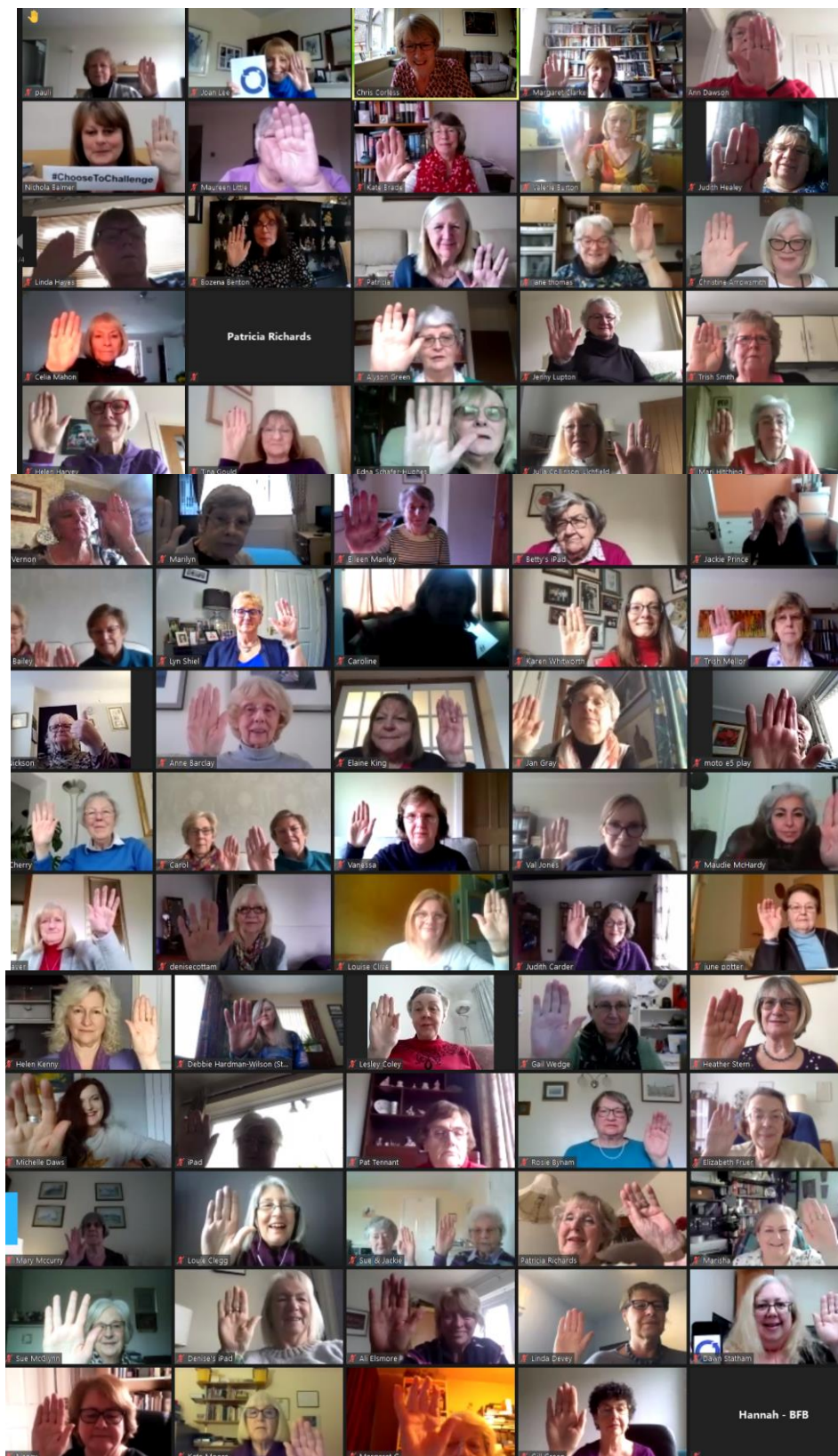


# SI Midland Chase Programme Action Newsletter April 2021



*Regional members celebrating International Women's Day at the March Regional Meeting*

**Women inspiring action,  
transforming lives**

**Website:** [sigbi.org/midland-chase](http://sigbi.org/midland-chase)  
**Facebook:** Soroptimist International  
of Midland Chase Region

## SI Midland Chase Programme Action Newsletter April 2021



At the start of her year, Regional President Margaret said she wanted to focus on **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16** Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and this, together with **International Women's Day (IWD)** which fell in this quarter, is the theme of this newsletter.

