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Editor: Sherry Eskander

Deadline for April articles is Wednesday 22nd, email Jane at barnes786@btinternet.com



SISEE President's Message

Welcome to our latest SISEE regional newsletter. As the sun continues to shine, I hope that you are feeling the joys of spring as much as I am.

Thank you to everyone who joined us on Saturday 14th of March for our quarterly regional meeting. Our guest speaker, Sarah Jacoby, CEO and founder of Comfort Cases UK (<https://comfortcasesuk.org/>), truly moved us with her passionate talk about the origins and impact of the charity. The essential work that they do, reminding children in and leaving care that they matter, is not only essential, but increasingly needed to help them grow into confident and significant members of society.

As Comfort Cases UK is the chosen charity for my presidential year, I asked Sarah to share how we can support their work. If you're a crafter, they need cotton drawstring bags, sanitary pouches and knitted/crocheted 'Barry' sloths. Club Secretaries should have received an email with details. We are also planning a packing day, which will be a wonderful opportunity for members to come together and help prepare rucksacks for the children.

Thank you to Hilary Rowberry for leading an informative STEM session, giving members an opportunity to make and launch paper rockets. I'm not sure whose travelled the furthest though.

As I continue my journey around the region, I was delighted to attend SI Sevenoaks President's Lunch. It was lovely to see members from other clubs in attendance. Hearing about the work of West Kent Mind was particularly insightful, their four-pronged approach supports the local community by building resilience among young people, the workforce, and those who may feel isolated. Congratulations President Margaret on a successful and meaningful gathering.

Finally, congratulations to SI Tunbridge Wells on the launch of the Women's Grassroots Activism Toolkit 100+, a fantastic collaborative achievement and an important contribution.

Wishing everyone a progressive and uplifting month ahead.

In friendship,

Roxanne.



International Women's Day Lunch, at The Mayor's

Several members of SI Sevenoaks celebrated International Women's Day by attending a lunch organised by the Sevenoaks Town Council and hosted by Mayor Cllr Tony Clayton.

The event welcomes local working women and volunteers, school-girls and apprentices - so that we can enjoy the speakers and lunch and network together. The speakers were excellent - Linden Kemkaran, Leader of the Kent County Council, Emily Heritage, who works in the construction industry and Renee Imafidon, a gender equality personality and entrepreneur.

After a pleasant lunch the Mayor called the raffle and a good sum was raised for his local charities. We all received IWD badges and pens - a nice touch! Pictured are SI Club Members Linda Larter (our Town Clerk), Tracey Kemp, Eleanor Burns, Club President Margaret Crabtree, Mayor Cllr Tony Clayton, Penny Robbins, Cllr Marilyn Canet and Sandie Higgs. *By Sandie Higgs, SI Sevenoaks*



FEDERATION
VACANCIES
2026

For more information log in to your
account on the Hub

Shirley and her Teddies

SI Sevenoaks were delighted to hear a talk by member Shirley Brigham on 10th March about her wonderful work making trauma teddies. Shirley knits these whilst watching television - she says it keeps her awake - and currently she has knitted more than 900 bears! The teddies have been donated to schools, police and hospitals and the latest batch has just been delivered to Ukraine for children there. Here is a little report from the charity's newsletter:

'Is there anything that says 'we care' more than a box of lovingly knitted bears? Thanks to the enthusiasm of Shirley, one of our supporters who lives in Sevenoaks, this box of 100 bears was sent to Ukraine in a recent shipment. Alla, from Ukraine on Palms, the charity we partner with in Ukraine, forwarded this note from a grateful recipient:

"... this is the mother of a little boy, thank you very much, I received the parcel. I was standing at the post office and waiting for my parcel to be brought. I see the guy carrying the parcel and I wonder if it's mine or not, but then I saw the inscription Luhansk region is mine and tears came to my eyes, I write and also tears in my eyes, and when I opened the parcel and there was a knitted teddy bear toy, emotions flooded. I caught myself thinking that I would keep the toy for life, somehow it looks homely.

