

President Grace's message

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



THE SNOW HAS cleared, snowdrops are blooming and the days are getting longer and brighter – it's beginning to feel like Spring is in the air.

Our lives are still moving in unexpected ways as restrictions change and while this is happening, Soroptimists in clubs across the South East England Region continue to help others in their area. I have very much enjoyed visiting more clubs this month and being

welcomed to your meetings. One of my aims during this year is to give a flavour of our region meetings to members who haven't attended previously and show something of this level of Soroptimist activity, and how we can get ideas and inspiration from other projects or events and learn from best practise.

Please do have questions ready when I visit your club – and that is when you will see that I'm still learning too! The SIGBI website has a wealth of information and while it is easy to access, there are still a few technical glitches so please contact head office if you come across any issues.

Tunbridge Wells & District and Medway and Maidstone both celebrate a fantastic 75 years in 2021, and Canterbury club close behind with 60 wonderful years of service.

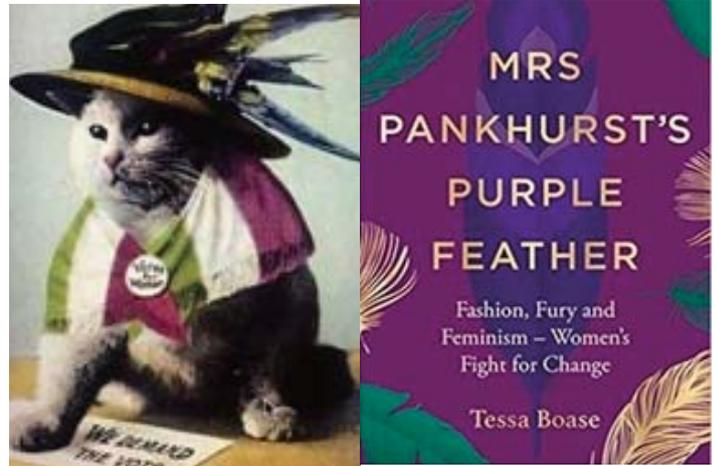
Amongst all the continuing support being given to local organisations by all our clubs, the gift of 75 pieces of a particular item each month to celebrate the 75th anniversary made me smile. What a lovely idea Tunbridge Wells. We may yet get to celebrate together, you never know....

The wonderful stories of so many trees being planted is great news for our wildlife, our natural places and of course ourselves. Our future depends on how well we look after our planet, and trees are a key element. Often overlooked when new developments are planned, when they create too much shade or affect foundations, or even just drop leaves, they are easily and quickly removed. It will take decades for our trees to replace recent losses but they are off to a good start and will soon be soaking up carbon emissions, providing habitats and food too.

Get ready for a splash of colour when those cheery Soroptimist tulips flash brilliant red and yellow colours; mine are already reaching for the sun.



Photo by Heather Bailey March 2020



EAST GRINSTEAD CLUB hosted a presentation by Tessa Boase which was quite a magical evening. She was a captivating speaker and the content was brought to life telling tales of strong women, the plume market, the extinction of small birds in the name of fashion, the poverty of workers preparing feathers for hat decoration, suffragettes, the RSPB* beginnings, and how many of the themes were interwoven.

Tessa drew our largest attendance at a Zoom meeting – 98! From far and wide fellow Soroptimists enjoyed this event and we will also be hosting a recording of this talk in the next few weeks for those who could not attend on the night.



*RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch

Like many Soroptimists, several East Grinstead members contributed to the Big Garden Bird Watch over the weekend of January 29-31.

International Women's Day March 08, 2021



Let's all choose to challenge.
#IWD2021 #ChooseToChallenge

Random Acts of Kindness programme continues



STAFF ON THE Frailty Ward at the local hospital in Eastbourne were delighted to receive gifts of food and drink treats and hand care as part of SI Eastbourne's recent "Random Acts of Kindness" programme action.

The hospital Matron sent a lovely letter saying how much they appreciated the gifts during such a difficult time for staff who are looking after patients with dementia and Covid.

"With the thoughtfulness of others it makes the staff work much more validated and for that I thank all the Soroptimists of Eastbourne to help my colleagues see this and that their hard work is acknowledged by the community."

