June 2026

see news

Soroptimist International South East England Region Newsletter

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Editor: Sherry Eskander

Deadline for July articles is Friday 24 July, Email Sherry at: soroptimistnewsletter@gmail.com

SISEE President Roxanne's Message

Welcome to our June newsletter

Marcia Summers & President Roxanne

I hope that you are keeping cool and hydrated during these exceptionally hot days. Thank you to everyone who attended our recent regional meeting. It was a full and inspiring day, from the thought-provoking presentation by our guest speaker, Marcia Summers, to Susanna de Sanvil's ingenious safeguarding quiz, and, of course, the launch of the Southeastern Railway Community-Led VIAWG Listening Groups.

Feedback from Marcia Summers *"The vibe in the room was so welcoming and I felt so privileged to be a part of your day."*

SER Community-Led VIAWG Forum -Five clubs were invited to participate in Phase One of the listening groups and, so far, all but one of the participating clubs were able to experience a taster session at the regional meeting. As discussed, folders will be set up for each club on Google Drive, with access granted to the designated club lead.

Comfort Cases UK - I would also like to personally thank everyone who donated items for Comfort Cases UK. They looked wonderful displayed on the table and served as a visible reminder of the generosity and compassion that exists across our region. A packing session is planned for Saturday 11th July, and I will aim to deliver your wonderful contributions in time for the session.

Celebrations - Congratulations to SI Medway and Maidstone on hosting a beautiful 80th Anniversary Afternoon Tea. It was a most enjoyable afternoon and a real pleasure to meet members from SI Osnabrück. Congratulations also to SI Tunbridge Wells on their forthcoming 80th Anniversary Weekend. I am looking forward to joining you for your celebratory lunch and sharing in this special milestone.

In Memory - Life has a way of throwing us unexpected curveballs. Sadly, in the lead-up to their celebrations, both clubs lost long-serving and much-valued members of their communities. June Bridgeman of SI Tunbridge Wells and Dr Mary Buchanan of SI Medway and Maidstone were remembered at our regional meeting. Thank you to Caroline Auckland and Janet Hughes for sharing their heartfelt tributes and reminding us of the invaluable contributions these remarkable women made to both our organisation and the wider community. May they rest in peace and may their legacy continue to inspire us.

In friendship, Roxanne

Supporting Women and Babies at the Women Of Kent Garden Party

Four members of SI Whitstable and District attended this years Women of Kent Garden Party, at Doddington Place, near Faversham, on 14th May. The chosen charity was 'Mama to Mama', Thanet's only Baby Bank, whose mission is to support parents and caregivers to ensure every baby and child has the best possible start in life, regardless of background.

The Baby Bank ensures basic needs are met by providing baby clothes, hygiene products and childcare equipment, from birth to age five. One to one support is also provided to help families build resilience by finding free local resources and essential household items. Free groups are on offer, providing inclusive, welcoming creative and outdoor play that reduces anxiety and isolation, while building communities.

Liz, Mags, Mary and Susan from SI Whitstable and District enjoyed a delicious afternoon tea and were very happy to support the fundraising event, on behalf of the Club. The unseasonal weather even took a break and the sun shone for a while, a relief for all concerned in the beautiful garden setting!

Mags Harrison SI Whitstable and District

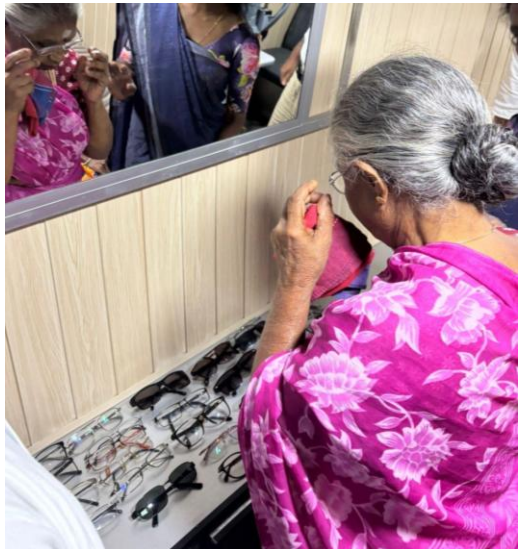
Eastbourne Members Make a Spectacle of Themselves

Before Covid, many clubs collected used/old/unwanted spectacles and donated them to go overseas. With Covid that stopped, but looking recently on the SIGBI Hub at Programme Focus Reports (PFR) clubs' opticians and doctors' surgeries have restarted taking them in (looking at other clubs' PFR can be very productive!).