Thank you for all the gifts. Happy holidays, peace, health, goodness and a Guardian Angel for many years to come". Says it all doesn't it?' (There were a few moist eyes when Shirley read this out to us! We are very proud of her - still working away in her 91st year - what a credit to our club she is!

By Sandie Higgs SI Sevenoaks



To support the Governance Director in achieving the tasks on her workplan, in order to make a valuable contribution to SIGBI's Strategic Plan.

KEY TASKS

- Attend regular meetings.
- Contribute to achieving the work plan.
- Helping to compile, reading, and commenting on draft documents.
- Take on tasks/responsibilities for the Director, and provide information.
- Be a sounding board for ideas.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS

- Experience of governance.
- Excellent communication skills.
- Previous contribution to a work plan.
- Ability to think creatively & strategically.
- Knowledge and understanding of Federation structure. (Desirable)
- Willingness to give the time required.



APPLY BY 30 APRIL 2026

An advertisement for SIGBI members. It features a photograph of three women in business attire high-fiving each other. In the top left corner, there is a logo for Soroptimist International Great Britain & Ireland. At the bottom, a blue banner contains the text "SIGBI Members needed for the Governance Standing Committee" in white and yellow.

High Sheriff of East Sussex

Eastbourne Club were delighted to welcome The High Sheriff of East Sussex, Mrs Annie Brown, as their February speaker meeting. We were in good company as she had met with Queen Camilla earlier in the day at Plumpton where the Queen was visiting the local charity 'Jamie's Farm'. As her visit to us was a more informal occasion, the High Sheriff did not have to wear Court dress, which is a velvet dress and jacket. The jacket has special buttons which were given to Mrs Brown by the previous Sheriff and will be returned to him at the end of her year. The hat, with removable ostrich feathers, was specially made by a local milliner.



The role of Sheriffs' is over 1,000 years old and is mentioned in the Magna Carta. Their original role was collecting revenues and enforcing law and order. They had to pay any shortfall in taxes! This diminished over the years with the appointment of the Inland Revenue, Judges, the Police and military forces. There are 55 High Sheriffs in England and Wales, who still have a duty of care to High Court Judges to welcome them, entertain them and offer hospitality. They also represent the Sovereign at events and attend royal visits. Sheriffs also promote voluntary work in the County, particularly those to reduce crime. Mrs Brown is on the Criminal Justice Forum with representatives from Probation and the Police.

The names of the High Sheriffs have been "pricked" on vellum and pricking takes place in November every year. The role commences in early March for one year. It is an independent, non-political role and Sheriffs are chosen by the Lord Lieutenant and former Sheriffs and have different backgrounds and expertise. High Sheriffs can have a theme for the year. Mrs Brown is a third generation family farmer on the South Downs and a passionate advocate of protecting our working landscape, ensuring that we have resilient rural businesses that can produce food while making space for nature. The farm has areas of biodiversity and a Glamping site. She has chaired the Sussex branch of the Country Land Association and been a Secretary of State appointed Board member of the South Downs National Park, the only farmer on the Board. Mrs Brown welcomes parties of school children from economically deprived and other underrepresented audiences in our urban communities to get out on the Downs and connect with nature. Club members were surprised to hear that children from deprived areas of Brighton have never been to the sea or the Downs. One in eight young people aged 18-24 are NEET (not in education or training) in East Sussex. We learned of the work in the community done by the Police, Fire Service and Ambulance service and the other charities in East Sussex which Mrs Brown has met with.



Some of the highlights of the year were attending a Police awards ceremony for commendation awards and financial settlements awarded by Judges and the Cinque Ports Day parade in Hastings, led by Hastings Bonfire Society and attended by other dignitaries.

We certainly learnt a lot from her and in discussion she learnt a lot from us about Soroptimism!

