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EDITOR

Sherry Eskander

Deadline for December articles is Tuesday 23rd December

President's Message

“Harnessing Our Past to Secure Our Future”

Welcome to our November newsletter.

It has certainly been a busy month, from the SiGBI Conference in Birmingham to Painting the streets orange as we march through Bromley and Canterbury.

Over 20 members from 8 South East England clubs travelled to Birmingham for our annual conference, representing us as volunteers, workshop facilitators and delegates. Thank you Past President Sue, for organising the delicious meal at Nisha Katona's Mowgli restaurant. Of course, we had to round the evening off with a few photos in front of the now iconic Ozzy the Raging Bull, a legacy of the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Congratulations to SI Bromley on the launch of your Fresh Thoughts booklet, which was very well received by those in attendance at the launch event. I am sure that the resource will not only prove invaluable to DV survivors, but will also ease some of the burden faced by the frontline agencies.



President at work; Roxanne and Lorna Blackmore (SI Tunbridge Wells) at Silent March Canterbury



My visit to Medway and Maidstone was much more than expected. An invitation to attend a talk being given by one of Southeastern Railway's Safeguarding Officers was in fact an extension of the Railway Safety survey.

The club has opened the door for SISEE to work closely with the Safeguarding Team to address women and girls staying safe whilst travelling. It is early days, but more information will be shared as the partnership progresses and SISEE's involvement is clarified.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you at our Regional Meeting on the 6th December at the Holiday Inn Rochester.

Yours in friendship,

Roxanne

EAST GRINSTEAD CLUB WELCOME UPDATE ON ONE OF THEIR MAIN CHARITIES



At their October speaker meeting East Grinstead Club were delighted to welcome Kate Geraghty, Fundraising Administrator at 'I Choose Freedom', a charity they have been supporting for several years. Kate reported that



coercive control, one of the primary risk factors in domestic homicides, was only criminalised in 2015 and it was as recently as 2021 that children who witness domestic abuse were recognised as survivors in their own right.

Figures published by the Crime Survey for England and Wales in 2025 estimate that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 years. Police receive a phone call every 30 seconds meaning that 90 people would have made a call in the 45 minutes during which Kate was speaking.

During 2024 the charity welcomed 250 women and child survivors but sadly many had to be turned away as 12 referrals are received for each room space available.

'I Choose Freedom' not only provides a place of safety for survivors but also an 'Opening Doors' programme to help women find employment. They organise training in CV writing and interview technique as well as providing vouchers to buy suitable clothing for job interviews. In addition, an 'Expanding Resettlement' programme assists with finding accommodation, how to stay out of debt and the transition to independent living.

Children are supported in schools and given activities such as art therapy to help them regain their childhood. The charity is also able to arrange trips and celebrations such as a visit from Father Christmas.

For some years now, East Grinstead Club, as part of its support, have been collecting Christmas gifts for 'I Choose Freedom' residents. After her talk, Kate provided two Christmas Wish Lists, one for adults and the other for children. In early December, brand new gifts will be delivered to the home of one of the Club members ready for collection by the charity. Our aim is to give the women and children the happiest Christmas possible at a difficult time in their lives.

Gill Beeney/Rosemary Stone



Speaker at Regional Meeting Diamond Education Grant - What can Soroptimists Do?

**SISEE
Region
Meeting
on
6th
December
2025
at
Holiday
Inn,
Rochester**

Ameeta Sabharwal is a member of SI St Albans.

Ameeta serves as a committed trustee of the Diamond Education Grant, a charity devoted to giving girls and young women a second chance in life through access to education, skills development, and transformative support.



Guided by the belief that opportunity can change everything, Ameeta helps steer the foundation's mission to empower those who have faced barriers to fulfilling their potential and that every grant awarded not only opens doors but also restores hope, dignity, and possibility.

As a Soroptimist Ameeta is a fervent activist for women's rights and has long championed initiatives that challenge inequality and uplift the voices of girls and women for a more equitable society.