So, Eastbourne members have been having a 'spring clean' of their unwanted spectacles. So far, 13 pairs have been collected ready to be taken to a local optician for onward partnership with The Lions. The Lions then send the glasses to Medico France – a humanitarian aid organisation – where they are cleaned, graded and then used in eye camps in Africa, India and Eastern Europe. Broken glasses and any other glasses which are unsuitable for reuse are stripped for scrap metal. This raises funds that support the sorting operations. It also enables the Lions Club to give financial support to eye-related projects in the UK and overseas.

So, it is not a bad result for a bit of spring cleaning, and who knows where our pre-loved spectacles will end up.

Joyce Boorman SI Eastbourne & District



Do You Have Any Spare Glasses for Older Women in Sri Lanka?

Marcia Summers Regional Speaker shared following message: "Regarding glasses, if any of your members have spare or old pairs they would like to donate, I would be happy to help get them to Sri Lanka. Assuming all goes well, I will be travelling there in September, but I could also ask others who are travelling to take them, or explore courier options. It has been remarkable to see how valuable donated glasses are and how appreciative their new owners are in some of Sri Lanka's

Congratulations to SI Croydon

Croydon club had its 99th birthday this year in May and invited Bromley to share in the celebrations.

We sat outside at Shirley Park Golf Club on a sunny evening and ate a lovely cake made by Heather Bailey, whilst Roxanne updated us on the Railway Project.

Chris Thomas – SI Bromley

Sarah Jones MP with Croydon Soroptimists and 2026 Loud & Proud competition participants at the Houses of Parliament. An informative visit and could have listened to the house debate even longer. ‘Thank you for your continued support and for encouraging the pupils to see how they can make a difference.’

East Grinstead members moved by Bloomin' Arts

At its May speaker meeting East Grinstead Club was delighted to welcome Ria the first full-time employee of Bloomin' Arts, a local creative arts charity driven by the voice of disabled people. Everyone is heard, valued and empowered to make choices with accessibility being a key to what they do, encouraging self-expression and confidence through art, theatre, dance and media.

Ria was assisted by two of Bloomin' Arts' students, Polly and Joe. It was obvious from what they told us that students have an enormous input into the direction of their courses and for Polly and Joe this is an extremely important part of their lives. Their enthusiasm was infectious and they delighted in showing the puppets they had made and used in a production called 'The Book of Fey' at nearby Wakehurst, a National Trust property. When asked about the challenges of using the puppets, Polly said, "I had to adjust and be challenged".

Bloomin' Arts believe that everyone has huge creative potential regardless of their skill level or physical ability as shown by their approach of making art accessible to all. Experienced artists lead small and friendly workshops focusing on students' individual skills so they can enjoy a fun and supportive space. Students are encouraged to use their own interpretation of an idea. Polly's insightful comment about having to adjust and be challenged was certainly a challenge to us.

Isn't that something we should be doing all the time? The two remarkable young people made members laugh and feel inspired while shedding a few silent tears.

Ria with Joe and Polly from Bloomin Arts

Gill Beeney/Rosemary Stone SI East Grinstead

Soroptimists Attend Seal Tea Set

On an extremely hot afternoon Sandie and Kathy were invited to Seal Tea Set's monthly meeting held in Seal Library. Sandie gave a wonderful account of what a Soroptimist means, what we do and how we raise awareness and money for various good causes. This was followed by tea and wonderful cake elegantly served on beautiful China. One lady is interested in joining the Soroptimists and we were given some lovely toys which we will take to the Sevenoaks Refuge. We were also given a generous donation of £30 towards our President's charity this year – West Kent Mind. We are delighted to receive it.