LYNNE CHISWICK, SI EASTBOURNE

Unwanted luggage helps refugees



CANTERBURY CLUB MEMBERS took up an initiative by one of their Link members, and donated more than 20 pieces of luggage to the Folkestone Asylum Seekers Support Network, for refugees to use as they travel to more secure accommodation.

JANE WEBB, SECRETARY, SI CANTERBURY

Teenage pregnancy in Meru, Kenya



IT WAS WITH great delight that Margaret Ikiara (above) and Jane Wanja were welcomed to the Canterbury Club meeting.

The Meru Women's Garden Project was initially proposed as the SIGBI Federation project by Canterbury and some members visited Meru towards the end of the three years to meet with Soroptimists and local women.

There is a special affinity between the two clubs arising as a result of the project and we are pleased to maintain a friendship link with SI Meru. Trees were donated as part of Canterbury's 60th Anniversary celebrations and these will be planted when the rains arrive in March.

Jane and Margaret work with CIFORD against a rising tide of teenage pregnancy in Kenya, worsened as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. They explained that this situation has a variety of causes including poverty, cultural reluctance to discuss sexual relationships (sex outside marriage considered unacceptable), the effects of the pandemic on income and living circumstances.

Margaret and Jane try to reach the girls to educate them about sexual relationships and health, as well as the importance of education as a tool for empowerment, which is every bit as important after childbirth as before.

They talked at length and with passion about this subject and clearly work with dedication to try and turn the tide.

We discussed ways in which we could help, perhaps by funding sanitary products and underwear or, if financially viable, assistance with the cost of an additional outreach worker.

Jane and Margaret will think about how our club can assist and will email with suggestions which will be put before the club for discussion.

Our very grateful thanks to Margaret and Jane for sharing their work with us – and staying up late to be able to attend!

If your club would like to hear more about Meru, please email Margaret Ikiara at cifordmeru@yahoo.com and she will be delighted to come to your Zoom meeting.

MAGGIE EDGAR, SI CANTERBURY



KNICKERS!

from Croydon Club



Croydon Soroptimists regularly help the Croydon Refugee Day Centre (CRDC) with donations of clothing or other items as and when they are needed.

This year, they have had to call a temporary halt to these donations for logistical reasons and have instead requested new underwear. So with a clear mission, our members quickly raised £100 and along with a voucher from my local Sainsbury's and items already purchased, presented the CRDC with over 30 multi-packs of underwear. With a variety of styles and sizes for women, children and men, that's over 200 individual items, including socks, vests and pants.

We know that little things can make a big difference and under the expert guidance of volunteers at the CRDC, we know that these little things will do just that for many families in need.

GRACE ONIONS, SI CROYDON

SI Canterbury Zoom meeting code of conduct

The usual meeting norms apply, eg turning up on time, wearing appropriate clothing, stifling yawns etc!

Mute your audio when you're not speaking and especially if you need to cough, if a person enters your room and starts talking etc because your screen, being the loudest, will come into prominence. So become familiar with your mute button!

The Chair will appoint a 'spotter' at each meeting who must be able to see everyone on one screen. The spotter will alert the meeting to any raised hands and will also keep an eye on messages sent through the Chat box.

Because Zooms are audio-based meetings, your voice acts as your physical presence. Be thoughtful when you speak. Be courteous, and don't interrupt the speaker.

Be explicit and animated about non-verbal communication. Nodding; thumbs up; hand-raising all helps the communication and feeling of interaction.

Minimise distractions and be present by putting away phones, closing unrelated work, closing the door, etc.

If you need to leave the meeting unexpectedly, leave a message on chat and disappear quietly without interrupting the meeting.

Improve clarity by speaking deliberately, use good lighting (behind your camera), test audio equipment in advance.

Wine is allowed. We are professional, but we're in the middle of a pandemic.