EAST GRINSTEAD EXTENDS ITS ANTI-SPIKING CAMPAIGN

At its meeting at the beginning of October, East Grinstead's Programme Action team discussed a range of projects but also spent time preparing materials to extend the Club's already well-received anti-spiking initiative. The following day, two members Jane and Gill, took to the streets of the town to spread the news. They visited seven establishments none of which was known to have a particular problem with spiking. Nevertheless, the proprietors were willing to display posters and have glass toppers available for use should they be needed.

Jane and Gill were delighted with the positive response they received, with nearly everyone visited accepting that spiking is a national problem and possibly one of which most people are not fully aware. Heartened by the response, they promised to return and provide more glass toppers as necessary.



Gill Beeney/Rosemary Stone

East Grinstead Community Bonfire



On the coldest night of the year so far, East Grinstead members were 'warmed' by a presentation from, Jon, Cam, Adam (Chairman) and Alison of the East Grinstead Bonfire Society. Chairman Adam delivered a very passionate presentation on their work.

The foundations of East Grinstead Community Bonfire were laid in June 2019 and in 2022, with the support of East Grinstead Town Council and Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC), East Grinstead

Community Bonfire Society was formed. Fundraising began in earnest at the Lions' May Fair and the Society's badge and banner were designed. Burgess Hill Bonfire Society provided East Grinstead with much help including practical experience in running an event. Early in 2023 East Grinstead members began coppicing wood for their torches ready for their first event to be held that October. [None of this would have happened without a generous grant from MSDC.](#)

The audience learned of the significance of the Orange and Green Jumpers that indicate East Grinstead. By all wearing the same 'uniform' it was – in days gone by – more difficult to be identified if problems arose at events. Some would wear masks, others would blacken their faces to avoid being identified. Each Society has different colour stripes in its jumpers.

The Society, a Community Interest Company (CIC), seems not only to have made a huge impact within the Town of East Grinstead but also within the community of Bonfire Societies across Sussex. These societies are not all about fires and fireworks but also about raising money for charity whilst spreading 'joy'. Profits made are reinvested into the

community. During the month of October, the Bonfire Societies of Sussex have events most weekends. After that the cycle of preparation begins again as they plan for the next year's processions. The residents of East Grinstead would not have enjoyed any of this without a generous grant from MSDC. As the Community Bonfire has gained more members as well as more grants and donations being received, the Society's dreams and aspirations have grown and the event has become bigger and better. Thousands of spectators attended in 2025 raising over £3000 for charity.



This was an informative, interesting and enthusiastic presentation – a huge 'Thank You' to Adam, Jon, Cam and Alison!

Rosemary Stone

Your Health Matters

On Tuesday 21 October various local agencies and volunteer groups filled Chequer Mead Apron Bar and Coffee Shop, the in-house refreshment area in the theatre and community complex. Following on from the recent launch of 'HerMove, East Grinstead' campaign by Town Mayor, John Belsey, an initiative designed to empower women and girls through sport, well-being and community, East Grinstead Club decided to have a table of materials to showcase our work relating to the well-being of Women and Girls.

Gill Beeney, Hilary Rowberry and Sue Edgar met old friends and made new friends resulting in Hilary's taking her STEM roadshow to the Brownies of Burgess Hill in the near future.



Following on from the networking event, Sue Edgar joined Meridian Radio (a local East Grinstead community radio station) and was interviewed by Alyson the presenter of the weekly 'Your Health Matters' show. Sue was interviewed and presented Soroptimist International - locally, regionally and internationally. Rosemary Stone

SI Folkestone Remembers

SI Folkestone members Susannah De Sanvil and Yvonne Freeman represented the club by attending the Remembrance Day Service at the war memorial in Folkestone. The parade from the bandstand to the war memorial was followed by the Service of Remembrance and then the laying of the wreaths by the various organisations present. Susannah & Yvonne at the war memorial following the laying of the wreath. Susannah and I both feel honoured to have laid the wreath for all those who gave their lives in World Wars I & II so that we might live in freedom today. Yvonne Freeman SI Folkestone Club



SI Whitstable and District Relaunches Whitstable Repair Cafe

A team from SI Whitstable and District worked for nearly a year on plans for the relaunch of Whitstable Repair Cafe. The previous Repair Cafe closed in 2020, due to the Covid pandemic. The relaunch took place on 8th November 2025 and was a great success!

