
see news

February 2026

Soroptimist International South East England Region Newsletter

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Editor: Sherry Eskander

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



President's Message

It is hard to believe that we are already moving towards spring. There has been plenty happening across the region, and it has been lovely to see the continued energy within our clubs.

This month I attended my first Regional Presidents' Meeting with SIGBI President, Gillie O'Rourke. It was a great opportunity to connect with fellow Regional Presidents and hear Gillie share her vision for her presidency, particularly the importance of working together and making sure the work Soroptimists are doing is visible and recognised. As we know, incredible things are happening across our clubs, and sharing those stories matters.

As I continue visiting clubs, I remain inspired by the initiatives and commitment I see.

At the end of January, I attended a speaker meeting at SI Whitstable & District where we heard from Emma Slade, a.k.a., Ami Pema Deki. Hearing about her recent trek across the Himalayas to raise funds for children in Bhutan offered real insight into her determination and spirit.

I also had the pleasure of inducting two new members into the club. Welcome to you both. Congratulations to SI Whitstable on a successful evening and for the positive difference you continue to make.

With International Women's Day approaching, many clubs will be preparing events and activities. It's always encouraging to see the varied and creative ways you engage your communities.

Congratulations as well to Caroline Auckland of SI Tunbridge Wells on her *Kent Life* article for *International Women's Day; excellent local visibility for Soroptimist work and the impact of women*.

Thank you everyone for the time and commitment you give so generously.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our Regional Meeting on 14th March and catching up then.

Warm wishes,
Roxanne



East Grinstead welcome a Community Hero

At our February speaker meeting we welcomed Lisa Marie McNamara, landlady of Dunnings Mill, one of East Grinstead's most prominent pubs. Although she has only been in East Grinstead since 2017, Lisa has a long history of running pubs. She employs 28 local people, many of whom have been with her for most of her time at Dunnings.

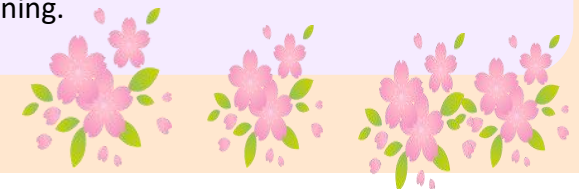
Dunnings not only sells alcohol and food but is also somewhere people can socialise, feel safe and welcomed. Lisa holds events bringing people together, realising that many people today feel isolated. Consequently, she welcomes groups for meals, arranges activities such as mum dancing, quiz nights and poker evenings as well as hosting weddings. The bar is somewhere people can sit, have a drink and find someone to talk to. Lisa's valuable role in the community has won her a 'Community Hero of the Year Award'. Local charities are welcomed at no cost and 'Being Neighbourly Chatter Café' meets at Dunnings monthly. Coffee, tea, and cakes are provided at no charge and their Christmas lunch is free!

Recently, because of a lack of places for youngsters to socialise, Lisa helped set up a youth club for 10-13 year olds and provided funding for the first 6 months. To ensure they do socialise they must surrender their mobile phones on arrival! Lisa said it is a great pleasure to see the youngsters become fully engaged in talking, playing games, crafting etc and the club is so successful that it is already oversubscribed. What was obvious from Lisa's talk was her enthusiasm and belief that she is not only running a business but also a social hub, where everyone is welcome! By Gill Beene/Rosemary Stone



On Saturday 31st January Sheila and Helen represented East Grinstead Club at the Community and Volunteer Fair held at the Meridian Hall. They spoke to lots of people and handed out several leaflets to possible new Soroptimists. They also had conversations with a one or two other organisations who expressed an interest in giving a talk at one of our meetings – altogether a most successful and worthwhile morning.

By Gill Beene



Tunbridge Wells collaborates with Visual Artist to promote action on safety and justice

Club members from Tunbridge Wells began working with visual artist Emma Smith in 2024. The partnership started with online discussion and continued in person at a club meeting, focussing on concerns raised through our *Spotlight on Safety* survey. Key themes included personal safety, night-time travel, and the need for statutory training in responding to domestic abuse.

Cherry Whytock and Caroline Auckland attended the launch of Emma's new installation where they viewed two panels shaped by these conversations. The artwork calls for action on safety and justice.

Emma Smith's exhibition, *Making Language*, will be on display at The Amelia Scott, Royal Tunbridge Wells, from 10 January to 12 April 2026. The exhibition explores how language shapes justice and highlights the gap between human rights and lived experience, while imagining fairer futures.



