

## President Sue's message

### It's Never Too Late – or Too Early



We are nearly at the end of January 2025 and I hope that all Clubs are back to their regular meeting dates after the 'holiday' period.

I have received invitations from many Clubs to attend an AGM, a President's Lunch and a role as Judge at the annual SI Croydon Loud & Proud competition

which is on 7th March.

On 24th January, SI proudly joined the global community in celebrating International Day of Education, reaffirming our commitment to empowering women and girls through education at every stage of life.

Orange Cafe events will continue in 2025 and hopefully our messages will spread across our local communities.

On 8th February, there is an Open Board meeting of SIGBI inviting Silent Observers to attend and at the 'official' closure of the Meeting, there will be time for questions and comments which can be made directly to the Board. You have to register via The Hub. Could be a very interesting opportunity! Following on from our last Regional Meeting, I wanted to highlight the importance of reporting your PA activities on



The Hub. The two UN representatives noted that recording our work is key for the UN to get a rounded perspective of the work happening across all Clubs. Here is SI East Grinstead at first

working bee of 2025 discussing what needed to be documented and how!

Another follow on from the Regional meeting is regarding the Refuge in Literacy UK charity that offers an opportunity to work closely with women's refuges to deliver literacy to children whose school life may have been disrupted.

Anne Stairmand answered questions posed on that day, however, to progress this opportunity further I have invited interested Club representatives to join a Zoom meeting on Tuesday 18 February at 6pm. The objective is for a discussion around next steps, interest in joining a pilot scheme and how to take the project further. Our Regional Secretary has already contacted your Clubs and sent out log-in details to those interested.

In Friendship

President Sue

## What's in this edition?



Visit to India P2



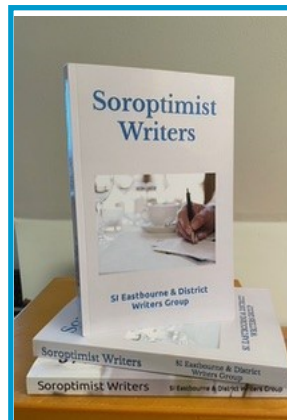
Centenary Action Event P4



Obituary Betty Deller P5



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Books for Refuge P7



Rhubarb and New Members P8

## Visit to our Soroptimist Sisters in the National Association of Soroptimist (NASI)- India

In November Pat Dale, Hilary Rowberry, Helen Schortz and I travelled to India to Chennai for the installation of the new NASI President, Naina Shah, who took over from Nisha Ghosh. Naina and Nisha have been regular visitors to our annual conferences and have stayed with several members across the region.



We arrived in Chennai after an overnight flight and were met at the airport by Naina, Priya and Naureen. They drove us to our hotel where we met up with Soroptimists from SI Kernow in Cornwall, Salisbury, Japan and San Francisco. Naina kindly invited us all to her home for dinner that evening, where we met up with Nisha.

Next day, Hilary, Helen and I visited the Railway Museum in Chennai travelling there tightly packed into a Tuc-Tuc. Hilary and Helen's grand-



father had been involved in the establishment of the railway in Chennai and so were keen to see if they could find out more.

The following day, we set off on an

early morning Tejas Express Executive Class train to Tiruchirapali and to Thanjavur for lunch where we met up with more Soroptimists from Belgium, the Netherlands and Siew Yong, SI President. After lunch we set off to our hotel in Swamimalai, located within a UNESCO World Heritage site and where we stayed for our Chola Heritage Tour of the temples built during the Chola Dynasty in the Tamil Nadu state of India.

We travelled back to Chennai and visited the Mukhti Foundation project, which is supported by SI Chennai Downton, SI Chennai Marina and SI



Kernow. Each club raises funds for prosthetic limbs for women and girls. We were delighted to see three of them have their new limbs (funded by SI Kernow) fitted during our visit.

We also visited a women's refuge in Chennai supported by the Aashraya Trust, where we met some of the women and their young children.

The Charter of SI Chennai Marina, was held at the residence of the Deputy British High Commissioner. This was a very happy event.



Cathy Cottridge, SIGBI Immediate Past President, who had joined us

during our visit, conducted the chartering.

The Amir Mahal palace was the venue for the 'Bonding with the Best' friendship evening when Naina Shah was installed as the new NASI President, taking over from Nisha Ghosh.