Once again, thank you to all Clubs in Midland Chase Region for sharing the work currently being done in relation to SDG 16 and IWD and for providing information to be included in this newsletter.

Between us, we are doing so much work in these really important areas.

We're also continuing to share our work – some clubs have held meetings and events which have been opened up to other members, for example, the IWD meetings held by SI Cannock, SI Wolverhampton and SI The Wrekin and the Domestic Abuse conference organised by SI Lichfield.

As Violet Richardson Ward, the founder President of Soroptimist's first club in Alameda County said 'It's what you do that counts' – sums up all of our Programme Action work.

The 65<sup>th</sup> session of the **Commission on the Status of Women**, CSW65, took place from 15-26 March 2021. For the first time, this took place in a hybrid format with mostly virtual meetings and, as a result, more Soroptimists could attend than usual.

The themes were:

*Priority theme:* Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls;

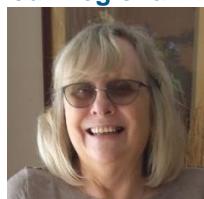
*Review theme:* Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development.

This is relevant to all of our work and also ties in with the theme of this newsletter and a report from a 'first time' attendee has been included.

### Programme Report Forms (PRFs)

All clubs have completed at least one PRF in the last year. We know this is an ongoing request but please ensure all your Programme Action work is reported. Our consultative status at the United Nations will be reviewed this year - reviewed every four years - and the PRFs are vital to ensure that we maintain our status at the United Nations.

### Your Regional Programme Action Team



**Edna Schafer-Hughes**



**Chris Corless**



**Ann Dawson**



**Carol Bailey**



**Zena Lear**



**Judith Healey**

**SDG 16**



*One of the targets of SDG 16 is 'Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere' - our work in the fields of Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women falls within this target.*

*Across the world, violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most pervasive violations of human rights, with a third of all women experiencing this kind of violence during their lifetime.*

*In every society, women and girls experience violence because of their gender. This includes physical, sexual, psychological and economic forms of violence, both within and outside of the home. Violence towards women and girls is often legitimised, justified or ignored due to discriminatory social norms, and fuelled by gender inequality. In some cases, women are even blamed for the violence committed against them and stigmatised as a result of it. In turn, VAWG undermines women and girls' ability to control their own lives, restricting their choices and freedoms.*

*Although VAWG has come under the spotlight in recent weeks, it has been a focus of the UK Programme Action Committee (UKPAC) for a long time. In Midland Chase Region, we have contributed to this work in a number of our projects over recent years:*

- *Specialist Domestic Violence Courts*
- *Prison Reform Trust*
- *Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking*
- *Forced Marriage*
- *Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)*

*In addition, most, if not all clubs, within the Region, work with local refuges in various ways – provision of clothes, toiletries, bedding, Christmas gifts for the ladies and their children, provision of planters in the refuge garden.*

## Domestic Abuse Bill



Both Dame Vera Baird and Liz Dominey from UKPAC have asked us to write to our MPs (and the Lord Chancellor) since October 2020 to promote two key amendments into the Domestic Abuse Bill:

- a) the new offence of non-fatal strangulation (NFS);
- b) to modify the law of self defence similar to the 'householder defence'.

To try to effect legislation that would help to reduce all forms of violence, particularly against women, we have encouraged as many of our members as possible to lobby their MPs and committee members.

Now, ministers plan to make non-fatal strangulation a specific criminal offence in the Domestic Abuse Bill. Dame Vera has emailed to thank us all for our letters in relation to amendments to the DA bill and she asked us to pass this onto all those who had written.

Responses, albeit often standard responses, have been received from a number of MPs but some members have not had a response at all. In addition, whilst MPs are generally supportive of the Bill, they have followed the Party line and would not support either of these amendments when raised in the House of Commons.

