

President Sue's message

It's Never Too Late – or Too Early



The Edinburgh Conference 2024 was a whirlwind of meeting up with friends, sightseeing, listening to a variety of speakers from the European President Hafdis Karlsdottir to Siew Yong Gnanalingam, President of Soroptimist International. Other international speakers were Dr Debora Kayembe who was called to the Democratic Republic of the Congo Bar in September 2000 and is the Immediate Past Rector of Edinburgh University. Jalila Moufjia, President SI Africa presented a Federation report with a theme of Education. From nearer to home, we heard from Ann Beatty 'CEO of the Steve Sinnott Foundation. An international education charity, working to support the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goal 4. 'Changing lives through education.' Click on the link to find out more as the synergies between Soroptimism and this foundation can clearly be seen. <https://www.stevesinnottfoundation.org.uk> Baroness Floella Benjamin was the keynote speaker and did not disappoint with her enthusiasm and passion for children's rights. A very international flavour to the conference.

The programme was packed with speakers from Clubs talking about their Programme Action activities and where those projects are now. SI Canterbury was awarded a SIGBI Best Practice Award for their programme area of Enable and the Migrant Women's Project. (See P4) [Congratulations to Canterbury Club.](#)

Many thanks to all of you who attended the Regional dinner on the Friday evening. A special thanks goes to Susie Forbes for organising this event for a group of forty-one. Thanks also to Jane Barnes who collected project information from across the Region and curated all the submissions. The result was a fantastic Regional Poster.

So, it is now official. Alison Driscoll handed over the chain of office and for the next year I am your Regional President. Thanks to Alison for all her support to me and for her year of office.

It has been the 16 days of Activism, and the South East were soaked in Orange as Clubs got out into their communities to highlight the issues 'Action Against Gender Based Violence.' (Read about it). It was with great sadness we learnt recently of the sudden passing of Patricia Painting, Regional Editor of SEE News. She will be sorely missed and we were all proud of the excellent Regional newsletter she produced each month.

It was good to see so many of you at our SISEE Zoom Meeting on 7th December and I hope you enjoyed it.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and best wishes for 2025.

YOURS IN FRIENDSHIP SUE

What's in this edition?



Sad farewell to Patricia P3



Best Practice Winner P4



Eastbourne visit to Germany P2



Welcome to new member P5



Canterbury's Silent March P8/9



Soroptimist Christmas Tree P6

Rail Project Revisited

At the Edinburgh Conference we heard that the Federation is revisiting the Rail Project.

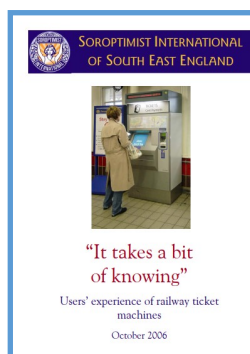
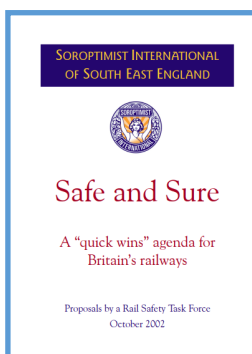
Who remembers our original project which ran from 1995-2008?

SI Tunbridge Wells, who led the SEE Region Rail Passenger Safety Project, is watching with interest to see how this new expanded project will be developed and what opportunities there will be to contribute at club and region level. Many members surveyed stations, attended meetings met with the Rail Authorities and spoke to the press. Sadly, many of these esteemed members are no longer with us but several of us are still around. If you contributed to the project we would love to know what you did.

STOP PRESS

I have received a request via Sally Higgins to link our reports to the project relaunch information. I have three of the four published reports on my computer but I don't have the first one, published in 1997. If anyone has a copy of this report or indeed any other documents related to the original project please email SITWD Secretary anngfield@gmail.com. We are searching our club archives!

Ann Greenfield SI Tunbridge Wells & District



SI Eastbourne Visits German Friendship Club

Lotte, new member Barbara and Denise were pleased to visit our link club Hildesheim in Germany to celebrate their 25th anniversary. We travelled on 25th October getting up early for a flight to Hamburg. We travelled by train to Hanover to meet our host. to travel onto Hildesheim. In the evening we met up with the German Soroptimists at a restaurant travelling into the country through a deer park.