The artist Emma Smith with Cherry Whytock and Caroline Auckland

Created in collaboration with community organisations across Kent, including **Kent Refugee Action Network (KRAN)**, **Gillingham Street Angels**, **Family Action Medway Pregnancy to Three**, **Soroptimist International Tunbridge Wells & District**, and **Professor of Law Diamond Ashiagbor (University of Birmingham)** this work draws inspiration from Amelia Scott's fight for equality, historic texts such as *Textus Roffensis*, (a medieval manuscript relating to English law and identity compiled around **1122–1124** and held in **Rochester Cathedral** in Kent, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. ***The exhibition asks: Who makes the laws we live by, and how do they shape everyday life? It presents proposals for future justice as debossed texts on paper, designed to be illuminated when each statement becomes reality.***



Commissioned by The Amelia Scott and funded by Arts Council England, *Making Language* invites visitors to pause, reflect, and consider how justice and equality can be realised in everyday life.

N.B The two pictures show the debossed texts on paper are designed to be illuminated when each statement becomes reality, By Caroline Auckland



Whitstable Soroptimists welcome British Buddhist Nun Emma Slade



Whitstable Soroptimists welcomed the inspirational British Buddhist Nun Emma Slade (Lopen Ani Pema Deki) to speak to us and answer questions about her journey to becoming a nun, the challenges of life for people with special needs in Bhutan and the charity she founded to support them, Opening Your Heart to Bhutan (OYHTB). Whitstable Soroptimists are supporting OYHTB with donations and by buying an assortment of beautiful goods from Bhutan, some made at the school funded by the charity. In recent months Emma undertook an incredible walk across wild Bhutan to raise vital funds to support the work into the years ahead. So far it has raised over £100,000.

For more information about Emma and her charity visit <https://www.openingyourhearttobhutan> or <https://www.emmaslade.com>

Online Safety

Following a Zoom Bombing Incident experienced by a Club during a Zoom meeting which was open to the public, SIGBI has produced some guidance on making your Zoom meetings as secure as possible. There is also a checklist that you can use to make sure you haven't missed anything. See the folder in the Library - <https://thehub.sigbi.org/filerepository?parent=6980a4ba04fa130008d36c50>



New Members Coffee Morning and Enrolment of New Members

SI Sevenoaks had a successful and lovely time at the new members coffee morning at Sandie's house on Saturday 17 January. Thanks to Kathy who did the coffees and Wendy who ran the tombola! Thanks to everyone's generosity, we raised £65 for West Kent Mind, a really successful morning!

There were 7 members and 5 prospective new members. Three ladies have now completed their membership forms and were enrolled at SI Sevenoaks' club meeting on Tuesday 10 February, Angel Gomes, Jagjeet Kaur, Vanessa Cuthbertson.

We have three more ladies that are interested in joining so we are keeping our fingers crossed. It is lovely to see so many younger ladies getting involved.

By Kathy Jordan



The Sorooptimists

SI Sevenoaks entered a team for the Mayor of Sevenoaks charity quiz on 7th February - we decided to call ourselves "The Sorooptimists" rather than "The Optimists" which is our normal team name, hoping to attract some new members! It was good fun and we didn't come last, and the Mayor announced that over £2,000 had been raised on the raffle alone for his charities, Sevenoaks Area Youth Trust and Sevenoaks Citizens Advice. Pictured are team members Tina Fenner, Wendy Metcalf, SI President Margaret Crabtree, guest Liz Dolding, Vicky Tibbits and Margaret Nicholson.
By Sandie Higgs





Tunbridge Wells and Eastbourne combine to support a Girls Group in Bexhill

SITWD was contacted by a Youth Worker who runs a Girls Group in Bexhill. She had seen our President interviewed on a BBC Southeast news report about the 'Reclaim the Night' walk to highlight women's safety. Having researched the Soroptimists, the Youth Worker felt that the Girls Group in Bexhill would benefit from the experience and guidance of our members.

Tunbridge Wells club member Theresa Phillips, who has experience of working in local schools, responded to the Youth Worker's request for support. We facilitated a round-table discussion with the girls,

centred on the two questions from SITWD's Listening Project:

1. What do you like about where you live?
2. What ideas do you have about what could be improved?

The aim of these questions was to help the girls recognise that they have a voice and that their opinions are valued.

Given the distance between Tunbridge Wells and Bexhill, we approached the **Eastbourne Club** for support, as they are better positioned to provide any follow-up work. Joyce Boorman kindly agreed to participate.

Theresa and Joyce attended a club meeting at the beginning of February. Ten girls aged between 8-11 took part and all responded positively. They were engaged throughout the session. They reflected thoughtfully on the questions, shared their ideas confidently with the group, and listened respectfully to one another. The Youth Worker commented that "the girls clearly felt heard."

