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Editor: Sherry Eskander

Deadline for February articles is Wednesday 25th , Email: soroptimistnewsletter@gmail.com

President Message

happy ♥
2026

Happy New Year to all SI South East England members.

I hope that 2026 has started well for you. As the days gradually begin to lengthen, there is a renewed sense of energy and possibility, which is always a welcome lift at this time of year.

January also brought **International Day of Education on 24 January**, a timely reminder of the powerful role education plays in transforming lives, strengthening communities, and advancing equality for women and girls. Across our Federation, Soroptimists continue to champion access to education, skills development, safety, and opportunity; values that sit at the very heart of everything we do. I encourage clubs to take a moment this month to celebrate, share, and amplify the impact of your education-focused projects and partnerships.

You will recall that following the **Women's Safety Railway Survey**, SI Medway and Maidstone introduced me to the Safeguarding Manager at South Eastern Railway. As part of their commitment to making rail travel safer for women and girls, a community-led forum is now being established. The Terms of Reference are currently in development, with the intention for this work to be completed by March. I am also aware that several of our clubs have had independent conversations with South Eastern Railway, reinforcing their commitment to working with SISEE as a key partner in this important initiative.

I am looking forward to visiting **SI Whitstable and District** at the end of January and continuing to connect with clubs across the region as we move into what promises to be a positive and purposeful year ahead.

Yours in
friendship,

Roxanne



Launching Fresh Thoughts in Bromley

SI Bromley are determined to take action against Domestic violence, meet the champions.....

On 10th November SI Bromley launched a new accessible resource for women fleeing domestic abuse. Fresh Thoughts is tailored specifically for women in the Borough to provide and guide them to the support they need. We are delighted that it has been so warmly welcomed by Bromley and Croydon Women's Aid and that it can be accessed on their website <https://bcwa.org.uk/fresh-thoughts-information-support-for-women-fleeing-domestic-abuse/> and innovatively via QR code from business and postcards.



The launch was addressed by Ruth Healey, Immediate Past President of SIGBI, Liam Conlon MP, Roxanne St Clair President of SI SEE and the Mayor of Bromley. They brought different informative perspectives on domestic abuse and the prevention of violence against women nationally and locally as well as insights into Government actions and plans on the agenda for this Parliament.

Invitees to the launch were those who sponsored the resource and those in key roles who can help create awareness and promote the resource to front-line professionals and so reach women more women who can benefit from it. Invitees

were drawn from the Council's strategic lead, public protection, safeguarding and care plan teams, the Health Sector, the Police, 2 local solicitors, Citizens Advice, Bromley and Croydon Women's Aid and the voluntary sector through Community Links and Bromley Well.

There was a buzz in the hall during the networking session with good contacts being made and clear intentions expressed to disseminate information and include in staff awareness and training. The value of the initiative driven by Soroptimists was recognized and SI Bromley will be taking forward a wider communication and follow up plan working with partner organisations, Councillors and MPs during 2026. **by Mary Dalman**



Worried about domestic abuse?
Information is available



info@bcwa.org.uk
tel: 0208 313 9303



Whitstable Repair Cafe 10th January 2026

Following the successful relaunch of Whitstable Repair Cafe on 8th November 2025, the second Repair Cafe took place on 10th January 2026, at the Umbrella Centre, Oxford Street, Whitstable. Members of Whitstable and District SI Club once again planned and ran the Repair Cafe, learning from the launch event on 8th November.

Working with a talented team of local volunteer repairers, 29 broken items were brought to the Repair Cafe, 23 of which were successfully repaired. The items included clothes and accessories, household gadgets, small electrical items, kitchen utensils, toys and garden tools. Kitchen knife and garden tool sharpening were added to the services provided and proved very popular.

Club members can see clearly how the outcomes of the Repair Cafes contribute to and evidence several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly:

No 1 - No Poverty, No 3 - Good Health and Well-being, No 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities, No 13 - Climate Action

The next Whitstable Repair Cafe is on 14th February 2026, 10.00 am to 1.00 pm at the Umbrella Centre, Oxford Street, Whitstable. Bicycle repairs are the next item to be promoted and included in the range of repairs. The Repair Cafe will run once a month on the second Saturday of the month during 2026, except August and

December. Further information and updates are available on our website www.sigbi.org/whitstable/repair-cafe and on our Facebook page: Repair Cafe Whitstable. Any enquiries can be emailed to whitstablerepaircafe2025@gmail.com We look forward to welcoming you to a Repair Cafe soon! By Mags Harrison

