



Xmas Newsletter

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MK Soroptimists

Newsletter 67

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Editorial Welcome

2025 our 10th Charter Anniversary and a year of celebrations

Hello everyone

It's the time of year of peace and kindness and whilst there are many worrying issues going on around the world, we have learned through the work we do that it is often the little things that have a big impact and matter the most to people and our charities. So, let's continue to concentrate on what we do well which is supporting our charities, each other in friendship and our projects. I want to say a very big well done to each and every one of you for all that you give and do. I love being a part of this club just because we all help in whatever ways we can and are there for each other too.

We certainly have had quite a year. Our 10th Charter anniversary year, a year of many celebrations as well as completing many projects for our charities. Here is a reminder of our year:

January



January started with our first celebrations. A celebration and a fond farewell to Angie, who was moving to Cornwall. We held a surprise "This is your life" celebrating her 10 years of life as a Soroptimist in Milton Keynes. Angie helped found our club and we shall be forever grateful.



January also saw us start another raising awareness initiative. It is Cervical Cancer month and SIGBI has launched a campaign to raise awareness to women, girls and boys of the importance of being checked and vaccinated. We have added a Women's Health board to our Orange Café, targeting Cervical Cancer. Since 2023 Soroptimists have been working hard to raise awareness of the importance of screening for the disease and to encourage vaccination to completely eliminate it. Soroptimists also work to bring practical and active support to women and girls who need direction and advice to look after their health. SIGBI has now produced Health cards which are a series of 7 pocket-sized cards, designed to be popped into wallets and bags, and give quick advice on symptoms and ways to get support on a range of health issues.

This month we always catch up with our charities to thank them for all their hard work, learn how we may help in the coming year and provide them each with a £100 donation, the first donation of the year. We finished off the month with two more celebrations. The first was learning that our project "MK Act's Friendly Foodies" was voted in first place in the Tesco Stronger Starts Scheme, meaning we would receive over £1,000 to support it to teach the mothers cooking skills. The second celebrated one of our members birthdays at our monthly friendship lunch. What a great start to the year.



In Feb we held our annual planning day, an important meeting in our calendar, it gives us the opportunity to look back over the past year, reflect on what went well, what we could have done better, look at the suggestions our charities have put to us and come up with a plan for the year. And if you have spotted the duck hats, they were donated to the children at the Ukraine school courtesy of Scottie. We met one of our MP's, Callum Anderson, MP for Buckinghamshire and Bletchley, presented the Soroptimists report on Special Domestic Violence Courts and discussed the issue of reducing violence against women and girls.



We finished February (you guessed it), with another celebration. As part of our 10th anniversary, we had a lovely meal at the Birch, Woburn Sands, ending with us lighting the cake outside. Why, it's a long story but you know Soroptimists - we are ever resourceful and don't let anything get in our way.

March saw us kickstart our fundraising events off with International Women's Day (IWD) - 8 March. The United Nation's theme for 2025 was "For all women and girls: Rights, Equality, Empowerment". The theme calls for action to unlock equal rights, power and opportunities for all and a feminist future where no one is left behind. Central to this is empowering the next generation—youth, particularly young women and adolescent girls—as catalysts for lasting change.



We held our 5th IWD Afternoon Tea on Wed 5 March and this year's event was the start to raise funds for our new pilot project "Healthy Relationships". This will be a preventative initiative aimed at engaging with young boys aged between 12-17 to give them the tools to foster healthy relationships. Our aim being to work in partnership with MK Act and possibly two other partners to pilot this and to take this out to as many schools as possible in MK. We had three wonderful speakers. Mayor Marie Bradburn who spoke about being a woman cycling on the redways of MK. Sue Burke, CEO of MK Act, Women's Refuge, speaking about the many strands of their domestic abuse service to support the community. Lastly, MP Emily Darlington spoke, via video, to update us on the work of the government to reduce violence against women and to support our project initiative.

A great afternoon of sandwiches, tea, homemade scones and cakes was enjoyed at Wavendon Community Hub Centre and thank you everyone for helping us to raise nearly £850 towards our pilot initiative.



