.
- The value of clothes in UK wardrobes is £30 billion, with each piece only worn 7 times. There are many ways to reduce the amount of clothing we buy and keep them in circulation for longer.
- In Staffordshire, every household throws away on average over 200 recyclable bottles a year. Plastic bottles are easy to recycle, or better still reuse a bottle!
- Almost half of the UK's households have up to five unused electrical items which could be recycled.



I've always been pretty "green" but when the call went out for volunteers to spread the word it felt like a good opportunity to give some service and to support the work of our Club's Planet sub-group, while promoting Soroptimism as a side benefit.

The biggest barrier to us all reducing, reusing and recycling more is the knowledge gap. The inconsistency which exists from one local authority to another in terms of waste management, the disinformation prevalent on social media, and the basic lack of good quality guidance to enable us to easily implement change, are all challenges which WSS volunteers aim to help dispel.

Most people know that there is "no Planet B" and once they understand what's really happening, are appalled at the way we abuse our environment and its natural riches, often unknowingly as we don't understand the implications of our actions.

It's long been time for change and, as Soroptimists, we're in a great position to make it happen.

Mental Health Gap

Fear, worry, and stress are normal responses to perceived or real threats, and at times when we are faced with uncertainty or the unknown. It is normal and understandable that people are experiencing fear in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Added to the fear of contracting the virus in a pandemic such as COVID-19 are the significant changes to our daily lives as our movements are restricted in support of efforts to contain and slow down the spread of the virus. Faced with new realities of working from home, temporary unemployment, home-schooling of children and lack of physical contact with other family members, friends and colleagues, it is important that we look after our mental, as well as our physical, health.

Many of the projects referred to above contribute to the mental health of others but our clubs are, quite rightly, also considering the mental health of our own members.

A selection of some of the measures which have been put in place:

- WhatsApp groups to support members, some of whom are isolating, has provided some light relief to help cope with lockdowns
- Zoom used for online coffee afternoons, Chit Chat (informal chats at G&T time!), monthly meetings for social chats, Songbirds, Art Appreciation Group, Book Club, Armchair Zumba
- Walks with other members
- Buddy system
- Good old-fashioned telephone!