Vidya Singh, Princess of Vijaynagaram, who was on our tour throughout, addressed the

audience. Following the inauguration ceremony, His Highness Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali Asim Jah addressed those present.

Our final event was the General Meeting and Assembly of Clubs followed by lunch at the Madras Cricket club. It was most interesting and not dissimilar to our own

Regional Meetings.

Nisha welcomed Naina as the new NASI President.



Early next morning (about 4.30 am!) we set off for the Airport and our return home to the UK. Did we have an amazing trip? Indeed we did as shown by the smiles on the faces of Pat Dale and myself. We can't wait for



our next visit to India!

Yvonne Freeman—SI Folkestone

## Christmas Gifts for the Folkestone Women's Refuge

SI Folkestone was once again pleased to be able to provide Christmas gifts for the women and children at the Folkestone Women's Refuge.



Our gifts included pamper items for the women, pyjamas for the younger children and manicure sets for the older girls.

SI Folkestone has been supporting the Women's Refuge for many years now, and we are hoping to get involved with the Refuge in Literacy UK project in the near future.



Yvonne Freeman – SI Folkestone

## Soroptimists volunteering at G4 Christmas Concert in aid of Missing People

Three SI Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists, Teresa Cambell, Stella Barnes and Jane Barnes were ushers at the G4 Christmas Concert held at Rochester Cathedral on 16 December. We collected donations on behalf of Missing People UK as people left the concert. The sum of £686.44 on the night.

Missing People is the only UK charity dedicated to reconnecting missing people and their loved ones. Someone is reported missing every 90 seconds in the UK. Each year, 170,000 people are reported missing.



Jane Barnes - SI Medway and Maidstone

## Volunteering for 193 hours at Christmas Shoebox Collection Point in Gillingham

Four Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists volunteered for 193 hours at the Blythwood London and South East England-Shoebox Collection Point in Gillingham. They were working with other volunteers between 28th October and 11th December checking, packaging more than 10,500 shoeboxes into cartons for transporting to Albania and Kosovo in time for Christmas.

Our club has been involved with supporting the Christmas Shoebox Appeal for more than 20 years. The Blythwood Chief Executive Jeremy Ross expressed his gratitude to all the volunteers:

*'At a time when many families are struggling to pay bills at home, it's testimony to how generous people can be to those in greater need. I want to thank everyone who filled a box and everyone who helped with the process. Your kindness really makes a difference to people living in hardship.'*

Jane Barnes SI Medway and Maidstone



# Attending Centenary Action Event at the House of Commons

On 7<sup>th</sup> January 2025, 3 Soroptimists from Tunbridge Wells were invited to the APPG Centenary Action Event in the House of Commons. They were joined by



Federation President Ruth Healey together with Mary Dalman and Edwina Mitchell from Bromley club in our region. Three other Soroptimists from other regions were also invited.

The main reason for holding this event was to increase female representation in Parliament. The current representation as per the last General Election is that the house is now 40% Female 60% Male. Centenary Action are requesting that by 2028, which will be 100 years since every female had the right to vote, that parliament should be 50% female and 50% male.



Attendees had the opportunity to hear from the new female's MPs, elected in July 2024, the journey they had to being elected, and the skills they possessed, and their first few weeks as new MPs.

We also heard from an inspirational Girl Guide, Aishah who all of us there felt was a new MP in the making. A truly interesting afternoon with many networking opportunities. This is Aishah's speech:

'The milestone of 263 women MPs marks a shift in our work towards gender equality. It is an opportunity to celebrate the journey of securing rights for women but it also highlights the gaps in freedoms that still exist. Whilst rights are things you ask for from the people who already control you, freedom involves actively engaging in the law-making process for the benefit of your own people. If you have to ask someone for rights, then you don't truly have them.