Saturday was the main event and was held in a conference centre in Hildesheim attended by 140 people from various women's organisations in the city. President Almute was in charge of the proceedings which started with a music group. Hildesheim support young musicians with a scholarship. The young girl was accompanied by two professional players on a variety of instruments who played at beginning and end of each session. We had a soup and cake lunch. The main speaker of the day spoke about womens' equality issues and gender gap in pay and position in the workplace that presented the same picture as in UK. It is good to have the facts - but how can we make things equal?

Afterwards a Soroptimist in traditional costume gave us a tour of the old part of Hildesheim.. In the evening we went to President Almute's house for a delicious meal. President Lotta gave a donation from the club towards their Soroptimist projects. On the Sunday we travelled back to Hamburg.

The Soroptimists were so hospitable and made us feel welcome. This is my third visit to Hildesheim and five of their members came to England to celebrate our 70th Anniversary in June.

Denise Staplehurst SI Eastbourne and District



Sad Farewell to Patricia our Editor

It is with great sadness that we announce the unexpected passing of our Regional Editor and Associate Member, Patricia Painting on Friday 29th November.

Patricia was SI Croydon's Club Secretary, and President from 2008 to 2010. After leaving the Club and becoming an associate member she continued to support many social events, regularly attended the Regional meetings, and enthusiastically took on the task of producing and editing our monthly SEE Regional Newsletter.

At the time of her passing she was busy working on producing the November edition of the Newsletter which would have been the 62nd edition since she had taken on the role of Regional Editor in 2018. Past Federation President Maureen Maguire commented about a recent edition,

'What a variety of service, fun and friendship that is going on in this Region. I have just read

their Newsletter and thoroughly enjoyed it. A mixture of everything, congratulations to all the contributors.'

Patricia was also a member of Croydon Rotary Club and regularly volunteered at PACE (Purley and Coulsdon Club for the Elderly).



Please note that as the wishes of the family are for a smaller and more private occasion, the funeral on 13 January will be an invitation-only event.

Any donations in her memory may be made direct to The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity.

<https://www.royalmarsden.org/donate>

She will be missed by us all

...and Sevenoaks Club say Farewell to Pauline

We first met Pauline in 2006 when she came to a club meeting as the guest of member, Jean Lines. We were delighted to enrol Pauline shortly afterwards; she was a very friendly, knowledgeable and helpful person and soon became involved in all our projects and activities. She was one of the judges when we entered the Jacquie Emery Essay Writing competition in 2017 and 2019, reading all the essays submitted by local primary schools and helping us to decide the winners using her excellent skills as an English teacher and lecturer. Pauline was very active, despite her painful hip and, once she had a replacement, there was no stopping her! She was regularly on the team who provided cream teas to the Monday Afternooners, a club for adults with challenges in Bromley.

She joined the Executive Committee and took over as President in 2023. Stand out memories of Pauline are running a stand with Penny at the Jubilee fair in Sevenoaks, manning our stall in Sevenoaks High Street at the Coronation celebrations, attending garden parties at Rockdale and helping to make a film about our

Spoken English Project with Wendy and Sandie earlier this year. We attended the Soroptimist Film Festival in Lewes earlier this year, visiting her sister Mary whilst we were there.

Pauline treated the Executive Committee to a delightful cream tea at Pat's

towards the end of her term and was able to attend our October club meeting to hand over to new President Margaret Crabtree, even though she was quite unwell. She was always full of fun and energy and achieved such a lot during her years as a Soroptimist and in particular in the 18 months when she was our Club President.

We are all greatly saddened at her passing and will miss her very much.



Sandie Higgs SI Sevenoaks

SI CANTERBURY

CHAT AND COFFEE WITH MIGRANT WOMEN

05/05/2023


WINNER

SI Canterbury was delighted to receive the 2023-4 first prize for the Best Practice (“Enable”) national award. This was judged from 105 submissions to the Edinburgh Conference. Our project, CHAT & COFFEE WITH MIGRANT WOMEN: ENABLING WOMEN THROUGH FRIENDSHIP, aimed to help improve migrant women’s connection within our city. We were aware of some migrant women in Canterbury who felt marginalised, often despite many years of living here. Some of our club members had also previously experienced this feeling of being ‘different’ and ‘out of place’ with limited language skills. So, our project started from a position of shared experience or empathy.

