
isee news

May 2026

Soroptimist International South East England Region Newsletter

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Editor: Sherry Eskander

Deadline for June articles is Monday 22nd June, Email Jane at: barnes786@btinternet.com

SISEE President's Message

Welcome to our May newsletter.

During this Membership Month, it was heartening to see the new SIGBI promotional flyers being circulated, and particularly lovely to spot some familiar faces from our region.

In line with my theme, 'Honour Our Past to Secure the Future', I have enjoyed conversations with SISEE members and learning more about the rich history within our region. It has been a pleasure to present long service awards to members who have dedicated 25 years to being Soroptimists. I have also had the privilege of witnessing the induction of new members and, sadly, hearing of the passing of a longstanding member, June Bridgeman.

Although I did not have the opportunity to work with June personally, hers was a name I frequently heard in relation to getting things done. I send my sincere condolences to her family and Soroptimist colleagues as we honour her memory and the contribution she made to our organisation.

Thank you to everyone who has been busy making items for Comfort Cases UK. To help contain distribution costs, completed items can be brought to the regional meeting to be collated and delivered to Sarah and her team.

Clubs will have received an email advising that Southeastern Railway's Community-Led VAWG Forum has now officially been approved. Following this, SIGBI worked with its PR company to secure timely media coverage recognising our involvement as a partner in the initiative. The articles coincided with the release of findings from our Railway Safety Survey and wider national coverage on how rail operators are being assessed in their efforts to prevent violence against women and girls across their services.

Our speaker for the June regional meeting will be Marcia Summers, <https://www.marciatrekssrilanka.com/about/> who will share stories from her trek across Sri Lanka, from the southernmost point to the furthest north, as well as the work she has supported through her travels. Copies of her book will also be available for anyone wishing to purchase one.

I look forward to seeing those who are able to attend on 20th June.

In friendship,

Roxanne St Clair



East Grinstead have fun with orange paint!

On Sunday 19 April East Grinstead Meridian Rotary held a fundraising Colour Run as part of the 'Cut Out Cancer' Campaign. The campaign is raising money to buy high-tech surgical equipment for Royal Surrey Hospital's new cancer centre. The centre covers Surrey, Sussex and beyond and the new facilities will revolutionise cancer surgery in those areas.

As a Club, East Grinstead supported this by paying to throw orange paint over the many runners and walkers. Sue thoroughly enjoyed taking on this role and was ably supported by new member Alison (who did not have gloves!) and her family. Her young grandson had a fabulous time as he was given a water shooter and spent a very happy hour firing water over the competitors!!

Gill and Jane looked after the Soroptimist stall and enjoyed sharing information about the organisation with several people, one or two of whom showed interest in joining the Club.

It was a fabulous morning filled with the sound of lots of happy voices. Gill Beene



SI Bromley Advancing Girls Education in Morocco

SI Bromley's journey to support women and girls living near the Atlas Mountains in Morocco began in 2018, when a small group from the club visited the area. During the trip, the group visited the women's centre in the village of Marigha. The building had been largely funded through donations from SI Ashford, who had also raised money for two carpet looms to help provide women with opportunities to earn an income.

Inspired by the work already taking place, the SI Bromley group was eager to contribute in a practical way. Their donation funded the purchase of a herb processor, which enables local women to process herbs gathered from the surrounding area. With herbs readily available nearby, the only ongoing costs are for gas bottles, glass bottles and labels, making it a sustainable source of income for the women involved.

After returning home, interest in supporting the women and girls of the region continued to grow, with discussions focusing on how the club could make a lasting difference. Recognising that education is key to empowerment and independence, **SI Bromley decided to help fund transport for girls from Agounsane, a village near the Atlas Mountains, to attend the nearest secondary school.** While most villages have schools for younger children, older girls often face significant challenges in continuing their education due to the distances involved, and boarding away from home is not an option for many families.



From that first visit to the villages through to the present day, SI Bromley has continued to contribute towards the running costs of the transport service. Everyone involved is proud to share that 13 girls have now successfully completed their higher education, and the charitable foundation that operates the service is actively seeking to purchase a second bus to support even more students in the future.