### *Update 21 April 2021:*

Further debate took place in the House of Lords on 21st April. Whilst the clause that included non-fatal strangulation was not included for debate, the Lords put up strong arguments for a similar 'householder defence'. In between the Commons and Lords debates, the Under Secretary for Justice met a survivor of domestic abuse at the Centre for Women's Justice who told him of her experiences and had meetings with Dame Vera Baird, Nicole Jacobs, Designate Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws. Although pleading their case was met with some sympathy on behalf of the Government, he was not willing to agree to this clause. However, the Government has agreed to an Independent Review of sentencing and Baroness Kennedy will be writing to the Lord Chancellor to request the terms of reference of this review include a much greater awareness of the situations that occur in domestic abuse.

As a result of the Lords' amendments there are now 8 amendments that will be debated in the House of Commons before any final agreement and the Bill receiving Royal Assent.

Hopefully, our actions are ensuring that our voice is being heard and, as with the introduction of a new offence of non-fatal strangulation, there is evidence that this is happening!

Katy Swaine Williams of the Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ) says '*It is obviously disappointing to have so little tangible progress to show after years of work on these proposals through the Domestic Abuse Bill. We are also considering whether to pursue the statutory defence proposals through the Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Bill.*'

We need to look at how we can lobby with CWJ on these proposals.

### SI Burton upon Trent & District

*Many of us heard Maimuna Jawo speak at a Regional Meeting a few years ago. Maimuna is a Gambian asylum seeker and campaigner against FGM. We heard how it was when she was holding down her own daughter for her mother to mutilate that she vowed not to continue the practice and how she would be at risk if forced to return.*

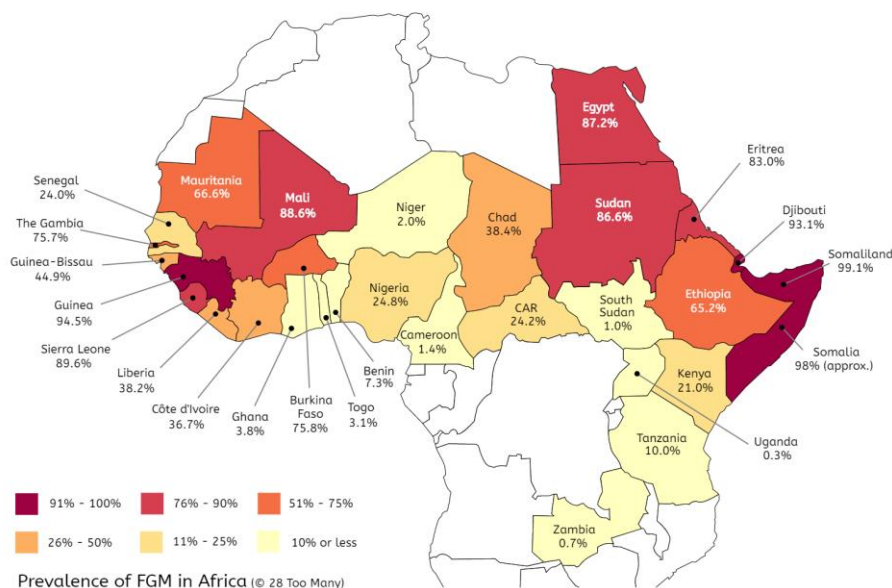
*This is an update on her story.*

Maimuna was in the notorious Yarl's Wood Removal Centre from January to July 2012. When she was released, she was sent to various 'holding' houses but eventually was given temporary leave to remain and was sent to the house in Hounslow where she has been for c10 years. She was awarded compensation for her treatment whilst in detention and her friend Marj Hitching, her ex-sister-in-law and a member of Burton club, is the 'guardian' of that money which has gradually been used to build a house in a village where her children live, away from their home village of Wellingara.

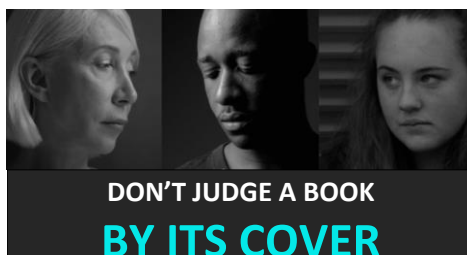
About 18 months/two years ago she was instrumental in setting up the Women's Empowerment Project International, a group of women in Gambia who work to eradicate FGM and promote positive community support for families. Burton & District SI sent a donation to the group via a member of SI Banjul who attended the Liverpool conference.