Repair Cafes are a global network of meeting places where broken items are repaired. Volunteers with repair skills donate their time and expertise, visitors bring their broken items for repair and are invited to make a donation. Together they avoid repairable items being thrown away, with the aim of repair, recycle and re-use. Repair Cafes promote sustainability within communities and are a relaxed, fun and sociable space, where all are welcome. There are over 2,500 Repair Cafes worldwide! Further details on this worldwide movement are available at www.repaircafe.org



SI Folkestone – Christmas Gifts for the Folkestone Women's Refuge 2025

SI Folkestone was once again pleased to be able to provide Christmas gifts for the women and children at the Folkestone Women's Refuge. We also hosted a coffee morning/tea party for the women and staff at the Refuge. It was a very enjoyable event as we were able not only able to spend time talking with the women, but also chatting to the members of staff and learning more about how the Refuge is run and how we might offer more support moving forwards. One suggestion we made was to purchase a small bookcase, which we could fill with books for the children to help them with their reading. The staff thought this was a good idea as the children have very limited access to books. By Yvonne Freeman



In Partnership With 101 Open Door Community Interest Company



In November 2024 **SI Folkestone** Club was given the opportunity to highlight the work of Soroptimists by creating a display in the window of the shop “101” in Hythe, also known as **101 Open Door**. It is owned by the [101 Open Door Community Interest Company](#) and operates as a community project with the shop being managed and staffed by volunteers.

The 101 Open Door Project is a community facility for local residents offering information, advice and support as well as access to meeting room facilities. SI Folkestone was fortunate enough to be offered the use of one of the shop windows for a month again in November 2025 for a display on the work of Soroptimists.

During 2025, we were also given the opportunity to use the meeting facilities at the rear of the shop for our monthly club meetings. We are most grateful for the opportunity to display the work of Soroptimists locally, nationally and internationally. **By Yvonne Freeman**

TUNBRIDGE WELLS SOROPTIMISTS DISPLAY THEIR WORK IN THE CIVIC CENTRE

The Soroptimists of Tunbridge Wells & District have a proud history of campaigning for the safety of women and girls. A few years ago, club members worked alongside our MP on the 'Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public' Bill, which is due to be enacted in April.

To raise awareness of Soroptimists and highlight the club's local work, members mounted a display at the local civic centre during the 2025 16-Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. The display showcased Soroptimist initiatives at international, national and local levels, presented key statistics relating to violence against women and girls, and provided details of the organisations active in the field, either as campaigners or supporters of victims.

The photo shows club member Amelia Dowler who oversaw the production of the display, President Jill Ruddock and club Membership Officer Lorna Blackmore.

A different statistic was featured on each day of the campaign, with a club member updating the display daily throughout the 16 days. The facts used in the display can be found on the SITWD website: <https://sigbi.org/tunbridge-wells/16-days-of-activism-against-gender-based-violence/>

In addition, the group selected a range of items for exhibition that reflected the development of the Soroptimist movement since its founding in 1921, as well as the achievements of the Tunbridge Wells club since its formation in 1946. These were presented across five separate displays, each accompanied by an audio commentary written and recorded by club members to provide background and context. Items included the club's insignia and examples of our activism.

Our MP Mike Martin visited the exhibition and issued a press release which appeared in the local press and his visit [was featured](#) in his monthly newsletter to his constituents.

'It was an honour to visit the Soroptimists of Tunbridge Wells & District's powerful display. The Soroptimists have been leading the charge in our fight to make both Tunbridge Wells and the wider world safer for women and girls. Their organisation played an instrumental part in my predecessor Greg Clark's Protection from Sex-Based Harassment in Public Act and have worked with me to set up Safe Havens for women and girls in Tunbridge Wells. (Mike Martin MP)



Soroptimists International Canterbury hold Arts Evening Fundraiser

Canterbury Soroptimists held an evening of music, storytelling, poetry and art to raise funds for two of our chosen charities - Rising Sun, a longstanding feminist-led charity supporting survivors of domestic abuse in Kent, and East Kent Mind who support all those affected by mental illness.

There were four sets on the bill.

First, we were treated to Dominic Abrams playing acoustic folk music with a blues/jazz flavour, and enjoyed being entertained by his guitar instrumentals and topical, humorous songs that he wrote himself.

