



May 2019

Soroptimist News



Mental Health Awareness Week - #SoroptimistsThinkonIt

Soroptimists at the Commission on the Status of Women 2019

Join us for our Conference in Bournemouth 24-26 October 2019

**Women inspiring Action
transforming lives**

Soroptimist News May 2019

Contents

President's message	3
Soroptimists focus on Mental Health	4
Soroptimist Clubs' action on Mental Health	5
Working with the United Nations	6
Soroptimists at CSW 2019	7
Gender Equality: A focus on older women	8
Soroptimist Clubs' action to empower women	9
Join us at our annual Conference	10
Meru Women's Garden Project	11
International Women's Day	12

Next issue: 16 August 2019, Deadline for submitting articles: 8 July 2019

Featured Articles: Environmental Sustainability & Food Security/Healthcare

Please send your articles to sally@sigbi.org

Disclaimer: Opinions expressed in this magazine do not necessarily represent those of Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) Ltd.

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President's message



I am delighted to welcome you to our online Soroptimist News. I hope that you are pleased with the fresh new design of our magazine.

This publication centres around the project work that is done by Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) and its Clubs and members. We want to promote the positive impact that we, as Soroptimists, have on the lives of women and girls. This magazine will help to ensure that our focus is firmly on our goal to change the lives of one million women and girls over the next three years.

Each of the four annual issues will have features on specific areas, which will then be illustrated by the work being done by our Members throughout our Federation.

The main feature of this issue is the Commission on the Status of Women annual meeting at the United Nations in New York, which took place in March this year. The SIGBI delegation had a fascinating experience and learned so much from other organisations and the work that they do. We will continue to work with the UN through its consultation processes such as CSW and the forthcoming review of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Carol Infanti, Assistant Programme Director for Economic Empowerment, explores the reasons for gender inequality, particularly concerning Social Protection for older women.

Our other focus in this edition is mental health. Firstly, thank you to every Club who has taken the theme 'Think On It' and promoted mental health awareness through conferences, speakers and events. Your action is helping to reduce the stigma associated with this issue and is contributing to more open discussions and positive attitudes to mental health. I am also very pleased to see the huge variety of imaginative ways that members have been safeguarding their

own wellbeing through fun and often stimulating activities and events. Please keep the momentum going in the coming months, because together our 7000+ voices CAN make a difference!

Finally, why not come to Bournemouth for our annual Conference, 24-26 October 2019. You do not have to be a Member to attend, everyone is welcome. We have some fantastic speakers lined up. Read the article on page 10 and visit the [Conference Website](#) to register.

In friendship

Sue Williams



Soroptimists focus on Mental Health

In support of President Sue's theme for her year, "**Think on it**", Soroptimist Clubs held events for **Mental Health Awareness Week**, which took place 13-19 May 2019. The theme of the week was "**Body Image – how we think and feel about our bodies**".

The Media often portrays a beautiful woman as being slender, which can make ordinary women feel inadequate. Even if they are generally healthy and not overweight, they still aspire to be thinner. Even when their friends and family assure them they are beautiful they do not believe them.



It is also becoming increasingly common for young girls to be bullied via social media, sometimes with tragic consequences. Body shaming is now a term in everyday use and is included in the Oxford English Dictionary.

Such influences can lead to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. Anorexia nervosa has the highest mortality rate of any mental illness, and affects about 1% of female adolescents. They can also lead young women to self-harm.

Soroptimists will also be using Mental Health Awareness Week to raise awareness of other mental health issues, as research tells us that twice as many women as men suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety or depression.

Women have different life experiences to men, which may result in a greater tendency towards problems with their mental health. In many cases, women are the primary care givers (whether it is for their children or their parents) as well as holding down a full-time job, which can result in increased stress. Situations such as domestic violence, rape and trafficking are also experienced predominantly by women.

In order to understand the mental health issues experienced by others, President Sue encouraged Members to hold an event to look at their own mental health. In the same way as the air hostess always advises you to "fit your own oxygen mask before helping others", it is as important, if not more so, to look after your own mental wellbeing. It will help you to cope better when looking after a relative or friend through their difficult times.

Soroptimist Clubs also held a Mental Health Awareness Raising event, and posted their activities on social media using the hashtag **#SoroptimistsThinkOnIt**.

If you need help then it is vital to speak to someone. There are lots of organisations out there that can help. Don't suffer alone. See the [SIGBI Website](#) for resources.

