

Garstang Soroptimist's Programme Action Annual Report – 2021/2

Well, another 12 months has flown by and we are very pleased to present the Programme Action (PA) Annual Report for 2021-2 to the Annual General Meeting on the 27th April 2022.

As ever, our thanks go to Kathy, for being our President during the 100 years of Soroptimism celebrations, and to all members who have helped make this another successful year for programme action. Whilst everyone's name is not mentioned in this report, everyone has played an important role in our successes this year. A great team effort.

To record everyone's contributions, we list all active members this year here as a record of your involvement (Angela, Annemarie, Fiona, Gail, Hazel, Jackie, Janet, Joan B, Joan H, Judith, Kathy, Lesley, Louise, Maureen, Muriel, Nora, Pamela, Rosemary, Ruth, Susan, Yvonne).

This was a year we had a lot of new members (Fiona, Louise, Pamela, Rosemary and Yvonne). We saw them quickly making a difference as they became involved in PA, making an active contributing to our successes this year. Fiona, Louise, and Yvonne took the lead on 3 new projects: Blister Packs; Wow Women and Old and Foreign Coins for RNIB respectively.

COVID19 has still featured throughout the year, either in the way we have had to prepare events and activities, or in helping us to develop our hybrid virtual/physical meetings for those experiencing a bout of COVID. Our thanks to Joan for keeping us technologically safe and sound throughout, enabling us all to meet up to thrash out ideas out for PA and keep projects on track.

What has been the result of all this work? Over ten PA projects submitted to SIGBI's PA database to celebrate our centenary year and what variety! - see the calendar of events below. All this work is no good without publicity and keeping our local community up to date. A big thank you to Gail, Joan and Lesley for spreading the word and captivating our local community via social media, our website and the Green Book chapters.

Importantly, we have again improved the lives of women and girls, benefited our local community and, of course, our environment.

Well done everyone!

In terms of our calendar of events throughout the year there are a number of highlights:

May

As part of the Soroptimist International centenary celebrations taking place in 2021, **we pledged to plant 100 trees in our local area, to represent '100 years of Soroptimism'**. This month Kathy reported good news from the Woodland Trust, they would fully fund the cost of the trees. Wyre Borough Council, via their Tree and Woodland Officer (Ryan Arul), would find a suitable planting site central to Garstang and to carry out the planning and consultation protocols on our behalf. Hooray!



We also launched the first of our **blister pack recycling collections** – four large containers were taken to Kepple Lane Pharmacy for recycling, and we also promoted the promotion of blister pack recycling through our petition of the month. Unfortunately we had to shelve this collection. It had been a victim of its own success. Collection of blister packs from Kepple Lane Pharmacy was cancelled and despite searching by Fiona and members, no other outlet was found, except Superdrug who would only accept collections from individuals.

June

Fund raising began for our **charity of the year – AfriReuse**, aiming to sponsor the production of 100 Dignity Packs. The 100-theme coincided with the 100 years of Soroptimism celebrations.

Firehouse Pads is a Kenyan social enterprise that trains girls and women to produce reusable sanitary pads. The social enterprise was launched in response to the issue of girls and women lacking access to sanitary wares and as a result missing out on schooling and also suffering health consequences as they use often used rags and paper to stem their period flow. Firehouse also provides access to vocational education and training, especially for those who have been rescued from FGM (Female Genital Mutilation).

Each dignity pack costs £10 includes:

- ▶ 2 moisture-resistant fabric shields
- ▶ 8 washable liners
- ▶ 2 pairs of underwear
- ▶ Soap a wash cloth
- ▶ A small protective bag to discreetly carry used liners home.

Joan recognised the potential of selling unwanted items on a Bric-a-brac website. Over the year the Virtual Bric-a-brac raised an amazing £429! Something definitely to continue with.

This month we presented a Climate Change PA video at the Regional Meeting about some of the work Garstang Soroptimists have done around the very important topic of Climate Change.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-liUKgKCFJU

July

We wrote to our MP Ben Wallace re the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill which was about to have its second reading in the House of Lords. Soroptimist Clubs had been approached by Dame Vera Baird, the Victims Commissioner asking for our support due to concerns that digital disclosure can be a real problem for victims of domestic violence and rape. We received a reassuring response advising that it would be a non-coercive power subject to a statutory code of practice to support victims.



Our '100 Afternoon Delights' also went down a storm in July, the 100 theme reinforcing the centenary of Soroptimism and our commitment to championing the cause. £143.50 raised via a raffle for our chosen charity AfriReuse.

August

Always a quiet month, with no formal meetings, but still the opportunity for a social get together. Muriel held a plant sale this month. Following months of COVID restrictions, the weather was no obstacle to the laughter, chatter and opportunity to socialise in the open air and £148 raised for AfriReuse.

September

September saw us communicate our Soroptimist International Statement on the Situation in Afghanistan – recognising the challenging situation women and girls in the country were facing as a result of conflict.

This was also the month that saw us complete our 100 mile relay – on foot, by bike, Sinclair C5 and all with the panache of our new Soroptimist neckerchiefs. The smiles said it all – and the donations totalled £1,086.32 (including £656.87 via Just Giving). Our annual target of funding the production of 100 Dignity Packs (£1000) for women and girls reached with one event! Unanimously, we agreed to send £1000 to AfriReuse now, rather than waiting to the end of the year.