Coffee and New Members Morning

On a wonderfully sunny morning, a small but select number of members and guests attended Sandie's coffee morning in aid of our President's charity this year – West Kent Mind. A selection of lovely cakes were consumed. The tombola and guess the weight of the handmade cake, kindly supplied by Vicky raised £120. Tracy was the lucky winner of the wonderful cake. An extra £37 was made from the follow-up plant sale.

Out In Force at Whitstable Eco Fair

Several members of SI Whitstable and District attended Whitstable Eco Fair as stall holders on 30th May 2026. Four different organisations were resourced, demonstrating some of the breadth of community-based activities Club members are actively supporting, only two and a half years after chartering.

Club members Susan and Mary were part of the Plastic Free Whitstable team and probably had the best 'give-aways', with stacks of very popular and eye- catching, re-usable cups, reminding people to 'Choose to Reuse'.

Val was part of the team for CT5 People's Forum, which provides a platform for local people and organisations to exchange information, have a voice, discuss ideas, and work together to improve the town.

As a founding member of West Cliff Bank Nature Path, Nicki was providing updates on the rich biodiversity that has evolved since the two-acre site gained Village Green status. The site is protected as a valuable green space in a busy and hectic town, for the enjoyment of local people and visitors, and will never be developed.

The Eco Fair was also the first 'outside event' for the Repair Cafe. Club members Carol, Glynis, Mags, and Mary with repairers Cathy, Jackie, Michel and Tony provided a pop-up demo cafe, to showcase the kinds of repairs that take place at the monthly Repair Cafe.

All Club members present enjoyed volunteering and being part of a large scale community event, while being mindful of the serious message behind the event and links to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The irony of Whitstable and Herne Bay being in chaos in the days leading up to the event, with water shortages, businesses unable to trade and anxiety for vulnerable people without access to water, will no doubt spur Club members on with future involvement and volunteering!

Mags Harrison SI Whitstable and District

East Grinstead welcomes a rubbish speaker!

At our June speaker meeting we were delighted to welcome Colin McFarlin, an award-winning Advanced Volunteer Waste Prevention Advisor with West Sussex County Council. Colin set the scene by saying that his talk was going to be rubbish!

Ten years ago, a scheme was developed to train volunteers to go out into the community and educate the public in the rights and wrongs of waste disposal. The volunteers' training takes the form of a one-year online course validated by Brighton University.
It has become abundantly clear that different Councils all over the country have different rules for dealing with waste - different colours of bins, different lists of acceptable contents for general rubbish, recyclable items, food waste etc. Legislation is in the process of creating uniformity across the land.

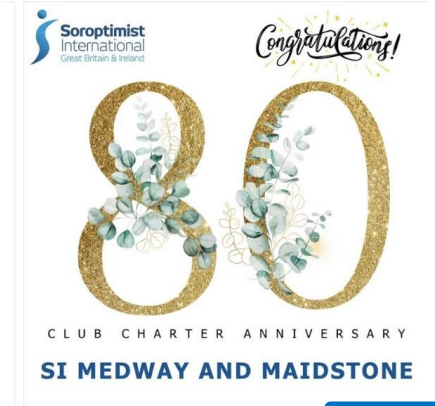
It is now cheaper to produce plastic containers from recycled rather than new materials since the Ukraine war has drastically increased the price of oil and energy used in plastic manufacturing. Any plastics in the categories of bottles, tubs and trays are recyclable in home bins whereas plastic bags should be returned to collection points in supermarkets. Some items ie toothpaste tubes are now acceptable for recycling due to pressure exerted upon the manufacturers.

In 2000 the national recycling rate was 11% whereas the current figures for East Sussex are 41% and Surrey 54%. Everything that is recycled is sold to be converted into something else, even general rubbish that is turned into pellets for fuel. Landfill rates are down to 4%.

A very interesting, informative and entertaining presentation. Colin brought a range of recyclable items to illustrate his talk

from which we learned that almost anything can now be recycled, one just needs to consult Council websites and other resources on the internet.