Eastbourne's Silent Hero



From left: Richard, Area Manager, Lucy, Peter, Store Manager, and his assistant Carl

PUSHING A TROLLEY around Sainsbury's looking for goodies for a hamper for the Frailty Ward in the DGH, I unexpectedly bumped into our store manager. I told him what I was doing and cheekily asked if he would like to make a contribution. What was to follow was amazing and quite unexpected. I was given a £100 voucher for the Club and a week later summoned to the office to meet the Area Manager and asked to talk about Soroptimists and what I have contributed personally as a member of the Club. Unsurprisingly they had never heard of the Soroptimists (so I gave them a brief history) and were surprised to hear of the scope and diversity of activities I have been involved in over the years.

I was pleased and proud to have been given a Silent Hero Love Award along with a voucher for £250 in recognition of my work as a Soroptimist.

LUCY MCKEON, SI EASTBOURNE

SI East Grinstead Talking Football

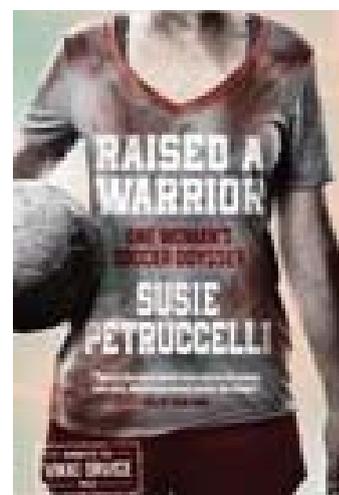
SI EAST GRINSTEAD has had a busy start to 2021. In January one of our speaker meetings took on an international and sporting flavour as we welcomed Susie Petrucci. Susie lives in Long Island, New York state and has great connections with women's football in the UK.

Of particular interest to us was her connection with Lewes with whom our Club has close links. Lewes is currently the only football club in the world to pay its women players the same as the men.

A Harvard graduate and winning soccer player in the Ivy League, Susie talked of how her education, career and ambitions were guided by her love of football.

SI East Grinstead will be hosting another Zoom meeting with a recording of this talk for those who could not attend.

ROSEMARY STONE, SI EAST GRINSTEAD





Memory Corner

An occasional series of memories from
SEE Region Membership Officer Pat Dale

Many of you will know that I have been a Soroptimist since 1996, when I joined SI Croydon and District.

Over the years, I have attended many conferences and met hundreds of Soroptimists, and other women, and men, who share our values.

Sorting through old papers, I came across the following poem which was written by the late Sheila Eustace in 2005 to welcome in Croydon's new President.

So, to start off this occasional series, I would like to offer this as a thank you to our newsletter editor, Patricia, for whom this poem was written.

PRESIDENT PATRICIA PAINTING INAUGURAL SUPPER MAY 12, 2005

It is an honour to be asked
To fulfil this important task,
At President Patricia's
Inaugural Supper.

The environment, her chosen
project
An infinite and wide-ranging
subject
With so many issues that do
affect
All our lives.

Climate change is so complex
With dried up rivers and lakes
Yet icebergs melt and rivers flood
It seems a contradiction.

Recycling is the mantra of today
But during the war we used
to say
Make do and mend, it had to be
that way
We've gone full circle.

So how do we make young ones
aware
When they shop till they drop
without a care
It's a daunting task when not
based on need
In this throwaway society.

Though air is cleaner and
there's little fog
No open fires and hence no smog
But what about all the cars
that clog
Polluting the atmosphere.

Fairtrade is important for
African dignity
But only charity's offered,
causing dependency
EU trading rules just ruin
their economy
Protectionism prevails.

Bitterly cold winters are now
in the past
Ice and snow no longer last
Plants are blooming all year
round
What on earth is happening?

Water Aid, Patricia's major theme
Forms a part of her overall
scheme
Something we westerners take
for granted
Because it's always there.

We leave taps running needlessly
Without a thought of scarcity
And never consider how it
must be
In the third world.

A pot on your head, a long walk
from the well
Imagine the horror when you
tripped and fell
And have to go back and do it
again
Must be sheer hell.

So as Patricia's year progresses
We'll learn more of the strains
and stresses
To get people to save the planet's
resources
For future generations.

Tomorrow Patricia you can paint
the town green
But for tonight let's just set
the scene
Please charge your glasses, (and
water will do)
To welcome our president, not
one recycled
But one who is bright and shiny
and new.

