

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

PROGRAMME ACTION ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

It is almost inconceivable to imagine that the global pandemic of Covid19 would still be with us 2 years on and its impact is again reflected upon in this third consecutive Programme Action annual report. We have continued to have been subject to restrictions through the last year but with the successful development of vaccines and the amazing roll out and booster programme we are now beginning to adapt yet again to now begin to live with Covid19. Government financial support through furlough, isolating payments and enhanced Universal Credit and free testing has been stopped despite people still expected to test and isolate if they develop symptoms to try to restrict spread. At the time of writing we are now facing new and additional challenges. A war has begun with Russia invading Ukraine resulting in the mass migration of the Ukrainian people fleeing the atrocities this conflict has brought. This and the fallout from the pandemic, have resulted in major disruption to global supply chains particularly in the food, energy and technology sectors resulting in the worst ever cost of living crisis in this Country. So our work is now more relevant and needed more than ever.

We have continued to promote the objects of Soroptimist International through Programme Action, the framework in which we strive for equality for women and girls through the 3E's **Educate, Enable and Empower** via the 3A's **Awareness, Advocacy and Action**.

And we do this within the United Nation Sustainable Development Goals better known as the 5P's framework shown here.



We have continued to face the challenges head on, adapting and using our skills to deliver our Programme Action in innovative ways but the essential element to our success continues to be our strategy to extend our partnerships to deliver to projects which meet the identified need of the community, overcoming many of the restrictions we experienced and maximising our efforts.

Programme Action has continued to be firmly at the centre of everything we did and resulting in Programme Action continuing to be totally inclusive, using the interests and skills of the members in the Club to deliver another very full and successful range of projects in 2021-22.

With the pandemic still with us we continued with our targeted themes to wrap our Programme Action around. As our Centennial year was coming to an end we added the theme of climate change.

- Food security
- Women and girls' safety
- Celebrating our Centenary (completed October 2021)
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Climate change

Increasingly our Programme Action projects this year have straddled more than one of these themes so I have reported these in the section that seemed most relevant but a key component has been the increased inclusion of a mental wellness element to our work.

FOOD SECURITY

As we began to return to our new norms, people on Universal Credit had the temporary increase levied at the beginning of the pandemic removed, others found that the jobs they had been furloughed from were no longer there as some businesses had not survived and the cost of living has reached crisis point with many people facing decisions as to whether to eat or heat their houses. Consequently there is more demand for and use of foodbanks by an increasingly wide range of people including many working full time no longer being able to cover their living costs.

Due to the increased demand on foodbanks and experience of providing Christmas Lunch last year, we agreed to fund West End Foodbank to provide **Christmas meals** over the wider holiday period this year. Our donation of £500 enabled over 300 people to receive a hot Christmas meal.

Our partnership with the **Newcastle foodbanks** and Morrison's continued to provide bars of chocolate, Easter Eggs and Hot Cross bun. Thanks to Kath Shearer who led on this with Morrison's Community Officer.

Again many of our sister Soroptimist's, attending our virtual Charter Event made donations in lieu of the charge, to their local food banks across the Northern Region and Scotland, a fantastic way of celebrating our Charter.

And many of you continued to with your **donations of food items** and sanitary products direct to Felling, Gateshead, Morpeth and Newcastle East and West foodbanks.

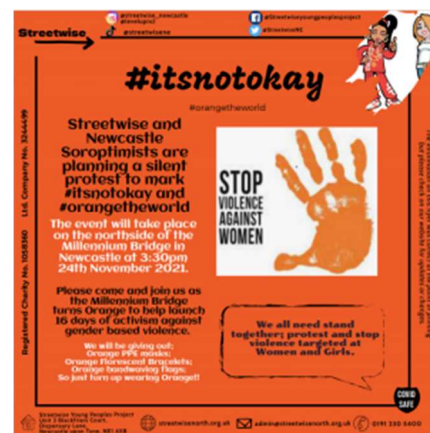
As we have learned many people unable to afford food are also often unable to afford the energy required to cook a meal so we provided 6 **microwaves** to West End Foodbank to help. Janet Heal, a former member of our Club has been operating a virtual Club in Scotland and as one of their project's they had created a **recipe book** containing easy, nutritious and cheap microwave meals. We supported this fledgling Club by purchasing 20 books to compliment the microwaves.

Our **teddies and knitted friends** in their travel bags continued to bring comfort to children who won't get much from Santa. Thanks to Chris Jones who delivered them to the Newcastle foodbanks for presents to children for Christmas and to Catherine Waller for continuing to coordinate her gang of knitters and to Kath Shearer for all of those travelling bags.

WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFETY

Research has shown that there has been a 30% increase in the incidence of domestic abuse during the pandemic.

Starting the 16 Days of Activism highlighting the fight against violence against women in partnership with Streetwise and sister Soroptimist's from Durham Club, we made a **silent protest against domestic abuse** along Newcastle Quayside and turned the Millennium Bridge **ORANGE**. It was great to work with the young people from Streetwise on this campaign and our thanks to Mandy Coppin for co-ordinating this event.



Margaret Ayton and Lis Graham again led our social media campaign in response to the **16 days of Activism against Domestic Abuse**. Thanks to you both for leading our 'orange' social media campaign.

The **Domestic Abuse Act 2021** was enacted with a number of the amendments we, along with many others, had campaigned for had been successful. This legislation sets of the legal framework to root out and punish those perpetrating domestic abuse.

