**Club discussion about Mental Health 11 October**

Breathing Space : Introducing the session, Barbara said that Soroptimists provided a ‘Breathing Space’ away from the routine of daily life – a place to share ideas, get involved in practical projects, and work together to improve lives for others. In response to World Mental Health Day she wanted the Club to have some space to think about ‘What is Mental Health and share our views about the language associated with Mental Health and the public focus on mental health issues.

The World Health Organisation defines Mental Health as ‘a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.’ While mental health is something we all have – how we feel, how we cope with the ups and downs of everyday life, how we feel about ourselves and our life, how stress affects us, and how we deal with negative events and our self – esteem and confidence.

After a group discussion where we all shared our thoughts on how we define mental health and the generally negative language that is used, we talked about the differences between mental health and mental illness. Mental health is common, but 1 in 4 people experience some form of mental illness in their lifetime. Diagnosis is more prevalent in women, but may go undiagnosed in men, and the most common mental health condition in adults is mixed anxiety and depression.

Among the key issues affecting peoples, mental health at present are:

* Anxiety relating to the pandemic and missing at work or leisure
* Bereavement
* Domestic violence / Relationship problems
* Financial wellbeing
* Increase in suicide
* Fatique
* Child care and schooling
* General uncertainty

Barbara split us into 3 groups of 4. She asked us to think about two questions: 1. what does the current focus on mental health mean to us? How does it make us feel? and 2. Should we as Soroptimists be addressing mental health?

The group discussions were lively and open. Each group then fed back to the others. The negative language around mental health was highlighted, as was the stress that many have felt about their health, vulnerability and lack of control during the pandemic. This was compounded by stress arising from the significant changes faced by society. The fact that as individuals we are affected in different ways was recognised, and members appreciated that when we are stressed we can show less empathy with others. Members acknowledged that there were good days and bad days for everyone. A strong voice from the groups, however, was that in times gone by people felt connected, and this is one of the great strengths of Clubs. Soroptimists are a Community and members strive to be supportive of each other. We don’t have to worry about sharing our views or saying when we are struggling, or facing particular challenges. Support from the Soroptimist Community comes in many different ways, but listening to others is one of the main ways we can help. One group mentioned coping strategies – e.g thinking of something troubling you as a book, and just put it away on the shelf – leave it behind. Another suggestion was to think of a flower and put it between yourself and the problem, so that negative energies can flow into the flower and be replaced by more positive connections. Above all we can as Soroptimists show compassion and understanding.

To improve our own mental health after these tough discussion our Member Bev Keech, an Alexander Technique teacher, led us through a wonderful 5 minute relaxation session before coffee. We are fortunate to have Members with great skills in our Club!

After coffee we covered Club business and forthcoming events (see [**Club Programme**](https://sigbi.org/st-albans-and-district/club-programme/)). Everyone agreed it was an excellent meeting and really good to be meeting face to face again!