The discussion also generated several constructive suggestions from the girls for future activities and projects, providing valuable insight for the Youth Workers. Joyce and Theresa enjoyed working together. We offered to run the same exercise with other groups linked to the Youth Workers. By Theresa Phillips

SIDLEY
YOUTH HUB

121 Ninfield Road
Bexhill-on-Sea
East Sussex, TN39 5BD

Girls Group

Free youth groups for young women

When?
Every Monday
5pm - 7pm (ages 8 to 13)

Take part in:

- Arts & Crafts
- Group / team games
- Learning new skills
- Making friends
- Health & Wellbeing workshops
- and more!

Speak to our Youth Workers:
Kerrie - 07874 637593
Suzana - 07720 144100

Email: EHYouthHubs@eastsussex.gov.uk
Phone: 01424 724 004

East Sussex
County Council

Knitting One a Day in 2026 for Shoeboxes

A surprise donation of 36 balls of double knitting and Aran wool was made to Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists knowing we would make good use of it.

Since the beginning of 2026, Jane Barnes has been busy knitting every day, either snoods or beanie hats for the Blythswood Christmas Shoebox Appeal 2026.

So far, she has knitted 50 snoods and 10 beanie hats, suitable for women and teenage girls using the donated wool.

Jane will continue knitting in coming months. As in 2025, they ran out of scarves at the Blythswood Collection Point in Maidstone. These are some of the essential items put in each shoebox sent to vulnerable children and adults Eastern Europe .



Becoming a Soroptimist Member



President Roxanne presenting Sonia Lambert with Name badge

Becoming a member of Soroptimist International doesn't feel like joining an organisation but more like stepping into a circle of purpose and shared values. From the moment I decided to make the commitment to join, the **Whitstable and District** members have welcomed me with genuine kindness, friendship and a sense of belonging.

It was a special moment when Roxanne, Regional President, welcomed and presented me with my formal name badge at the Club Meeting on 28th January. It was simple, symbolic and marked the beginning of a new chapter of friendship and impact.

The evening included an inspiring and insightful Q&A with Emma Slade from the

Open Your Heart to Bhutan charity. Emma shared details about her walk across the Bhutan, the challenges she faced and the determination to complete the journey, in order to raise much needed funds to support the special needs schools in Bhutan. I really enjoyed the meeting which also reaffirmed my reasons for joining Soroptimists. By Sonia Lambert



KENTE SASHES AVAILABLE

Nellie Adjaye will have Kente sashes on sale at the March Regional meeting. She has a limited stock available costing £15 each.

She has just returned from an extended stay in Accra. She reports that Kente materials and cloth are becoming more costly and could impact on securing future supplies of Kente sashes at this price.

SO DO NOT MISS OUT - BUY YOUR SASH NOW WHILE STOCKS LAST.

Meet A Star Angela Hulm

Angela is a member of a SI Bromley since 2018; inspired by Grace Onions and Alison Driscoll I deepened my knowledge and involvement with environmental actions.

November 2025, she was honoured with ABBBA Community Hero Award ([Life in Bromley magazine, January 2026 issue, page 29](#)). The Above and Beyond Bromley Business Awards ABBBAs were founded by Loretta Wright, who is the publisher of a local magazine that recognises community achievements.

Angela was nominated as a Community Ambassador volunteer with [Greener and Cleaner](#) an award-winning environmental/sustainability charity in Bromley and beyond, our mission is to build a sustainable community in Bromley to be used as a blueprint across the country.

She is 1 of 12 qualified energy advisers and taking part in presentations to local residents for example: networking groups such as [Bromley Ladies Who Latte](#), [People, Planet, Pastry](#), residents associations. She also make free visits to people's homes to help them to reduce their bills and make their home warmer. She is also an excellent ambassador 'I am pleased to attend your club and tell you more'.

Bread pudding was mentioned at the November 2025 Awards evening. Angela started making bread pudding because so much bread gets wasted domestically and by retailers. Sharing bread pudding is a good conversation starter to highlight ways to avoid waste.

Since joining [Olio](#) in 2020, an international free mobile app to avoid food waste by connecting locals to share waste from supermarkets as well as private homes, She has saved over £4,000 off my grocery bills and more than 1,5 million litres of water from being wasted. She has met more than 300 new local people, including Hannah Lynes, who is a member of National Maternity Voices, came along to a SI Bromley meeting and now hosts a monthly board games café at the Greener and Cleaner shop 'The Hub' in The Glades shopping centre in Bromley. Life in Bromley magazine reported: 'Angela is a Soroptmist and has worked on projects to support vulnerable women. She was identified as a hero who constantly uplifts others with her kindness and compassion.' By Tais Gabrieli



President Roxanne with Community Hero Award Winner Angela Hulm



SITWD celebrates Women's Leadership

Members of the Tunbridge Wells and District Club worked in partnership with the local Southborough Society to organise and present a library display celebrating the significant contributions of local women, past and present, to the community.