Rosemary Stone SI East Grinstead



After much planning and preparation led by Daisy O'Hagan, SI Medway and Maidstone CIO enjoyed a weekend of friendship and celebration to mark their 80th anniversary.

It started on the Friday evening with a Bring and Share Supper to welcome our guests from SI Osnabruck. Sightseeing in Maidstone on Saturday before Afternoon Tea at Tudor Park Marriott Hotel with 60 Soroptimist friends and family. Toasts were given by Mayor of Maidstone and Lorna Blackmore with responses by President Roxanne and Janet Garnons-Williams.

Sunday involved more sightseeing in Rochester followed by a traditional pub lunch looking over River Medway and then visiting Gardens in Brompton as part of the National Open Garden Scheme for charity.

Thank you to all our guests and well wishers for making the occasion so special.

In Memory of Dr Mary Buchanan MRCS, LRCP. DFSRH

Dr Mary Buchanan, MRCS, LRCP, DFSRH, Life Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine, Life Member of the British Medical Association and an Honorary Member of Soroptimist International (SI).

Mary was in General Medical Practice from 1964-1989 with a special interest in the health of women and adolescents, having responsibility for the Well Woman Clinic, Adolescent Clinic and Cervical Screening Clinic. She was an Occupational Health Physician with Marks and Spencer running cervical and breast screening programmes, and Clinical Assistant in a hospital breast cancer unit as a Breast Physician.

Mary became a Soroptimist in 1967 joining the former Maidstone Club and hence would have reached 60 years of service next year. She was made an honorary member many years ago.

She held leadership roles at local, national and international level. In 1991 she was Chairman of the SI Convention. She assisted the SI President in making a successful application to the WHO for official relations in 1991, and from 1991-1995 she was International Co-ordinator for Health. Mary's involvement with the WHO whilst working on Female Genital Mutilation, Safe Motherhood and AIDS programmes continued during the SIAM (Soroptimist International AIDS Mediation) quadrennial project, which she led as International Liaison from 1995-2000. She was WHO Liaison for Soroptimist International from 2000-2003.

However, Mary's special interest was in women's cancers and from 1989-1999 she was Chairman of the Women's Nationwide Cancer Control Campaign, advocating health education programmes for prevention, early detection and screening of women's cancers. From 1995-1998 she was Chairman of the Cancer Education Group of Great Britain and Ireland, and UK National Representative at the Europe against Cancer Programme at the European Commission.

In 1997 she was appointed to the UK Cervical Screening Action Group by the Chief Medical Officer to review all aspects of cervical screening. She also was instrumental in setting up EUROPA DONNA, the European Breast Cancer Coalition in 1993, becoming President from 1999 -2004 representing the Coalition in the European and Italian Parliaments. In 2001 she was presented with the European Woman of Achievement Award by the European Union of Women, UK.

Mary also held a number of key roles with voluntary organisations in Kent, including Chairman of Steering Committee for the Maidstone Volunteer Bureau from 1972-1975; Member and Past Chairman of the Board of Visitors at the Women's Prison, East Sutton Park, Kent, from 1972-2000; Director and Chair of Trustees, Kent Cancer Trust, from 2002; and Honorary Vice President of Kent Branch, British Red Cross, following several years with Maidstone Red Cross Centre.

Mary was married to Dr John Scott Buchanan, JP, who was a physicist and sadly passed away in August 2022.

Mary continued to play an active role in the club until recently usually attending the monthly catch-up meetings on- line, always having read club minutes, and always showing concern about the welfare of other members. She even completed a rail safety survey for the SIGBI review last year after travelling to meet friends.

She will be sadly missed by all who knew her and especially as a Soroptimist sister. She was a truly amazing, gifted and kind woman who made a huge impact in her unique understated way.

