

President Grace's message

Our planet, our future – let's get cracking!



Make use of your publications

THANK YOU TO all of you who have already returned feedback to me on the various Soroptimist publications – Soroptimist News, the SIGBI briefings and our Region newsletter, SEE News.

Federation President Johanna is very interested in members' comments.

SEE News is a fantastic tool and can be used anywhere and everywhere in order to show everyone the fantastic variety of projects that are undertaken by our clubs. Potential members can see the great scope of opportunities and ways that they could become a true Soroptimist – just like you!

So please do forward any of our Region newsletters to potential members, friends, family, other groups, local schools – anyone in fact. It might be quicker than trying to explain what a 'Soropto -what?' is...

Webinars and zooming all the way! How are you managing with so many interesting and absorbing speakers and online events to attend? There is a wealth of material out there to investigate – I just need more time. It was wonderful to welcome over 70 attendees to the Region Meeting this month to hear updates on club and region activities and to hear some very worrying global environmental trends from our guest speaker from Greenpeace. It has been a delight to visit SI Lewes this month and two more in the pipeline for April. Hearing how clubs are helping those who are not so knowledgeable or confident with the technology to join in has been heart-warming.

The centenary tree planting project is going from strength to strength, with over 10,500 trees listed on the interactive map on the SIGBI website – over 500 of which were planted by SI East Grinstead – WOW! Many more trees have been planted than are shown on this map so if yours aren't there yet, click on the link below to add them. Not all clubs have the opportunity to join in this part of the celebrations by planting a tree in their area so the 'Plant trees for a Brilliant Future' team have come up with some suggestions of alternative ways to contribute (details via the same link).

Let me know if you have plans for Earth Hour (lights off on Saturday March 27 from 20:30) or Earth Day (April 22) – it's a great opportunity to show Soroptimists environmental credentials on social media. I look forward to zooming merrily along with many of you in the coming month and I wish you all productive AGMs.

[Planting Trees for a Brilliant Future | Soroptimist International Centenary 2021 | SIGBI](#)

The sons of Croydon Club member Gisella Pereira, raised a hand in support of International Women's Day



International Women's Day

We will forge positive visibility of women

Grace Onions, Regional President
Soroptimist International South East England

#ChooseToChallenge



International Women's Day

I will maintain a gender equal mindset

Tejan Pereira, Bristol University

#ChooseToChallenge



International Women's Day

I will call out gendered actions or assumptions

Ilyas Pereira, Wilson's School

#ChooseToChallenge

How Region clubs celebrated International Women's Day

Lewes Club



SI LEWES CLUB celebrated International Women's Day with a performance by local poet and playwright Ella Dorman-Gajic.

Ella performed some of her poems, including one written for the occasion celebrating the women in her life.

Members also brought their favourite poems by women for Ella to read out or read themselves. The meeting was open to friends to share the experience.

Everyone agreed that it is amazing what we can do on zoom bringing people together who live a distance away is some compensation for not being able to meet face to face.

VERA GAJIC, SI LEWES

Croydon Club



Club member Stella Sangster

Canterbury Club



CANTERBURY MEMBERS WEARING Suffragette colours for their International Women's Day Choose to Challenge.



...thank the Eastbourne Soroptimists

ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S Day, Care for the Carers announced: "we would like to give a huge thank you to the amazing Eastbourne Soroptimists, part of an international women's movement giving a global voice for women, who raised £1,293 to help carers in East Sussex. (See below for one of their fundraising events.)"

Women make up 58% of carers, and many women are 'sandwich carers' looking after both children and parents."

The full report may be found at <https://www.cftc.org.uk/eastbourne-soroptimists-fundraise-for-carers>.



How Region clubs celebrated International Women's Day

'Tough' talking at East Grinstead Club

TO MARK INTERNATIONAL Women's Day East Grinstead invited Jenny Tough to speak at the Club's Zoom meeting.