Mental Health Awareness week helps to focus the mind, but awareness of the issues should be maintained throughout the year.

Is someone you know behaving in an unusual manner? Does a work colleague seem withdrawn or has a friend cancelled a regular get together without giving a reason?

Take the time to talk to them and find out if they are having any problems that could be causing them stress.

Sometimes a conversation may be all they need.



Soroptimist Clubs' action on Mental Health



SI Madurai appointed a number of renowned health professionals to address 250 college students from three colleges on 1 March 2019 to raise awareness of mental health. The topics covered related to mental, social and physical health, with the theme "Think on It".



SI Cardigan & District researched mental health in their local, rural areas. Farming is a career which comes with huge pressure and isolation and has one of the highest rates of suicide affecting both men and women. The Club donated £1200 to a 'Share the Load' scheme, to provide counselling to farmers.



SI Poona conducted a seminar on 'Enhancing the Mental well-being of Women and Girl Children' as part of its Girl Child Protection Initiative, by addressing issues of obesity and child sexual abuse. Over 100 teachers, students and NGOs attended, and left feeling very well informed.



SI Liverpool hosted a coffee morning on 7th February 2019 (Time to Talk Day). After cakes and drinks, members and visitors began with a short quiz about mental health. This encouraged people to begin sharing their own experiences. The morning was so successful, it now takes place every month.



SI Chennai addressed 40 girls from the 12th grade at the local school about depression and suicide. The girls were taught to recognise the behavioural symptoms, for example depression, anxiety, constant fear and stress, a general feeling of lack of purpose, hopelessness and withdrawal.



Four members from **SI Ellesmere Port and District** travelled to London on Monday 8th April 2019 to visit the HQ of MQ Transforming Mental Health Through Research. Thanks to the Club's fund raising efforts they were able to take a cheque for Four Thousand Pounds for the charity.



SI Northwich and District regularly donates items to Knit for Peace, who say, 'Knitting is good for people. In our experience, knitting is important as an activity that can be carried out into extreme old age and helps improve long-term health, both mental and physical.'



SI Northern Ireland hosted an informative and inspiring event at Belfast City Hall to promote awareness of Maternal Mental Health in Northern Ireland. Regional President Catherine Milhench has Mental Health as a focus for her year.



SI Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, held a Mental Health Awareness Evening with 4 speakers addressing various aspects of mental health. Funds were also raised for Friends of the Valkenberg Hospital Trust.



As Dementia UK is celebrating 10 years of 'Time for a Cuppa', **SI Dewsbury** held several fundraising events, and raised nearly £1,000 for Admiral Nurses, who are specialists in dementia care.

Working with the United Nations

Kay Richmond, Programme Director, reports



Following successful [agreed conclusions](#) from the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63) in March this year, there is much to do if we are to achieve implementation by member states. The themes for this session were:

Priority theme: Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls;

Review theme: Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development.

Equality



The assumption is that everyone benefits from the same supports. This is equal treatment.

Equity



Everyone gets the supports they need thus producing equity.

Justice



The cause(s) of the inequity was addressed. The systemic barrier has been removed.

This [summary of the outcomes](#) emphasises the need to have a fair system in place for all including, for example, people with disabilities. This means applying equity and putting resources where they are needed most. Equity is the quality of being fair or impartial.

This year, Youth were well represented, with the UN publishing a [youth-friendly guide](#) to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Over the next year we will be working towards [CSW64](#) which will review the Beijing Declaration

and [Platform for Action](#). This is the 'action plan' for CEDAW. At country level it might be difficult to get agreement on a way forward. The USA has pointed a way towards addressing failure to implement at national level through [CEDAW for Cities](#) where this has been achieved in several cities. For help in achieving this see their useful [fact sheet](#).

If you want to see how countries are performing on the SDGs, a good place to start is the interactive map at <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/#/>, which could be used to target our activities. Countries are asked to undertake national comprehensive reviews, reporting on progress made and the challenges encountered. We must take opportunities to influence these reports through advocacy and action.

At the global level, the mandate for CSW64 is:

- To undertake a review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly;
- To assess current challenges that affect the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women;
- To contribute towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through a gender perspective.

There will be opportunities to influence this mandate by attending a regional intergovernmental meeting. Tentative dates for these are:

- Europe & North America 29-30 October 2019, Geneva;
- Latin America & Caribbean 4-8 November 2019, Santiago, Chile;
- Africa mid-November 2019, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia;
- Asia Pacific November 2019, Bangkok, Thailand;
- Western Asia February 2020, Beirut, Lebanon.