SHEILA EUSTACE

Maya sews Bonding Hearts for premature babies



MEDWAY AND MAIDSTONE Soroptimist Maya Bangar joined Medway Scrubbers at the start of the first lockdown to offer her sewing skills to help the NHS. She has remained busy working tirelessly over the past year making scrubs, face masks and drainage bags.

The latest request received by Medway Scrubbers was for desperately needed 'bonding hearts' for the premature babies at Medway Maritime Hospital.

Medway Maritime Hospital have 1100 premature babies in a year and every baby needs five bonding hearts. These bonding hearts are particularly important for the parents to start to build a bond with their child especially if they are not allowed to touch or hold them.

Bonding hearts are simple hearts made from fabric that the mother/father put next to their skin so that their smell can get on it and then they are put in with the baby to help calm them and build that important bond between them and their parents.

As you can imagine, at five bonding hearts per baby the request to Medway Scrubbers was for 100s so that they can be properly rotated to stay safe.

Maya's contribution was 45 bonding hearts and 43 Macmillan cancer drainage bags



Toiletries for the elderly



AFTER A 'CALL OUT' on Facebook for donations of basic toiletries for elderly patients in Crawley Hospital, SI East Grinstead put its hand up and said 'Yes' we can help.

A nurse working in the hospital and living in Lingfield, Surrey, had been funding care packages for the elderly patients for months and needed to find help to provide such items. The Club will continue to support this local initiative bi-monthly.

Learning how to be a racial equality ally

Another in the occasional series of articles by Tessa Woodward, SI Canterbury

Moving out of the 'white = normal' mode.

IN A RECENT ISSUE of this newsletter, I explained what triggered my decision to work on becoming an anti-racism ally.

I reflected on the fact that, given the country I was born in, my family, home, school, and social experiences, it's small wonder that I tend to be, consciously or unconsciously, biased towards those of my own skin colour and hair texture, seeing them/us as somehow normal and right.

The next thing I felt I could do about this partiality is to spend more of my time with people with a different skin tone and hair texture to my own. Since I am currently socially distancing and live in a tiny, very white hamlet in East Kent, it's difficult for me to get to know new people face to face who have a very different heritage to mine. And if I relied on Google, I'd find it difficult too since I am fed stuff that Google thinks I want to see, have seen in the past, and that fits my demographic.

So, it took a while to figure out what to do. But it's simple really. Every day, yes EVERY day, I either read a book by a black author (eg, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, Bernadine Evaristo), or read a book about black characters (eg, Andrea Levy's 'The Long Song') or watch TV programmes with presenters from diverse backgrounds (eg, Emma Dabiri, Afua Hirsch, Samuel Jackson), or scan the TV listings for interviews (eg, one with Alexandra Wilson, a black woman barrister). I Google '10 best black blogs'.

Also, I am in a group of Women's Equality Party race equality allies all hunting for similar resources and we let each

other know when we have found something interesting. One thing leads to another and so I have come across wonderful 'places' to 'go' to such as gal-dem.com, the independent British online and print magazine produced by and for non-binary women of colour.

And what has happened as a result of this deliberate, daily experience?

After some months, it now feels natural to me to read and hear and see people of African, Caribbean and Asian heritage. I'm moving out of my 'white = normal' mode. My new normal is bigger and more inclusive. I'm getting an insight into the issues that are specific to people of different heritages and which I have never had to think about or deal with. As a result, I am finding:

- new definitions of words (like 'racism') that I thought I knew how to define
- words for concepts which are new to me (like 'micro aggressions' and 'micro interventions', 'racial profiling' and 'white fragility')
- new insights into old concepts (like 'reparation' and 'enslavement')

It feels good to be starting something interesting and important, and to feel that my world is expanding. In the next of this series, I'll start unpicking my understanding of some of these new definitions, concepts and insights.

Litter Picking



TUNBRIDGE WELLS CLUB members now have our own litter pickers. These are not just ordinary litter pickers they are made from recycled ocean plastic. (We purchased them from Waterhaul as we like their ethos). These will be great for solo walks and will help with aluminium can collection. (We recycle cans for cash and put the proceeds towards Toilet Twinning). Plus when we can meet up for socially distanced walks outside we can walk, talk and tidy.

We have downloaded health and safety information from Keep Britain Tidy and risk assessment details from our local Council.