As a young woman growing up in the 21st

century, it's safe to say that I benefit from the work that the women who came before me put into ensuring that I have equal rights. However, it is now my generation's turn to ensure that women get to experience the freedom they deserve and have worked so hard for. One major step that can be taken to ensure that this is the case is reaching the milestone of 50% of MPs being women. It is truly inspiring to see 263 women MPs take up space in a place that seems to have often been reserved for men alone. The significance of representation is immense when you're a young girl and is vital to fostering the belief that 'Girls can do anything'. When it comes to positions of power and leadership – the places where **real** and **immediate** change can be evoked – it is rare that a woman herself is the one facilitating the conversations involving the needs of both herself and her fellow women. The change that this new cohort of women MPs have the ability to make is immeasurable – and I personally cannot wait to see all that they achieve in the coming years. My hope is that they inspire a generation of young women to speak up and occupy leadership roles, no matter how big or small, as I wholeheartedly believe that women in power foster powerful women in society. In addition, I am eager to see determined progression in tackling the issues directly facing young women and girls including sexism, safety, appearance, well-being and online harm as well as the issues that we are worried about such as the cost-of-living crisis, climate change and a more equal future. Having women in the room to coordinate and hone in on the importance of tackling these issues head-on will undoubtedly make it much harder for them to be ignored or sidelined in the way that they have in the past.

Whilst the divisions within parliament are often the point of focus – the milestone of the



highest number of women MPs ever should be followed by a message of unity and cooperation. This is why it is paramount that women MPs cross-party come together to achieve change. According to annu-

al [Girls' Attitudes Survey](#), 69% of girls aged 7-10 feel they're expected to behave differently because they're a girl which is a rather worrying statistic given its ability to limit their scope of thinking, self-expression and knowledge of the opportunities available to them. Through uniting as women across the political spectrum, women MPs have the ability to really make a difference in the lives of young women and girls across the UK and beyond. After all, there are many ways in which women from all backgrounds share similar experiences.

The issue of women's safety is often one that spans across all ages and life experiences, and given that safety is a right and not a privilege it is mutually understood that we are not adequately protected. *47% of 11-21-year-olds feel less safe as a result of sexism, a significant rise compared to 10 years ago* which highlights the way in which young women and girls as young as 11 are recognising the correlation between their gender and lack of safety in society. Similarly, women MPs are arguably expected to simply endure misogyny, sexism and threats of violence and accept that it is simply a part of the role if you are a woman. As such, it is paramount that we create an environment where not only our women MPs can thrive and feel safe but also that our future and aspiring women MPs see the potential for them to do so as well.



Whilst 40% of MPs being women is surely a milestone to celebrate how far we have come as women, it is also the starting point to discovering how far we can really go. This cohort of women MPs has what it takes to tackle the remaining barriers facing young women and girls today. After all, 2 in 3 girls and young women aged 11-21 think that confidence will be one of the most important attributes for a successful future and the confidence displayed by the 263 women standing in parliament today will surely inspire them to be confident too.

Lorna Blackmore—SI Tunbridge Wells  
Mary Dalman—SI Bromley

## Obituary—Betty Deller 2nd September 1926—9th January 2025

It is with great sadness that S I East Grinstead announce the passing of our club member Betty Deller on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2025 at the age of 98.

Betty had been a member since 1978 and held various positions in the club including President and Treasurer. She enjoyed attending Region Meetings, Conferences and Conventions, including San Francisco and Melbourne and received the Key to Quezon City while she was on a Soroptimist visit to the Philippines. Barbados and Liverpool were two of the last conferences she attended. Betty enjoyed working with fellow Soroptimists on many projects and especially enjoyed teaching Guides and Brownies to knit and make pillowcase dresses .



Betty was a member of the Trinity Methodist church in East Grinstead where she often played the organ for church services and took part in weekly House Groups.

She will be greatly missed by all her family and friends.

Her funeral service will be held at Trinity Methodist Church on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> February at 2.30pm. Please join us afterwards in the Church Hall, where refreshments will be served.

Please let Chris Jones (mob: 07711784374, email: [chrismjones100@btinternet.com](mailto:chrismjones100@btinternet.com))

know if you are attending so we make sure we have enough food!

Family flowers only please, donations to St Catherines Hospice or RNLI.

Chris Jones (daughter) SI East Grinstead

## Living with Allergies

As the first speaker of the new year, East Grinstead Club was delighted to welcome Sarah Baker who provided a personal perspective on living with allergies. Anaphylaxis, a serious, life-threatening allergic reaction, can appear at any time in one's life. The body's immune system wrongly identifies a substance as a threat and produces antibodies. The reaction normally occurs within a few minutes.

Sarah, a qualified nurse, grew up with an allergy to root vegetables, an allergy so severe that even the smell of potatoes cooking could cause a reaction.

Some allergies are more common and allergens such as celery, wheat and milk appear in bold print on food packaging. Reading the labels proved particularly difficult during the pandemic when it was forbidden to pick up items one was not intending to purchase!