Originally created as part of the Soroptimists' 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign, the exhibition resonated so strongly within the local community that it remained on display in the library until the end of February.

The exhibition highlighted women from the town of Southborough who have made or are making a meaningful difference to the safety and wellbeing of women and girls. It featured photographs of seven contemporary local women making a significant impact, alongside seven prominent women from Southborough's past. Current representatives included GPs, a headteacher, a councillor and former Mayor of Southborough, a vicar, a community artist, and a Keep Britain Tidy Ambassador.



Past local residents featured in the display were:

Katherine Tynan (1859 – 1931) – Poet, Novelist

Amelia Scott (1860 – 1951) – Campaigner for Women's Suffrage, Tunbridge Wells Councillor

Margaret Bondfield (1873 – 1953) – First Female Cabinet Minister

Doris Leslie (1891 – 1982) – Author, Woman of the Year for Literature 1973

Violet Godfrey (1898 - 1996) – Singer, Local Choir Leader

Elizabeth Garlick (1919 – 1991) – Chair of Southborough Urban Council, Mayor of Southborough

Daisy Fletcher (1924 – 2014) – Mayor of Southborough, Tunbridge Wells Councillor

Club members Kathy Lewis and Amelia Dowler led the project in collaboration with the Southborough Society as part of a wider local initiative to raise awareness of, and speak out against, violence and abuse in all its forms. The exhibition also provided information and signposted organisations offering support to victims, as well as those working to prevent gender-based violence. By Theresa Phillips

Eastbourne Soroptimists and Hells Angels Unite!

Well, who would have thought that Eastbourne Soroptimists and Hells Angels had anything in common! But, they did. They took Amelia Kolpa to their hearts. Amelia is the 7 year old girl with Stage 4 Neuroblastoma whose wish was to receive 8000 cards for her 8th birthday on 3rd March 2026. Club members wrote cards and sent them to help towards Amelia's goal. The Hells Angels went one further and delivered thousands on their motorbikes.

So far, Amelia has received more than 70,000 birthday cards from around the country and abroad.

Eastbourne members may have numbered less than 20 cards, but each single one counts as does the dreams of one young, very ill girl in Rowley Regis, Birmingham. Bless you, Amelia. **By Joyce Boorman**



Orange the World

SI Sevenoaks had a good turnout for Orange the World on Sunday 25 January at Basil's Coffee Shop in Sevenoaks Town which included 8 members and 4 prospective new members. All dressed in Orange with supporting flyers and balloons; we certainly could not be missed. **By Kathy Jordan**

Making a Difference with **LENDWITHCARE**



Eyo Enian Group



Luyando A 1102 Group



Thongyang



Kiran Zubair



Cherious Group



Bangon

The LendwithCare Working Group was set up in 2025 to administer the spend of £1000 on behalf of the Region. Loans have been made to female entrepreneurs from various countries including Ecuador, Malawi, Pakistan, Thailand, Uruguay, Vietnam and Zambia. The types of businesses selected are in farming, retail /grocery, sewing and tailoring. Repayments are regularly received so more loans are possible. See impact below :

No. of loans	15
Lent	£1285
Women Entrepreneurs helped	81
Family members helped	213
Jobs created	37
People helped	331



Mariuxi del Cisne



Ngan



Monica



Liza



Tilimbike 5 Group



Piramide

Date for Your Diary



HPV AWARENESS DAY



4 March

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

Regional Membership Zoom meeting for all club membership officers or their representatives on:

Saturday 28 March at 2pm – 3pm

An opportunity to discuss recruitment and retention issues, share good practice and find out about latest tools and resources available.

If you are able to join us contact Jane Barnes at barnes786@btinternet.com for Zoom link details.

On The Hub


HPV

New graphics and an updated article on HPV have been added to the existing cervical cancer materials. These can be found here <https://trello.com/b/T8YIGQ5x/cervical-cancer-awareness-materials>


New member toolkit

A new member toolkit –is available on the Hub. The toolkit consists of ready to use social media graphics, a leaflet, plus a new member handout, video and presentation. Head to the Hub Library/Resources and Materials/Club & Seroptimist Marketing Tools and Materials/Promoting Seroptimists/Resources for new Members. Or click this link <https://thehub.sigbi.org/filerepository?parent=684174b531bac40008f39270>

RIGHTS . JUSTICE . ACTION
For ALL Women and Girls



8 MARCH
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



Our new website is now live



SIGBI Conference 2026
Cardiff

30 - 31 OCTOBER



PUT IT IN YOUR DIARY

NEW MEMBER TOOLKIT



Ready to go social media graphics

