

# Equality

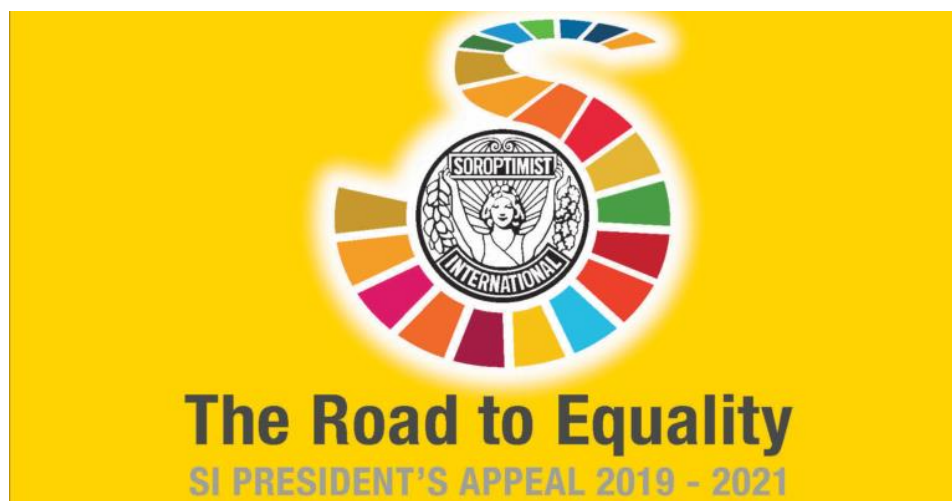


In this newsletter we have looked at Equality in the widest sense - could be one of the areas of focus of the SI Road to Equality Appeal as noted below, or any sort of divide where inequality is seen e.g. related to food, IT, gender, finance, etc.

The UN Secretary General António Guterres summed up many of the basic issues related to gender inequality exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic in his Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture 2020 speech in July 2020.

*“Everywhere, women are worse off than men, simply because they are women. Inequality and discrimination are the norm. Violence against women, including femicide, is at epidemic levels. Globally, women are still excluded from senior positions in governments and on corporate boards. Fewer than one in ten world leaders is a woman [...] The economic fallout of the pandemic is affecting those who work in the informal economy; small and medium-size businesses; and people with caring responsibilities, who are mainly women [...]*

*Gender inequality harms everyone because it prevents us from benefitting from the intelligence and experience of all of humanity.”*



The Road to Equality, our current Soroptimist International President's Appeal, aims to empower women and girls who have been left behind. The Appeal will raise awareness of human rights challenges that prevent women and girls from reaching their full potential, focusing on...

<b>Female Genital Mutilation</b>  It is estimated that more than 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone female genital mutilation.	<b>Domestic Violence</b>  1 in 3 women throughout the world (35%) will experience physical and/or sexual violence by their partner during their lifetime
<b>Older Persons</b>  Older women account for 54% of the global population aged 60 years and above, and 61% of those aged 80 years and above. By 2030, the number of persons aged 60 years or over is projected to grow to 1.4 billion	<b>Human Trafficking</b>  The crime of human trafficking is complex and dynamic, taking place in a wide variety of contexts and it is often difficult to detect.
<b>Migration</b>  Recent figures from the International Office of Migration (IOM) estimate there to be 271.6 million international migrants worldwide (2020)	<b>Child Marriage</b>  Worldwide, more than 650 million women alive today were married as children.

## Domestic Abuse

*Growing evidence from women's aid organisations as well as police services show that there has been a major increase in domestic violence and abuse.*

*According to the BBC, between 2016-17 and 2020-21 the total number of common assaults flagged as instances of domestic abuse increased by 71% from 99,134 to 170,013. In the same time period, the number of these common assaults that resulted in charges being brought fell by 23%.*

*It is stated in the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women reporting to the UN in July 2020:*

*"The intersection between the COVID-19 pandemic, and its lockdown measures, and the pandemic of violence against women, has exposed pre-existing gaps and shortcomings in the prevention of violence against women as a human rights violation that had not been sufficiently addressed by many States even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Measures to combat COVID-19 have mostly been gender-blind with many States failing to consider measures to combat gender-based violence against women as essential services and as basic human rights that should not be restricted. A combination of such factors has resulted in the fact that lockdown measures imposed to contain the COVID-19 pandemic increased the risk of gender-based violence against women, especially domestic violence."*

### SI Bilston

Since hosting two speakers from Black Country Women's Aid during lockdown and learning about the predicament of the women, many of whom are fleeing domestic abuse, we decided to make a difference. At that time the Charity was unable to accept donations that were not new but our members were still able to help. One of our members made 60 cotton bags which we all filled with toiletries and these were handed over, suitably socially distanced, on the car park of Linden House. Since the Covid restrictions have been lifted and the Charity can now accept previously loved items, we have, on two occasions, donated what amounted to two car loads of clothes, bedding and children's toys.