Currently, Maimuna does a great deal to support, educate and amuse the children in the National Asylum Support Service house - gardening, exercise, language and craft activities. Most of the children are currently back in school - vulnerable children whose first language is not English. In the past she has created calm when there have been 'difficulties' with some women. Just imagine the tensions and the trauma in a single house of a group from different countries who don't know what the future will be. SI Burton has helped by donating money and craft materials.

Maimuna has to 'sign on' every month and has a card which is 'loaded' weekly with about £35. If she received asylum, she would have to leave the house in Hounslow and find somewhere to live but she has no money. The Gambia High Commission has a new passport for her but won't let her have it until legal flights are available. Her intention is to return to Gambia in spite of "anything that might happen" but she would be living with and in the protection of her adult children whom she has not seen since her first arrival in the U.K. in 2009. Her arrest happened because she was an 'overstayer' but the authorities in Yarl's Wood did not believe her reasons for fleeing from Gambia - hence all the applications for asylum, refusals and appeals.



SI Lichfield & District



This Domestic Abuse Conference promised to be thought provoking and enlightening for those attending and this was certainly the case. As with most events nowadays, the conference was presented via zoom adding a degree of apprehension for the presenters but there was no need to worry - the day was run efficiently and professionally. We heard from exceptionally committed speakers who were passionate about their work. The event attracted over 100 Soroptimists from all over UK plus our friendship club Kaarst, in Germany.

**Dame Vera Baird QC, the Victims Commissioner**, opened the Domestic Abuse Conference with an overview of the progress of the Domestic Abuse Bill currently going through Parliament and reminding us of the power of advocacy and the positive effects it has for changing the law. She spoke about the unequal sentencing of men and women for murder, a key part of the recent publication from the Centre for Women's Justice titled 'Women Who Kill'.

**Kate Young, Founder of the Safeguarding Association**, explained the responsibility we each have for reporting and speaking up for children if we are concerned. The lockdown has increased the risk of abuse for vulnerable children and young adults making it difficult for them to access help. We learnt about the toxic trio - a term used to describe the problems of substance misuse, mental health issues and domestic abuse - and the rise in young people for self-harming and suicidal thoughts.

**Head Teacher Sarah Hewitt-Clarkson of Anderton Park Primary School** gave us an overview of her role in a multi-ethnic school. She told us how she has to think the unthinkable reminding us of her duty to safeguard children and that school is a safety net for many children. Sarah promotes equality of the sexes highlighting misogyny whenever she sees it.

**Saidah Sultana** spoke about her new Housing Association venture called **Big Mamma's Housing**. The idea came from her background of rescuing girls and women from abusive situations and her realisation that rescuing the women was not enough. They needed ongoing support to deal with the effects of the abuse together with the need for housing and a safe place to live. Saidah then introduced us to one of the women she has helped who gave a powerful account of her life before she came to live with Saidah and how it had changed her. Her life of abuse had taken away all trust in men and slowly she was now rebuilding her life.

**Dr Cath Hannon of the Strategic Policing & Crime Board of the West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner** explained the difficult route victims have when going through the court system. She referenced the Victims Code, a statutory code which lays out the minimum level of service victims should expect from the criminal justice system. She referred to Sally Challen's experience who was convicted of the murder of her husband after years of coercive control. Sally admitted to not understanding her situation, the questions that were put to her during the trial or being able to express how she felt. The new version will provide more support for the victim with a holistic approach to the process. Dr Hannon will be the liaison between our clubs and the police for the Court Project and she went through the feedback from our observations and thanked all Soroptimists who helped collect this valuable data.

### SI Stafford

On 3rd April 2021, we held a socially distanced vigil in the centre of Stafford to raise awareness of the plight of women and girls who are victims of abuse and violence.

We were supported by men and women in asking the Government and leaders of the criminal justice system to act swiftly to ensure the criminal justice system is fit for purpose where women's issues are concerned whether the offence is rape, sexual assault, domestic abuse, or online abuse and sentencing.

We were supported by a county councillor and cabinet member, Jeremy Pert, and our former MP, Jeremy Lefroy. Jeremy stressed the importance of men being active allies in countering violence towards, and abuse of, women.