We have continued to support the Multi Agency Hub providing **New Start Bags** in partnership with Northumbria Police, Newcastle Social Services, for women and girls fleeing trafficking and domestic abuse. Another 2 bags containing essential 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 October 2020 to October 2021

Soroptimist Internationals Centennial year concluded in October 2021. Many of us celebrated at a number of virtual events able to join sister Soroptimist's across the world and we continued to add trees to the **Centenary Tree Planting Legacy Project**. The interactive map showing where over 120,200 trees have been planted in this centenary year can be found at sigbi.org and go to Tree Planting Map. Thanks to Christine Lumsdon for populating this.



President Christine planted a tree in Exhibition Park. The tree was a gift from SI Glasgow commemorating years of Soroptimists.

You will recall that in 2020 we planned our Programme Action activities around a 100 theme and set ourselves the challenge to complete 100 for 100 challenges to celebrate the Centenary. Well we smashed this target with members continuing to read, walk, plant bulbs and trees, take photos, donate food items and LOTS LOTS MORE! to complete this. The full list of 100 for 100 challenges is attached.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING

2021 marked our 23rd year providing **Christmas bags for homeless women** through the Joseph Cowan Health Centre which were gratefully received by the women supported by the Health Centre. Thanks go to Lesley Bowes for co-ordinating and delivering the bags on our behalf.



As soon as we were able to meet together we held a **Prosecco Afternoon Tea** and we enjoyed a long awaited social event catching up with friends we had only seen on screen for so long.

Our resident Poet excelled this year, Cris Young **compiled her poems into a book** and sold them raising over £380 to improve mental health and wellbeing. Congratulations Cris. £200 has been **donated to Alzheimer's Research UK** and £54 for **Sensory Therapy equipment donated** to Canning Street Primary School.

CLIMATE CHANGE

We launched our **schools climate change collaboration project** supporting **Gosforth East Middle School's Gardening Club**. The club gave the students donated £200 to buy tools, together with pallets, potato sacks, seed potatoes, nets, hoops and top soil. The produce will be used in Food Technology lessons and any surplus donated to the foodbanks



Next on stream came Canning Street Primary School in the West End to extend outdoor learning for the children aided by the development of their **garden and a forest school**. A donation of £350 plus wellies and waterproofs helped them to achieve this.



This had long been a special interest of our past member Dorothy Sisterson and she generously nominated this project to benefit from donations made in her memory. Thanks to Christine Tomkins for co-ordinating on our behalf.

Herself previously a beneficiary of a Churchill Fellowship, Christine Lumsdon secured a £10,000 Fellowship grant to support **West End Women and Girls'** first activity on their newly acquired **farm**. This includes the setting up a large polytunnel for growing food and also to provide transport to the farm for their members. This project is using the activities on the farm to provide the women and girls with access to the countryside and activities to help them recover from the effect of Covid19.



In addition the Club has donated **10 trees to be planted on the farm** in reembrance of Dorothy Sisterson.

AND.....

We celebrated **International Women's Day** in March joining West End Women and Girls launch of their 40th Anniversary and launch of their 40 Women and Girls book These 40 women and girls were chosen because they had been influential in the development of the Centre and its activities. A great night of celebrations followed with a fun fair, street food and ice cream and comradery.

Others attended 'Time to Stand Up' in aid of Rape Crisis at the Tyne Theatre enjoying a full programme of women stand-up comedians.

On International Women's Day, President Christine went to the **International Women's Day Awards** event for the 60 Year 6 pupils which we had organised with Canning Street Primary School. The children were challenged to depict, in either words or images, a woman who had inspired them. President Christine thoroughly enjoyed this collaboration and was very impressed at the enthusiasm and standard of work produced by the children. All the children received a certificate and Celebration chocolate and he school was really pleased with the enthusiasm and the effort they all put in. Thanks to Christine Tomkins and Lis Graham for leading on this one.



We completed our first success in our **campaign for Blue (Black) Plaque Parity**. Newcastle City Council having agreed to recognise our candidate, Dr Ruth Nicholson unveiled her commemorative plaque this year.

We are extremely proud to have nominated Dr Ruth Nicholson for a plaque commemorating her life and work as a pioneering surgeon in WW1 for which she was awarded the French Croix de Guerre and later as a founder and a Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecologist. Our Lord Mayor (Councillor Habib Rahman) unveiled the plaque Friday, August 27th 2021. We were joined by Professor Alison Murdoch, representing the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Baroness Joyce Quin and a large group of Ruth Nicholsons family. They were thrilled and very pleased that this honour had been given to their relative and very proud of the plaque.



We have also received news that our second candidate, Dr Dorothea Sinton has been commemorated with a Black Plaque and arrangements for this unveiling are underway. Thanks to Christine Lumsdon for leading this project.

As mentioned at the beginning of this report the situation in **Ukraine** is just devastating with hundreds of thousands of women and children being displaced to Poland and across Europe, whilst the men are not allowed to leave the Country to defend against the Russian onslaught. We have sent £100 to each of the 5 Soroptimist Clubs in help support their work in their communities. We hope some resolution can be swiftly achieved.

Further information about all of 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 TRULY SPECTACULAR!!!!!!.

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

These achievements just show how we have continued to adapt to an ever changing world together. Still unable to fundraise through traditional routes, it has been your continued generosity that has enabled us to deliver this level of support to our and wider communities. For this I would sincerely like to thank you ALL.

Christine Lowthian

Programme Action Officer