Gender equality is essential to achieving all 17 SDGs, and partnerships to achieve our mission is a good place to start.

Together we are stronger!



Soroptimists at CSW 2019

Margaret Clark, Assistant Programme Director



The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63) considered how social protection, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure can help to achieve equality and empowerment for all women and girls. Agreed outcomes were achieved despite attempts to remove rights achieved previously.

A concern about unpaid care was raised. What is the cost of unpaid care? How many women have the burden of care? Social protection does not extend to many parts of the world. Child care is often the responsibility of the aged, the sick and older children. It features heavily in society, and needs to be put onto centre stage. Many *'old girls'* shoulder the burden – mothers and grandmothers.

For rural women social protection is political and topical in many capitals. There is a great need to look at the issues. Free education is OK but how many realise that there is no follow through process? Is there a bus to get pupils to school? Is there a toilet? Do they have water and food provided?

Social protection, if available, enables students to fly high and levels the playing field for working women, providing maternity leave/benefits. Did you know that there are more female graduates than men but more male graduates in the labour market? A woman's right to financial independence must be protected and opportunities enabled.

HE Ambassador, Geraldine Byrne Nason, CSW63 Chair, on the Outcomes of CSW63 affirmed that the role of civil society is a great example of how you can make a difference, and if you put pressure on the government they are bound to listen. Women should be alerted to the political regression in women's rights. Social protection is not an end in itself but it does empower women. Finally Ms Byrne Nason said that the political activism of young women should be reawakened, as it is important that they are at the table.

The 'Me Too Movement' is an awakening. Key messages are to inform via social media, improve policies on sexual harassment and provide workplace protection.

Lack of birth certificates/ID make women more vulnerable to being trafficked because they cannot be traced.

It is important to act. Use your influence at street level, with your neighbour, local government, Parliament, United Nations by lobbying, campaigning, shouting out loud. Be ready for Beijing +25 in 2020!

Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) coverage of CSW63 can be found on the [SIGBI Website](#).

The importance of CSW for Soroptimists

Bev Bucur, SI Director of Advocacy, Reports

CSW is the single largest forum on gender equality and women's rights for UN Member States. This year more than 5,200 women and men representing civil society, along with at least 1,850 delegates from governments attended CSW63, which focused on the access to social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure for women and girls as key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is important for Soroptimists to be present at this event to be the Global Voice for Women and Girls and ensure women and girls are not left behind. To read more about CSW63 please visit the [UN Women Website](#).

The Soroptimist delegation included more than 80 members from the four Federations. Soroptimist International ran a successful side event on "Inclusive Social Protection for Women and Girls: Best Practices and Equity" and participated in 11 parallel events. Our signature parallel event was "Lifting Women From Poverty Through Lifelong Learning", which included best practice projects from the four Federations and an update on the International President's Appeal.

The disappointment this year was the attempt to push back women's rights that had been previously agreed by member states, prompting António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations to call on civil society to push back on the push back. [Read more here](#).

Soroptimist coverage of CSW63 can be found on the [SI Website](#).



Gender Equality

A focus on older women



Carol Infanti **Assistant Programme Director Economic Empowerment reports**

While the world has achieved progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment, women and girls continue to suffer discrimination in every part of the world.

What is holding women back?

The lack of women's empowerment stems from a variety of problems including lack of access to opportunities and resources. Poverty is a huge barrier that often separates

women from the opportunity to develop skills in school, create their own capital, or participate in political life.

Social Protection

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) this year focused on social protection systems, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Social protection is about having policies and programmes designed to prevent and overcome situations that adversely affect people's wellbeing. Everyone should enjoy at least basic income security. Social protection systems should support women and girls; the challenge is to make them economically viable.

Globally women shoulder three quarters of the domestic/unpaid work; 80% of women in India do casual work.

Social protection schemes are important as they help reduce poverty and inequality. However, they need to recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work and recognise where work is carried out e.g. in the home and, in some parts of the world, in streets and waste dumps.

Older women and economic empowerment

The world is ageing at an unprecedented pace, with more women living into older age. Globally, there were 962 million people aged 60 or over in 2017, making up 13% of the population, with most living in low- and middle-income countries. This will rise to 20.7% by 2027.