East Grinstead Club inspired by Comfort Cases speaker at Region

At a recent SISEE Region meeting we had an excellent presentation from Sarah Jacoby, CEO of Comfort Cases, a charity which provides filled backpacks/holdalls for children going into care or moving between foster homes.
They are provided with essentials so they have things they can call their own and do not have to transport their possessions from place to place in bin liners.
At the meeting Sarah showed the items that are put into backpacks. Toiletries are put in plastic Ziplock bags to prevent leakage, but Sarah said it would be lovely if they could provide drawstring toilet bags for children instead and material pouches where girls could place their sanitary pads.
East Grinstead Club have now taken this project on board and Helen and Jane started making the cases. Production is now in full swing. *Gill Beeney*

Maya Bangar of SI Medway & Maidstone CIO has made 40 bags so far.....

Tunbridge Wells Crafters

Under the leadership of Louise Taylor, an enthusiastic team of members came together to support this initiative. The bags have been made in a variety of fabrics suitable for different ages and interests, and we also created 'Period SOS' pouches for older girls to carry essential sanitary products discreetly.
We are delighted to report that SITWD has now produced:
✨ 100 waterproof wash bags
✨ 60 Period SOS pouches

170 toilet bags & 60 Period SOS pouches delivered at Region by 3 clubs

Barry the Sloth
Crochet version

Mary Dalman is delighted to say we met deadline of June Regional Meeting. There have been lots of hoops to go through to get this far, especially re the website creation for the crochet pattern with sign off from all parties.

An email note is available for all crafters and shared with WK WI for launch to WI members. Includes link for crochet pattern at the top of page 2 https://patchblooms.com/elementor-774/ and 10% discount code for SIRDAR wool.

Mary as facilitator is happy to be contacted if there are any questions or Regional President Roxanne, whose initiative this is.

Why Support Comfort Cases UK?

Every 15 minutes a child enters care.

Many arrive with little more than the clothes they are wearing.

We exist to ensure no child enters, moves within or leaves care carrying their belongings in a bin bag.

No child should carry their life in black bin bags.

This is your chance to help change that.

You are not creating a toy.

You are creating Barry.

No Comfort Case is complete without him.

He offers comfort on a hard day. You are creating a friend on a scary first night away from home, a soft hug whenever the child needs it.

This page is a place where handmade creativity and generous community meets compassion. Every stitch represents warmth, love, and support for children and young people who deserve to feel valued, safe, and cared for.

With huge thanks to members of SIGBI South East Region and West Kent Federation of WIs for your time, skills and heart in supporting this project. Barry's will be collected at your Organisational Meetings.

Please send photos of you creating Barry or finished Barry's to hello@comfortcasesuk.org

BARRY WILL BE COLLECTED AT YOUR ORGANISATIONAL MEETINGS

Barry the Sloth
Knitted version

I am happy for your wonderful knitters to use my sloth pattern in the way described, and I do hope the Barrys are helpful friends for their future young owners.
https://email.bt.com/mail/bin?csrf=7GyFmzFwrCZpZRIGgNMAeA&r=mail.message.attachment.getPart%7B%22uid%22%3A112141%2C%22folder%22%3A%22INBOX%22%2C%22part%22%3A%220.1%22%2C%22wantsTranscoding%22%3Afalse%7D
I have a blog post which lists substitute yarns that your knitters could use in case they have any difficulties sourcing the one I used:
https://fluffandfuzz.weebly.com/blog/lazy-daze-sloth-substitute-yarns
Best wishes
AMANDA BERRY
KNITTING PATTERN DESIGNS

❤️ Bromley Soroptimists Carmelita Kalloe & Angela Hulm connected with a couple of young families, and the handful of visitors and volunteers at Greener & Cleaner in the Glades shopping centre. All took a fresh thoughts postcard to put up in a Bromley venue or a business card to keep handy.

❤️ Tracey Wong who works for Greener & Cleaner wore orange especially, having supported a service user at her Lewisham based volunteer job. Great to see how the word about our work is getting spread by our regular contacts

❤️ Angela spoke for one minute at Bromley Ladies Who Latte on Weds 24th which led to more than 20 women entrepreneurs taking a fresh thoughts card to display publicly in Bromley. 'Every person we mention Soroptimist International's work on Fresh Thoughts helps to end the silence of domestic abuse'. Thank you to all involved locally, regionally & across SIGBI.