Five Facts About Women's Education in Morocco

Morocco is known for being one of the most progressive states in the Middle East because of its advancements made for women. Despite these advancements, women's education in Morocco still lags behind.

- ◆ Literacy rates are low but are still increasing.
- ◆ There is a big gap between the urban and rural areas of Morocco.
- ◆ The Language Barrier: Berber vs. Arabic.
- ◆ Education for mothers on the rise.
- ◆ Foreign aid is a necessity.

by Jane Bahaijoub and Sherry Eskander

References: Information from an article by Maria S. Rodrigue, titled *Five Facts About Women's Educa-*

tion in Morocco

<https://borgenproject.org/womens-education-in-morocco/#:~:text=Just%2010%25%20of%20girls%20attend,girls'%20dormitories%20at%20existing%20schools>

SI Tunbridge Wells and District Club support the local Climate and Nature ('CAN') Fair 2026

Tunbridge Wells CAN is a non-profit organisation established by local volunteers to create the annual CAN Fair. This was the second year that SITWD participated in this community event, which aims to inspire local people and businesses to adopt more sustainable lifestyles. We shared a stall with United Nations Association Tunbridge Wells and Wealden to promote, in particular, the reduction and eventual elimination of plastic waste.

The fair sought to raise awareness of the climate and nature emergency, encourage collective action to reduce carbon footprints, celebrate individuals and organisations making a positive environmental impact, and support local sustainability initiatives. These objectives closely align with SITWD's own commitment to helping make Tunbridge Wells a plastic-free town.

The stall was organised by SITWD Treasurer Louise Taylor and UNA and SITWD member Marguerita Morton. Together with other SITWD members, they engaged visitors throughout the day, sharing

information about the work of the Soroptimists and discussing practical solutions for reducing plastic waste. The Soroptometer our interactive information-gathering tool, was also used to encourage conversations with visitors about reducing plastic use and achieving Plastic Free Town status for Tunbridge Wells.

The stall attracted considerable interest, with 75 people responding to the Soroptometer questions. The event provided valuable insights from the local community and raised the profile of Soroptimists.

Notably, 100% of respondents agreed that Tunbridge Wells should become a plastic-free town. SITWD plans to use the same questions at future events throughout the summer to gather an even broader range of local views.



TUNBRIDGE WELLS CAN!
Climate & Nature Fair

Headlining - Michaela Strachan, much-loved wildlife TV presenter and Springwatch star.

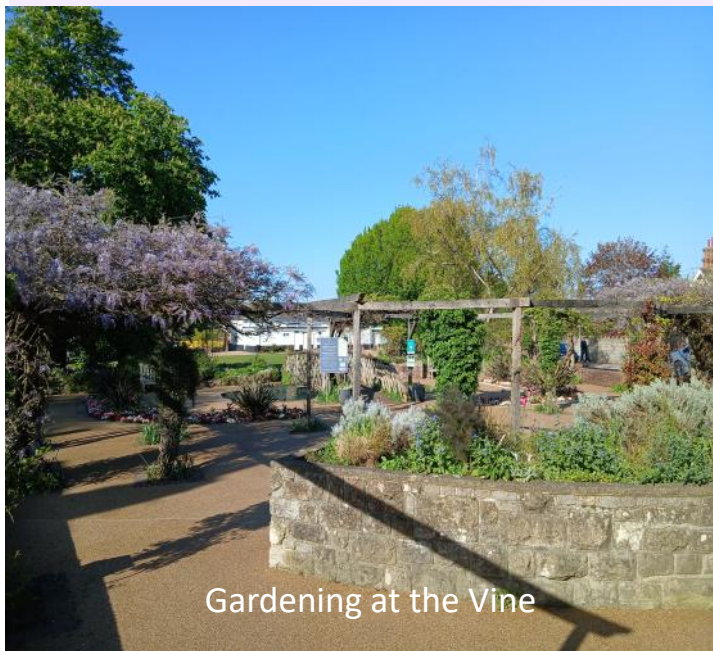
- Amazing line-up of national speakers
- Community groups & open forums
- Family activities & crafts
- Energy & Renewables advice
- Live music, poetry & upcycled catwalk
- Food, coffee & eco stalls

Join us for a vibrant day of community, fun, solutions and hope for the planet we love.

