

## Thelma de Leeuw

Thelma de Leeuw has been an outstanding Soroptimist throughout 55 years' service. She has been totally focused on improving the lives of women and girls throughout the world. Her dedication and commitment are unswerving, being recognised in 2011 when she was made an Honorary Member of SIGBI.

Aged 11 in boarding school, her interest was sparked because the Soroptimist Headmistress involved girls in Club events. From 1951 to 1954 she attended the Royal Academy of Music, London, beginning her teaching career in schools in 1954. In 1966 she became Lecturer in Music and Education at Bingley College.



Whilst there she was introduced to SI Bingley in 1966 by her Headmistress who said, "This girl could be useful!" In 1973 Thelma changed direction to become Admissions Officer and Deputy Dean of Students at Bingley College, progressing to Student Adviser Ilkley College, and ultimately became Head of Central Student Services at Bradford College until August 1997.

Her Soroptimist life began March 1966 and her international involvement followed while attending the SI Convention in Rome as SI Bingley Club President 1971-1972. She considers the best job in Soroptimism is SI Yorkshire Secretary, a post she held from 1970-1974. She was Regional Secretary for the Sheffield International Convention 1975. As SI Yorkshire President (1976-1977) she attended the SI Europe Congress in Sweden.

In 1977 Thelma's first involvement at Federation level was as a member of SIGBI's Executive Committee, developing the new International Programme work and attending the SI Convention in Hawaii as Co-ordinator for Economic and Social Development (1979-1981). As SIGBI President (1982-1983) she chartered the first Club in Bangladesh, a link which she retains today.

Thelma became involved at International level as SI Programme Liaison (Director) from 1983-1987, attending the 1985 World Conference for Women in Kenya. Her board level experience led to her becoming Soroptimist International President 1989-1991. Thereafter "in retirement" in 1993 she represented SI as Co-ordinator on the Board of Project Five-O (vocational training for women in developing countries).

Upon retirement she continued her love of music and has worked in volunteer capacities using skills honed during her career and Soroptimist service including Voluntary Service Overseas, for whom she worked in selection and placement for many years, alongside always being an active club member at Bingley.

Her Soroptimist service required considerable world travel, with regular attendance at major United Nations Centres. She is totally committed to supporting the UN and served as a Board Member for United Nations Association UK. After meetings at the UN in Geneva on 'The Rights of the Child', she was challenged to commit Soroptimism to concentrate on work for women and girls. Others brought that work to fruition and Thelma remains convinced it is the fundamental challenge for international women activists today.

She is honoured she was “mentioned” to SI Bingley by her headmistress 55 years ago and is grateful for all that this generous gift has brought into her life, as are Bingley members for being inspired by her.

Photo credit Chris Clark

This lovely photo below is of Jane Glendinning, Vice President of SI Yorkshire presenting Thelma with her #WhoisShe? certificate.