❤️ Delighted to have been approached by local theatre who are keen to help spread the word after the meeting.

Orange Cafe 'Fresh Thoughts' postcards to women's group Bromley Ladies Who Latte

Date for your diary

Bromley's July Orange Cafe, Books and Bakes at Bromley Methodist Church Coffee & Chat Sat 25th July 10:30am till 12noon with thanks to Alison Driscoll

International's Global Voice Newsletter June 2026

- is now out, with the launch of the SI Convention 2027 website, announcement of the SI President Elect 2026-2027 and other news.

Read the Newsletter:
https://www.soroptimistinternational.org/2026/06/16/global-voice-june-2026/

Tunbridge Wells and District Soroptimists supporting the community

Care Home Open Week 2026

SITWD received a request from the Customer Relationship Manager at Chamberlain Court, a care home in Tunbridge Wells, for suitable bunting to help celebrate Care Home Open Week 2026.

This nationwide initiative, which took place from 15 June, gives people the opportunity to see what life in a care home is really like. This year's event had a World Cup theme, featuring football-themed days of fun, homemade treats, and opportunities for visitors to explore the facilities and meet the friendly team.

Club members sourced enough football-themed fabric to create approximately 25 metres of bunting, providing a colourful backdrop for the care home's celebrations.

Supporting Women's Wellbeing

On a very warm day in June, members of SI Tunbridge Wells joined volunteers from Tunbridge Wells Rotary, the Kent High Weald Partnership, and local allotment groups to help paint the new Breathe & Bloom Women's Shed.

This community project, led by Kent High Weald Partnership, will provide a safe and welcoming space where women can relax, be creative, learn practical skills, and build meaningful connections with others. We are proud to have supported the project through funding, alongside other partners, and were delighted to roll up our sleeves and help bring the vision to life.

Armed with paintbrushes, refreshments, and plenty of enthusiasm (with the occasional break in the shade) we made excellent progress in protecting and enhancing this valuable community asset. The shed is now well on its way to being ready for its official launch.

Caroline Auckland SI Tunbridge Wells and District

On the HUB….

We know that it can be a challenge for smaller clubs to identify projects that are manageable for their members, so we're creating a resource on the Hub to help inspire ideas and share good practice.

Has your club run a project that worked particularly well? Eg it:

✅ Was achieved with a small team

✅ Had a positive impact on your community

✅ Could be replicated by other clubs

It needs to be a project that is in a report on the Hub.

Please email details to programmedirector@sigbi.org.

Have you seen our line-up of speakers for the 2026 Soroptimist Conference in Cardiff?

- Tiffany St James, Global Digital Strategist
- Michelle Griffith Robinson OLY, an Olympian and Changemaker
- Leslee Udwin, Campaigner for System Change in Education
- Anne Stairmand, Author, Educationalist and Literacy Specialist
- Jennifer McClelland, Regional President of Soroptimist International Midland Chase
- Cathy Cottridge, Chair of Soroptimist International Foundation
- Renata Trottmann Probst, President of Soroptimist International

Book your conference ticket here https://thehub.sigbi.org/events

DATES FOR DIARY

Soroptimist International Great Britain & Ireland

REGISTER NOW

UK PROGRAMME ACTION MEETING

FRIDAY 3 JULY 2026
19.00-21.00 GMT

Join Lindsay and the Programme Action Team for this meeting which is specifically aimed at the UK.

Details of the meeting will be sent out when you register.

Soroptimist International Great Britain & Ireland

ALL MEMBERS WELCOME

OPEN SIGBI LTD BOARD MEETING

TUESDAY 28 JULY 2026
11.30-16:00 GMT

All members are welcome to attend the Open SIGBI Ltd Board Meeting as Silent Observers on 28 July 2026 at 11.30-16.00 GMT.

Please register, and you will receive an email containing the meeting link. A reminder will also be sent to you the day before the meeting.

The Agenda will be available nearer the time.