Sarah highlighted problems that we would not naturally have considered, for example when travelling on a train or plane, is the table next to you contaminated? Although most companies have an allergy policy, life becomes difficult when staff share desks or move from one work area to another.

What should we look out for? ABC:

**A = airways** – (throat swelling etc),

**B = breathing** (respiratory problems),

**C = circulation** (dizziness/fainting).

If anyone is suffering a reaction they should be laid down with their legs in the air and an epiPen used to administer adrenaline into their thigh. An urgent call to 999 is also vital. If there is no improvement in 5 minutes a second epiPen should be used. Demonstrator EpiPens were distributed among the audience so people could practise administering them – not as easy as one might imagine! Sarah reported that there are various developments for the treatment of allergies in the pipeline including nasal sprays, under-the-tongue tablets and skin patches as well as immunotherapy. Hopefully the future will soon be looking brighter for those living in daily fear of anaphylaxis.



Rosemary Stone—SI East Grinstead

## Marching and Speaking Out for Worldwide Women's Rights

Members of SI Whitstable and District and SI Canterbury joined forces on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> January to support the UK Women's March. At this time marches were taking place worldwide in solidarity with the Women's March on Washington DC, USA, and ahead of Donald Trump's inauguration on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January. All marches highlighted issues affecting women and girls, globally and in the UK. These include the national emergency of violence against women and girls across the UK; the need for access to reproductive care worldwide and the endemic misogyny and discrimination faced by many women.

20 marches happened in towns and cities across England, Scotland and Wales. Our Canterbury march included was about 300 women, men and children. It was positive and pleasing to see so many younger women marching. SI Canterbury were pleased to have advised on the early organisation of the march in our city. We are also very proud of the powerful and compelling speech prepared by Keji Moses, President of SI Canterbury and read to the crowd during the rally. Rachel Levy, one of our newest members of SI Canterbury comments on the event:

"There is a frightening awareness of progress being eroded in some areas of the world, and a strong wish to support all those girls and women whose freedoms are being impacted by this. This was my first event as an official member of the Soroptimists and, as a life-long advocate of women's rights, I am happy to have 'found my tribe' in Canterbury".



Liz Wingrove from SI Whitstable and District found seeing so many people come together to stand up for equality, justice and the rights for girls & women truly inspiring. "So interesting to see people share

their stories and their energy. It's a reminder of how much we can achieve when we stand together".

A copy of Keji's inspiring speech is here:



*'Today, we gather in solidarity, united as one voice, for the rights and dignity of women everywhere. We stand here not just for ourselves, but for the women who came before us, for the women standing beside us, and for the generations of women who will follow.'*

*Women of every shade, culture, and socioeconomic background are here today to say: we see you; we hear you, and we are with you. Too often, we are told to be "strong," even in moments of deep vulnerability, as if strength is the only measure of our worth. But today, we redefine strength. Strength is also in our vulnerability, in our unity, in reaching out and saying to another woman, "I've got your back".*

*This march is more than just an event, it is a symbol of joyful resistance, community building, and transformative action. With every step we take, we declare that shame has no place here. Instead, we hold our heads high, standing on the shoulders of the fearless women who paved the way before us.*

*Today, we commit to looking after ourselves because self-care is not selfish; it is radical and necessary. We commit to challenging discrimination in all the spaces we occupy, from boardrooms to classrooms, from our communities to our homes. We will no longer tolerate words or actions that seek to diminish us.*

*We also commit to standing together, not tearing each other down. We will not shame another woman, but instead, uplift her. We will choose compassion over criticism, support over judgment, and love over fear.*

*Because change begins here with us. With our words, our actions, and our choices.*

*Today, we are marching forward, not just for equality, but for equity. For a world where no woman feels left behind, unheard, or unseen.*

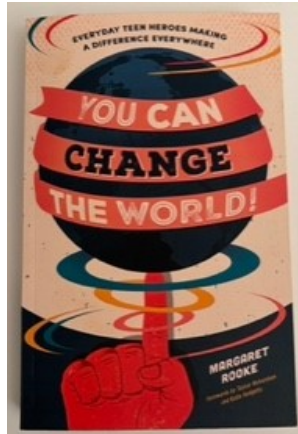
*Together, we are a force of nature. Together, we are the change. And together, we rise.*

Thank you., Keji Moses, President Canterbury Soroptimists

Mary Adams PAO and incoming President, Canterbury  
Karen Grieves Safeguarding Officer, Whitstable and District

## Celebration Event at Eastbourne Academy

The remaining copies of 'You Can Change the World' were recently presented to girls at the Eastbourne Academy who had completed their Girls' Networks programme. 14 girls were delighted to receive the books, which were funded by the South East Region in 2023. This means nearly 140 girls have now received a copy of the book which also contains details of Soroptimism and a bookplate stating that the book was given by SI South East England. It was also an opportunity once again to talk about what Soroptimists do and more information was requested by one of the girls and another mentor.