Between 2023 and 2024, we invited women attending weekly English language lessons to join us for a walk or chat after class. We promised a safe space to practice everyday conversation outside of the classroom as well as opportunities for women to ask questions, seek advice, express ideas, and communicate in a relaxed way. We ensured, from the outset, that we engaged with women on their own terms, respecting cultural differences as well as finding our commonalities. The project was led by one club member who coordinated club rotas and risk assessments. Ten club members rotated the weekly walks and chats, with two or three members present at each event. Some club members also received training for the local walks and on safeguarding with the *Mason Foundation*. We met in the quiet venue of a church hall annex next to the women’s language class. We also visited coffee shops, galleries, a museum, a food festival, our cathedral gardens, city parks and our own homes and gardens. The women and their families were guests at our fund-raising garden party in June 2024, where husbands and children joined our families to share food and enjoy a live local band.

We made sure to review our project regularly and we did this by involving the migrant women. We listened and then revised the plan for walks to include more meetings in venues closer to their language class. With time, and by listening and responding, our ‘get togethers’ became more relaxed and rapport and trust grew. The women themselves set up a ‘WhatsApp’ Group for everyone to plan ‘get togethers’ and exchange news of local events, courses, and celebrations. For project set-up and continuation our club collaborated with several organisations, including the *Kent Refugee Action Network*; *Mason’s Mile* and *Kent Support for Refugees*, along with local church wardens who provided a meeting venue

without charge. We have kept other local groups informed of what we were doing and the *White Cliffs Welcomes Refugees* approached us for advice on developing similar events. During our project year we celebrated many positive outcomes. These included supporting one woman through Job Centre interviews; accessing personalised GCSE support for a family member who needed this to access Higher Education for a teaching career (they passed!); and introducing another woman to a neighbourhood needle work group (where her crochet is greatly admired) and to our local *U3A* where she has visited gardens with us. As a club, we have gathered new insights into different cultures and festivals; shared personal and family stories and worries; enjoyed wonderful food and company; and made lasting friendships. One interest that drew all of us together was... FOOD! Our chat group always promised a new recipe or cooking technique to learn and our ‘Bring a Dish’ Christmas Party was a memorable feast alongside traditional party games.

Looking back on the year we noticed the growing confidence of the migrant women in becoming involved in our city and in making friends with one another. In 2023 our project received a “Highly Commended” award by *East Kent Mind Mental Wellbeing Awards*. This external recognition of the club was very encouraging for everyone.

This summer we paused the project as many of the women had begun work, volunteering or studying – moving on with the next stages of their lives. However, women have recently contacted us to ask for our chat group to reconvene as they are missing it so much. We are now making plans for a monthly chat group starting early next year and hope to have this group more closely integrated into our club meetings. The Edinburgh committee asked us for hints and tips for clubs considering a similar project. Looking back, we think that several main ingredients are required: knowing that there is a need; finding good collaborators (and a venue); having efficient co-ordination; and responding to ongoing suggestions and feedback are all part of the mix. However, the essential ‘raising agents’ in our club project has been having fun together. Please do contact us if you want to know more at soroptimistcanterbury@gmail.com

We owe a big ‘Thank You’ to Roxanne who presented our project for us at Conference and accepted our award, and to Sally Higgins who printed and displayed our conference poster.

Tessa Woodward—SI Canterbury

Mr Bates vs The Post Office and Beyond

At their late October meeting, East Grinstead Club were delighted to welcome Kay Linnell and Barbara Jeremiah who told about their involvement in one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in British legal history, The Post Office Scandal. The case had been rumbling on for around 19 years and it took a television drama to bring it to the attention of the general public and cause universal outrage. Well over 500 sub-postmasters and postmistresses had been wrongly accused of embezzling huge sums of money, the loss of all of which was due to errors within the Post Office computer system. Some of the accused had lost their homes, their life's savings, their livelihoods, their health and in some cases their lives.