### SI Bilston & District

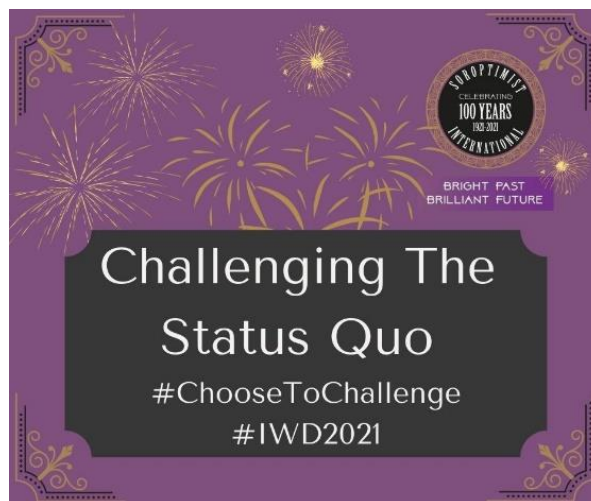
For some time now Bilston Club has been part of WASP (Wolverhampton and Walsall Anti-Slavery Partnership). During lockdown meetings have been on Zoom but we have been able to promote publicity on human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

**International  
Women's Day**

The United Nations announced the International Women's Day 2021 theme as "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world". The theme celebrates the tremendous efforts by women and girls around the world in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The campaign theme of International Women's Day (IWD) 2021 was #ChooseToChallenge - a challenged world is an alert world. Individually, we're all responsible for our own thoughts and actions - all day, every day. We can choose to challenge and call out gender bias and inequality. We can choose to seek out and celebrate women's achievements. Collectively, we can all help create an inclusive world.

***From challenge comes change, so let's all choose to challenge.***



Most clubs placed comments on social media - Facebook and Twitter and also on their websites - in celebration of International Women's Day and calling for a challenge to the status quo; these ranged from comments on club events for IWD, highlighting women (including some members and former members) who have challenged gender stereotypes, references to websites where more information was provided, youtube videos on IWD, celebrations involving poetry – and lots of Zoom screenshots with the raised hand! Many of the comments ended with the call to find out more or join us – let's try and use these posts to encourage new members to join.

Soroptimist International President Sharon Fisher commented on IWD 2021 ***'This past year has brought health and economic challenges, together with extraordinary societal change. However, we have also seen a resilience in humankind. We have witnessed a strength within communities and families, and in women leaders who have gained recognition for their pandemic response. As we continue on the Road to Equality, we must take up the challenge, break free of the barriers that reinforce gender stereotypes, and take action to achieve equality for all.'***

## SI Cannock & District

SI Cannock & District marked International Women's Day 2021 by featuring 12 local women on their social media, their website and by inviting them to a special evening conducted on Zoom. The theme this year is #ChooseToChallenge – gender equality.

These women have chosen to challenge stereotypes by going into careers traditionally thought of as male roles. Cannock Soroptimists approached a firefighter, a prison officer, a Sky technician, a local Councillor, an MP, and CEOs of local organisations to ask them to share their experiences, positive and negative, of having a successful career in what might be seen as mainly a man's world. They also wanted to highlight how working mothers have coped during the pandemic, juggling working from home with home schooling alongside running a home and all that entails.

Seven of the women were able to accept the invitation to join the meeting to mark International Women's Day 2021 – the others were working or at pre-arranged meetings. They were joined by Soroptimists from other clubs in the Midland Chase area and from Port Talbot, Wales and Harrisburg, USA: 41 in all!

The women were asked to say a little about ways they have handled gender discrimination. They had all found different ways of doing this, but the main theme that ran through their responses was that having confidence in their abilities gave them the strength to carry on despite some often major setbacks. They also found that proving those abilities often meant that they received the respect they deserved from their male colleagues.

They were also asked about what advice they would give to younger women thinking of embarking on similar paths to theirs – it was a resounding 'Go for it!' What was obvious with all of the answers our women gave was the desire they had to 'bring others with them' on their journey to achieving success in their chosen careers. They advised that the ability to empathise with those they work with was key to a harmonious working environment. Another feature of everyone's answers was the importance of role models, whether that be family or school.