Women live longer than men but this does not mean they are living their later life in good health with adequate resources. Less than 16% of older people in low-income countries have access to a pension. Older women are less likely than older men to receive a pension, partly due to gendered working patterns.

In many (richer) countries, evidence suggests older women may undertake unpaid care work as they see this work as rewarding. However, in poorer countries, where care infrastructure is severely lacking, unpaid care work is often time-consuming and the positive impact on older women is less clear, carrying emotional and physical consequences.

The lack of visibility of older women in the economic empowerment agenda means they are invisible to policy makers - they are not included in efforts to address systemic gender inequality. Tackling ageist attitudes is fundamental to social protection and making economic empowerment a reality for women of all ages.

What you can do? #OlderWomenMatter

- Raise awareness, help create policy for the specific health needs of older women working in developing countries.
- Ensure the Government's implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, [Target 5.4](#) on unpaid care, fully recognises older women's unpaid care/domestic work and provides older women with necessary support.



Soroptimist Clubs'

action to empower women



On 27th February 2019, **SI South Kolkata** donated 2 Singer sewing machines to South Kolkata Parasmoni, an organisation that helps differently abled people, with the aim of giving women skills so that they achieve financial independence and enhance their feeling of self worth.



SI Bromley raised funds to enable a Kenyan widow, Anna, to build her own home.



SI Belfast raised funds to provide microloans in Malawi. These enable women to start a small business and earn enough to support their families.



SI Medway towns held a wine tasting to raise funds for their Soroptimists On Sustainability (SOS) Project. The money provides microloans for women whose lives and livelihoods have been affected by climate change.



SI Chennai have held their "City Shandy" twice a year for 11 years. This provides a platform for women to sell items that they produce. In February 2019 there were 85 stalls selling clothes, jewellery, household items, gift articles, toys and home made food items like jams and pickles. There were crowds of shoppers eager to buy.



Soroptimists in all four Federations support the International President's Appeal, which is chosen by the President of Soroptimist International and runs for two years. The current appeal is **Women, Water and Leadership**, which was selected by SI President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen, and which provides finance to five water-related projects on five continents.

Women play an important role in water management and they are vital in achieving equitable access to water for all, and for all uses. Despite positive steps taken in past decades, the potential contributions of women in water development remain largely untapped, inhibiting women's economic empowerment.

Full details are on the [Soroptimist International Website](https://www.soroptimistinternational.org/).

Join us at our annual Conference

Bournemouth - 24-26 October 2019



Speakers to inspire you: L-R Baroness Susan Greenfield, George Anderson, Dr Leyla Hussain, Penny Mallory

Do you want to pick up new challenges? Or are you hoping to extend your social networks?



Entertainment to rock you: L-R The Rock Choir, Abba's Angels

Either way the annual SIGBI Conference in **Bournemouth (24 – 26 October 2019)** is for you so what are you waiting for?

www.sigbi.org/bournemouth2019

The Conference theme is **#ThinkOnIt**, raising awareness of Mental Health.

Registration for the Conference is open to all - register via the [Conference Website](http://www.sigbi.org/bournemouth2019). You will be meeting up with other delegates in the expansive new Bournemouth Conference Centre situated on the seafront and close to many hotels.

Conference Chair Eileen Hunter writes:

“As the planning for Conference comes to its final stages the excitement is mounting. A huge warm welcome of friendship and fun awaits everyone from the ‘rocking’ entertainment provided by the Rock Choir and Abba’s Angels to the wonderful retail therapy opportunities and exhibition from Soroptimist Clubs and supporting partners and sponsors. All this before you even listen to the speakers!”

“Join us in Bournemouth to be a part of an internationally vibrant and dynamic organisation”.

Opening Ceremony

The arrival of the flags of all the member countries of Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland is a moving and emotional occasion.

Members in all of these countries make a difference to the lives of women and girls every day, every year. You will have the opportunity to learn more during conference.

Catch up with all the details on the website:

www.sigbi.org/bournemouth2019/

Celebrated speakers

Baroness Susan Greenfield is a renowned research scientist, author and broadcaster. She is CEO of a biotech company that she founded in 2013.

Penny Mallory changed her life from ‘homeless waster’ to ‘Rally Champion’. She inspires audiences to achieve greater things for themselves.

George Anderson uses his own experiences of failure and self-limitation to illustrate the steps to success.

Dr Leyla Hussein is a psychotherapist specialising in supporting survivors of sexual abuse. She is an international lecturer on female genital mutilation (FGM) and speaker on Gender Rights.