Kay, a forensic accountant together with her business partner Barbara, both of whom are members of Winchester Club, worked tirelessly in support of and as advisors to the Justice for Sub-postmasters Alliance campaign. Kay had recently given evidence to the Post Office Horizon IT inquiry and both she and Barbara emphasized that much remained to be done to ensure that all the original 555 victims received the financial redress they are due and have been promised. Although many of us had seen the TV drama, our eyes were certainly opened as to the scale of the scandal and its devastating and long-lasting effects on all those wrongly accused. Members are encouraged to write to their MPs stressing the horrendous nature of the Post Office case. Claims should be settled urgently since settlement was confirmed in the October Budget.



Rosemary Stone SI East Grinstead

Welcome Liz as a New Member

We met Liz Owsley at the Regional AGM in September as she had recently become an Associate member. Following a discussion over lunch, Liz said she wanted to come along to a Medway and Maidstone club meeting to find out more about us. We were really pleased that she decided to become a member of our club.



At our November club meeting, Carol Infanti presented Liz with her name badge.

Liz spoke about her 30 years with the Metropolitan Police, with the latter part

of her career as National Coordinator for the British Association for Women in Policing (BAWP) dealing with gender equalities. She is now retired and is involved as a trustee with the Amuka Foundation in Kenya.

The Amuka Foundation was set up to change the lives of young people in Kenya, providing them with the education and skills they need. They focus on the prevention and relief of poverty by advancing education, health and well-being and improving the long-term conditions within which these young people live.

Liz likes to run, although her competitive days are over, she loves walking and has completed many long-distance trails; golf is also her passion and travel to visit many countries.

Jane Barnes SI Medway and Maidstone

How did clubs mark the 16 Days of Activism?

On 25th November, the start of the 16 days of activism, twelve members of SI Tunbridge Wells & District joined women from the community to walk from Rusthall to The Old Auction House in Tunbridge Wells where we all enjoyed wine to hot drinks to **Reclaim The Night**. A second group left from St John's walking through the centre of town passing the Town Hall, pubs, taxi ranks and the station thus raising visibility.

This has become an annual event to highlight the safety issues of women walking alone after dark. November the 25th is also White Ribbon Day and several men also joined in the walk.

The Amelia Scott, the cultural centre in the town, will be lit up in orange for the 16 days at the request of the Soroptimists. Finally the club held an orange Cafe at the Trinity on Saturday 14th December 10am-1 noon.

Ann Greenfield SI Tunbridge Wells & District



Soroptimist Christmas Tree at Tree Festival

Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists are taking part in the Christmas tree Festival at St Margaret's Church, Rainham. It runs from 29 November through to the beginning of January.

As it is the 16 Days of Activism (25 November – 10 December) we have chosen an orange theme, and decorated the tree with 'Soroptimists Say NO to Violence against Women' badges and baubles to raise awareness.



Jane and Stella Barnes went along to set up the tree with orange baubles kindly donated by member Jill Squires and the new SIGBI Safety cards prepared by Liz Duckworth.

*Jane Barnes
SI Medway and Maidstone*



SI Sevenoaks join SI Bromley on Silent March

Members of SI Sevenoaks set off to join their friends from SI Bromley on a Silent March up Bromley High Street on 25th November – the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and the first day of the SIGBI 16 Days of Activism.

We joined forces with SI Bromley outside the Richmal Crompton Wetherspoons at Bromley South and marched up and down the High Street. It was great that a prospective new member Kerry was also able to meet up and march with us! It was a nice sunny morning and we did attract some attention! SI Bromley had kindly arranged an Orange Café visit to The Hub, Greener & Cleaner, in The Glades, where we were treated to delicious carrot and coriander soup (keeping the orange theme going!)

It was a great day out, a chance to talk to members of the public about our organisation and our reasons for the march. We were also able to chat and catch up with each other's forthcoming projects and events. A big thank you to Angela and Alison of SI Bromley, and all their other members, for arranging it all and welcoming us so kindly.



Pictured are club members Vicky, Sandie, Jenny, guest Karen, Anne, Penny and Tracey.