Our guest speaker for the month, Charlotte Elwood from Northwest Cancer Research delivered a very informative talk to coincide with Breast Cancer Awareness month. The Q&A session provided details on the current and future research opportunities, and gave us some

good ideas for future fund-raising support. We also raised over £25 for the charity through the sale of cards.

We also supported Garstang Fair trade by completing their **Climate Change Questionnaire** during the Climate Coalition's 'The Great Big Green Week' 18-26 Sept 21, Garstang Fair trade pledged to secure the completion of 100 Climate Change Questionnaires by the local community. The aim of the questionnaire was to identify the level of awareness in the public of the current crisis and to establish what they thought should be done about it from both government and individual basis.

Following the Afghanistan humanitarian crisis, SIGBI called for support from all members. After exploring a number of options as a Group, Ruth found Lancaster Refugee Centre would be grateful for our support.

October

October was also the month where we were honoured to take part in the unveiling of the SIGBI memorial at the National Arboretum – Judith, one of our long-standing members, took part in the unveiling of the memorial reminding us all that, wherever we are in the world, we make an impact.



November

This month was the opportunity for us to reflect on the work SIGBI was doing through their participation in COP 26 by having an exhibition booth on 8 and 9 November 2021. Two centenary exhibition banners were on display, and specially designed postcards distributed to attendees and also by the local Clubs in the area.

It was also the month that we, yet again, promoted our **16 days of activism** – 16 days where, through the power of social media, we highlighted the issues facing women and girls across the world, and promoted ways in which changes can be made.

Members donated a generous amount of food items for Janet to take to the **Salvation Army Foodbank in Preston**.

December

December was our 'collection' month – Clothing collections for refugees; a collection of trauma bears to offer support to children in need/experiencing trauma; stamps for the RNIB.

Ruth delivered around **10 dustbin bags clothing and 7 trauma bears donated by members to the Lancaster Refugee Centre**, mainly for Syrian refugees.

It was also the month for putting pen to paper – sending our ‘Cards for Kindness’ to coincide with the season’s festivities.

January

Janet collected and despatched over **7kg of stamps to RNIB** (300g last year) over the next couple of months. This substantial increase was due to the generous participation of our local community using the 4 collection boxes we had placed around Garstang and a particularly large collection (2 bags) from one member of the public.



Yvonne’s proposal to support the RNIB by saving foreign and old coins was approved. Following problems in involving the local community in this collection, this project was rolled over to next year.

February

February saw Garstang Soroptimists taking part in a national campaign to show the people in power that tackling the climate crisis is the fight that unites. Using the symbol of the green heart, our crafty members created some wonderful examples to share with our MP, letting them know we want to see real and rapid action to tackle the climate crisis.



March



March was our tree planting month - the long awaited opportunity to celebrate 100 years of Soroptimism by planting 100 tree whips. A celebration, and a contribution to our climate change priorities. The sun shone, the spades were busy and we ended up planting over 180 tree whips in Garstang. This project could very easily have not happened, had not it been for Kathy’s continued patience and persistence over the last 2 years to bring it to fruition. A big thank you Kathy.

International Women's Day on the 8th March also saw us launch the first of our series of **WOW women profiles** (www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDPrhKRoLA8)

The aim of WOW women is to highlight the achievements of local women in employment fields where females are often under-represented. The aim of the profiles is to 'bring to life' the options and opportunities for employment and skills for the next generation of women; to inspire girls to think about different career paths; and to prompt some ideas about future ways of working.

The publication of these profiles was the culmination of a lot of work by Louise, Gail, Joan. and Kathy. The value of this work was recognised by members and voted to continue into next year.

April

Sadly, Annemarie reported that due to logistical problems, **Mary's Meals Backpack Project** was to come to an end. This month was our last chance to send backpacks to the charity. A further 37 backpacks were sent, making a fantastic total of 575 sent over the 10 years we have supported this project. It was agreed to send remaining funds from the project (£133) to Mary's Meals and any spare stationery, toiletries etc to Preston's Salvation Army. Annemarie and Joan H have now got their bedrooms back! A huge thank you to Annemarie and Joan H (and previously Judith) for coordinating this project.

Our **petition signing** this year covered ten different topics from: Stop the rot (asking supermarkets to address food waste in their supply chains); recycling of blister packs; end child exploitation in cocoa; period poverty, remove VAT on period pants; farmers call for fair climate promise; blue recovery, WWT petition to save wetlands; DEFRA survey on single use plastic; fashion models, petition against fashion models being forced to slim; call for a law against sexual harassment on women. What a variety! A big thank you here for everyone who completed them and also to Lesley and Joan for publicising them in the Garstang Focus and for the postings on Facebook by Gail. Who knows how many more people we encourage to sign these petitions. A small thing to do but it does sometimes make a difference.

The final tally for the money raised for **AfriReuse Dignity Packs was £2,055**. When bank charges (£55) taken off for transferring the money, this allowed us to send two sets of £1000 to the charity to buy 100 dignity packs each time. One in October and one at the end of the year. A fabulous end to 2021/22!!!

2022/23

Our plans for 2022-3 look just as exciting, and with Kathy continuing as President, we know we will have another 12 months of fulfilling friendship, and support for women and girls locally and nationally.

Thanks again for all your innovative ideas and hard work this year.

PA Officers – Jackie and Gail