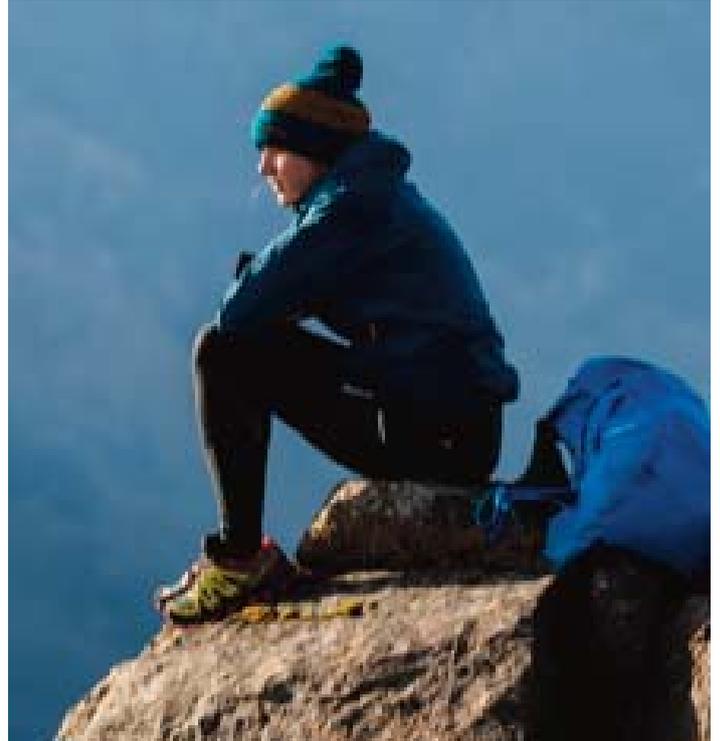
Jenny is an adventure traveller originally from Canada, who enjoys writing about her solo mountain expeditions and tales of world travel as a solo female. When she's not exploring the mountains of the world, she lives in Scotland, and occasionally, wherever she parks her adventure van.

What does "toughness" mean to you? Perhaps it's being physically fit and mentally resilient. Perhaps it's doing something no one else has done before. Perhaps it's breaking down boundaries and proving what you can do, in spite of the naysayers. Perhaps it's travelling alone, immersing yourself in new cultures and meeting new people. Perhaps it's running ultramarathons in the blistering heat and beating the competition. Perhaps it's conquering your fears.

Jenny Tough has taken her running to unparalleled heights and tested her body to extremes in the process. She's an adventurer with a particular fondness for running the world's most unforgiving mountain ranges and she does it alone.

The adventurers in Jenny's book 'Tough Women-Adventure Stories', are all fearless, intelligent, compassionate and curious about the world. They all happen to be female!

SUSAN EDGAR, SI EAST GRINSTEAD



A collage of all the IWD activities carried out by East Grinstead members

How Region clubs celebrated International Women's Day

Medway and Maidstone, and Project Hope

PROJECT HOPE is a Pen Pal project which is run by SATEDA (Swale Action To End Domestic Abuse) and involves writing supportive letters to women in prison. It was launched last summer by a SATEDA volunteer who was incarcerated because of her abusive ex-partner. Female inmates are often locked in their cells for 23 hours a day – with no family visits – due to the difficulties of maintaining social distancing within the prison setting.

During our 75th anniversary year we decided to get involved in this worthwhile project and set ourselves a target to write at least 75 letters. Six members met in February for a planning meeting and mapped out some guidance for members wishing to contribute. Some example letters were shared, along with ideas for the sort of content, perhaps poems or quotes, which would be acceptable and supportive. One of our members, Wanda Wright, has even painted some beautiful butterfly cards (see photo) to send along with her letters. Each letter or card is put in an unsealed envelope and then all of them placed in a large sealed brown envelope and sent to Mary Williams, SATEDA Volunteer Co-ordinator.

This project was also shared with our Friendship Link clubs when we met via Zoom in February, and SI Heswall and District and SI Voorburg said they were keen to work with us and get involved in Project Hope. It was felt this type of project was ideal for those members who may not feel at ease using technology but enjoy letter writing.