Repair Cafes are a global network of meeting places where broken items are repaired. For example, clothes, furniture, electrical appliances, bicycles, crockery and toys. 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

An impressive 28 out of 30 items brought to the Repair Cafe were repaired. This success is due to a great team effort from Whitstable and District Club members, who ensured that everything was planned meticulously and implemented smoothly on the day. A talented team of volunteer repairers were recruited and gave their time and expertise generously. Visitors to the Repair Cafe trusted the team with their broken possessions. The launch was supported by the Lord Mayor of Canterbury Councillor Keji Moses and Lady Mayoress Carol Reed (who are also members of SI Canterbury), plus local Councillors Chris and Charlotte Cornell, all kindly showing a keen interest in learning about the Repair Cafe.

Whitstable and District Club members are focussed on how the Repair Cafe helps to deliver several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, including:

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

Building on the success of 8th November, the next Whitstable Repair Cafe is on 10th January 2026, 10.00 am to 1.00 pm at the Umbrella Centre, Oxford Street, Whitstable. Following that, the Repair Cafe will run once a 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. Enquiries can be emailed to whitstablerepair-cafe2025@gmail.com

We look forward to welcoming more visitors to our Repair Cafe soon!

Mags Harrison Communications Officer SI Whitstable and District



47 Shoeboxes for Christmas to Kosovo

Six Medway and Maidstone members met up on 29 October to fill shoeboxes for Christmas at a member's home as part of the Blythwood Care Christmas Appeal.

In preparation, 47 empty shoeboxes had been collected and wrapped ready to be filled. Our target group were women and girls age 10+. Items identified on the checklist provided had been knitted or purchased by members. These essential

items included hat, scarf, gloves, underwear, socks, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, sweets, and a toy/gift plus other items such as pens, pencils, notepads, and hairbrushes.

During the afternoon we were busy and had a fun time and successfully filled all 47 shoeboxes. The shoeboxes were loaded up into Jane Barnes' car and delivered to the Collection Point in Maidstone the next day.

In 2024, over 85,000 shoeboxes were sent by Blythwood Care to eight different countries – Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Kosovo, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine. The individually wrapped boxes are distributed in schools, hospitals, orphanages, and care homes, and to households in very low-income communities. The shoeboxes from our local Collection Point will be going to Kosovo.



Angel Delight!

SI Eastbourne has a craft group, and in support of the President's charity this year – Alzheimer's – members of that group have been making items to sell at Christmas fairs.

A particular item has been wonderful angels made from dried poppy heads. Some Club members grew the poppies from seed and dried them. Then Immediate Past President, Lotte Peasgood, has done the rest! She has given them golden crowns, wings and stands.

To date she has made over a hundred, with more to come and has sold £100+ worth. There is another fair on December 6th which hopefully will add more to the fund raising.

Well done, Lotte, and thank you.

Joyce Boorman, SI Eastbourne & District



Every year Medway and Maidstone member, Carol McKeough hosts a soup kitchen at her home as a fundraiser. As part of our commitment to the 16 Days of Activism we wanted to raise monies for the SI Foundation.

SI Foundation provides funding for projects that aim to Educate, Empower and Enable the lives of women and girls around the world. Projects and programmes will be funded in countries to improve the lives of all women and girls. Through the money raised, the projects funded, will focus on the following three Soroptimist International Objectives:

- The advancement of education
- The relief and/or prevention of poverty
- The advancement of human rights, peace, equality and diversity

On 22 November, 12 members were at Carol's Soup kitchen many wearing something orange. We had a great time enjoying a selection of homemade soups and bread followed by desserts all provided by members. Everyone made a financial contribution and £220 was raised, which will be donated to the SI Foundation.

