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EDITOR

Sherry Eskander

Deadline for January articles is Friday 23rd January

President's Message



“Harnessing Our Past to Secure Our Future”



Roxanne with Ameeta Sabharwal

Sending season's greetings to all members and loved ones.

December is a special time of year when many of us embrace the spirit of giving, from making up gift boxes to creating special decorations, and more. It reflects the true heart of Soroptimists.

Thank you to everyone who made it to our Regional Meeting in December, the energy in the room very upbeat and the ideas shared gave way to further discussion.

Our guest, Ameeta Sabharwal said

“It was inspirational to hear about the great work your members are doing.”



As mentioned at the meeting, my chosen charity for the year is Comfort Cases UK, they provide personal backpacks/duffle bags for children in care or care leavers: www.comfortcases.org. Their CEO, Sarah Jacoby, will be joining us in March to share more about their work and ways in which our region can help.

As we settle down for the holidays, my wish for you is peace, joy and love. May you end the year well and I look forward to connecting with you in 2026. Stay well.

In friendship,

Roxanne

Eastbourne Busy Bees!

Members of SI Eastbourne have certainly been busy bees during November and December.

Some participated in several events during the 16 Days of Activism including a silent march and a noisy march in the town centre, and a vigil outside the Town Hall, where the clock shone orange for the 16 days. We also posted comments daily on the club's Facebook page.



On 6 December the club had a stall at Hampden Park Community Centre's Christmas Fair selling decorations and cards raising £191.50p for the President's charity, Alzheimer's.

The following day, some members joined Lewes members at the East Sussex Foster Carers Christmas party, where they helped the foster children wrap presents for their foster parents. As one member said 'It was truly a 'bonkers' afternoon'. So, obviously an enjoyable event for all!



We did manage to relax with our Christmas lunch in between time.

Then, Christmas goody bags were delivered to the women's refuge for the women and children.

So, now it is a time of quiet until the new year. Happy Christmas everybody.

Joyce Boorman SI Eastbourne & District



East Sussex Foster Carers Christmas party

Goody bags for Women's Refuge



For over 10 years now the Eastbourne club have supported the ladies at the Eastbourne refuge at Christmas time with special presents all present in a large Christmas bag. The refuge are delighted with the gifts which they place under the Christmas tree as they receive several gifts at Christmas, but they are often for the children and not in bags ready for the 9 ladies.

The bags contained a Christmas card made by a club member, toiletries shower gel, shampoo, body lotion, shampoo and a make-up bag with hand cream, body spray deodorant and make up. A tin of chocolates and a teddy bear holding a cracker with a little note saying from the Eastbourne and District Soroptimists.

Denise Staplehurst – SI Eastbourne

Soroptimists Volunteer at G4 Christmas Concert in aid of Missing People



Angela Howe and Jane Barnes

Three members of SI Medway and Maidstone volunteered again this year at the G4 Christmas concert held at Rochester Cathedral on 25 November.

G4 are supporters of Missing People UK and over the past 21 years have raised more than £110,000 for this worthwhile cause. Did you know that:

- Someone is reported missing every 90 seconds in the UK.
- 170,000 people are reported missing every year in the UK.



Stella Barnes

Financial struggles, mental health problems and the exploitation of children mean that for many, the only option is to disappear.

As a Missing People volunteer we were able to enjoy a magical evening of beautiful music, singing along with the audience to Christmas classics performed by G4 and a local children's choir.

During the evening, some of the young people in the choir held up posters of those people missing, to raise awareness.

At the end of the evening, we were responsible for the bucket collection as the audience members were leaving. They were generous and we collected £717.26 on the night which had to be taken away, counted and then paid into the bank.

Jane Barnes SI Medway & Maidstone



Choir member with Missing People poster

Donation to Dandelion Time The Big Give Christmas Challenge

Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists had raised monies through holding Charity theatre evenings at Medway Little Theatre in Chatham organised by Angela Howe.

One organisation we chose to support was Dandelion Time who assist children with challenging emotional issues, often resulting from adverse childhood experiences, such as domestic violence, loss, abuse or neglect. Their systemic and trauma-informed approach, focuses on the family as a whole unit, helping them to recover from life events and improve relationships.

We were able to double our donation of **£200** during the [Big Give Christmas Challenge](#). From **2–9 December**, every pound would be matched and doubled. So our donation was matched and with Gift Aid became **£450**.

Dandelion Time sent out a thank you — together an incredible £44,284 was raised through the Big Give! .

Jane Barnes SI Medway & Maidstone



Hedge Planting at Barnett's Wood, Tunbridge Wells

In December 2025, Tunbridge Wells Soroptimist Communications Officer Caroline spent five hours at Barnett's Wood taking part in the Hedgerow Heroes Planting Project, run in partnership with Kent High Weald Partnership (KHWP). The project brought together a small community team to help improve local biodiversity and strengthen natural habitats.