By International Women's Day, our initial contribution consisted of 60 cards that had been written by members. A total of 450 letters of hope and encouragement from both our club and other SATEDA volunteers were sent off by Mary to three women's prisons, namely HMP East Sutton Park, HMP Downview in Surrey and HMP Peterborough to help combat loneliness.

We have invited Kirsty, a Volunteer with SATEDA to SI Medway and Maidstone's club meeting on May 13 to talk about Project Hope and share with her our on-going commitment to support the project during 2021.

TAKING CARE OF OUR BEACHES



PLASTIC FREE EASTBOURNE have suggested a monthly clean of the "Adopt a Beach" supporters. In response, Kshama and I spent an hour, socially distanced, in glorious sunshine on the Soroptimist's beach (number 68) on Tuesday, February 23.

We collected over 46 pieces of detritus the majority of which were small pieces of plastic, including a toy soldier and a number of what looked like suntan lotion tops.

The survey sheet has been simplified and is much more user friendly. I am more than happy to make a note of people who would like to participate each month and ensure that we are within current COVID guidelines.

HILARY MORGAN-JONES, SI EASTBOURNE



CANTERBURY CLUB CONTINUE with their beach cleaning, and can be seen here with some of the eight kilos of rubbish collected recently.

JANE WEBB, SI CANTERBURY

The Emotion Game



SI LEWES AND Eastbourne donated 80 copies of “The Emotion Game” to the East Sussex Foster Carers Association to send to their most isolated families during lock-down. These types of games are increasingly recognised as a fun but therapeutic way to support young people’s mental health and are growing in popularity.

Lewes and Eastbourne clubs have a long association with East Sussex Foster Carers, having run a project with them for the past eight years at their annual Christmas Party. The clubs donate hundreds of presents which they help the foster children choose, wrap and take home to put under their tree for their carers. This has been a popular element of the Christmas party and we hope to be able to resume in 2021.

The Emotion Game is a simple card game designed to help children identify, manage and understand their emotions. It is designed to help children express how they feel; and think about ways to actively deal with any difficult feelings.

Thanks to the generously discounted offer from Focus Games, the Lewes and Eastbourne Soroptimist’s clubs could raise funds to buy 80 games.

These games have been distributed throughout ESFCA foster families across East Sussex where they will help looked-after children as they return to school, adjust to school transitions, as well as the struggle with lockdown conditions and social distancing.

VERA GAJIC, SI LEWES

Bromley members urge us to support the people of Yemen

BROMLEY URGES SI members to sign the petition on overseas aid to Yemen.

The UK government has recently announced a drastic reduction in humanitarian aid to Yemen, making cuts of almost 50% at a time when food, water and medical supplies are urgently needed.

Tens of thousands are likely to starve without support from western countries, in the midst of a conflict that has gone on for years and the impact of the pandemic.

Malnutrition is at an all-time high and the spread of Coronavirus is likely to be devastating in a country with poor sanitation and little access to hospital facilities.

Please log onto One Campaign to lobby the British Government to reverse the cuts.

Bromley members have written to local MPs asking them to act on the situation and asking what we as a club or individually can do.

Eastbourne’s Photo Challenge



AS AN INTERESTING social activity which would engage a lot of the members we decided to have a photo competition. There was no limit to the number of photos each member could send in but they had to be on the agreed themes.

The theme of the last challenge was Winter and there were 33 photos in total. The two winning entries are, above, Claire’s grandson tree planting in his wellies, and below a February swim in the sea. The next subject is “Spring Hope”.

DENISE STAPLEHURST, SI EASTBOURNE



A big thank you...

...from from Jeanette Lee for the £400 raised at the recent Region Meeting for the SIGBI Benevolent Fund. The amount raised will help members who really need it, as any one of us might one day.



Number “63” 500 Club



Just a few short weeks after joining the 500 club, your Region President Grace is now £50 better off. Never expecting to win, it was a lovely surprise, and being able to support our gorgeous Soroptimist hotel No. 63, to boot.