By Gill Morris & Joyce Boorman, SI Eastbourne

In the photo the High Sheriff is on the left with the Club President, Julie Healey-Hill.



Annual President's Lunch

SI Sevenoaks President Margaret Crabtree welcomed members and guests to our annual President's lunch on Tuesday 17th March at the Nizels Golf and Country Club Hildenborough near Tonbridge.

Our special guests were SEE Region President Dr. Roxanne St Clair who spoke on the work of Commonwealth Girls Education fund; Cllr Tony Clayton The Worshipful the Mayor of Sevenoaks Town proposed the toast to Soroptimist International of Sevenoaks; Gill Clayton Mayoress Sevenoaks Town; Pip Lawrence Interim Chief Operating Officer West Kent Mind - Presidents Margaret's chosen charity for the year; Elizabeth Dolding Warners Solicitors South East and Past Region President Sue Edgar.

We were delighted that fellow Soroptimists members from Tunbridge Wells, Bromley, East Grinstead, Croydon and Folkstone were able to join us. The raffle was held in aid of West Kent Mind Sevenoaks raising the amazing sum of £355. Together with donations received and some other income we raised a grand total of just over £600 for our charity.

Everyone had a most enjoyable lunch with inspiring speakers, delicious food and thanks to Nizels and their staff.

Penelope Robbins Past President SI Sevenoaks





Tunbridge Wells and District hold an International Women's Day Event – "Gender Equality through Economic Empowerment"

SITWD organised an event to mark International Women's Day aimed at raising awareness of the importance of financial literacy as a means of being safe and empowered.

Members of the public were invited, and many club members also attended. Four representatives

from Citizens Advice, who provide financial guidance, and an expert from Wave Community Bank worked with club leaders to plan a session designed both to educate participants and to address specific financial situations and concerns.

A panel discussion, led by President Jill Ruddock, explored topics such as the warning signs that someone may be heading towards unmanageable debt, times when women may be particularly financially vulnerable and how they can protect themselves, and initiatives aimed at improving financial education in schools.

There were four workshops covering: recognising economic abuse; budgeting and debt management; managing energy costs; and the role of credit unions and how they can help.

The experts also engaged with participants on a one-to-one basis, offering personalised advice tailored to their individual circumstances.

Feedback from the session was very positive. Participants shared a number of encouraging comments, including: *"That knowledge share is going to help people directly in the community and increase the ripple effect of the couple of hours we spent together."* Another attendee noted, *"I really enjoyed the event and the speakers were excellent,"* while someone else added, *"The interactive tasks were fun and helped me retain the information."*

Smart Money, Strong Women
Gender equality through financial empowerment

Sunday 8 March
2.30-4.30pm

King Charles the Martyr Hall
Tunbridge Wells

A free event to celebrate
International Women's Day

East Grinstead Celebrate Milestone Birthdays and International Women's Day



from left to right - Helen, Jane and Hilary

At our meeting in the first week of March, SI East Grinstead celebrated the 'special' birthdays of three of our members whose combined ages came to an amazing 220 years!

The three ladies had prepared a delicious supper for everyone to enjoy and entertainment was provided by the Song Sisters, a local choir of which two members are a part. The tables were beautifully decorated with fairy lights, spangles and fresh flowers.

It being very close to International Women's Day, everyone was encouraged to dress in purple, green and white to pay homage to the Suffragettes who fought so bravely to give us the rights we enjoy today. Altogether, this was a very enjoyable evening celebrating both the present and the past.

By Rosemary Stone SI East Grinstead



WHY NOT ENTER OUR RUBY ANNIVERSARY THEMED QUIZ?

and give yourself the chance to win a Zaytoun Gift Box worth £50.00.

There are 40 questions, all answers beginning with the letters A,B,C or D.

Closing date: Friday, 1st May.