KHWP's mission is to connect people with nature through conservation, education, and wellbeing activities, and this planting session was a good example of that in action. The group consisted of five community volunteers supported by two KHWP team members. Together, they planted 335 hedgerow plants, using a mix of native species:

- Hawthorn
- Alder buckthorn
- Field maple
- Guelder rose
- Blackthorn
- Dog rose



The work aligned closely with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 13: Climate Action and SDG 15: Life on Land, as the new hedgerow will support wildlife, increase habitat connectivity, and contribute to long-term environmental resilience.



Caroline returned home tired and extremely muddy but having learned a great deal. The team covered planting techniques for different soil conditions, how to construct biodegradable tree guards, and even discussed local species such as newts and soil invertebrates. On top of that, the chance to spend five hours away from the computer, watching birds overhead and taking care not to disturb worms, offered clear benefits for SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being.

Caroline Auckland SI Tunbridge Wells

Getting into the Christmas Spirit

Members of SI Croydon were spreading the Christmas spirit by supporting young people in the borough. Legacy Youth Zone invited the club to sponsor a bauble; for a specific donation the club could place a bauble on the centre's virtual Christmas tree. A young person from the centre would then decorate a bauble in the name of the donor. As informed by the centre, "Every donation, big or small, helps provide a safe, inspiring space where young people can discover their potential, build confidence, and feel part of a positive community. By sponsoring a bauble, you're not just decorating a tree — you're lighting up futures.

Your generosity will help fund vital programmes, warm meals, and opportunities that make a lasting difference for young people who need it most."

Roxanne St Clair SI Croydon and District



SITWD decorates Christmas Tree at local Charity Festival 2025

SITWD took part in the annual Christmas Tree Festival at King Charles the Martyr Church in Tunbridge Wells. The festival featured 28 uniquely decorated Christmas trees, each designed by local businesses, charities, schools, and community groups.

Visitors were invited to stroll through the displays and bid on the trees in silent auctions, with decorations included. All proceeds supported charities chosen by the tree decorators.

Club members voted to support the local charity Home-Start South West Kent, a community network of trained volunteers and professional support that helps families with young children through challenging times.

Club member Cherry Whytock, along with seven other members, created the decorations. These took the form of a continuous chain of linked women's hands from around the world, each one individually made.



The event was joyful and well attended, transforming the church into a festive wonderland that brought the community together while supporting vital local causes. Home-Start South West Kent will receive approximately £125 from the event.

Club members enjoyed creating together, knowing that the tree not only raised funds for charity but also helped raise awareness of the work of the Soroptimists..

Theresa Phillips SI Tunbridge Wells & District

Orange themed tree at Christmas Tree Festival in Medway

During the 16 Days of Activism, Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists were invited to take part in the Christmas Tree Festival at St Margarets Church, Rainham.

Jane and Stella Barnes decorated the tree with orange/bronze baubles, orange knitted flowers, SIGBI safety cards relating to STOP violence, Modern Trafficking, Travel Safely, HPV and eliminating Cervical Cancer.

Literature about 'Love me... Love me not ..', Membership plus two orange knitted Trauma bears were on show to promote the work we do as Soroptimists and about becoming a member.

Jane Barnes SI Medway and Maidstone



East Grinstead provide some Christmas Cheer for Crawley Open House and 'I Choose Freedom'

Again this year we were overwhelmed by the generosity of our members in providing Christmas gifts and basic necessities for the Club's two main charities, Crawley Open House and I Choose Freedom, a local women's refuge. Members descended upon the home of Jane Griffiths laden with bags of presents, turning her garage into a Christmas grotto. As in previous years there was a particular emphasis on donating new socks and underwear for both men and women who either reside at or drop into Crawley Open House.



At an earlier talk by their Fundraising Manager, we were horrified to learn that clients come in off the streets, enjoy a much-needed shower and then have no clean underwear to put on. Warm hats, gloves and scarves were included on their wish list as well as chocolates and biscuits along with ongoing requirements such as long-life milk, tinned foods and toiletries.

For I Choose Freedom (ICF), our local women's refuge, we not only collected a wide range of gifts from their women's and children's wish lists but were also delighted to be able to send them 70 teddy

bears. A local resident, Corina, with whom the Club has forged a relationship, had amazingly collected 816 teddies over the course of just 3 weeks, seventy of which she passed to us. Others have made their way, via local charities, to various new 'homes' including some in Ukraine. Grateful thanks go to Corina, Lingfield College and the many generous teddy bear donors for providing extra Christmas joy for the refuge's residents.