Next, Canterbury Soroptimist, Tessa Woodward, delighted us with her humorous stories of life in the countryside. She performed as if on a West End stage, and everyone was enchanted.

After a break for refreshments and a bit of bubbly, David Lilford, co-owner of the gallery, gave a fascinating talk about contemporary artists, including anecdotes from his personal interactions with many of the artists he represents. As befitted the evening he also linked these in with issues around abuse and mental distress.



The event was a sell out and we will soon know how much we can pass on to the two charities!

Our artists volunteered their time for free, and the event was held in November in an art gallery belonging to one of our members.



The evening drew to a close with Victoria Field and Eduard Heyning performing *Step by Step, Grain by Grain - A Walk Across Chalk and Flint*. Through poetry, music, and ambient sound, they celebrated the pilgrim paths of Kent and the iconic geology, flora and fauna that link the North Downs, the Weald and the coast.

The setting of the contemporary art gallery enhanced the evening, and all the performers expressed their willingness to do it all over again in the future!

Our event raised £431.00 and this will be divided between two local charities, the Rising Sun (the supports families after domestic violence) and Mind East Kent.

By Mary Adams



Soroptimist Rose



FIRST GARDENING SESSION IN 2026



Stella busy at work on
Churchfield Steps

Stella and Jane Barnes joined with other volunteers from Friends of Rochester Churchfields and Esplanade (FoRCE) for their first 2-hour gardening session in 2026.

After recent frosts and rain, we were fortunate it was a sunny but fresh morning, ideal for getting outside and gardening. A short reel had been produced in early January showing the developed areas and included our Soroptimist rose planted in the Sensory Garden and in full bloom.

On arrival various tasks were allocated including working on the newly planted hedgerows, and litter picking. We opted to clear the areas at the side of the steep, flight of cobbled steps (more than 90..!!) at Churchfields. Armed with tools, and 'Great British Spring Clean' bags we set about our task clearing weeds and filling 3 bags. The plan is to paint the handrails on the steps when the overgrown areas are cleared as part of the community improvements.

Whilst busy working, we were serenaded by some Jenny Wrens and Robins. An enjoyable and productive morning and looking forward to the February session.

Jane Barnes SI Medway and Maidstone

Soroptimists Making a Difference

Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists had previously reported about preparing Christmas shoeboxes for vulnerable women and children in Kosovo and Romania.

This month we received a thank you letter from Blythswood with a certificate. It highlighted where the 47 boxes go and 'make a real difference'. Read on....

'Who do you share your shoes with? Do you wear them one day and someone else wear's them next? Or do you take turns morning and afternoon?.'

We delivered your gift-filled boxes to one family in Kosovo and discovered the boys took turns at wearing their one pair of shoes. The one who did not have any shoes was barefoot. He was glad to find socks in his box. The toddler in the family had nothing from the waist down. New underpants in the shoebox were put to good use very quickly.'

Imagine how much your gifts mean to them?.

Jane Barnes – SI Medway and Maidstone



♥ (With Love) From Me to You! ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

Some of you are probably singing the Beatles song by now in just seeing the title! I am, but then I did see them live during the 1960s, but I shan't go down memory lane. What members of SI Eastbourne have done is much more important. Those of you who were at the Federation Conference in Birmingham will remember the presentation by Alison Hitchcock from the charity 'From Me to You' (writing letters to those living with cancer to reduce social isolation and loneliness). Eastbourne club members wrote cards (20 in all) which were posted first thing in the new year. The club also sent a small donation (£20) to help towards postage to the recipients (they would be all women as Alison had promised that they would be).



The following is a message received from From Me to You:

'Please pass on a huge thank you to your wonderful members for embracing letter writing and taking the time to do this for us - we are so grateful. The new year can often be a quieter time for getting letters in, so they will be coming to us at the perfect time.'

It's extremely kind of you to send a donation to help with postage costs of your letters - thank you. This is always so appreciated.

On behalf of everyone whose days will be brightened because of your letters, thank you.

Best wishes,

Harriet '

The club has decided to write and send more cards later in the year (possibly around May time). What a simple but rewarding thing to do.

**By Joyce Boorman,
SI Eastbourne & District**



A Busy Evening at East Grinstead Club

Our speaker meeting on 7 January having been cancelled due to inclement weather, there was a great deal to fit into the 21 January Club evening.