Before the meeting ended, everyone held a hand up high to show our commitment to **choose to challenge** and call out inequality.



## SI Bilston & District



For two years Bilston Club members have identified and promoted women who have achieved greatness in their lifetime. The first year we mounted a display at a community centre in Bilston, together with the display of our club work. Last year, it was proposed to mount a similar display in Bilston Library of local prominent women but COVID intervened.

Not to be beaten, we decided to post on our Facebook page for the eight days leading up to IWD, 16 local women ending with two of our own members (no longer with us) who had achieved greatness.

**Gwen Stafford Good** was twice president of Bilston Club. In her youth, she was a cabaret singer in Berlin! Gwen was a local councillor and in 1998/1999 she was elected Mayor of Wolverhampton Council. She had a long career as a teacher and retired from the headship of Willingsworth High School.



**Violet Elsmore** was a founder member of SI Bilston in 1943 when she held the Office of Treasurer. She was President for two years in the first 10 years of the club. Miss Elsmore was the head teacher of Stonefield Secondary Girls' School and inspiration to many pupils including two current members of our club.

In retirement she moved and transferred to SI Stratford where she continued her enthusiasm for our organisation. In February 2021 Vi was featured as one of SIGBI's special 100 women #WholsShe?



*Bilston members celebrating International Women's Day on Zoom*

### SI Stafford

We wanted to raise awareness of why International Women's Day is celebrated and its importance as a rallying point to build support for women's rights and for greater participation in political and economic decision making.

Members interviewed local women in leadership roles and asked them how the pandemic had affected them professionally and personally. Their responses were added to our website. Interviewees included Kate Tague who is the Executive Principal of WMG Academy for Young Engineers and Rachel Parrott, Quality Manager for Ideal Standard. They explained the challenges their organisations faced from the dramatic loss of trade and furloughing of some staff whilst keeping other staff safe and operational. For schools, there were also the additional demands of remote learning whilst maintaining high quality education, and ensuring pupils were safe.



### SI Wolverhampton

SI Wolverhampton partnered with Women of Wolverhampton to run an Online Harassment Against Women workshop. It took place on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> March via Zoom and in line with the IWD 2021 theme of #Choose to Challenge, the workshop objectives were to help attendees understand what online harassment is, tell them how they can protect themselves from abuse and to give them confidence to challenge it. Several members from clubs around the Region attended the workshop including President Margaret.



### SI Wolverhampton



Members of SI Wolverhampton were invited to make pledges for International Women's Day that in some way supported women and girls. Members' pledges included:

- Getting 10 women to sign up for the monthly breast check reminder via text or email from Coppafeel which is a charity that promotes breast cancer awareness.
- Speaking out against discrimination, inequality and misogyny.
- Supporting Simple Acts of Kindness in their aim to provide Mother's Day gifts for less fortunate women.
- Joining the 'Because I'm a Girl' campaign run by Plan-UK.
- Donating to Pregnancy Sickness Support.
- Pushing for respect at work for women in management positions.
- Learning about women who have achieved or influenced.
- Buying a piece of art by a new upcoming female artist.
- Buying a copy of the book written by Dr Anne Green about Dr Evelyn Hickman's involvement in the treatment of phenylketonuria (PKU), an inborn error of metabolism.
- Buying flowers for those who would not otherwise receive them or is elderly and has survived lockdown with great positivity.
- Tracing a dear friend who was forced to move and to visit or send her flowers.
- Supporting a friend who has lost her spark and confidence during lockdown.
- Making more regular and ongoing contact with a childhood friend.

### SI Sutton Coldfield

We were invited by the Mayor of Sutton Coldfield to nominate inspiring speakers for her IWD event and nominated Hannah Simnett who is not only one of our newest members but also CEO of Cherished, an organisation which mentors girls with low self esteem providing mentorship and support to girls, families and schools. Bozena Benton also spoke about Soroptimist International, club projects and advocacy.



### **SI The Wrekin**

SI The Wrekin held a virtual meeting for International Women's Day and invited two child psychotherapists from a charity in Shrewsbury called Sea Change to give a presentation on how lockdown has affected primary school children and their education.