Kate, a member of their staff was amazed at the number of bags, full of gifts, that she packed into the boot of her car. She was also able to tell us that thanks to a £600 donation from the Royal Ashdown Golf Club, with whom we collaborate, and £400 from our Club, both of which were matched by the Big Gift, ICF had exceeded its fundraising target of £12,000 enabling them to buy welcome packs for each family they house. These packs contain bedding, crockery and cooking utensils that the families take with them when they leave the refuge.

It is not only enjoyable but heartwarming to be

able to spread some happiness into the lives of those who, without the support of strangers, would not be able to enjoy the festive season in the way that we all take for granted.



SITWD supporting the local Community Safety Partnership

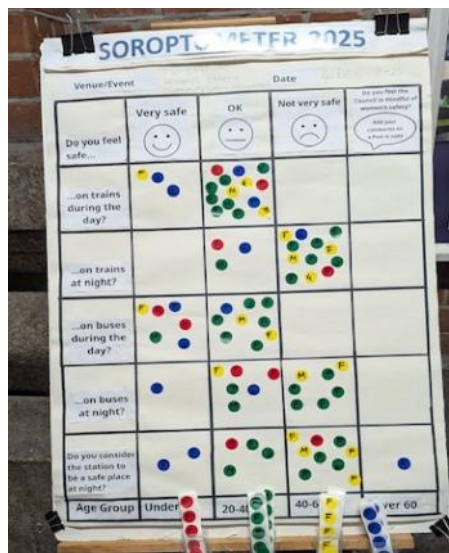
One December evening, two members of the Tunbridge Wells and District Club joined the local Community Safety Partnership (CSP) at Tunbridge Wells Railway Station to engage with the travelling public on safety-related issues.

Armed with the Soroptometer—a tool featuring six safety questions—they engaged passers-by and also supported the promotion of the White Ribbon pledge.

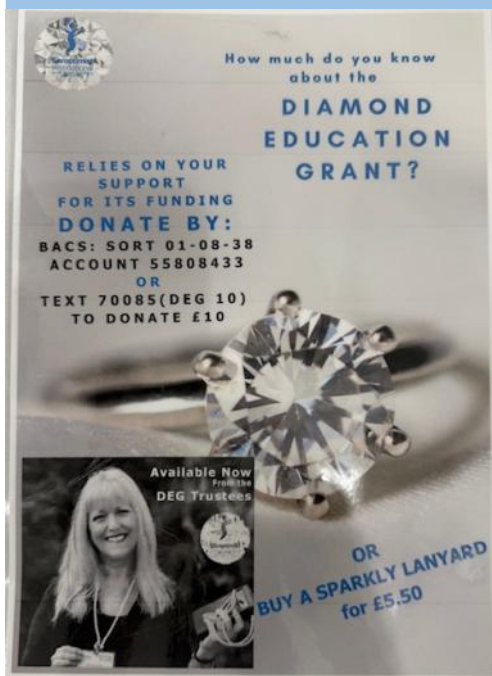
SITWD President, Jill Ruddock, and Treasurer Louise Taylor (designer of the Soroptometer) spent a few hours alongside CSP and White Ribbon representatives, inviting commuters to consider the five safety-related questions on the Soroptometer.

These questions focused on how safe people feel while traveling on trains and buses, both during the day and at night, as well as whether they view the station as a safe place after dark.

The feedback collected will be shared with public, voluntary, and community organizations to help enhance safety and make the borough a safer place for everyone.



News from Region



Donations from Members/Clubs/Region are always welcome to Diamond Education Grant

President Roxanne presents Pat Dale with a certificate from SIGBI Programme Director Lindsey Green for 'Loud and Proud'



SI Medway & Maidstone

Making a Difference in December

During the 16 Days of Activism, Medway and Maidstone Soroptimist members were active and engaging in a variety of activities. On 2 December, a Zoom Get together with our Friendship Link Clubs was held each sharing what we had been doing to 'Orange the World'.

Members are aware of the financial struggles many families experience to put food on the table and so supported the Medway Foodbank Reverse Advent Calendar Appeal. Two boxes of festive food items and toiletries were delivered to Medway Foodbank in time for Christmas. Whilst surplus toiletries and sanitary products from the Shoebox appeal were delivered by Nellie Adjaye and Janet Hughes to the Maidstone Salvation Army and were well received.

On 3 December more than 60 Soroptimists and friends attended a Charity Preview production of 'A Sherlock Carol' at Medway Little Theatre organised by Angela Howe. It was an hilarious play enjoyed by all raising £426 with sale of tickets and raffle for Soroptimist Charities.

Twelve Trauma bears knitted by Jane Barnes were given on 8 December to the Head of SEN at Byron School after listening to a Governor presentation about the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) programme and a new specialist unit for children with severe mental health challenges.