Sandie Higgs SI Sevenoaks

SI Eastbourne wear Orange



Members of SI Eastbourne and District marked the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on 25 November 2024 at our club meeting at the Hydro Hotel by wearing orange.

Claire Bell -SI Eastbourne and District

SI Canterbury's Silent March - 'Every 10 minutes'

As part of the United Nations 16 Days of Activism against gender based violence and domestic abuse, this year's Silent March was bigger than ever.

Past, Present and Future members of SI Canterbury were joined by our Regional President, Sue Edgar, members of SI Folkestone, SI Tunbridge Wells, SI Whitstable & District, SI Bromley, SI East Grinstead, East Kent Federation of Women's Institutes, The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress, Maya's Community Support Centre, Catching Lives, The Westgate Hall, Canterbury Diocese Mothers' Union, Canterbury Welcomes Refugees, Canterbury City Council, The Rising Sun, The Women's Equality Party, Rev. Wendy Dalrymple, men, women and children.

We marched in solidarity with women all across the globe against violence towards women and girls ,

A dry, mild day it was for early Christmas shoppers. And thankfully for the homeless people camped out in doorways too. But in the Butter market, the cobblestone space in front of the cathedral gate, and under the blue statue of Jesus, people were coming together.

Women and men, wearing orange coats, or scarves or hats. Some women held orange placards, others carried banners. Even the dogs they brought with them wore orange ribbons on their collars. People arrived in ones, twos and small groups. They did not look sad but they looked serious. They were going to walk.

The caped figure of Revd. Wendy Dalrymple, precentor of the cathedral spoke . She reminded the people gathered of the terrible fact that:-
- **Every ten minutes** - somewhere in the world, a woman or girl is killed by an intimate partner or family member.

- **Every ten minutes** - in the home, where a woman should feel most safe, she is not safe.

.To bear witness to that statistic, and to give an expression for those who cannot, she encouraged everyone, every sort of woman, to walk together silently through the streets of Canterbury. And so, the people wearing orange did walk, slowly, silently through the Saturday crowds,



past the shop windows, displays, theatre and pubs.

The Lord Mayor of Canterbury, Jean Butcher walked with them, the Lady Mayoress, Diane Baldock and Region President, Sue Edgar walked as well. All thinking about that statistic.

'Every ten minutes'.

And after the solemn, silent walk, the procession returned to the Butter market. And because the people dressed in orange had been able to march without incident, with no catcalls, nothing shouted or thrown at them, no interruptions, because they were safe and all together, it was time for joy.

And so with capes and scarves flying, with placards still held high, the group took a carousel ride in the cathedral yard. The seriousness changed to delight and gratitude. That they had walked and were all still here together, without fear, unharmed.



Tessa Woodward SI Canterbury

16 Days of Activism



Canterbury members lead March



Cat Mennell and Sue Edgar



St Folkestone with Sue Edgar



Keji Moses with Sue Edgar



Enjoying the carousel



Yvonne having fun

March for Clean Water

Members of Whitstable and District SI Club were out in force in London on 3rd November, joining approximately 20,000 people, marching in protest about the state of our waterways. Our creek and coastal environment is of great concern to Club members and we actively support local campaigns and activities for plastic free, clean seas, rivers, waterways, footpaths and beaches.

Our Club supports local organisation Save Our Seas Whitstable, with Mags, Tricia and Mary representing the Club at the march and rally in Parliament Square. Our colourful banner shown in the photos even attracted a prospective Club member and we look forward to welcoming Jane, the fourth person in the photo at a Club meeting soon!

The Club will continue to work with Save Our Seas Whitstable, in support of nationwide objectives for clean waterways, which will benefit all our communities www.soswhitstable.com

Mags Harrison SI Whitstable and District



Cream Tea for Monday Afternooners

Three members of SI Sevenoaks joined past member Ann Hines to help serve a special cream tea to the Monday Afternooners, a monthly club for disabled adults in the Bromley area. We have been doing this for more than 10 years and were delighted to discover that it was the Club's 25th Anniversary! Ann made a superb iced celebration cake and scones with jam and cream, and

Margaret, Kathy and Sandie supplied cakes, savouries and sandwiches which we took along to Bromley UR Church Centre. We were joined by 20 members, helpers and representatives from Bromley Mencap. Lots of balloons, party poppers and fizz were provided, plus a challenging quiz! It was great to see how much the club members enjoyed the event, and we did too!