At the beginning we were pleased to welcome Rosalind Crowther, the present warden of Sackville College, and to present her with a cheque for £400. This wonderful sum was raised at the Club's annual mince pie morning in December, the proceeds of which have traditionally been donated to Sackville College. The College is a Jacobean Almshouse in East Grinstead founded in 1609 by Robert Sackville and still in use as an Almshouse today.

Following the cheque presentation, we were delighted to welcome Steve Pond whose talk had been postponed from 7 January. Steve was introduced as East Grinstead's expert on the night sky an accolade he modestly denied! The presentation that followed, however, proved the accuracy of that title as Steve imparted his extensive, self-taught knowledge of the planet Jupiter. The planet is currently at its closest point to Earth and is obvious, on a clear night, for all to see despite its still being 395,000,000 miles away, a figure difficult to comprehend. We also learnt that Jupiter's equatorial diameter is approximately 11.2 times that of the earth and whilst the earth takes 24 hours to rotate around the sun, Jupiter takes approximately 9 hours and 55 minutes. Approximately 1340 earths could fit into Jupiter. At the end of the evening, Steve answered questions and told us what he loves most is using the naked eye to further his love of astronomy whilst appreciating that the telescope can add to the experience.

His enthusiasm dates back to the first Apollo Mission to the moon an interest that has gained him that well-deserved title, 'East Grinstead's expert on the night sky'. Leaving Jupiter, we came down to earth with a bang as there were a few urgent business matters to discuss!

**By Rosemary Stone/
Gill Beeney**



Soroptimist International Sevenoaks

Invitation to President Margaret's Charity Lunch at Nizels Golf & Country Club, Nizels Lane, Hildenborough, Kent TN11 8NX

In aid of West Kent MIND

Tuesday 17 March 2026 at 12.30 for 1pm

Speakers: Dr Roxanne St Clair, Regional President, Soroptimists International,
Pip Lawrence, Interim Chief Operating Officer, West Kent MIND, and also attending Cllr Tony Clayton,
Sevenoaks Town Mayor

Menu

Welcome soft drink

Main:

Roast Chicken Breast served with new potatoes, seasonal vegetables
& gravy, **or**

Pan Seared Salmon Fillet served with new potatoes, courgette ribbons & a
zesty lemon caper butter sauce. **or**

Rib of Beef slow-cooked short rib of beef with a rich gravy and served with
root vegetable mash and fine green beans, **or**

Cauliflower & Cheese Tart served with new potatoes, seasonal vegetables
and gravy (v)

Dessert:

Baked Apple Tart served with clotted cream ice cream (v) **or**

Calypso Chocolate Mousse served with whipped cream (v) **or**

Lemon Meringue Tart served with pouring cream (v)

Coffee & Mints

Pay Bar and RAFFLE

Please inform Margaret Crabtree at margaretc295@gmail.com all
guests names and contact details,

menu choices and any dietary requirements by the 23rd February 2026.
Please send payment as detailed below:

Cost: £38 per head. Please make payments by BACS transfer to:
Soroptimists International Sevenoaks

Sort Code: 090155 Account Number: 45827809. Please add your
name for reference

Or send a cheque made payable to SI Sevenoaks to:

Mrs Wendy Metcalf, Flat 2, Epicurus House, Akehurst Lane, Seven-
oaks, TN13 1NJ

On the Hub This Month



**ALL MEMBERS
WELCOME**

OPEN SIGBI LTD BOARD MEETING

**TUESDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2026
11.30-16:00 GMT**



**HPV vaccination is cancer
prevention – for women and
for men. Let's all get protected**





INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY
8 MARCH



2026 THEME:
Rights. Justice. Action.
For ALL Women and
Girls.



Bits and Pieces

SI Sevenoaks club members enjoyed a happy time at their Christmas party on Tuesday 9th December with some exotic food and fizz, plus some tricky quizzes from member Margaret Nicholson. We had a small collection in lieu of sending Christmas cards, and the sum of £45 was raised and forwarded to SIGBI for the Diamond Education Grant.

Sandie Higgs"



Hello Ladies

I hope you find the new newsletter layout enjoyable, I would like to hear your feedback. —please feel free to email me at soroptimistnewsletter@gmail.com. I'm also proposing that articles be limited to a max of **320 words for a full page— preferably less**, allowing space for pictures and artwork. I'd really appreciate your thoughts on this as well.

Happy New Year! May the year ahead bring you good health, prosperity, and peace.

With love,
Sherry Eskander
Newsletter Editor