FIGHTING THE CLIMATE CRISIS WITH FAIRTRADE

Webinar, 12:00 to 13:00 on March 05, 2021

TUNBRIDGE WELLS SOROPTIMIST Mandy Flashman-Wells is the Chair of Tunbridge Wells Fairtrade Town Group, which has asked that we share the following invitation. TW will be joining the event and Mandy hopes other Soroptimists in our Region, will join us.

The climate crisis is an immediate and ever increasing threat to the livelihoods of farmers and workers across the world. This event will feature Adam Gardner from the Fairtrade Foundation and a Fairtrade producer to discuss how Fairtrade farmers are supported to adapt to and mitigate against the effects of climate change. They are joined by Harry Frederick, a local farmer from the Tunbridge Wells area. **REGISTER NOW** at:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/.../webinar-fighting-the...>

Fairtrade has always believed that there is no climate justice without trade justice. Farmers and workers are on the front line of the climate emergency. Please get involved, register for the webinar and find out what each of us can do to support them.



Tunbridge Wells' monthly 75 for 75 donations



AS REPORTED LAST month, SI Tunbridge Wells pledged to donate 75 items of one product to the Nourish Food-bank during each month this anniversary year.

In February they gave 75 cans of beans and pulses. During March they will be collecting chocolate themed products in preparation for Easter.

In January Nourish reported: 'During 2019-2020, we increased our referral base to 151 frontline referral agencies across Tunbridge Wells and South Tonbridge who made a total of 4,321 referrals to Nourish.

Covid has had a huge impact and we are naturally very concerned about the implications for families and individuals on referrals, and for those impacted by Coronavirus in terms of illness, loss of income, homes and employment.

Next year's figures are anticipated to be much higher than these.

Soroptimist Tunbridge Wells is 75 Years Young
2021



Medway and Maidstone supporting the Byron Primary Breakfast Club

AT OUR JANUARY club meeting, member Julia Search spoke about funding challenges being faced by schools running breakfast clubs during the pandemic, prompted by an article she had read in The Guardian.

The main purpose of a breakfast club is to provide a safe, secure environment before school, where children can have a decent breakfast with their friends. They also play an important role in providing before-school childcare for families where parents work or need to get other children to different schools or childcare settings.

The benefits of children having a good breakfast include:

- Improved concentration
- Improved attendance and punctuality
- Better behaviour
- Improved attainment and achievement at school.

SI Medway and Maidstone support Byron Primary School in Gillingham, which is in one of the deprived areas in Medway. The school has been open throughout lockdown with an average of 80 critical worker children attending school each day and 10 vulnerable children.

When the school is fully operational, they would usually have about 40 attending their breakfast club from 07:40-08:40. The cost is normally £4 a day which includes breakfast, as it must be

self-financing. Currently they have up to 15 attending breakfast club each day and five of these are being funded by the School.

Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists donated £100 to the Byron Primary School for the breakfast club. Head Teacher, Jon Carthy said: "Thank you for the generous donation for our Breakfast Club in these difficult times. It is both very thoughtful and much needed. We will think very carefully about how to use this money with our most vulnerable of children"





Safeguarding is Everyone's Responsibility

Report from Carol McKeough
SEE Region Safeguarding Officer

I HOPE THAT you have all seen in the SIGBI February News Briefing that the new SIGBI Safeguarding Policy and supporting documents have been published on the SIGBI website.

As the Regional Safeguarding Officer, I have been working with a small SIGBI Working Party of Safeguarding leads, together with the SIGBI Designated Safeguarding Officer, since January 2020 to review and update all the SIGBI Safeguarding documentation.

We have of course had to work remotely and in June, when the 'GoToMeeting' platform let us down, I asked Jane Barnes (SI Medway and Maidstone) to join the working group and from that time we used ZOOM. The Safeguarding Working Group benefitted greatly from Jane's knowledge of safeguarding and her ability to make changes to documents during our meetings.

We focussed our work on making sure that the Safeguarding policy and other documents assisted all SIGBI members to understand what constituted the abuse of a child, young person, or an adult at risk, (unable to protect themselves from harm).

