

## **SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE**

### **PROGRAMME ACTION ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21**

It seems surreal that twelve months on, in April 2021, our Country along with the majority of many others in the world are now totally in the hold of the global Covid 19 pandemic. We couldn't have imagined that we would experience ongoing restrictions including lockdowns when we reported at last year's AGM.

But what a year we've had! I know that we could have never imagined what lay ahead but despite everything we have ALL risen to the challenge. We have smashed the Programme Action targets that we set ourselves at our last face to face meeting back in March 2020.

At times it has maybe felt that everything has changed, but this is not necessarily true and as Soroptimist's, we have the ability to adapt to deliver the Objectives of Soroptimist International using the skills and interests of the members in the Club.

As you know, SIGBI Programme Action projects are expected to tackle at least one of the five Programme Action areas

- People
- Planet
- Prosperity
- Peace
- Partnership

In response to Covid 19, we quickly restructured ourselves meeting virtually on Zoom and reprioritised our Programme Action work focussing on

- Food security
- Women and girls' safety
- Celebrating our Centenary
- Mental health and wellbeing

We have had an exceptionally busy and successful year of Programme Action across 2020-21 despite many of us shielding throughout and at times, all of us under lockdown.

Adjusting to this challenging situation we found ourselves in, Programme Action activities became the main focus of our meetings alongside helping each other to become more familiar with the new IT challenges and frustration we faced!

Having placed Programme Action firmly at the centre of everything we did and hopefully resulted in Programme Action being even more inclusive part of the Club. Members continued to take lead roles and everyone became involved in a wide range of projects we delivered.

Building on previous years, it was essential that we worked with partner organisations for most of our projects. The limitations we encountered through ongoing restrictions would have severely limited and in many cases meant that without partners we could not have delivered our work. It also enabled us to maximise our resources and gain greater benefits.

## **FOOD SECURITY**

With many people unable to work in the lockdowns, the Governments Furlough Scheme which met 80% of a person's wages helped many people, but the sudden reduction of 20% from a person's income became the difference of being able to eat or not for many. The immediate shutdown of many workplaces placed major challenges on the supply chain which resulted in empty shelves at the supermarkets and consequent inflated prices. So whilst again welcome, the temporary increase in Universal Credit by no means covered the inflated costs and many people just fell through the cracks as they were unable to work and did not qualify for any Government financial support.

We immediately sent £200 to both the East and West End of Newcastle Foodbanks.

Working with Newcastle food bank and Morrison's we donated £500 to provide 100 Christmas dinners. This was raised through your donations as we couldn't have our Charter Lunch. Thanks to Kath Shearer who led on this with Morrison's Community Officer.

Many people unable to afford food are also often unable to afford the energy required to cook a meal so the foodbank mass catered and produced takeaway Christmas Lunches. So as we enjoyed our Christmas Lunch we were proud that we had enabled 100 local people to do the same.

In addition, we provided 100 breakfasts for families over the Christmas period. Christmas is always a time for chocolate we provided 100 bars of milk and white chocolate to Gateshead and Cris Young donated 100 bars of mint chocolate to Felling food banks. Maybe anytime of the year is a good time for chocolate so we provided 100 Easter eggs and 100 hot cross buns. A 100kg of food items were delivered to Gateshead Foodbank.



Many of you, including Cris Young's mum and neighbours made donations of 100 food items to Felling, Gateshead, Morpeth and Newcastle East and West foodbanks. Many sister Soroptimist's, who attended our virtual Charter Event made donations in lieu of the charge, to their local food banks across the Northern Region and Scotland. What a fantastic way of celebrating our birthday this year.

For some, still unexplained reason there was a major shortage of toilet rolls due to many people bulk buying, so we also donated 100 toilet rolls to Gateshead foodbank. This was complemented by 100 sanitary products

Understandably, this year has been a real tragedy for some families. So we offered our teddies for children who won't get much from Santa. Chris Jones took 25 requested by the Newcastle foodbanks for presents to children for Christmas. Thanks to Catherine Waller for coordinating her gang of knitters and Kath Shearer for making them all a travelling bag.

## WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFETY

Margaret Ayton and Lis Graham led our social media campaign in response to the 16 days of Activism against Domestic Abuse Thanks to you both you certainly changed the Facebook and Instagram pages orange.

