

## DR CONNIE CLARKE - GENETICIST

Dr Connie Clarke joined Soroptimist International Stockton-on-Tees, in the Region of Northern England, in 1980, introduced by her cousin, Margaret Clough, already a member. Connie soon began playing a leading role in club meetings and activities, becoming Club President in 1986.

She was the first to bring to our attention the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the plight of many in Africa, particularly Nigeria, where she had spent some time in her younger days. This was at a time when there were some Soroptimists who felt that HIV/AIDS was a subject not to be talked about!

She began to regularly attend Regional Council Meetings and she offered her expertise in the field of Programme Action. Connie showed herself to be an authority on subjects such as genetics and biochemistry as well as HIV/AIDS and, with the rare ability to impart her knowledge to the uninitiated, bringing it into the comprehension of all who listened. She became Regional President of Northern England in 1990 and her Regional Conference the following year was a landmark event. The promised hard work of the morning – a crash course on ‘genes’ – inspired enthusiastic listening to the afternoon’s talks on a subject that most of us would have expected to be totally incomprehensible!



During the same year, Connie prepared the Region’s proposal for the International Quadrennial Project, the distribution of clean needles to counteract AIDS, based on the SIGBI Club network. When the Sightsavers Project was chosen as the preferred Project, the Northern Region elected to carry through Connie’s plans more modestly as a Regional Project, a continuing joint effort on Programme Action. Needless to say, Connie herself worked extremely hard, giving unstintingly of her time and expertise. Many consignments of needles were despatched to where they were most needed, on the African continent.

As Federation Executive Representative she was of service to the Presidents of the time, doing sterling work for Federation, Region and Club. She was also, for some time, the Federation Correspondent with Soroptimist Clubs in the Caribbean.

Connie organised a Biochemistry seminar in Birmingham, an open meeting about AIDS in Stockton, which was inspirational to all who attended, and in Berwick, a Programme Action morning on Genetic Engineering. All who participated in the Glasgow Federation Conference in 1995 will remember Connie’s outstanding presentation.

Anyone meeting Connie would never forget her. She once cooked a Christmas meal for 30 club members in her own home! She had so many talents, and her decorated eggs were legendary! When Stockton celebrated its 50th Charter Anniversary, she decorated eggs in gold for each of the 80 people who attended. She also organised craft days for members, which were fun as well as being educational.

Connie was made an Honorary Member of SI Stockton-on-Tees in 2015. It is so sad that she now has advanced dementia and is living in a nursing home near Bristol where she is close to her family; a brilliant mind, ruined by this cruel disease.