A new addition to the Safeguarding resources is the short video available on YouTube <https://youtu.be/OiXJVQSha9k>. This explains what to do if you think something is not right. The message is, "If you see something, say something".

One of the questions that I was asked most frequently was, how to identify if someone is being abused. A document called 'Types and Indicators of Abuse' is included in the suite of new Safeguarding documents.

It was disappointing that the SIGBI Board at their January meeting did not mandate clubs to have a Safeguarding Lead/Link person. They considered this to be too onerous for clubs to be able to recruit and that having a Regional Safeguarding Officer should suffice. However, Federation President Johanna did say that where clubs had already recruited Safeguarding Leads/Links that they could continue.

As you will know we had already recruited in the South East England Region, so I have written to all 10 of our Club Safeguarding Lead/Links hoping that they will feel able to continue in their voluntary role. I value their contribution to work with me in my capacity as the Regional Safeguarding Officer to support the implementation of the 'Safeguarding Awareness' in our clubs and to get the message across to every member of our Region, that 'Safeguarding is Everyone's Responsibility'.

I consider that the role of the Club Safeguarding Lead/Link is important and part of good practice as they are closer to their club members who are likely to feel more comfortable talking to them of any safeguarding concerns as a 'first step'.

Plans are being made to meet with the Club Safeguarding Lead/Links via Zoom during March/April as part of the support network and to discuss arrangements for holding Safeguarding workshops as we recognise Safeguarding is an important issue.



Short Video - 'Safeguarding is Everyone's Responsibility'

Together Talks

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

SI Lewes

Monday, March 08, 2021 at 19:00

Ella Dorman-Gajic Performance Poetry presentation.
A special event for International Women's Day

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.

SI TUNBRIDGE WELLS traditionally take part in any International Women's Day event that happens locally. This year it will be online and, together with many community groups, we will be part of a local programme broadcasting poetry, song, art, slideshows, activism, photography, mask making, history environmental issues, in fact any medium in which local women have made a contribution. The event will stream on March 08 on Facebook link: <https://www.facebook.com/twforumtv>

It will also be streamed via Instagram.

The exact time is still to be confirmed so do visit our Facebook page or other social media platforms for more details nearer the time.

#ChooseToChallenge.





SI Medway and Maidstone with Friendship Link Clubs striking Choose to Challenge pose



International Women's Day 2021 #ChoosetoChallenge

TWENTY-TWO SOROPTIMISTS from five clubs came together on UN Day of Social Justice (February 20) for their regular Zoom Friendship Link meeting. Soroptimists from SI Medway and Maidstone, SI Heswall, SI Le Quesnoy in France, SI Voorburg in The Netherlands, and SI Osnabruck in Germany met to exchange ideas for membership extension and retention, and programme action. Unfortunately, members of SI Accra could not join us on this occasion, but one of our members, Nellie Adjaye, is staying in Ghana and joined us representing them.

Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists who hosted the event will be celebrating their 75th Anniversary on June 03 and will be marking it throughout 2021 by activities with a '75' theme.

So, they were keen to see if SI Heswall would join with them in Project Hope, which aims to send 75 cards or letters to women in prisons in Kent, Peterborough, and Surrey as they are unable to have visitors at present and are feeling the isolation so much. SI Heswall were keen to join in the project and felt it would be of great benefit to some of their older club members who were not able to join in internet meetings. SI Voorburg thought there might be an opportunity for them to do something similar in Holland.

We discussed how the clubs were trying to get new members in these difficult times and Janet Hughes from Medway and Maidstone told the group that a recent speaker from Mary's Meals at one of the club's meetings had now joined as a member. All agreed that retention of existing members was equally as important.

SI Osnabruck left us with a smile by showing a photograph of one of their new younger members with her newborn child, born this week.

Next month, on March 08, as Soroptimists we will all be celebrating International Women's Day and the theme this year is #ChoosetoChallenge and so we were all proud to hold up a hand to show we are in, as from challenge comes change.

The lockdown has created new opportunities for us – one of them being our regular friendship link clubs Zoom meetings, but wouldn't it be lovely to meet up in person in the not too distant future.

