

## The History of Soroptimist International Madurai, India

### The Journey Begins:

Even the mighty banyan tree sprouts from a tiny seed. Here we trace the small beginnings of SI Madurai. The seed has sprouted...Even though the earth is hard, the resilient grass thrives and grows despite rough weather. We are hopeful that in the years to come, SI Madurai will reach for the skies in an aspirational burst of glory

Annette Mascarenhas, Extension and Membership officer NASI granted the charter to Anitha Rajarajan, Charter President of SI Madurai at a glittering ceremony on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010 in Madurai in the presence of Naina Shah and Kshiti Davey from SI Chennai Downtown. It is now among the 13 SI Clubs in the country. Each member from diverse backgrounds, interests, professions and outlook was introduced dramatically with a power point presentation that celebrated their unique strengths, individuality and skills. A hushed silence descended on the room as each member, lit a candle and set it afloat and had the membership badge pinned by the President of SI Madurai.





**From the President** - "I have seen SI Madurai grow from conception to a fully evolved organisation with a great potential for growth and development. It is truly my personal desire the SI Madurai must grow from strength to strength and evolve a dynamic organisation managed by strong and committed women of substance".

## Reuse, Reduce and Recycle Plastics - 2009

After a number of brainstorming sessions we at SI Madurai decided that our very first project should be for the community and we zeroed in on doing a campaign to reduce the use of plastics in our city.

We rallied together in a united voice, that recognised the potential hazards of plastic that is non biodegradable and hence has an adverse impact on the environment and on the food cycle. The poster campaign sought to create awareness and sensitise the public of Madurai about the potential environmental hazards of plastic carry bags. Speaking on the occasion, Anitha Rajarajan, requested students to jointly support the campaign and help in making Madurai cleaner, greener and environmentally safe. SI Madurai organised an unprecedented public rally advocating the ecological mantra-reuse, reduce and recycle plastics. Around 5000 people-including students from schools and colleges, professionals from all walks of life, NCC cadets and heads of service organisations spilled onto the streets of Madurai as a mark of their solidarity and support for the cause. Dr. R. Vasudevan of Thiagarajar college of engineering, a pioneer in plastic fortified road technology offered to take all the plastic waste from educational organisations for the laying of roads which would be stronger and based on the ecological mantra of reduce, reuse and recycle. According to him, one tonne of plastic or ten lakh of plastic carry bags could be utilised to lay 1 km of road.

We included the student community in all our environment projects thus sowing the seeds in the young minds for a mindset change for a more sustainable environment.



## Smart Class Education Project 2017-2018

Soroptimists transform the lives and status of women and girls through education, empowerment and enabling opportunities. Addressing the SDG 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for girls SI Madurai set up a smart class in a government school.

It all started with a conversation with our city's new Commissioner, Mr Sandeep Nanduri at an official function, being introduced to him as the founder President of a women's service organisation. As he learned more about Soroptimists he spontaneously responded to my request to consider, help and support the starting of a smart class in a government school.



We approached our friendship link sisters SI Machtelt and Katrien of SI Aalst in Belgium. They showed keen interest in collaborating with us on the smart class and with their goodwill gesture and monetary support we were able to successfully do this project. Their presence at the inauguration of the smart class was highly appreciated.

Our members, well-wishers and institution's have been very supportive in constantly sponsoring the needy students by way of paying their college fees, which enables them through to graduation.



## Environment Project - Plant Trees 2018

SI Madurai are very committed to making our environment greener and cleaner by planting trees. Two years ago, working with local school children and the community, the club set out to plant a 'tiny forest' using the Miyawaki method, a technique pioneered by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki, that helps build dense, native forests.



The approach aims to ensure that plant growth is 10 times faster, the resulting plantation is 30 times denser than usual and requires less water to maintain its health.

In India tree plantation programs are held just before the onset of the monsoons so that the saplings can get plenty of water to grow. The members of the club took great care to choose the right kinds of trees to plant using native species that suited the local conditions, maximising ecological resilience for their native environment, and giving the best potential to enhance biodiversity. The trees we selected included Indian Mahogany, Ashoka, Banyan, Gulmohar, Curry and Peepal Trees.

The work started by digging a pit along the school backyard, 10ft wide and 2.5ft deep and filling it with leaf litter and a starter enzyme. This enzyme helps the leaves to decay quickly providing good nutrients for the young plants, and topsoil was added a few weeks later. The work was a real community event, involving club members, many members of the community, school staff, children and some parents. Saplings were planted close together and haphazardly, not in rows, ensuring the different species were well mixed. 160 trees were planted in total. The resulting 'tiny forest', as you can see, is truly spectacular, creating a wonderful environment for the school children and staff, and a haven for wildlife.

This project won the best practice Award and having learnt a lot through the first project, and fuelled with enthusiasm, SI Madurai have recently planted a second 'tiny forest' at a centre for mentally ill patients, and their forest for the Centennial Celebrations will be in full bloom in 2021. They intend to continue planting trees, one for every club in the Federation and are busy encouraging other clubs to get involved!