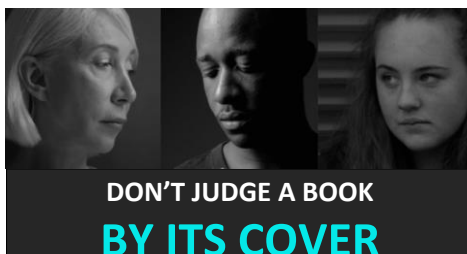
### **SI Lichfield & District**

All Soroptimists want to make a difference to the lives of women and girls, it is our mission and vision, and by rising awareness and providing information we can. Earlier this year we arranged a Conference about Domestic Abuse. We advertised the Conference widely as we felt it was important to reach everyone, we wanted as many people as possible to hear the words of our excellent speakers.

Domestic Abuse is a broad term used to describe harm to women which sadly increases year on year. Last year 207 women were killed in the UK, a shocking statistic, 9 out of 10 times by men known to the women. The very sad case of Sarah Everard's death by someone unknown to her but nevertheless, a person she assumed would protect her, is rare, but it happened.

The last session of the conference was titled "The Way Forward" and intended to provide ways to encourage the delegates to take back to their workplaces, clubs, friends and colleagues what they had learnt and to find ways to promote discussion and influence change in attitudes towards women.

We were able to support the important work of Saideh Sultana by donating the money raised from our conference. Saideh and her team provide twenty-four-hour shelter, support and accommodation to women fleeing from abusive partners and families. The women are often victims of honour-based abuse, arranged marriages and domestic servitude arriving often with nothing. She gives the support they need when they need it most, by offering counselling, safe housing, financial assistance and understanding the importance of using money and what constitutes a healthy relationship



### **SI Sutton Coldfield**

#### **Tree for remembrance garden in sanctuary for Trafficked women**

Members have funded a Japanese Maple to be planted in a remembrance garden within the grounds of a sanctuary for women who are survivors of being trafficked.

The sanctuary is run by the Black Country Women's Aid (BCWA) and the tree is in remembrance of 'Auntie' a resident of the sanctuary who herself had been trafficked for many years and who had helped many settle in to the sanctuary and supported them. When she passed away none of the organisations or services with whom BCWA work with offered support in connection of the death or funeral. BCWA made all arrangements for recording death, sorting out a place of rest and memorial service.

### **SI Lichfield & District**

SI Lichfield & District have been following the progress of the Domestic Abuse Bill with great interest and some involvement. Our President at the time, Jenny McLelland, gave us an excellent understanding about non-fatal strangulation. So when Dame Vera Baird requested Soroptimists write to their MPs to lobby for this to be included in the Bill we needed no prompting. We were also able to support her request for us to write to our MPs about giving survivors of domestic abuse who offend when they were controlled by their abusive partner a statutory defence when being prosecuted.

We also learnt a lot from the excellent webinar run by the Centre for Women's Justice on 'Women who Kill' which gave us useful information to use when we were writing to our MPs.

Not only do we action UKPAC's requests for support in our advocacy work, we have also widened our focus to any other organisations who are supporting women's right for equality. This included SI Southern England when they made us aware of Plan UK's links to a group called 'Our Streets Now' who were campaigning to make unwanted public sexual harassment a crime. Various members supported this and Stylist magazine's campaign to stop violence against women and girls following Sarah Everard's murder.





## Digital Equality

*Over recent months, many schools have offered remote learning to students through virtual classrooms to mitigate the impact of school closures. While this is an option for some, it is out of reach for many. Many students, children and youth in vulnerable and disadvantaged communities do not have access to technology to allow them to attend.*

*Although distance learning solutions are provided in four out of five countries with school closures, at least 500 million children and youth are currently excluded from these options. Lack of access to computers and the internet at home, as well as a low level of computer-related skills, put many already marginalized students at a further disadvantage. The digital divide will widen existing education equality gaps.*

*In addition, the gender digital divide more greatly impacts women who are the least likely to have access to mobile technology or any type of computer.*

### SI Cannock & District

Covid 19 has given us many challenges; one of the most serious being the disruption to children's education. Lockdowns and subsequent outbreaks of the virus in schools have meant children have spent many months at home over the last two academic years, having to rely on virtual lessons.