Rhythmic entertainment

Rock Choir on Thursday evening

Let yourself go in the music and be uplifted by the harmony of voices.

Rock Choir has been perfected over the past 10 years and has achieved an award-winning standard of excellence.

ABBA's Angels on Saturday night

Get your toes tapping, become ‘Dancing Queens’ and enjoy a massive dose of nostalgia.

ABBA’s Angels perform all the best known Abba songs wearing hand-made replica costumes with choreographed dance routines.

Meru Women's Garden Project

Summary of the Year 2 Annual Report Amanjit Dhillon, Child.org

The Meru Women's Garden Project completed its second year in March 2019, and it has again been hugely successful.



The Agricultural Training saw Child.org work with 9 groups of 253 women in Lairangi community. Groups had good attendance and the curriculum stayed the same as in the previous year covering topics such as leadership, planting, indigenous foods, environmental conservation etc, with each group having a say in what they preferred to learn first.

The Alternative Rite of Passage sessions were well attended with two sessions being held. The total turnout was 149 girls, which was 29 more girls than originally planned. A boys' forum ran at the same time in a different location and the turnout for this was 48 boys out of a target of 60. This is the most successful boys' forum we have run and the feedback was hugely positive. The Alternative Rite of Passage and boys' forum graduations took place at the same time and were well received by the entire community.

Year two also saw Child.org launch the first Mother's Nutritional Training groups. We worked with 5 groups of 83 mothers over a 6 month period and the groups met once a month to receive training sessions either at the CIFORD centre or within their community.

For a more in depth update and overview of the entire project to date please view the [full annual report](#) on the [Meru Women's Garden Project](#).

Team Mum - getting your donations match-funded by the UK Government Patricia Gatherum, SIGBI Project Liaison reports

On 1 February nine Soroptimists went to a Shindig in London to see the launch of Child.org's Team Mum Project.

Hopefully by the time you read this lots of you will have taken advantage of the Government's matched funding and raised even more money for our Meru Project.

Here are a few accounts of how you have been raising money since February.

The [Canterbury](#) club members held a dinner dance on International Women's Day. After a lovely meal Suzanna Townsend, the GB Gold medal hockey player, gave an inspirational talk. The event was enjoyed by all attending and raised £500 for Meru.

[SI Canterbury](#) also raised £346 at a screening of the film Grease in the Gulbenkian University of Kent. Congratulations to them for raising an amazing £846.

[Newcastle upon Tyne](#) club donated £425 at this special time. Thank you.

[Stockton on Tees](#) members raised £100 by eating smarties and filling the empty tubes with money. Fun with a good result.



Patricia Gatherum held an open day in her home, with African art and jewellery as well as refreshments for sale. £615 was raised and lots of friendships renewed as it was attended by Soroptimists past and present.

I know there have been lots of other events but these are the ones I have been told about.

Thank you again to everyone who raised £8,306.63p in February and March. Soroptimists have raised an incredible £144,737 so far for this project.

I am really impressed and I know the women and girls in Meru will be also.

International Women's Day

International Women's Day is an important date in the Soroptimist Calendar. Soroptimist Clubs celebrate in many different ways.



SI Barnstaple gave out 100 roses, which had been donated, to women in the town centre. It was a joyful event, with some of the roses being used to remember loved ones who are no longer with us.



SI East Grinstead held a dinner in the presence of the mayor. The main speaker was a female Chelsea Pensioner, who gave a fascinating insight into her life at the Royal Hospital Chelsea.



SI Mansfield and District hosted an event attended by over 160 people. There were speakers, an auction, and the local Tesco donated fairtrade chocolates.

£1,159.00 was raised for MIND and Mercy Malaysia.



SI Kings Lynn ran Women Aloud, a free event with numerous stalls, Bollywood dance workshop, inspiring speaker and performances by the Marham Military Wives Choir and The Rock Choir. Plus a presentation of prizes for a School Art Competition.



SI St Albans and District held a debate called "Are Women Their Own Worst Enemy?", which was broadcast live on Radio Verulam. The animated discussion covered a wide range of subjects concerning women.



SI Bebington dressed as suffragettes at a coffee morning, attended by the Mayor and his wife, and raised £566 for Incubabies, which supports a neonatal unit on the Wirral.



SI Dewsbury attended a "Building Better Balance" Festival.

The speakers were inspirational, and the Club gave a presentation about Soroptimist International.