Rosie Bynam explains some of the concerns relating to her own grandchildren which led to them inviting the speakers from Sea Change to their meeting:

*I was increasingly concerned about how my grandsons were behaving in lockdown - my daughter and son in law had been working from home for well over a year. They were all stressed, trying to help with teaching of the two boys, aged 5 and 9. The boys' behaviour changed drastically for the worse, particularly the 9 year old. He was rude and aggressive and fed up with doing his lessons via a computer or laptop. They were extremely lucky that they had sufficient IT equipment to make this possible.*

*My daughter was worn out, as the help with teaching was mainly her responsibility as her husband was full time.*

*I was really concerned about the mental health of both boys and my daughter. She was starting work at 7am, then helping the eldest with his school work, which was very stressful as he missed one to one teaching. The youngest had only been at school for 6months and started when he was only just 5yrs old. He was a very sensitive boy and didn't like zooming. I tried to help by talking to him twice a week on my daughter's 2 full days of work. To begin with it was novel as he read to me and we played games. But of course it was zooming again!*

*I mentioned my worries to a neighbour who is a school assistant at a local Primary School. She had a friend who knew about a local charity in Shrewsbury that gave psychological help to Primary schools.*

*I approached them and they gave a very interesting presentation about the lockdown affects on the mental health of children. They were both psychologists and have been working with individual children for the past year. They work with art therapists and have been increasingly busy since Covid 19 started. The charity is called Sea Change and is located in Shrewsbury. Hopefully all those that attended were made more aware of the adverse effects to mental health caused by lockdown.*

*They explained how we can help our young relatives and the signs of stress to look out for and suggested ideas of things to do to help and also what not to do! They also emphasised how we should look after both the parents and ourselves as well as the children – we can't look after others unless we look after ourselves.*



**CSW65** - report from 'first time' attendee Marisha Place, SI Lichfield & District



Due to the pandemic the conference was being transmitted virtually which gave me the opportunity to attend as it is held in New York, USA.

I had to be approved and give a photograph of myself. It sounds silly but it fed my excitement for the week and made me feel so important.

I decided to attend some training on what to expect and how to obtain the most experience from the week. It was worthwhile, and when put into breakout rooms I was fortunate enough to be partnered with two senior Soroptimists and a young woman who had mobility restrictions from an organisation that empowers women with disabilities. I had not thought about how positive the world becoming more virtual would be to someone with disabilities until she explained that everything was now more accessible to her.

As well as the CSW conference official meetings, we could have access to the side events and NGO (non-governmental Organisation) events. So after registering I went to see what events there would be and what I could view. So many interesting discussions - I decided it would be easier if I used the download and then I could see when I was available to attend some discussions over the two weeks. There were 700 events downloaded into my electronic diary!! My virtual assistant Alexa nearly had a breakdown when giving my agenda for the day.

Once I had decided what I was attending, I signed up.

The side events were inspiring - I watched so many discussions on a variety of subjects including child marriage, FGM, violence against women, empowering women, women in leadership and climate issues. It was great to see the work that was being done to combat the issues; educating the communities, supporting the victims and what I could do myself. I also watched how villages were being built by using waste plastic bottles that were filled with soil to create bricks for building houses.

One event that really opened my eyes was the online violence; the abuse women were getting online was inexcusable, especially towards female journalists. Former President Trump seemed to have provided an excuse for abusers who would use the 'fake news' reason for their behaviour.

These female journalists, who were mainly reporting on articles around women, were harassed and abused online but sometimes the violence spills offline. In some countries like the Philippines, the threat is heightened; one female activist who was abused online was shot whilst on her way home.

Two links I would recommend to read;

[Maria Ressa- Fighting an Onslaught of Online Violence 0.pdf \(icfj.org\)](#)

[UNESCO's Global Survey on Online Violence against Women Journalists](#)

The other bonus to the virtual event is that the sessions were recorded and are still available to view online via the UN Women website.

In the summing up by Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and UN Women Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, at the closing of CSW65, the success of the virtual event was recognised, acknowledging how many people they had reached and how the voices could be heard from across the world, from cities, towns and villages. If you would like to read this for yourself the link is; <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/3/speech-ed-phumzile-closing-csw65>

I'm looking forward to the next one and hope its virtual again.