Please contact: katie@abcdbethlehem.org for your quiz sheet. Our thanks go to Zaytoun for their authentically sourced Palestinian produce. www.zaytoun.uk

By Alison Driscoll, SI Bromley





WE DID GREAT BRITISH SPRING CLEAN

Members of Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists joined in with other volunteers from Friends of Rochester Churchfields and Esplanade (FoRCE) to do a litter pick along Rochester Esplanade on 21 March as part of Great British Spring Clean. We covered a distance of 2.3km collecting discarded rubbish using pick-up sticks and bags provided. Types of rubbish collected included drink cans, food takeaway cartons, plastic bottles and cigarette butts.

The Great British Spring Clean is organised by Keep Britain Tidy and is the nation's biggest annual mass-action environmental campaign. It takes place from 13 to 29 March 2026. Keep Britain Tidy cannot achieve its goals - eliminating litter, ending waste, improving places and helping people live more sustainably - alone and rely on army of supporters, donors, partners and volunteers like ourselves.

So far in 2026, 372784 bags of rubbish have been pledged across UK. Here are our filled rubbish bags as our contribution.....

Jane Barnes – SI Medway and Maidstone

A Toolkit for Grassroots Activism

Tunbridge Wells members Caroline Auckland and Lorna Blackmore have played an active role in the Women's Grassroots Activism Project (2023–2025), funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project aimed to raise the visibility of leading women's organisations, highlight their legacy in campaigning for gender equality, and safeguard future activism by preserving local archives and promoting innovative ways of using them.

Grassroots activism takes many forms, from local community action and education to campaigning and influencing policy at national and global levels.

Lorna and Caroline focused on two key areas: environmental sustainability and women's safety, highlighting the work of the Tunbridge Wells Soroptimists. Environmental initiatives included the collection and recycling of aluminium cans, helping to fund sanitation projects in developing countries, helping Tunbridge Wells becoming a "Toilet Twinned" town.

Caroline's contributions centred on campaigning against gender-based violence and harassment. She highlighted initiatives such as community vigils, safety surveys, and collaboration with former Tunbridge Wells MP Greg Clark on his Private Member's Bill, the Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act 2023. The Act, which received Royal Assent in 2023 and comes into force on 1st April 2026, makes harassment in public motivated by sex an aggravated offence.

Working alongside organisations including the Irish Countrywomen's Association, the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the Federation of Women's Institutes of Northern Ireland, and Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland, the project represents the activism of over 200,000 women committed to improving the lives of women and girls.

The project concluded with the publication of *Women's Grassroots Activism Toolkit 100+*, a resource outlining how women's activism has shaped society at every level. The toolkit provides practical guidance for those wishing to become activists, encouraging approaches such as storytelling, intergenerational conversations, the use of meaningful objects, and collaboration and networking.

The steering team, led by Caitríona Beaumont, Professor of Social History at London South Bank University, launched the toolkit in March. Caroline participated as a roundtable member representing the Tunbridge Wells Soroptimist club.

The toolkit can be downloaded here: [Women's Grassroots Activism Toolkit 100+](#)



Lorna



Caroline



Angela



WORLD HEALTH DAY
7 April

<https://thehub.sigbi.org/filerepository?parent=69a6d7bfa12bc200091aea19>

Soroptimist International
Great Britain & Ireland

REGISTER NOW

**PROGRAMME WEBINAR
SPOTLIGHT ON VAWG**

**SATURDAY 18 APRIL 2026
13.30-15.00 GMT**

On the Hub...
check it out for more information

LSBU
London South Bank University

Women's Grassroots Activism Toolkit 100+ launch

Tuesday 10 March
5:30pm to 7:00pm
Online event

Helping to enhance the lives of women and girls for another 100+ years

Register here



**Soroptimist International
Medway & Maidstone would like to invite you
to join us in celebrating
our 80th anniversary
on Saturday 6th June
at Tudor Park Marriott Hotel, Maidstone,
Kent, ME14 4NQ**



Timetable

2.30 – 2.45pm Arrival and welcome drink
3pm Welcome address followed by Afternoon Tea
4.30pm Toasts. Prosecco is served
Cutting the cake
The Molly Oldham Award
Raffle
5.30pm Closing remarks

The Mayors of Medway and Maidstone will be joining us, plus local MPs and some members from our International Friendship Link clubs.