SAVE THE DATE!
Sunday, 3rd May 10am - 5pm
Calverley Grounds, Tunbridge Wells

www.twcan.org.uk





Gardening at the Vine



Orange the World Coffee Morning



Independent Advisory Group at Sevenoaks Fire Station

SI Sevenoaks Active @ Work

21 April – The ladies from SI Sevenoaks recommenced their monthly gardening duties at the Vine on a wonderfully sunny Tuesday. The spring gardens looked magnificent, especially the Wisteria. The theme for this year will be celebrating David Attenborough's 100th birthday and the colours are blues, greens and yellows. Fingers crossed for a Gold Medal.

25 April – Eight ladies from SI Sevenoaks attended the monthly Orange the World Coffee morning at the Cornflower Café at Coblands Garden Centre. Apart from the wonderful weather, coffee and large helpings of cake we also took the opportunity to spread the word and buy some spring flowers.

30 April – Whilst attending the Independent Advisory Group (IAG) for the local police at the Sevenoaks district meeting held at Sevenoaks Fire Station SI Sevenoaks and other attendees were treated to a tour of the Fire Station by Ben Frake, Station Leader. The Pump left on an emergency callout just as we arrived, unfortunately we did not witness them sliding down the pole as the station no longer has one! We were encouraged to try on the clothing to witness how heavy they are. We all had an enjoyable and informative evening.



Eastbourne Soroptimists Help at Arlington Bluebell Walk 2026



It was very apt for Eastbourne members (and a couple of Soroptimisters) to help at the Arlington Bluebell Walk this year in support of Eastbourne Dementia Action Alliance (EDAA) and Eastbourne Dementia Club as outgoing President Julie's charity was for Alzheimer's. Members and Soroptimisters got stuck into the various tasks allotted to them – in the kitchen preparing snacks and lunches; meeting and greeting; taking money at the walk kiosk.

The Bluebell Walk started in 1972 and since then has raised well over £1million for local charities. So, what could be lovelier than walking in a 24 acre ancient woodland through bluebells and white wood anemones? Nothing really, apart from supporting the EDAA on 20th April when it was their day to manage the walk and supply refreshments.

Approx £3000 was raised (divided between the two organisations). So, not bad for a few hours volunteering (around 20) for good causes.

Joyce Boorman SI Eastbourne & District

Cream Tea @ Coolings

SI Bromley and Croydon got together on May 20th for a scrumptious cream tea at Coolings Garden Centre. The tea flowed and the plants flowed into the baskets.

The friendship between the clubs is longstanding as Croydon is mother club to Bromley and they are currently in talks to plan coming together as one club.

Chris Thomas - SI Bromley





Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists volunteer at Dandelion Time May Fayre

It was a busy time at the Dandelion Time May Fayre for the Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists and a Soroptimister helping out on the Refreshment stall. We had lots of homemade cakes and savouries, (*some made by members*) on sale along with hot and cold drinks. All were welcome on a hot sunny day.

Group photo (*courtesy of Jane Barnes*) shows those members having worked the morning shift with other members set to takeover for the afternoon.

A lovely and enjoyable time for all with more than 1000 people at the Fayre on such a sunny day. Every donation, every gift, every gesture of kindness helps give the children who attend Dandelion Time hope for the future.

A total of £9,197!! was raised from the Fayre, with an amazing **£1,326.40** from our efforts on the Refreshment stall!

Jane Barnes SI Medway & Maidstone



Update on SIGBI Rail Safety Survey 2025

Safe and Sure: a 23-year progress report

The 2025 survey was carried out by members at 371 stations across England, Scotland and Wales, generating 386 individual survey entries and covering approximately 971 platforms. The report presents both the 2025 findings and a direct longitudinal comparison with the 2002 survey, allowing us to assess what progress — if any — has been made over 23 years.