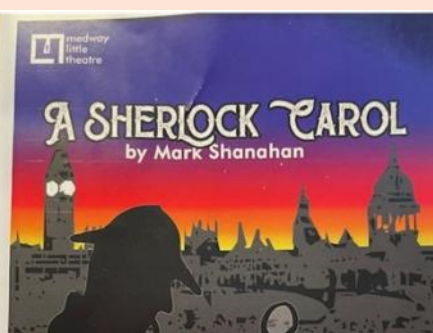
Three current Soroptimist members and 2 former members volunteered for 135 hours at the Blythwood Shoebox Collection Point in Maidstone during November and December. More than 11,000 shoeboxes were checked and packed in 1150 cartons by 11 December, when the final transport lorry was loaded and left for vulnerable people living in Kosovo and Romania.

In time for Human Rights Day and SI Foundation Day (10 December), our Christmas Newsletter was published by Jane Barnes with member's Christmas messages in lieu of exchanging Christmas cards. Pledges raised £245 for SI Foundation.

Jane Barnes SI Medway and Maidstone



Reverse Advent Food Donations to Medway Foodbank



Charity theatre evening raises £426



12 Trauma Bears for Byron School



135 hours volunteering at Maidstone Shoebox Collection Point

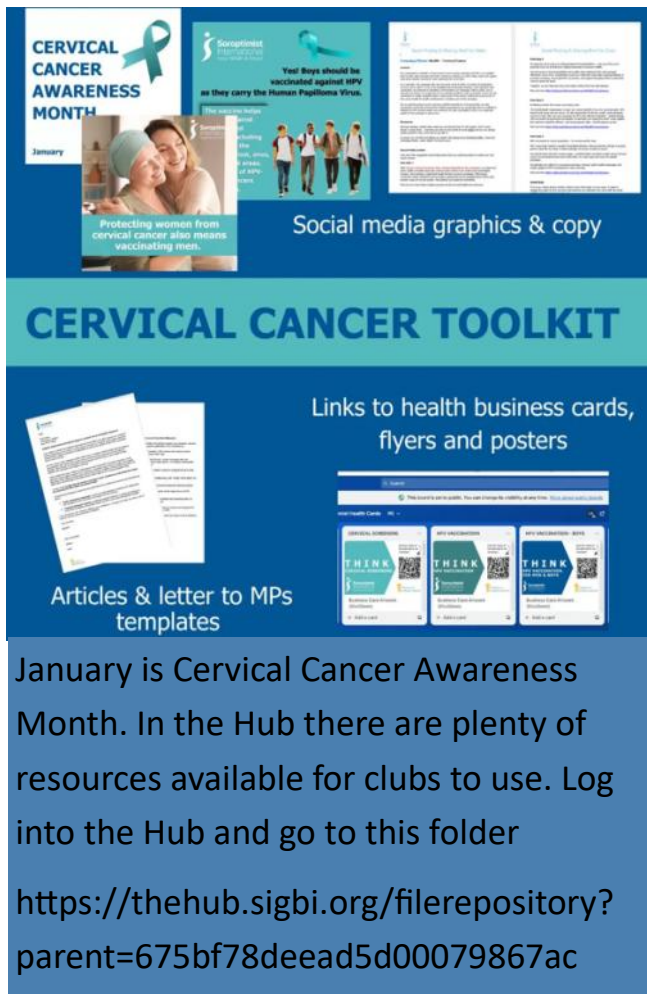


Christmas Newsletter Pledges raises £245 for SI Foundation



7 Hampers and Gifts delivered to Medway and Maidstone Refuges

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY IN 2026



CERVICAL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH
January

Protecting women from cervical cancer also means vaccinating men.

Social media graphics & copy

CERVICAL CANCER TOOLKIT

Links to health business cards, flyers and posters

Articles & letter to MPs templates

January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month. In the Hub there are plenty of resources available for clubs to use. Log into the Hub and go to this folder <https://thehub.sigbi.org/filerepository?parent=675bf78deead5d00079867ac>



Big Garden Birdwatch

23-25 January 2026

Big Garden Birdwatch

As part of the world's largest wildlife survey. Every year hundreds of thousands of nature lovers take part helping to build a picture of how garden birds are faring.

Spend an hour watching the birds in your patch/garden between 23 and 25 January and record the birds that land.



Matthew Scott

Kent Police and Crime Commissioner

Speaker at SI Medway and Maidstone's club meeting on

Thursday 12 February

at 7.30pm

at Holiday Inn, Rochester.

Visitors welcome



SIGBI Conference 2026
Cardiff

30 - 31 OCTOBER

Soroptimist Conference 2026 will take place at Holland House Hotel & Spa, 30th – 31st October 2026.

Further information about the conference is on the new conference website. Further information about accommodation and a promotional video featuring Cardiff is now available.

Registration opens in May 2026.

<https://sigbi.org/cardiff2026/>

We hope you'll join us!