Afternoon Tea Menu

*Savour a delightful selection of sweet and savoury treats accompanied by your favourite blend of tea
in the opulent surroundings of Tudor Park Marriott Hotel
A selection of wholemeal and white finger sandwiches and savoury bites
Homemade fruit and plain scones with clotted cream and jam
A selection of homemade dainty cakes and sweet treats
Tea and coffee
£30 per person*

Guests are welcome to stay, chat and enjoy the gardens after the event. A pay bar will be available

RSVP to Daisy O'Hagan at daisy.ohagan@gmail.com by **Monday 18 May 2026**

Payment is by bank transfer.
The Club's account details are:
Sort code: 30-18-06
Account number: 00002827
Account name: SI Medway and Maidstone.
Please state your name as reference.

Celebrating International Women's Day in Medway

Maya Bangar and Wanda Wright had done a great job putting our Medway and Maidstone Soroptimist display up for the International Women's Day (IWD) event at Victory Academy in Chatham on 14 March. It had a prime position so could easily be seen on arrival.

The event had been organised by Medway Diversity Forum and Medway Public Health. The theme was 'Give to Gain'. It was a well organised event with a range of speakers on various women's health issues plus some lively entertainment.

Jane Barnes joined them later from Regional meeting and they each handed out membership cards with contact details to a number of people. Also handed over a supply of the 'Love me...Love me not' cards to Oasis Domestic Abuse service and spoke with a Medway Voluntary Action (MVA) rep who had been commissioned by Public Health to raise awareness of various cancer conditions including cervical screening. A good networking afternoon celebrating women.

Jane Barnes – SI Medway and Maidstone



Maya Bangar and Wanda Wright



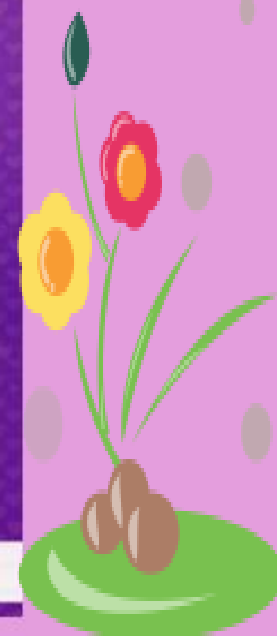
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
Saturday, 14th March 2026 - 13:00 - 16:00
Victory Academy, Magpie Hall Road, Chatham ME4 5JB

Theme: Give To Gain
Celebrate amazing women worldwide with fun talks, laughs, and inspiration—all in person!

- ↳ Motivational speakers
- ↳ Health checks
- ↳ Dance sessions

Scan this QR code to book

MEDWAY DIVERSITY FORUM | A BETTER MEDWAY
Make space for her health



80 for 80 with 'Give to Lent' Appeal

Medway Foodbank launched a 'Give to Lent' Appeal for period 18 February to 2 April, listing a range of food and toiletries they needed. Medway and Maidstone members wished to support this appeal as it addresses issue of food poverty amongst Medway families.

In 2026 Medway and Maidstone members are celebrating their 80th anniversary. Donations from members amounting to £80 meant we could purchase 80 items from the list provided.

The food and toiletries donations including nappies and toilet rolls were delivered to Medway Foodbank on 25 March.

Sharon from Medway Foodbank said, *'I am loving the '80' theme....how amazing to be part of an organisation that has been successful for so many years! Thank you for your continued support.'*

Jane Barnes SI Medway and Maidstone