Many families without the technology to support this have seen their children fall behind others who have been able to log on whilst at home. Again, this has seen the divide between these children and those from a more privileged background widen even more.

Many organisations have stepped up to try to alleviate the issue and SI Cannock has been no exception. We decided to concentrate on helping one local Primary school. We set a target of supplying ten laptops which we have achieved and are still collecting laptops from members and their friends and families.



### **SI Sutton Coldfield**

Members are very aware that lockdown and the pandemic has negatively impacted on women with regard to interacting with their everyday life owing to the digital gap widening. Many women for many reasons have little or no access to smartphones, tablets or computers or even broadband. During lockdown, where a family did have access, women gave priority of such to their partners (for work purposes) and their children for home-schooling. Many women across Sutton Coldfield are living in isolation with little contact with family and friends.

The pandemic has impacted on women in a variety of ways. Many may not have smartphones or transferable IT skills to operate computers, complete forms on-line for work or benefits or access support, undertake on-line banking or shopping, make medical appointments on-line or respond to such.

Sutton Coldfield members have partnered with Age Concern with regard to provision of a lending library giving access to tablets and appropriate training. Members will provide referrals (working with women from a local community centre), be Ambassadors for the scheme and provide some mentorship.



### **SI Lichfield & District**

As noted by SI Cannock above, home education during lockdown placed a huge strain on families where several children of different ages either had no devices on which to do their school work, or alternatively had to share one device. This led to children falling even further behind in families who simply cannot afford the high cost of internet-connected devices.

We decided to help tackle this Digital Divide in two ways:

1. Donation of 7 refurbished PCs and a wide variety of "pre-loved" office furniture/equipment to The Den 101 Youth Centre in Rugeley . This would help create an internet/quiet room to enable teenagers to carry out their school work/homework in a calm environment.
2. Worked with charity freeIT Stafford who installed 2 PCs and 3 laptops and donated 3 brand new Hudl tablets at Spark Children's Centre in Burntwood. The equipment will be used by the children and parents who use Spark in a wide variety of settings and activities. It will also mean that parents will be able to use the computers to draft CVs thereby enabling them to obtain employment

freeIT Stafford is a non-profit, unincorporated community organisation made up of a network of local IT repair professionals working voluntarily in their spare time. They provide free computer equipment to schools, charities, community groups, the voluntary sector, and other neglected corners of society and good causes, who are spending money on their IT provisions that could be better used elsewhere in their missions, or where that money simply doesn't exist in the first place. By working closely with them we were able to ensure that every item could be found a good home.

## Educational Equality

*The UN Sustainable Goals Report 2020 provides extensive information on the impact of the closure of schools. Despite progress, the world is not on track to meet 2030 education targets. Before the coronavirus crisis, projections showed that more than 200 million children would be out of school, and only 60 per cent of young people would be completing upper secondary education in 2030.*

*School closures to stop the spread of COVID-19 are having an adverse impact on learning outcomes and social and behavioural development of children and youth. They have affected over 90% of the world's student population—1.6 billion children and youth.*

### SI Burton Upon Trent & District

We have been supporting Maimuna Jawo in her fight against FGM, her story is known to the Region.

Maimuna is currently living in this country - she has been seeking asylum for 10 years. Throughout the pandemic and the lockdowns, Maimuna has done a great deal to support, educate and amuse the children in the National Asylum Support Service house, where she and they are living in Hounslow, through 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. This is what SI Burton has helped with by donating money and craft materials. Maimuna has been awarded the Diocese of Westminster Social Action Award.



About 18 months/two years ago, Maimuna was instrumental in setting up from here, the Women's Empowerment Project International, a quite large group of women in Gambia who work to eradicate FGM and promote other positive community support for families. SI Burton & District supported this by donating money as did another club in Midland Chase.

We have supported Maimuna in her fight for many years: we have managed to supply money, craft items, introductions through Soroptimists, the most support has been by one of our members, Marj Hitching, who is Maimuna's ex sister-in-law and friend.



## SI Lichfield & District

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.

Our "Sewing Bee" group meet monthly and, as well as making dresses, shorts and knitting soft toys, jumpers and blankets, we have made washable feminine hygiene kits to enable girls to continue their education without missing days each month when they have their period.