Jane Barnes SI Medway and Maidstone



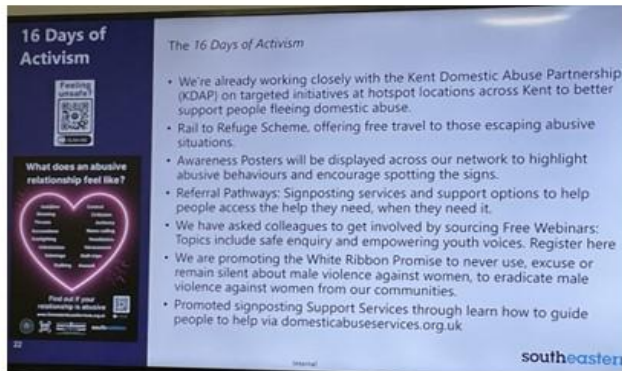
Friendship Link members meet at Conference



Janet Garnons-Williams and Jenny Jones from SI Medway and Maidstone met up with members of SI Heswall and district at Conference. Ann McKillop had been in contact prior to conference suggesting a meeting for the first time face to face for our two Friendship Link clubs. The photograph shows Jenny and Janet with 4 members of SI Heswall.

Jane Barnes SI Medway and Maidstone

Southeastern Rail Safeguarding at Medway and Maidstone Meeting



Southeastern Rail
16 Days of Activism



November club
meeting



Janet Hughes, Adam Downing, Cllr
Martin Round, Mayor of Maidstone
with Regional President Roxanne



President Roxanne presents
Wanda Wright with long
service certificate

We were fortunate to welcome three guests at our November club meeting. They were Cllr Martin Round, Mayor of Maidstone, Adam Downing, Southeastern Rail Safeguarding and Regional President Roxanne St Clair.

Adam gave an excellent presentation about the work of the Safeguarding team, which has only been in place for 2 years. They have a dedicated team based in Ashford. There are 24 officers dedicated to preventing anti-social behaviour. There are 90 rail Enforcement Officer across the network.

In Kent there are 165 stations, 4000 employees and 500,000+ passengers with 1,700 trains daily to London.

A large part of their work is suicide prevention. As part of their support for the 16 Days of Activism, Southeastern Rail are working with Kent Domestic Abuse Partnership on targeted initiatives at hotspot locations across Kent to better support people fleeing domestic abuse.

Medway and Maidstone members are hoping to explore with Adam opportunities to work together in the future on Women and rail safety issues.

President Roxanne was pleased to hear that Southern Railways are making passenger safety a priority. She spoke with Adam before the presentation, and he asked that we have a follow up conversation and gave Roxanne his contact details. Roxanne has reached out to Lindsay Green to find out how she would like us to proceed in line with the SIGBI safety project, and we just need to feed back to the working group.

President Roxanne presented Wanda Wright with her long service certificate for her 25 years of service to Soroptimism in Medway and Maidstone.

It was a very full, informative and interesting meeting enjoyed by all in attendance.

Jane Barnes SI Medway and Maidstone

SIGBI Annual Conference in Birmingham 2025

Friday, 31st October – Sunday, 2nd November

We were pleased to welcome Siew Yong Gnanalingam, Soroptimist International President to the conference and Africa Federation's President, Mary Muia, who leads the federation as an SI Authorised Representative. The SIGBI Annual Conference always provides the opportunity to meet up with old friends and also to make new friends. I had the opportunity to catch up with two representatives of the former UKPAC (UK Programme Action Committee) namely Pam Robertson and Rita Beaumont both from SI London Chilterns Region, with whom I had the pleasure of working whilst I was the Regional Representative for SI South East England Region.

The conference opened with the traditional flag ceremony on Friday afternoon and this was followed by two keynote speakers. The first was Suzie Imber, Space Physicist, who dedicates much of her time widening opportunities for disadvantaged young people to study science.

The second keynote was Shazia Choudhry, Professor at the Faculty of Law,

Wadham College. Shazia's research is focused on gender, human rights and violence against women and she was the UK's candidate for election to the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) committee in 2024.



From left to right: Rita Beaumont, Pam Robertson, Yvonne Freeman & Mary Muia

On Friday evening we held our Regional dinner at Mowgli's Indian Restaurant in Birmingham New Street Station. Saturday was dedicated to workshops/breakout sessions covering a wide range of topics. Some workshops were run by Soroptimists and others by outside speakers. There was indeed something for everyone.