Sandie Higgs SI Sevenoaks

Soroptimists Support World Porridge Day

In Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, Mary's Meals serves children steaming mugs of vitamin-enriched porridge, helping them to learn and grow. That's why Mary's Meals celebrate World Porridge Day on 10 October every year – as they know that porridge has the power to change lives.

Medway and Maidstone member, Annette Davies who is also a Mary's Meals Ambassador called on members to celebrate World Porridge Day in a fun way. Members were asked to simply take a photo of their porridge breakfast during October and send to Annette and donate a pound for Mary's Meals.

Fifteen members took part and the £15 raised was match funded making it £30. The member with the best photo was Carol Infanti's which was a birthday porridge with strawberries, mango and candle.

Mary's Meals says it costs **£19.15** to feed a child for a whole school year and with the match funding it means two children can be fed.



Mary's Meals provides one good meal every school day for hungry children living in 17 of the world's poorest countries. The promise of these meals attracts children to the classroom, where they can gain an education and grow up well-nourished and well-educated to become the men and women who will lift their communities out of poverty.

Supporting SATEDA and Sharewear

At our November meeting, as part of our commitment to the 16 Days of Action, our speakers were Pat Jackson and Sarah Cornell talking about SATEDA's Youth Work in Swale. We heard about how they work with young women and young people at risk of domestic abuse, providing 1:1 support in a safe place. The programmes that they run are: -

- **Healing Together Programme** - for young people aged 7 – 16 focusing on understanding the body and brain, senses and feeling.
- **Choose Liberty service** - for young women aged 13 – 16 years, who are experiencing domestic abuse or at risk of being in an abusive relationship.
- **You Matter Programme** - for young people aged 7 – 16 years, building confidence.

Members had brought unwanted good quality second-hand warm clothes for Sharewear, another service offered by SATEDA. They provide them free-of-charge



to women and children in economic difficulty. The latest campaign is 'It's a Wrap' and looking for warm winter clothing. . Annette Davies delivered the clothes to Sharewear. The clothes weighed 32.5kg and were well received by Valerie Williams. Annette spent two and a half hours helping to sort through the clothes and one of the donated jackets went straight out to a woman in need.

Jane Barnes SI Medway and Maidstone

Byron School Donate for Shoebox Appeal

In October, I told the Byron children in the UNICEF Rights-Respecting Schools Steering Group about the Blythwood Christmas Shoebox Appeal that as Soroptimists, we support each year.

I took along a filled and wrapped shoebox to show the children what types of essential items we provide in each box such as a hat, scarf, gloves, toothbrush, toothpaste, underwear, socks, soap, flannel, sweets, and a toy.



The children were keen to get involved and they voted on the items they felt were important. They agreed a tooth brush and tooth paste were useful to help children achieve their right to health.

They were marking World Children's Day on 20th November this year with an act of kindness and so each class was asked for any donations by 23 November..

All the donations were gathered together and presented to me to take to the Collection Point on their behalf.

I was able to take them straight after our meeting as I was joining some of my Soroptimist colleagues volunteering there. They were really pleased to receive this generous donation from Byron as their supplies as fillers were getting low and would have to have been restocked.

Jane Barnes SI Medway and Maidstone

Fundraising for Soroptimist Foundation

Carol McKeough hosted her annual Christmas Soup Kitchen on 30 November. 16 Members enjoyed home-made soup and bread followed by delicious desserts.

Afterwards we put together 8 Christmas hampers to be shared across three local Women's Refuges and 4 half-way houses that included gifts for the women and children.

£400 monies was donated by Medway Towns Charitable Trust for items to be purchased for the hampers.

Proceeds from Soup Kitchen raised **£200** that will go to the SI Foundation

Medway and Maidstone's Christmas Newsletter with Christmas messages and pledges made in lieu of exchanging Christmas cards has raised **£242.50** towards the Soroptimist International Foundation.



Jane Barnes SI Medway and Maidstone