Don't miss out, contact Pat Dale at SI Croydon to get your tickets now – a bargain at just £12 each and there's no limit on how many you can have.

Would I do it again?



I TOOK ON the role of Club President because it was my turn. I wasn't eager, but I wasn't too reluctant. I was worried about getting it wrong and letting my club down but odds were that during a 12 month period I had to get something right.

Being handed SI Canterbury's chain of office was a solid (and heavy!) reminder of how important the position of Club President is, and how my name would go down in Soroptimist history with my predecessors. For a moment I fully felt the burden of responsibility – I decided then that I would earn my place amongst these women and not just bide my time.

However, this has been far from an ordinary year; clearly it has been a year like no other so as a club we had to change how we did things, just as every organisation has had to.

Events were cancelled, postponed, or at least completely revised. As we faced and overcame these challenges I became more optimistic about the club's ability to ride the crisis. With a strong Executive committee and a willing club membership we found opportunities and made different things happen. We were inventive, creative and more insightful.

One of the most momentous occasions of my year was laying the wreath at the city war memorial – not with all the ceremony and crowd of previous years, but alone in silence with two friends and exec members supporting me from a safe distance. It was quite extraordinarily moving and I could not have felt more proud to represent my club than at that moment.

In these last 12 months I have learned so much about being a Soroptimist and the organisation we belong to, but as corny as it sounds, I have mainly learned about myself. Not only has the club survived this year, but we have thrived. We have worked hard on Programme Action, improved our knowledge through attended meetings, talks and seminars held by other organisations, shared news articles and petitions, strengthened our bond with other clubs, recruited members and looked out for one another. We have all been tested. But SI Canterbury has had fun too and I have loved seeing my friends relax and laugh at our virtual meetings. I have done more than just survive my year in office, I have enjoyed it. Would I do it again? Yes, but next time I would choose a 'normal' year.

DAWN LILFORD, SI CANTERBURY

ARE YOU COMING TO THE LLANDUDNO CONFERENCE?

THIS YEAR'S SOROPTIMIST Federation conference will take place virtually on October 29 and 30. The decision to be virtual was made early giving the planning committee time to set up a professional, interactive event which members can take part in. In fact Llandudno will come to you in your home!

The theme is "Believe to Achieve". Conference will have the usual high calibre speakers including Dr Carina Tyrell, the former Miss England and now feminist and epidemiologist. There will be a choice of workshops, plus the usual exhibition where clubs, charities and other organisations can showcase their wares and a gala concert to celebrate 100 years of Soroptimism.

You can find the conference website on the SIGBI site by searching for Llandudno conference. It's regularly updated and booking will open before the summer. Book early so that you can be sure to get into the workshops of your choice.

JANE WEBB, CHIEF STEWARD



IN MAY 2020, we had just come together as SI Medway and Maidstone when we became aware of the #WhoIsShe? campaign. This campaign is part of the celebration of the first centenary of Soroptimist International in 2021, where more than 100 Soroptimists are being selected to be commemorated. The centenary of the organisation seemed a fitting opportunity to recognise and celebrate the professional and personal comments made by these outstanding members through the years.

Dr Mary Buchanan had transferred over in April 2020 from SI Maidstone as an Honorary member to our club. A small task group with members from both Medway and Maidstone clubs set about putting together a nomination for Mary, who we felt met the criteria. The challenge for us was, we had less than two weeks in which to do this, to meet the deadline ... but we did it!

We were pleased to be told some months later that the nomination for Mary had been successful. We were obviously biased in feeling it was well deserved for what Mary had achieved professionally as a General Practitioner and her interest in Well Women and Breast Cancer Care, and personally for her contribution as a Soroptimist locally, nationally, and internationally to benefit women and girls.

During the month of April, Mary is being showcased with 11 other Soroptimists, both past and present on the SIGBI Centenary website as part of the #WhoIsShe'.