Sunday morning included the Annual General Meeting led by Outgoing President Ruth Healey, the Best Practice Awards led by Programme Director Lindsay Green, the Delegates Choice for the Best Practice Award and the Change of Insignia to the Incoming President Gillie O'Rourke with her opening address.

The location for next year's Annual Conference has already been determined and we will be returning to Cardiff, which I know was very popular with those members who attended the last conference there in 2017.

Yvonne Freeman

Regional Programme Action Officer & SIGBI Benevolent Fund Trustee
SI South East England Region



SI Tunbridge Wells and District Listening Project

In August 2024, SITWD held an 'Away Day' to reflect on past achievements and plan future projects. We decided to go beyond just gathering input from club members, and to actively support issues reflecting the wider needs of women & girls in the Tunbridge Wells area.

What did it involve?

To better understand those needs, we set out to engage directly with a diverse group of local women and girls, to find out how they feel about living in the area. Thirteen club members collaborated to design a 'Structured Conversation' template to guide conversations with individuals or groups.

The conversation starts with two key questions: the first encourages participants to share what they feel is going well in their community. This positive framing has proved powerful. Many women take time to reflect, and their thoughtful responses are often uplifting and empowering. The second question invites ideas for improvement, with a focus on constructive suggestions rather than complaints.



So far, we've heard from 110 women and girls from a wide range of backgrounds. We talked to women at community coffee mornings and mum & toddler groups for example. We collated and analysed responses to identify recurring themes, which will help to shape our future projects.

What We Learned?

Overall, feedback has been heartening. Many women expressed positivity about Tunbridge Wells and their local communities. Suggestions for improvement were varied, with no single dominant issue; concerns commonly raised included public transport, accessibility, and the condition of the town centre. To help take these concerns

forward, we've arranged a meeting with the CEO of the local Borough Council to share our findings from women across the town.

One particularly impactful result arose from our engagement with the local Muslim Women's Group, who expressed a wish for access to women-only fitness and swimming sessions. In response, we approached the local Leisure Centre, whose manager agreed to introduce a weekly women-only swim session with female lifeguards. Around 25 women now attend each week, and participants consistently describe the atmosphere as more relaxed and welcoming than mixed sessions

The Soroptometer

Where structured conversations aren't practical, we deploy an interactive visual tool we call the Soroptometer, which allows women to express their thoughts about common issues affecting their lives. Used at public events, it's an informal way of gauging valuable insights into women's priorities. For example, concerns raised about local women's healthcare have prompted several members to join their GP's Patient Participation Groups, ensuring that women's voices are heard at both a local and a strategic level.

Being large and colourful, the Soroptometer invites attention and interaction, raising the profile of the club in the town.



Jean Meadows and Theresa Phillips

Christmas Hampers for Medway and Maidstone Women's Refuges



As part of our commitment to support the 16 Days of Activism each year is to provide Christmas hampers and gifts to the women and children at the local Women's Refuges.

Contact was made with each Refuge to find out how many women and children are currently being supported to know how many we need to cater for. An application was made in October to our Medway Soroptimist Charitable Trust for up to £400 to go towards funding food, toiletries, and gifts for the hampers and this was approved.

A date was agreed for members to fill the hampers after the Soup Kitchen. Seven large boxes were wrapped in Christmas paper ready for filling. Two members agreed to do the shopping for the hampers purchasing mince pies, Christmas puddings, custard, chocolate biscuits, cheese biscuits, Christmas cake, tubs of sweets, Christmas crackers, crisps and various savoury nibbles plus fruit juices and sparkling drinks. A gift was bought and wrapped for each of the women. Members bought the children's gifts.

Everything was transported to Carol McKeough's, and we successfully prepared the hampers. We filled them with all the goodies to ensure the Women and children have a good Christmas and know they are not forgotten. Carol McKeough delivered the hamper for Maidstone Refuge.

Jane Barnes SI Medway and Maidstone

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Turning Faversham Orange!