JULIA SEARCH, JOINT FRIENDSHIP LINK OFFICER,
SI MEDWAY AND MAIDSTONE



Medway and Maidstone's new logo to celebrate their 75th Anniversary in 2021

Becoming a Soroptimist

THE TREND FOR most UK charities is a downward drift in membership numbers. So, when the Soroptimists International Canterbury managed to gain two new members recently, they were invited to share the reasons why they had bucked the trend.

Below, they say a little about their membership stories and try to draw out general points in case this may help other clubs wishing to recruit new members.

How we heard about SI

One of us can blame it on playing cards! A woman turned up at her local Bridge club and, after playing, mentioned that she was off for a 'Soroptimists lunch'. The word was intriguing, combining optimism and sisterhood, both familiar concepts to one of those gathered. A bit of home Googling filled in the picture of a vibrant organisation with terrific aims and practices.

The other new recruit learned about Soroptimists during a conversation about modern slavery with a friend who isn't a member – she's still thinking about joining! She hadn't heard of SI before.

General point: Why not mention your involvement with SI when you are in other gatherings? You never know who might be listening!

Coming to meetings

That card-playing Soroptimist offered to take her curious new friend to a meeting... in a nice place, for a decent lunch, at a reasonable price, with friendly people. That having gone well, the suggestion was to give the potential

recruit a ride to, and back from, an evening club meeting. It would be a one off. No need to prepare anything. Interesting speaker coming too.

General point: It may be best to avoid a hard sell and concentrate instead on food, friendship, and enjoyment at first.

Gradual involvement

As we gradually attended more events... for example, a silent vigil to highlight Violence against Women and Girls, we were impressed by the number of active projects on the go, the consultative status of SI at the UN, and the fact that the Mayor of the city and the local Bishop attended the vigil too!

General point: SI has reach and clout and this is impressive to a newcomer.

What we liked once we had joined

Once in, the speed at which information (such as the new members' booklet, the club programme for the year, the local newsletter) arrived and the warmth of the welcome from the Club President, Club Secretary, and club members were truly remarkable. We were given a mentor to help us settle in too. Any idea we came up with, such as starting a book club, or writing a series of articles for the local newsletter, were discussed and accepted with lightning speed! We were actively engaged as fellow volunteers before we knew it!

Since joining, one of the new members says, 'I realise that Soroptimists are about everything that I believe in, in relation to women's issues and women's empowerment and friendship. Among many things

I appreciate is that Soroptimists are an international movement whose members take their role as advocates seriously. Since joining, I have felt an incredibly warm welcome, a tremendous (almost a daunting!) energy among the members, who appear happy – and talk sense! "

General point: Women who become members of SI are likely to have a broad experience of joining other charitable and volunteer groups. SI can stand out amongst these for its excellent welcoming and induction procedures. It also stands out for its emphasis on practical activity and involvement. This is very refreshing to new members who may have had experience of non-SI groups that have stalled, been dysfunctional, or fallen apart.

What could have been done differently

Once we were in national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a surprising benefit was that Soroptimists could easily attend all kinds of SI meetings via the internet and so invitations to attend other local meetings, regional meetings, national and international meetings abounded. It sometimes seemed, to one of us, that her inbox was filled with SI invitations, meeting minutes and other business.

This was not only a little confusing but also a bit daunting. Goodness! How much time in a week did these people feel we had? But a quick chat with a mentor sorted out what was expected, what was advisable, and what was optional.

TESSA WOODWARD AND JOY STEPHENS
SI CANTERBURY

Women in the news

The **World Trade Organisation** has chosen Nigeria's former finance minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as its first female and first African leader.

She was selected unanimously by all 164 members.

Jasmine Harrison of Thirsk, North Yorkshire, aged 21, rowed solo across the Atlantic, reaching Antigua, West Indies after 70 days and 3000 miles.

Jasmine has become the youngest female solo rower to cross any ocean.

Lady Helena Kennedy QC has embarked on a year-long investigation into hate crimes. "There should be no limits on the types of women protected from hate crime", she said, as she begins her consideration of whether Scotland requires a standalone offence to tackle misogynist abuse.

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN

Region Meetings in 2021
are scheduled to take place on:
March 13
June 26
September 25

Closing Date for the March issue
of SEE News
is Wednesday March 24, 2021

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