Unfortunately, we will not be able to celebrate with Mary in style with a party due to lockdown, but in the meantime, the club has sent flowers to Mary in Soroptimist colours to congratulate her. Mary's response has been, 'A big thank you to everyone, family, Soroptimist family, both in Maidstone, SIGBI and indeed in the other Federations, for supporting and nurturing me on my long Soroptimist Journey – again I would not have been able to accomplish it without you..' from Mary, Proud Honorary Member of SI Medway and Maidstone."

JANE BARNES, SI MEDWAY AND MAIDSTONE



#WhoIsShe Congratulations

to our member **Dr Mary Buchanan** MRCS, LRCP, DFSRH who is being celebrated for our centenary as one of some hundred women who have made a difference.

We are proud of her!



Closing Date for the April issue of SEE News is Friday April 23, 2021

Email your text and photographs to Patricia at pat.painting@btinternet.com
020 8668 2681



An overview on the event from APD Carol Infanti

WELL, WHAT A week it has been, full on doesn't cover it. I haven't been to CSW before but it was on my list to do. Quite honestly, I think experiencing it virtually has been really good. I am sure it has not been the same as actually being there, missing the social contact and sharing the fun and friendship, but this has been a brilliant way to attend so many powerful sessions, there is UN TV, Parallel sessions and Side events.

Generally the speakers were very good, they included Govt Ministers, UN Ambassador, CEOs from a range of companies, educators, scientists plus women with lived experiences, everyone wanted to share their passion.

I took away three key messages from António Guterres in his opening address;

- "C-19 is a pandemic with the face of a woman"
- "Leave behind an entrenched position"
- "Be an International Gender Champion"

Here are a few points from some of the sessions which I have attended. If you are interested to read more please read the blogs on the sigbi website and sign-up next year if there is another virtual event.

Empowering Women in STEM is essential for achieving the UNSDGs

Marlene Kanga – President World Federation for Women Engineering Organisations (WFEO). During her Presidency, Ms Kanga worked with UNESCO to set up World Engineering day which was launched on March 04, 2017. She believes that women engineers can create the world we want. In the western world engineering is seen as a male dominated career, in Kuwait 50% of the engineers are women. Engineering is a career with purpose, it is advancing the SDGs. A recurring message from speakers in this session was that diversity is essential. Diversity avoids 'group think', we need to ensure that there are a range of perspectives to solve the wicked problems.

Reimagining the Leadership Table With Women's Full And Effective Participation and Decision-Making

We were encouraged to think about ourselves as leaders, we should know our own strengths and exploit them. What is your brand or that of your organisation, what is your niche? Know what your difference is and do it well. Femininity has been seen as a weakness, but no woman should feel the need to become

like a man to succeed. If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

I ended the session with the feeling that we are on our way to a world where women will be at the leadership table.

Utilizing Fashion to Advocate for Women participation and Decision Making

Fashion is not just frilly and frivolous. Fashion shapes lives. Through fashion students learn about STEM, design, heritage and cultural awareness, business education, entrepreneurship, e-commerce, software, housing, behaviour and language.

How can we support women designers and entrepreneurs in developing countries? Could NGOs showcase handmade items from small businesses, do you work in an area which could help with this?

We Need Women Leaders in Politics: Better Society, Strong Democracy

Around the world 25% of Parliamentarians are women, 21% are speakers, 6% are Heads of State and 22% are in Ministerial positions. Violence is the main barrier to women entering politics. Of the women in politics 82% have experienced psychological violence, 47% have experienced death threats and 26% have experienced physical violence and the numbers of online attacks has increased during 2020, young women are deterred because the online harassment is visible. The speaker called for zero tolerance and better reporting mechanisms.

Women shouldn't be 'ghettoised' into dealing with issues typically associated with women ie, childcare, health etc, they need to be seen dealing with all issues.

The three sessions organised by Soroptimists were excellent:

Fix the system: Get her elected – SI in partnership with Women for Water Partnership.