March's branch meeting welcomed **Sexual Assault and Abuse Support service for Bucks and MK (SASSBMK)** to tell us about their work. It was an emotional, interesting and sad discussion when you hear of the continuing increase in need for this service.



The day after our meeting a few of us popped into MK Snap to make a very special delivery. At last years MK Snap craft fayre Steve had seen one of Scotties crocheted animals and thought it was fantastic. But when he came back it had been sold. Scottie decided to make a speical Blue Dragon, MK Snap's mascot, just for them and staff and learners were delighted with their present. It cements our partnership working with them and we are so grateful for the use of their facilities and their support.



Also in March we were delighted to attend YMCA's community lunch to celebrate their 5th birthday in their new facilities. Can't believe it's that long ago that we held a sewathon which raised over £2,600 to sponsor a room, which we named "Violet", after Soroptimist founder Violet Richardson-Ward. We also provided 30 handmade quilts and a learner from MK Snap painted a beautiful Violet themed picture for us to present. March ended with our usual Orange Café and then we were all round Barbara's for a crafting afternoon. Half of us were making boxes with little surprises for our 10th Anniversary dinner on 28 June. The rest of us were making our Orange the World bunting to use for future Orange Cafes and to support the Annual Vigil event taking place on 25 November, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls.

March finished with a lovely message from Works For Us thanking us for the donation of three much needed clothes rails for their Working Wardrobe initiative. They said "These rails have made a huge difference in helping us organise our wardrobe, ensuring we can offer professional workwear to women preparing for interviews and starting new jobs. Thanks to this support, we can help create capsule wardrobes for their first week, giving them

confidence as they take the next step in their careers. Thank you, MK Soroptimists, for making a real impact!" As I said before it's the little things that matter the most.



**What a way to start April off.
Another one of our 100 challenges completed.**

119 Pairs of pants delivered to UnityMK along with 2 books, the start of our next 100 challenge. They were so delighted to received some womens clothes, especially underwear, which they are always short of.



And a big thank you to Laraine. At our April meeting we celebrated her 80th birthday with cake and flowers. Laraine, for her 80th not only donated a beautiful quilt she made for MK Act but she held a birthday party, inviting all her friends and only asking for donations for her chosen charities. She raised £200 for the Myanmar Earthquake appeal and £115 for our charities. Thank you Laraine, for always being there, for all your suport at our events and for all your beautiful handmade quilts you donate to our charities.



And here, on the left is our April Orange café, which now includes a stand on promoting Women's Health issues using the new SIGBI Health cards.

On the right, a big thank you to Frank for his very kind donation of 48 Easter Eggs we were able to deliver to the Ukrainian children at their Sunflower school in time for Easter.



In May a few of us had the privledge of travelling to Krakow to meet up with our friends at Soroptimist International Kraków. You will remember we sent out donations to help them support Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland, sponsoring educational workshops and a bar-b-que for the children. We had a lovely day catching up on those projects and learning more about what they are planning for the future. It is great to learn from and help each other. It was also lovely to meet a Soroptimist friend from the Hague club in the Netherlands.



At the beginning of June, we met with another of our MP's Emily Darlington to talk about how we support our Milton Keynes charities and the work we are doing to raise awareness around violence against women and girls. We had a really interesting discussion and are looking forward to working with her on this important issue.



June continued with a meeting with the new High Sheriff of Buckingham, Pippa Kirkbride to tell her all about Soroptimists, what we stand for, the work we do with our chairites. She was very interested in our Orange Café and raising awareness to end violence against women and girls. We are contuning to raise our profile as much as we can





At our June branch meeting we welcomed Hannah from the charity BabyBasics MK. Like us they have been working with MK Families for 10 years. They support the most vulnerable families with children up to 6 years old working in partnership with midwives, health visitors, children's centres, social workers and other professionals to provide help when it's needed most. Mums and families are referred to their service and at the time of our meeting they had given out 400 kits and worked with 500 families. Since Covid they have seen a significant increase in demand. Baby Basics MK with help from the community and local businesses reuse high-quality second-hand and new items, creating gift packages filled with essentials for families with children aged 0–6. Hannah brought one of these new born baby start up kits along for us to see. They consist of a moses basket full of essential equipment like baby food/formula, bedding, clothes, toys, feed bottles, toiletries. We had pleasure in donating a cheque as well as over 100 items and a handmade quilt donated by one of our members. Another 100 challenge completed.