Whitstable & District Soroptimists, Faversham Town Council and SATEDA came together on 25th November to mark the start of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. The UN Secretary-General's global campaign, held annually from 25th November to 10th December, encourages communities around the world to raise awareness, spark conversations and take meaningful action to end violence against women and girls.

A group of Whitstable & District Soroptimists braved the cold on this chilly November evening and attended an event in Faversham Town Hall, hosted by the Mayor of Faversham. It was well supported by members of the local community including representatives from the local police and churches. The Mayor spoke briefly, from his own perspective, on how important it is for men to speak up against any forms of discrimination against women likely to cause distress or harm; the Town Council is proudly White Ribbon Accredited (a global movement encouraging men and boys to actively challenge and prevent violence against women).



Soroptimist Jane Webb then gave a short address explaining the Soroptimists involvement in the UN's 16 days of activism. This was followed by the CEO from SATEDA, a Kent-based domestic abuse charity; she explained how the charity provides advice and long-term support to help survivors of domestic abuse rebuild their lives.

At 5.00 pm the Mayor led a countdown that ended with the Town Hall being officially lit up in orange; the clockface on the Guildhall tower opposite was also shining orange, symbolising hope and a brighter future free from violence and fear. Visitors to the town will see both buildings lit up in orange every evening for the 16 days of activism.

Back in the Town Hall, with tea and delicious cakes provided, it was a chance to network and consider how these new partnerships might be developed in the future and what new opportunities might arise to enable us to provide continued support for women and girls.

Mary Chippendale SI Whitstable and District

Silent March in Canterbury

SI Canterbury organised their fifth Silent March through the streets of Canterbury on Saturday 29th November. The March included local women's organisations, staff and volunteers from local domestic violence survivor and counselling services, Soroptimists from across the South East, friends, relatives and members of the public.

Many of the silent marchers wore orange and held orange placards, the colour of the United Nations 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence worldwide for a future free of violence against women and girls. This colour, and the impact of almost one hundred people moving silently through the busy city streets, sparked local attention and discussion.

There were inspiring speeches from four wonderful guests. Blu, a survivor of domestic violence, shared her story of how and why she became an unwitting victim and of what she needed from friends and family to help her move away from that situation. Our Lord Mayor, Keji Moses, and member of SI Canterbury, highlighted the frequency of domestic violence within our communities, especially as experienced by children. Bishop Rose, the Bishop of Dover, spoke of the importance of a collective responsibility not only for victims but also the fostering and identification of perpetrators. Roxanne St Claire, our Regional President, closed the speeches by noting the importance of public events, like the Silent March, for raising public awareness of this critical social issue.

Together these speeches argued for a wider and ongoing awareness of the fact of domestic violence in all communities, and of its impact on families and individuals.

The event was a great success in many ways. While the march was silent, it spoke loudly of the need for wider awareness in this pressing issue. The speeches galvanised many of us to increase support for the provision of local services, essential to women escaping domestic violence. The event was also a great opportunity for Soroptimists from across the region to come together, and to meet women from local and national organisations. We want to thank the clubs who supported us by coming to the March.

Canterbury Silent March Photos



SI Sevenoaks join SI Bromley for their Silent March to Raise Awareness about Violence Against Women and Girls

Nine members and friends from SI Sevenoaks travelled to Bromley to join SI Bromley in their Silent March on Tuesday 25th November, the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism on Violence Against Women and Girls.

Dressed in our orange hats and jumpers, we had a coffee together at Wetherspoons then marched up and down the High Street, placards in hand. We did receive some support from members of the public and handed out cards with our message.



Our picture, sent to us by Alison Driscoll, shows us part way through the march. We had a beautiful sunny day and there was a real feeling of unity in our cause. Following the march members gathered at The Hub in The Glades and were regaled with coffee and brownies and later vegetable lasagne! Very much appreciated! SI Sevenoaks are very grateful to SI Bromley for their invitation to join the march and for their kind hospitality afterwards.

Sandie Higgs SI Sevenoaks"

SI Croydon thank Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA) for offering their shop front in the Centrale Shopping Centre for the 16 Days of Activism. In addition to raising awareness members aim to use the opportunity to attract potential new members.

