

Press Release

Soroptimists Raise Awareness of Modern Day Slavery.

On Saturday 7th February, around 150 Soroptimists from clubs across South Wales along with representatives from Immigration, Save the Children, Bawso and New Pathways attended a Symposium at the Aberavon Beach Hotel to raise awareness of Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery. The Symposium featured presentations from Stephen Chapman, Anti Human Trafficking Co-ordinator for Wales and Fiona McTaggart MP, Co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery. In addition members of the four South Wales Anti Human Trafficking Police Fora were present; notably, Fora co-ordinator Kim Ann Williamson. Presentations were also given by Dorian Elias, Border Force Officer based in Pembroke Dock, Nici Evans from the Cardiff Partnership Board and Jeff Farrar, Chief Constable of the Gwent Police Force.

The speakers gave a clear and sometimes harrowing insight into the nature and extent of illegal trafficking in people. Globally this has become big business, turning over billions of dollars. People can be trafficked for many reasons: domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, child exploitation, forced begging and cannabis farming. The Welsh Government has been proactive in tackling the issues, seeking to make Wales a country hostile to Modern Day Slavery and to provide the best possible support for the victims of trafficking. However, Human Trafficking remains a hidden crime, difficult to detect but with devastating effects on the victims. The message from all the speakers was not to be afraid to be a 'nosey' – be vigilant as to what is going on in your local area and if you are suspicious, ring 101 and report your concerns. You may be the link in the chain that saves another human being from a life of servitude and degradation.

The meeting concluded with a panel session, chaired by the President of Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland, Jenny Vince, with no shortage of questions from the floor on this highly emotive subject. Last year, Soroptimists across Wales distributed 4,000 anti-trafficking stickers in association with the Welsh Government to help raise awareness that this could be happening in any community in Wales, large or small. It is important to know what signs to look for that may indicate someone in the local community may have been trafficked: victims are often not allowed to speak for themselves and are usually accompanied in public, they are afraid of authority and have no papers. A video to show how vulnerable young people can be drawn into slavery, made by Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum, can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDFnTVIZE0k>

All speakers commented on how Soroptimists are well placed to raise awareness of Modern Day Slavery in their local communities and to lobby Governments to ensure strong measures are taken to protect victims and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Soroptimist International is a global network of volunteers working together to transform the lives of women and girls with 80,000 club members in 130 countries and territories. Soroptimist International works at a local, national and international level to educate,

empower and enable women and girls to reach their true potential. There are 17 Soroptimist clubs across South Wales. For more information please visit <http://sigbi.org/wales-south>

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