Our findings present a mixed picture:

- **CCTV provision** has improved dramatically, from under one third of stations in 2002 to 89% in 2025 — a genuine achievement.
- **General information provision** has improved significantly, with 90% of stations now displaying a general information board.
- **Emergency Help Points** are now present at 72% of stations, compared with only one third in 2002. However, non-functional help points and removed phones remain a documented and serious problem.
- **On staffing** — the single factor passengers most value — conditions have deteriorated significantly. In 2002, one quarter of stations were wholly unstaffed. In 2025, 30% are permanently unstaffed and only 10% are staffed at all times passengers

are present. This is the survey's most serious finding.

- **Accountability notices** — the mandatory display of who is responsible for station safety — show no improvement. In 2002, under half of stations displayed this information in a readily observable place. In 2025, 44% do so. Twenty-three years, and no measurable change.
- **Digital-only information provision** has created a new accessibility barrier not present in 2002: QR codes and app-based timetables exclude older passengers, disabled travellers, and those in areas with poor mobile signal.
- The **removal of payphones** without replacement has rendered taxi information and emergency contact numbers useless for passengers without mobile phones — a new failure that compounds 2002's unresolved recommendations.

Report has been shared with the Department for Transport, the Office of Rail and Road, Network Rail, train operating companies, and Community Rail Partnerships. Link for report <https://thehub.sigbi.org/file/6a10458388567e0008d9be47>



We've had our first hits for Southeastern Rail partnership release:

Rail Business Daily: <https://news.railbusinessdaily.com/womens-charity-joins-forces-with-southeastern-railway-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls/>

Rail UK: <https://railuk.com/rail-news/womens-charity-joins-forces-with-southeastern-railway-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls/>

On the Hub

Updated Comms Planner for 2026

There is updated comms plan for 2026, showing UN awareness days and SIGBI campaigns, which is available in the Hub Library, under resources and materials/live campaigns.

Urgent request from SIGBI President Gillie

Train Travel and Safety

When travelling by train have you had an experience which caused you to feel unsafe and threatened or which was just downright unpleasant? Would you be happy to talk about this to a journalist? If so, please send brief details and your name to me (president@sigbi.org) and Lindsay Green (programmedirector@sigbi.org) so that we may forward details onto Altitude (our PR company). All contacts will be treated confidentially.



Soroptimist International
Great Britain & Ireland

The SIGBI Railway Station Safety Survey 2025

Britain's most extensive passenger-led station safety survey

30 - 31 OCTOBER



SIGBI Conference 2026
Cardiff

Registration is now OPEN



Registration for the Soroptimist Cardiff 2026 Conference is now OPEN.

Book your ticket in the Events section of the Hub. Further information about the conference and what to do in Cardiff is on the conference website: <https://sigbi.org/>

Soroptimist International
Great Britain & Ireland

MEET THE SPEAKER
Helping to share the British digital industry.

Recently named in the
Top 100 Most Influential and Innovative People leading the use of IT and AI in the Public Sector.

30
OCTOBER
2026
HOLLAND HOUSE HOTEL & SPA, CARDIFF
SIGBI CONFERENCE

TIFFANY ST JAMES
Global Digital Strategist

On the Hub

Membership Meeting with Director of Membership

Free



MONDAY
8 JUNE 2026
19.30-20.30 GMT

We are delighted to announce that we now have a new recruitment leaflet in stock. Priced at £4.75 for a pack of 50 leaflets, plus P&P. This leaflet is A5 size printed both sides, on good quality paper, it answers the question “What sort of woman is a Soroptimist?”. Ideal for handing out at stands or leaving in waiting rooms. Order via the online shop - www.sigbishop.com



NEW SIGBI WEBSITE

FOR CLUB/REGION/NETWORK WEBSITE
EDITORS/COMMUNICATIONS OFFICERS

WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE 2026
19.00-20.00 BST

COMMUNICATIONS CAFÉ DROP-IN



Communications Cafe

🕒 Friday, 29 May 2026 12:00

NEW SIGBI WEBSITE

FOR CLUB/REGION/NETWORK WEBSITE
EDITORS/COMMUNICATIONS OFFICERS

SATURDAY 27 JUNE 2026
13.00-14.00 BST