The Road to Equality: Preparing women and girls to lead hosted by SI.

Combatting trafficking/slavery throughout the life's course using education awareness and action – organised by SIGBI, Federation Programme Action Team. Yvonne Freeman and I were involved, working with our clubs in the Caribbean. A recording of the session will be made available on the SIGBI website.

Medway and Maidstone welcome two new members during lockdown



THE CLUB is delighted to have inducted two new members, Annette Davies (pictured far left) and Sandra Covington.

Annette is the Kent Ambassador for Mary's Meals, and was guest speaker at our January meeting on the 'Double the Love' campaign. Annette has an impressive background in teaching and education, and has a love of travel, having travelled extensively to more than 100 countries on the UN list.

Sandra came to us through her friendship with member Sue Daykin. They met at U3A, where their friendship developed through shared wider interests, including theatre, a lunch club, and a group involved with the shoebox appeal.

2021 is an important year for Soroptimists worldwide as Soroptimist International celebrates its centenary, and as a club, Medway and Maidstone celebrates our 75th anniversary. We are delighted that both Annette and Sandra will be able to share in these celebrations with us.



Report from Federation Councillor Jan Doyle

March 2021

First of all I want to thank all clubs in the Region for responding so quickly to the Membership Survey I sent out at the end of February. It meant that, in turn, I was able to meet the deadline for the return of the survey.

I promised to let you have feedback from the survey and it certainly made for very interesting reading. Barbara had told me there were 238 members and five younger members presumably that was the total following the payment of region subscriptions in May. The survey showed there were in fact 241 members and clubs reported that in the previous year the total membership had been 248. The number of young members had remained fairly stable with one or two leaving for various reasons. The region has 15 associate members. The number of clubs in our region has diminished – there are now only 11 – following the merge of Medway and Maidstone and the sad demise of Ashford.

However, on the positive side you have all managed to keep going throughout this pandemic – who had heard of Zoom before last March? We seem to have all added to our technical skills and the great majority of us are now very experienced users. Clubs reported that on average, attendance at their zoom meetings was between 60-75% and they are ensuring that those unable to come along to zoom meetings are kept fully in touch with their club – newsletters, phone-calls, emails. Zoom meetings have allowed more inter-club activities with invitations

to speaker meetings being easier to accept. Clubs have also held zoom meetings with their friendship clubs.

Many of the clubs felt that their programme action had been curtailed by the pandemic, but the survey showed that you have all been very active and have found some inventive ways of raising money and supporting the local charities we all hold so dear. The programme focus report forms submitted by the region for the past six months show 109 Programme Action Forms completed, with an estimated £6,999.50 being raised for the benefit of 13,727 beneficiaries.

Clubs do, however, have concerns that because we have not been able to hold our usual business and social meetings – let alone the coffee mornings and other ways in which we all get together, the annual return for 2021 will show a loss of membership. However, overall, I feel the survey from our region shows that we are getting on with it and that there is optimism for the future – especially as clubs have a total of 23 potential members in the pipeline!

It will be interesting to see the full results of this national membership survey and I will certainly share the results with you.

The only other point from me is to draw your attention to the Dispute Resolution Procedure which is on the SIGBI website; I will ensure that a copy of the procedure is sent to every club. The Region Exec will consider this in more detail at its next meeting and will report further at the next Region meeting.

Canterbury Club's DIY meetings

A THEME AT Canterbury's Reflections Day is that members like to have DIY open meetings, without speakers, so that we can respond to the issues of the day. Accordingly President Dawn invited members to select a topic for discussion at our February meeting. This was what was decided upon:

As individuals, and as a club there are so many issues/causes to choose to devote our time and finances to. So this is our discussion subject – how do we choose?

We are aware of countless essential platforms eg WaterAid, Domestic abuse charities, Trafficking charities, MIND, Age UK, the Arts, FoodBank, Oxfam, animal charities, medical research... and so on.