Not only did we hear from the wonderful Baby Basics charity but we welcomed a new member, Debbie. We thanked Sally, one of our friends who, in partnership with groups she supports in her village, is providing us with valuable donations we are able to pass onto our charities. A very big thank you Sally and your friends. We also celebrated another birthday, Lynne's.



Gosh, we continued to be busy. The next day a few of us went to help Works For Us and their working wardrobe. Earlier in the year we had donated 3 clothes rails and over 70 coat hangers to help better organise their working wardrobe, helping people to get back into the working environment. Now, they needed all their clothes to be steam ironed and organised into sizes and types. Over a number of sessions during June and July a merry band of us turned up to iron, sort and size. All with a smile.



June was our month to really celebrate. On the 28th we celebrated our 10th Anniversary with a fabulous dinner at the Best Western Moore Place Hotel with lots of our friends, our charities and our regional clubs who have supported us and been a part of our journey over the past 10 years.

It was an honour to have as our guests and speakers, the President of SIGBI Ruth Healey and Emily Darlington MP and what a way to finish our evening than to have the Surprise Singers from the Ukraine Appeal charity getting us up and dancing. A thank you must go to Jan Flawn, a previous member, for her generous donation to sponsor our dinner. We are looking forward to the next 10 years and how we can help women and girls achieve their potential. Here are just a few photos from that amazing evening.





July saw us start the month providing a summer buffet for the clients of UnityMK. We are now providing two buffets a year, in the summer and at Xmas time. Thank you to our members for the donation of food items and to our friend who is able to provide chocolate bars the clients really love.

We helped out with more sessions at Works For Us on their working wardrobe and started on our Refuge lunch project. With the help of donations from Tesco through their blue coins scheme, we have been able to purchase kitchen items for cookery. Every few weeks we are now going to the Refuge and giving cookery

lessons to the mums there to help build up their confidence in cookery and life skills. So far we have cooked soups, curries, tuna pasta bake and baking cakes, to name a few. We are looking to continue this project into 2026.



At this month's meeting not only did we thank Laraine for another of her beautiful handmade blankets to go to one of our charities, we celebrated Scottie's birthday. And we welcomed Blue bear, for our 10th anniversary, kindly made by Scottie and to represent our club and Soroptimists. July continued to be busy as we sponsored YMCA's community lunch this month. It is a great opportunity for charities and organisations to network and hopefully develop working partnerships.



August is usually our quite month but somehow we still work. This month our friend and great supporter Miss Quiz hosted a Fish and Chip quiz fundraising event for us. All we needed to do was turn up, take part and help with donations for MK Foodbank which we were happy to do. Always a great evening and quite competitive too but thank you all the quizzers as they helped us raise

£350 towards our new project "Healthy Relationships". We are developing this project with MK Act and the aim is to produce a training programme to go into schools to teach boys about healthy relationships. This is in line with our United Nations Orange the World work to end violence against women and girls. Miss Quiz kindly hosted another quiz for us in September when we raised over £200 and so we are very grateful for her support.

Our August meeting has now become our summer party and this year's theme was (can you guess?), green. Green cakes, green clothes, a green raffle and a green quiz. We had Rupi and Bonnie join us as new friends to find out more about us. A lovely evening was had by all and another £80 was raised for our new project.



September saw us welcome Rupi as a new member to our club. We are so pleased she has joined us and hope she will find fun, friendship and a purpose with our work.



And at our branch meeting Laraine donated another of her beautiful hand made quilts for a family at MK Act. Thank you Laraine for your kind generosity.