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. This translates to 180 days of education, health, safety and dignity for each girl who receives one of these kits over 3 years.



We used the Days for Girls pattern to make our kits. We are also conscious of environmental sustainability and have used recycled material to make the packs.

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. So far, we have sent 325 kits to Zambia, Nepal and Uganda so have helped 325 girls to continue their education and enabled them to have just under 60,000 additional days in school.

Ticks a few SDG boxes too!



### **SI Cannock & District**



SI Cannock, led by their PA team, have worked on a project over the past year that has addressed equality in relation to literacy and education.

We run an ongoing project in liaison with Rotary Books4Homes where we regularly collect children's books from various sources such as schools, private donors and a charity and take them to the Books4Homes co-ordinator who, via schools in the area, distributes them to children who have never had a book of their own. This gives the children the opportunity to choose a book and take it home. This scheme promotes literacy and a love of reading. To date we have donated an amazing 3,427 books.

SI Cannock also pays the charity the same amount they would have received if they had sent the books for pulping, ensuring no one loses out.

### **SI Bilston**

The manager of a local community centre in Bilston that we sometimes use is married to a Panamanian whose niece, Sugheily, still lives in Panama.

'Auntie' Trisha brought Sugheily to a club meeting. We were very impressed by Sugheily's personality, sincerity and commitment. Sugheily was at that time about to be the first child in her family to go to university but as her mother is a single parent with four children life is not easy. She was very keen to take a medical degree and times were hard but she was taking part time jobs in Panama to help with the travel to university and some of the resources she need for the course.

Club members decided to help Sugheily financially and we have sent her three donations enabling her to purchase a laptop and other items for her studies. Sugheily consistently writes to us with thanks and updates. She has now completed her first internship with excellent grades.

Her emails not only tell us of her progress but also she is interested in our projects. Thank goodness for 'Translator' on Google!



## Food, Health and Wellbeing Equality

*Eradicating hunger and achieving food security remains a challenge, more so in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Food insecurity was already on the rise and the population affected by moderate or severe food insecurity went from 22.4% in 2014 to 25.9% in 2019. The estimates for 2016–2019 also indicated that food insecurity was higher among adult women than men in every region. At the global level the total number of people suffering from severe food insecurity has been on the rise since 2015 and there are still millions of malnourished children.*

*Probably one of the most critical areas for fighting the corona virus, 3 billion people worldwide still lack basic handwashing facilities at home which is the most effective method for COVID-19 prevention. The coronavirus crisis has brought to the forefront the critical importance of water, sanitation and hygiene for protecting human health. Despite progress, billions of people across the globe still lack these basic services.*

### SI Sutton Coldfield

Members have planted a small fruit farm consisting of 75 fruit trees in Naic, Cavite, the Philippines, in partnership with Upskills+ Foundation (sister charity to the Purple Community Fund). The fruit farm will serve as both a part of a Nutritional programme for the families living on a toxic waste dump and also a livelihood programme whereby some of the fruit will provide an income for the families. Owing to the pandemic we were not able to attend the tree-planting ceremony but we were represented by Dr Grace Francisco-Torres, Past President of SI Malabon who read our message.





### SI Bilston

Always on the look out to help others, a member had seen the request from Innocent Smoothies for knitted hats for their drinks. Each hat knitted brings 25p to Age UK. So, needles at the ready, members knitted a total of 250 hats which were safely delivered.



### SI Bilston

Like many other Soroptimist Clubs we are collecting Blister Packs to support Marie Curie Charity. For every pack TerraCycle will donate points to Superdrug Pharmacies to be redeemed into financial donations to Marie Curie. Members are delivering packs to Superdrug and carefully posting them one at a time into the TerraCycle box!



### Midland Chase Region

Many clubs throughout the Region continue to support local Food Banks and other local charities with donations of groceries. Food banks rely on the goodwill and support of the public.

Over 90% of the food distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network is donated by the public so our food donations are absolutely vital to enable them to give everyone who has been referred to them a balanced and nutritious three-day supply of food.

The UK's food poverty rate is already among the highest in Europe. Despite being the sixth richest country in the world, millions are struggling to access the food they need. But a donation to a food bank is one of the most direct ways of helping local people at their most desperate time.



### SI Burton Upon Trent & District

We have been supporting and publicising via social media 'Hand Washing Day'. We feel this is a subject which currently needs publicity and it contributes to Equality for All as it is something we all need to do.