How do we not get overwhelmed trying to do our best? How do we balance our family concerns, work worries, looking out for friends etc, with those of our local community, wider community, NHS, local politics, world politics, climate change, human rights, being well informed etc?

Given that no one can do everything, how do we prioritise where to spend our time and money? And how do we come to terms with those moments when we feel we aren't doing enough?

This was the conclusion of our discussions. Most members took part in the discussion as the problem was clearly recognised within members' private charity causes and those

supported by the club. Common threads ran through each discussion:

- Each individual supports causes which have personal importance.
- All acknowledge the overwhelming extent of charity advertising campaigns and the difficulty of choosing which of these to support.
- It is important to support those charities where the resources are well managed ensuring goals are met and have direct impact.
- Effort can also be made to change situations (political lobbying etc) therefore tackling the cause as well as the symptoms.
- Comments were made about feeling 'guilty' but this emotion is negative and destructive. No individual can support all causes and it is essential to value and appreciate our own decisions.

President Dawn Lilford closed the subject by thanking all participants for a mutually respectful discussion where views sometimes differed but all spoke with passion. The conversations were a fascinating way to get to know each other better and to learn about the wide range of issues we support individually as well as the issues we support as a club.

MAGGIE EDGAR, SI CANTERBURY

Canterbury members showed their respect for Sarah Everard and all the other women who have lost their lives.



Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists Supporting the #WIWalkWithWomen



Together Talks

All Region members are invited to join the following Zoom speaker meeting. Please register with the Club Secretary.

SI Lewes

Monday, May 17, 2021 at 19:00
Faith from Zambia to talk about the 'Mothers of a Million' Project and the Football Boots Project

SI Lewes

Monday, June 21, 2021 at 19:00
Hazel Thompson author of e-book 'Taken' will talk about children and sex trafficking in India

SI Lewes

Monday, July 19, 2021 at 19:00
Stephanie Pech
'Boosting our Immunity through Nutrition' talk and Q&A

SI Lewes

Monday, September 20, 2021 at 19:00
Brighton Women's Shelter on how they provide domestic violence support for women and their children

SI Lewes

Monday, October 18, 2021 at 19:00
Ram Rajil co-founder of Bloom Nepal School to give us an update on the school and children.

UKPAC ASKED SOROPTIMISTS to join in with WI members to show support and solidarity with all women who have experienced abuse and harassment. They wanted us to safely join their 'WI Walk with Women', in accordance with social-distancing rules by walking down our local street; using candles, lanterns or your phone's flashlight, to show our support.

Although it was at short notice, some members of Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists decided to take part. We created a sign to use, and Jane Barnes, who was in South Wales went on a walk with her sister between 6pm and 7pm on March 19 and this was captured in a photograph.

Some members were unable to take part in the 'WI Walk with Women', so Sue Daykin, Angela Howe and Janet Hughes took part from their front doors, holding a light to show their support. We shared the photographs on our Club Facebook page using #WIWalkwithWomen to promote what we had done and increase awareness of the issues.

**Region Meetings in 2021
are scheduled to take place on:
June 26
and
September 25**



The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established by the United Nations in 1946, and it is the principal global inter-governmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

It is hard to believe that some 75 years on, we are still striving for gender equality and the empowerment of women. The themes for CSW65 were:

Priority theme: Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls;

Review theme: Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development (agreed conclusions of the 60th session)

A total of 128 delegates from SIGBI registered for CSW65 this year – we are usually allowed up to 20 delegates and so the fact that the event was virtual (due to COVID19) allowed more of us to participate. In addition to the main CSW event, the NGO/CSW Forum organised over 700 parallel events for which over 25,000 participants registered. The NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) CSW/NY organises the civil society of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and the Forum runs parallel to the official sessions taking place at the UN Headquarters in New York. This provides civil society organisations without ECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council) accreditation with the opportunity to engage in the processes and CSW sessions. SIGBI has special consultative status with ECOSOC.