Bletchley and the MK centre campus. MK College is White Ribbon accredited and we are happy to support them in this initiative. This year we also brought along our Women's Health matters awareness information.



In October we held our 3rd Violet Awards recognising those women staff and volunteers who go over and above their roles to help the people needing their services. It was a humbling and inspiring experience to hear the managers say thank you and for the nominees to hear the praise in front of their peers - well done to the winner from Works For Us. We heard how she helped one client to believe in herself, regain her confidence and apply for (and get) the job she wanted after a couple of years. It was a truly great evening and it is all about "It's what you do that matters".



October is also Annual Conference season. This year we were at Birmingham. And what a very interesting time we had. Lots of workshops to get ideas from and certainly great to hear from Lynne Elliot, CEO of White Ribbon UK just as we come up to November and the 16 Days of Activism period. We as a club took part in one of the workshops, that was showcasing clubs and their projects. We were asked to tell people about our 90 challenges project so other clubs could learn from this idea and possibly adopt it as well. Even at conference we took part in another 90 challenge. A lady from a Perthshire club was trying to meet 90 different clubs at conference so Milton Keynes obliged with a photo. Another challenge completed and another friend made. We had a great time and would recommend members to come along. Next year's conference is 30-31 October and will be in Cardiff.



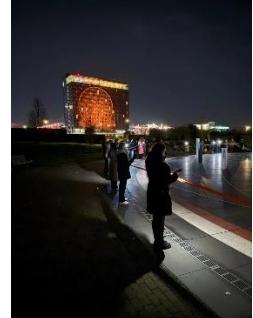
Another donation completed. This is the second year we have donated 50 bags of much needed toiletries to the students of the Bridge Academy. Last year, they contacted us because they had heard about our sanitary and toiletries donations to our charities and asked if we could help them. They work with many young people who don't have access to basic hygiene supplies and whilst the academy has access to sanitary packs, they often need more basic items like

toothbrushes, deodorant, shower gel etc to help those children taken into care or when a family is being moved. Members made donations and we were able to drop these bags off to the academy in the **first week of November**.



Soroptimists Milton Keynes attended the 11 November Remembrance wreath laying ceremony at Milton Keynes Rose and we feel this is an important annual event for us now. This Remembrance Day, and every day for those women who served and died in war and those women killed in conflicts we shall not forget you, we will always remember. And on the 18 November our supporters MK Snap allowed us to celebrate the planting of a lovely Acer tree to celebrate our 10th anniversary. At our branch meeting we formally welcomed Rupi as a new member to our club. Two lovely ways to celebrate our 10th year.

November is another very busy month for us because it is the Orange the World and 16 Days of Activism month.



Soroptimist MK is part of the organising group who run the Annual Vigil at MK Rose. This year, not only would there be the vigil but a craftivism event, getting groups across MK to make a decoration for one of the pillars at MK Rose depicting their experiences around violence against women. We were allocated the International Womens Day pillar, one of the tallest at MK Rose and started planning early and thank goodness there are a number of us

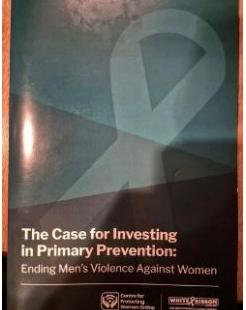
who are good at crafts. Mary built the top which it would sit on the pillar, whilst Lynne made all the ribbons decorated with flowers and brought our pillar decoration to life. The craftivism event was a great success. Over 50 decorations were made by groups including Inner wheel clubs, WI clubs, schools, women's groups and art groups to name a few. MK College students took part by photographing each decoration and those photos were then displayed in the centre MK by John Lewis for the whole 16 Days of Activism. On the day of the Vigil on 25 November, the Photograph display of all the pillars was opened by the Deputy Mayor and there were over 150 people in attendance at the vigil at MK Rose, where we were pleased to have as one of our speakers, Lynne Elliot, CEO from White Ribbon UK. This year, not only did we have Hotel La Tour light up in Orange for the 16 Days, but The Centre MK also lit up their car park in Orange, so we thank them for supporting our event and hope we can build on this partnership for future years. To top that, our local newspaper did a whole page spread of the event helping to raise awarness of this issue.