Lynne Chiswick—SI Eastbourne

## Teddies Get Around..!!

Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland [SIGBI] celebrated 100 years of service in 2021 launching challenges to members which included knitting 100 Teddy Bears for traumatised children.

SI Sevenoaks club responded with great fervour. Teddies were distributed to Kent and Sussex Police who used the bears as comforters when interviewing traumatised children. Women's refuges, Refugee organisations and the Alzheimer's society also welcomed the bears as a comforting aid.

For two years they have been donated to the Charles Dickens Primary School, Southwark which serves two housing estates in a deprived area. Teachers had noted that the last two intakes of children were very behind with their literacy skills due to covid and lock down. Each child was given their own bear and encouraged to have conversations with them also playing with them with other children improving literacy skills and self confidence. Most recently medical students from Guy's Hospital have visited the school as part of a learning module teaching the children to take care of their bodies using the bears as patients. A lot of sticky plaster seems to be used!

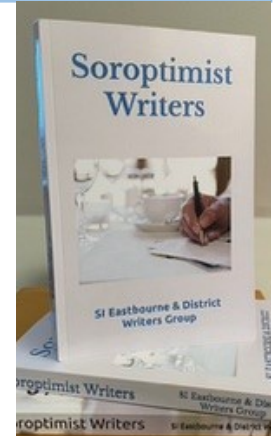
Teachers have commented on the huge difference the bears have made towards improving the children's development. The club was thrilled when the project was highlighted at a recent SIBGI Education webinar attended by 124 members from clubs in the UK, the Caribbean and India.

Isobel Groves, Associate member

## Books for Children in the Refuge

SI Eastbourne and District's Writers Group recently produced a book of their short stories entitled *Soroptimist Writers* and profits raised from the sale of their book to Club and Region members were used to buy books for children staying at our local Refuge.

We were advised that although picture books were welcome for younger children, the real need was for educational books for school age children to help them catch up on



missed schooling so that they might not be so far behind when they return to school.

We purchased a range of educational workbooks covering the years in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and our contact at the Refuge will



give them out appropriately as different children enter the Refuge.

President Lotte's daughter, Victoria, very kindly made lots of lovely cloth bags for the books to be kept in and included coloured pens and pads.

Lynne Chiswick—SI Eastbourne



## New Members Coffee Morning

SI Sevenoaks held a new members coffee morning at Sandie's on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> January, with a chance for members to bring friends along to meet us. We also held a tombola with prizes from the post-Christmas deluge of gifts! Two interested ladies came and seven members welcomed them. The star of the show was Rhubarb, pictured with guest Irene Collins! Rhubarb is a trainee guide dog puppy and she is gorgeous!

SI Sevenoaks' President Margaret Crabtree has chosen Guide Dogs as her main charity for the year and we raised £75 for this very worthwhile cause!

SI Sevenoaks wish a very Happy and Healthy 2025 to all the SISEE members!

Sandie Higgs—SI Sevenoaks



## Orange the World Café on 25th



SI Sevenoaks celebrated the 25th of the month with an Orange the World event at Gail's Café in the centre of Sevenoaks. It was a busy market day, so we were pleased to have so many people around us - we were able to hand out leaflets and have some discussion with fellow café users!

Nine members and 4 guests, including one past member and 3 hopefully new members are shown in our photo!

Sandie Higgs SI Sevenoaks

## Amnesty International

Amnesty International Kent Network are keen to develop better links with Soroptimist clubs across Kent and hopefully attend one of our Regional meetings.