As this was my first CSW I was keen to ensure that I made the most of the opportunities available and to determine the best way to participate to gain the most knowledge and inspiration for future Programme Action work. The following sessions I found most interesting and informative:

Leaving no child behind: Ending social discrimination that makes children vulnerable to trafficking

This webinar was sponsored by ECPAT-USA and partners working to address this issue. One of the speakers said that she came from a family of sexual abuse and could not go back to her community because of the stigma of abuse and low self-esteem. She added that there was evidence of this with all indigenous and trafficked people.

Violence against migrant women: empowering survivors beyond the emergency

During this session, sponsored by AIDOS, an Italian association for women in development, we heard testimonies from the field in East Africa, the Middle East and Italy. The definition of migrants as women who are just seeking a better life and escape gender-based violence resonated with me.

Addressing the Safety of Women and Children: Creating Video Conference Batterer Intervention Programmes.

The focus of this session was that victimisation against women and children can be addressed by educating men who abuse. Using Pathways to Family Peace (a program of Global Rights for Women) offers batterers an intervention programme using video conference software and aims to tackle the root cause of the problem through online courses for men.

Breaking Paradigms: Local Women Peace Initiatives to Promote the Full Participation of Women in Decisions Related to Peace and Security.

This webinar explored the ways in which women have fought

hard to gain a place at the peace table. The example given was the efforts of women in Israel and Palestine to bring about a peaceful solution as they did not want any more fighting.

The keynote speaker was The Honourable Mobina S B Jaffer, QC, Senator for British Columbia, Canada, and the first Muslim Senator. Mobina has been involved in peace making processes in various parts of the world and she believes that women have the will and the skills to negotiate peace.

Invisible Women – The Face of Women turned Invisible by the Crisis in Venezuela.

I was interested in this session, having worked on the SIGBI webinar on human trafficking and the presentation on trafficking in the Caribbean. In Trinidad and Tobago Venezuelans represent over 90% of the identified victims of trafficking. I wanted to gain an understanding of why these women and girls are eager to leave their home country but end up as victims of trafficking.

Six Venezuelan women representing different support organisations gave testimonies of the situation of women with whom they work, which in some cases includes violation of basic human rights.

Negotiating Public Place Safety Through Women's Collectives: Learning and Challenges.

A highly informative webinar which addressed the issue of women's safety in public places. Of particular significance was the SAFETIPIN project based in India, which aims to make cities safer by providing data collected through technology tools and apps to its users. Mapping exercises have been carried out in Delhi, Bhopal and Bogota and the project has been adopted in 16 countries and 65 cities.

There were many more interesting sessions which I attended covering a wide range of topics. At the start of my 'visit' to CSW, I had planned to keep to just a few areas of interest. However, when faced with such a wide selection of key issues, it was often difficult to choose which would be the most interesting and of value to my Soroptimist work.

Would I be willing to travel to New York to join a future CSW? Yes, I believe I would as I understand from those who have been before that they missed the buzz of a live event and the opportunity to network with likeminded women, all of whom have the well-being of women and girls at heart and who strive to achieve gender equality.

Pat Dale came across this letter

It seems that years later we are still asking the same questions.

What is this life...

..... If full of care we have no time to stand and stare?? It seems to me it must be essential for Catherine and her dog Sam, to stand and stare at the lambs and geese, ... to have time to breathe and reflect. In this age of the environment are we not in danger of mental pollution, with all the pressures on our time? Maybe the Soroptimist movement itself needs to become less high-powered and more realistic in its efforts whilst still keeping to the traditional aims which are so important.

The WI is an efficient organisation, much less high-powered than we are, but it has just as much impact and a much higher public profile. Maybe we could learn something from them about the way they are organised and financed. I do accept the comments that their membership too is declining and that a large part of their members are middle aged or retired. But let us not underestimate the value of these women, possibly even recruiting them. They do have more time to stand and stare, and possibly 'to do'? The retired may have more time to be Secretaries and Treasures. Whilst it is vital to enrol a younger membership, the newly retired often have so much more time to give.

Anon
(name supplied)