This year, again, we supported two important events. Not only the Annual Vigil but on Thursday 27 November, during the day we displayed our Orange the World stall at Milton Keynes City Council offices at an event to raise awareness with staff about the Orange campaign, the issue of violence against women and to highlight the services available in MK. We were there alongside other agencies including Thames Valley Police, MK Act and SASSMK and Cllr Marie Bradburn came and said hello.



We finished the month by getting into the Xmas mood at the Newport Pagnell Xmas Light switch on. This year's stand was "Name the Dog" raffle to raise more funds for our "Healthy Relationships" project. The Mayor of Newport Pagnell helped out for a moment and although the weather was absolutely atrocious at the start of the day by the end we had collected £120. A very good day, we met lots of lovely people and were able to tell them about Soroptimists and what we do and even got some more 50 pences donated as a result.



December started with an invitation from our MP Emily Darlington to attend a White Ribbon event at the Houses of Parliament where the White Ribbon new report "The Case for Investing in Primary Prevention" was launched. It was an informative event and we made some good networking contacts as well.



joyful concert and helped us raise £860 towards our project to develop a Healthy Relationships training programme for boys to take into schools. It was a lovely way to get into the seasonal cheer. If you have never been to one of their concerts then we would highly recommend. They make you want to join in and you certainly come away feeling quite uplifted.

On the 6 December the wonderful Heart and Music Charity Choir gave us a beautifully



Now I should say I have forgotten to mention one of our challenges this year. After our great fun during SIGBI's 90th Anniversary year where we carried out a number of 90 challenges, just to remind you of a few we did, 90 coat hangers for Works For Us,

4 x 90 grams of used stamps for Against Breast Cancer and Macmillian Cancer charities, 90 bras to Smalls for us charity. We enjoyed these challenges/projects and so decided to do more this year. One of those is our 50pence challenge. In 2025 MK Act have been delivering vital domestic abuse services to Milton Keynes for 50 years. They are now planning to build another refuge due to increasing need and set organisations, groups, individuals the 50 challenge to raise funds for this facility. One of our members came up with the great idea of collecting 50 pence pieces. You may laugh in this age of card readers. We thought if we could collect 100 or £100 by MK Act's National Conference in November that would be our target. All members were to ask their friends and their friends friends. And so the word went out. By the beginning of August we were up to £139.50, our friends were rallying round. We kept on asking. We were cheeky. On one day's outing a couple of members were in a café ordering tea and cake, as you do, and one said to the other don't forget to ask for 50pences in change. The chap behind us had just got his wallet out and the member said if you have any please donate and went onto explain what we were collecting them for. We were being cheeky but when we were heading back to our table, he came up to us and gave us three 50pence pieces. We thanked him most gratefully. That is how this project has gone along. We have told people we came into contact with and they have come up trumps. Another example is a talk we gave to the Water Eaton Ladies group in September. In adition to giving us a donation, a number of the women looked in their purses and handed over their 50pences. Another example was one of our new friends attending our summer party was so inspired by this project. She went home and came back with a very generous donation. It meant that at the beginning of December we were invited to attend a xmas meal for the mums and were very pleased to present a cheque for £400. Three times more than our target. Suffice to say I won't tell you how heavy £400 worth of 50 pence pieces are when you are taking them to the bank. To everyone who has helped thank you on behalf of MK Act. From little acorns big things can happen.



Soroptimists Milton Keynes has had a fabulous 10th Anniversary Charter year and we finished off 2025 with our Xmas projects all provided with the help of our wonderful members, their families and friends and our clubs friends. We want to also take this opportunity to thank Sally and her friends in Horwood who have helped throughout the year to provide recycling donations for our charities and helped with our Xmas projects.