If your club are interested in finding out more and opportunities to work together then please contact :

Victoria Gascoine at  
email: victoria.gascoine@btinternet.com

## Promotional Materials Available

The collage features the following items:

- SI Bromley Sleepout for the homeless (62511) - Just Giving campaign, £2195 raised.
- SI Canterbury Silent March (63567)
- SI Croydon and District Loud & Proud Public Speaking Competition (62154)
- SI Eastbourne and District Mentoring with The Girls Network (64892) - INSPIRE EMPOWER MENTOR.
- SI East Grinstead Anti-spiking Campaign (64388) - Focus on young women being targeted.
- SI Folkestone Supporting our Mayor (65046)
- Regional President's Project: To fund Speech and Language Therapy, now working with the children in the East Kent Regional Learning Centre.
- 'Working in our Communities to Effect Change' - Soroptimist International UK.
- Funding a Speech and Language Therapist for ABCD (65051) - Soroptimist International UK.
- SI Lewes & District International Women's Day Film Festival (64386)
- SI Medway & Maidstone Byron School Partnership to Success (65033)
- SI Sevenoaks Bengali schoolgirl conversations (62070)
- SI Tunbridge Wells & District Act of Parliament on Women's Safety granted Royal Assent (61624)
- SI Whitstable & District Plastic Free Whitstable (63209) - Soroptimists working with CTS Forum to raise and rebunch Plastic Free Whitstable; Sign up as Community Ally of Burles Against Storage; Recruitment of Plastic Free Whitstable Business Champions; Planning parties of Soroptimists are newly oriented Club.
- Kent College School Club Eco-garden (60840) - The school garden is to be a growing and learning hub garden at Kent College.

This photograph shows you the SISEE Poster that was put together by Jane Barnes for a place in the Poster Gallery at Conference in Edinburgh. We purchased two copies and have recently purchased three x PVC banners (835 x 1000mm) which are more robust.

The aim is that these resources are for all Clubs and if you have local events and think they could be of interest to your local community, they can be borrowed.

Just declare your interest to me and we will find a way to deliver them for your particular event.

President Sue Edgar—SISEE Region



## What is happening on International Women's Day?

We now are heading towards International Women's Day on 8th March and I am sure many Clubs are working on activities to raise awareness. There are useful images via the Trello materials you can find on The Hub.

The UN theme for 2025 is :

**For ALL women and girls:  
Rights. Equality. Empowerment.**

### Details of Events

Keji Moses, Sheriff of Canterbury, Vice Regional President and member of SI Canterbury is featuring at an International Women's Day Networking Breakfast on 7th March at Westgate Hall, Canterbury.

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



### Networking Breakfast

Inspirational women discuss 'Resilience'

Friday 7 March  
9-11:30am  
Westgate Hall Canterbury

Featuring  
Keji Moses, Sheriff of Canterbury  
Tracey Furminger, Financial Planner Girlings  
Sarah Crouch Marketing Manager Girlings  
Sophie Read, Family Law Partner from Brachers



**For ALL women and girls:  
Rights. Equality. Empowerment.**

8 March - Happy International Women's Day

### 20 years supporting women's employment and empowerment

For 20 years the Medway & Maidstone Soroptimist club, in partnership with SI club of Accra, Ghana has been helping men and women in Ghana get employment to support their families. These vibrant blue and yellow sashes are hand woven using the traditional Kente method specially for the Soroptimist club. Medway & Maidstone club sell the sashes internationally to other Soroptimist clubs. The Ghanaian weavers are paid for the materials plus a small profit. From the sales, a small profit is made which is shared between the [Soroptimist club of Accra](#), and the Medway & Maidstone club. In Medway & Maidstone the profits raised have been used to support Women's refuges, food and hygiene banks. In Ghana, in a School for the Blind, equipment has been refurbished. When that was completed, funds were used to build a library for a cluster of schools in a deprived area in Accra. Profits are now being used to keep the library up-to-date.

Carol Infanti—SI Medway & Maidstone

International Women's Day **DANCE**  
with  
'Project F'

Whitstable Umbrella Centre, Saturday 8th March 2025  
8.00 pm to 11.00 pm with Bar

Hosted by Whitstable & District Soroptimist International  
<https://sigbi.org/whitstable/>

Tickets £18  
<https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/whitstable-and-district-soroptimist-international/t-avnarav>

Proceeds to local Charities

SI Whitstable and District are organising a dance event with 'Project F' at Whitstable Umbrella Centre on Saturday 8 March from 8—11 pm. Tickets on sale at £18 and all proceeds going to local charities.

It would be good to hear about what other clubs across our Region will be doing to celebrate International Women's Day—let us know