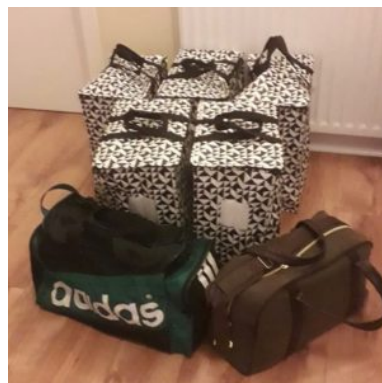


At the Northern Regional Meeting of Soroptimist International in June the Club was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation in the Annual Reach for the Sky Programme Awards for supporting the Domestic Violence Champions run by West End Women and Girls Centre. The Champions are young women who provide peer support and information to other young people challenging domestic abuse through schools and in the community. The Champions acknowledged the need to be easily identifiable if someone need their help.so by providing 100 hoodies they achieved their objective.



A major piece of legislation has been progressing through the Houses of Commons and Lords this year and we have joined in the campaign for amendments and ascension of the Domestic Abuse Bill into Law. This will improve the protections for women under a tighter legal framework.

We have continued to support the Hub providing New Start Bags in partnership with Northumbria Police, Newcastle Social Services, for women and girls fleeing trafficking and domestic abuse. Another 7 bags containing over 100's of essential items of clothing and toiletries were delivered to ensure these often young vulnerable women could start new lives. Thanks to Laura Steel and Kath Shearer for putting these together.



## CELEBRATING OUR CENTENARY

I'm sure that you will have recognised a theme of 100 or multiples thereof, in our activities and giving in this report. This year (September 2020-21) sees the Centenary of Soroptimist International and to celebrate we planned all of our Programme Activities around the 100 theme. Then Jill Smith challenged us to complete 100 for 100 challenges – which we enthusiastically accepted.

So we embarked on 100 for 100 Challenges all within the focus areas we had agreed upon. To avoid duplication I have included many of these under the Programme focus areas recording our progress. We are well on our way to completing this challenge by September 2021.

'WholsShe', a Soroptimist International project set out to identify 100 exceptional Soroptimist women from the last 100 years. Our Club submitted 4 candidates; Edith Base, Dame Vera Baird, Florence Kirkby and Dorothea Sinton (left to right) and all made the list. Thanks to Christine Lumsdon for leading on this and congratulations to these exceptional women.



Christine also took over the lead on our Blue (Black) Plaque Parity campaign from Hilary Brewis and it's great to report that Newcastle City Council have agreed to recognise our candidate Dr Ruth Nicholson. More on this next year.

Funded by donations made at our Charter Lunch in 2019, in partnership with Tree Sisters over 2000 trees were and planted. Tree Sisters is an organisation which works with women across the world to plant and care for the trees tackling climate change and providing them with the opportunity to generate an income supporting both them and their communities. SIGBI launched tree planting as a Centenary Legacy Project and thanks to Christine Lumsdon who has loaded these onto their map,

We made donations support the SIGBI Benevolent and Education Funds Centenary appeals.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING

For 22 years we have provided Christmas bags for homeless women through the Joseph Cowan Health Centre so a pandemic wasn't going to prevent us continuing this year. Members were innovative and made donations in lieu of haircuts, coffees and lunches during the first lockdown. Unable to go shopping we moved online and had the products delivered in batches as to manage supply chains many items were restricted and we could only purchase 3-6 items of products at a time. 25 Christmas bags containing over 500 items were gratefully received by the Health Centre. Nothing stopped us!



Thanks to Patricia Gatherum and her merry band of angelic knitters, nearly 1300 yes 1300 angels were born, quarantined and distributed to every care home resident in Morpeth and the remainder hidden around the Town for people to have a nice surprise.

We marked World Mental Health Day with a mindfulness session arranged by Cris Young.

Lis walked 1000's of steps delivering 100 hand creams and cards to care homes in the City to acknowledge our gratitude and to thank the caring staff who had worked tirelessly during the pandemic.



We kept fit and well walking and cycling 100's of miles, losing 100kg of weight, planting 100's of spring bulbs, reading nearly 100 books, and kept in touch with each other as we all found our different ways of getting through.

We celebrated International Women's Day by celebrating our Programme Action achievements' with a virtual Open Meeting thanks to Margaret Ayton and Lis Graham.

Further information about our activities can be found by visiting our Clubs Website <https://sigbi.org/newcastle-upon-tyne>

## **THANK YOU**

All that remains is to record really big THANK YOU to you all for your Programme Action work this year. What we have achieved is JUST TRULY AMAZING!!!!!!.

My thanks to Jill Smith for continuing to populate our work on the SIGBI database.

These achievements prove that we certainly adapted and rose to the many challenges we faced this year. I would sincerely like to thank you ALL for sending your extremely kind and generous donations throughout the year, without which, unable to fundraise in the traditional way, we have not been able to achieve so much.

**Christine Lowthian**

**Programme Action Officer**