This year we delivered;

- 👉 28 food vouchers to the families at MK Act
- 👉 Xmas buffet to the homeless clients at UnityMK
- 👉 Xmas craft demonstration to the staff and volunteers at Works For Us
- 👉 Educational items and raised raffle donations for Ukraine Appeal Charity
- 👉 30 bags of essential items to the supported living clients at YMCA Milton Keynes

We couldn't do this without our members and all our friends who always give generously. And so we just want to say a big thank you and wish you all a very Merry Xmas, Happy New Year and all the best for 2026.

But that is not all we have been donating and amongst these are some of our 100 challenges. Here is just a taste of what we have done this year?

- 👉 408 books have been donated to Unity MK for their library to help their clients wellbeing by taking their minds off their worries. Another 100 challenge.

- 👉 At our January meeting each charity received a £100 donation, the first of the year.
- 👉 400 grams of used or new stamps collected to date this year. 200 grams were donated to Against Breast Cancer Charity and 200 grams were donated to the Macmillan Cancer Charity.
- 👉 850 grams of Medical Blister packs have been recycled at Superdrug or Boots fuiling part of our Green Pledge.
- 👉 Over 100 baby items have been donated to Baby Basics MK to help support vulnerable families.
- 👉 119 pairs of women's pants were donated to UnityMK for their women clients.
- 👉 Over 40 big sacks of clothing and bedding todate have been recycled to UnityMK, YMCA and Works For us.
- 👉 16 big bags of toiletries have been donated todate to MK Act, YMCA MK and Unity MK.
- 👉 3 Clothes Rails and another 70 coat hangers donated to Works For Us.
- 👉 Craft demonstration given to the staff and volunteers at Works For Us.

Soroptimists and our friends are versatile and we try to adapt to our charities needs.

Before I sign off, two things to note please. There have been some updates, especially with regard to the Orange Café date, so please check you have all the following dates in your diaries.

Branch meetings – Tuesday - 5.30pm Community Room (back of café), Morrisons, 4 Barnsdale Drive, Westcroft, MK4 4DD	Friendship Lunch Wednesday, 12.30pm The Inn in the Lake, Mount Farm Bletchley	Orange Café – Dobbies 10am to 1pm
20 January 17 February 17 March 21 April 26 May AGM 23 June 21 July 18 August – Summer Party 165 September 20 October 17 November 15 December	28 January 25 February 25 March 29 April 27 May 24 June 29 July 26 August 30 September 298 October 25 November	27 January 24 February 24 March 28 April 26 May 30 June 28 July 25 August 29 September 27 October 24 November
Events		
Wed 4 March – International Women's Day Afternoon Tea and cake event, Time to be confirmed, MK Snap, 20 Bourton Low, Walnut Tree Sat 14 March TBC – SILC Region Conference celebrating International Women's Day, Lancaster Hall, London Sat 20 June – SILC Summer Regional Conference , to be Hosted by SI St Albans and District and SI High Wycombe July – SIGBI Day of Action TBC July / Aug Fish and Chip Quiz 7.00pm for 7.30pm Venue TBC, Simpson 18 Aug – Summer Party Venue and Time TBC Sat 10 Oct – SILC SILC Region AGM/Conference, Lancaster Hall London Fri 30 to Sat 31 Oct – SIGBI Annual Conference Cardiff 11 Nov Remembrance Day - MK Rose 25 Nov – 10 Dec 16 Days of Activism Tuesday 25 Nov Annual Vigil MK Rose and other venue TBC Music Concert Venue, Date and Time TBC		

Further dates will be added during the year so please keep an eye on our diary.

Finally, as I sign off this editorial, I just want to say that it is a privilege being a Soroptimist and being a part of this group. We have achieved so much this year and helped our charities and all whilst busy celebrating our 10th anniversary. I for one have loved every moment. May I take this opportunity to again say thank you all our

members, all our families and all our friends for all your support, time given and efforts in what we have achieved in 2025. Happy New Year and all the very best for 2026.

Happy Reading everyone. **Sue Key, Chair**



Soroptimists standing up for Women and Girls

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SI:MK support these local charities:

