**THE HISTORY OF SI ABERDEEN (2000 -2019)**

By 2000 funds had been raised for the Federation ‘Limbs for Life’ project, aimed at helping people who had lost limbs as a result of detonating mines in the war-torn areas of Afghanistan, Angola and Georgia, and many other charities benefitted from fundraising including Age Concern, the Cystic Fibrosis Research Trust and the Woodland Trust. Around this time members began to donate books to the patients’ library at Cornhill Hospital, a service project which continued for more than ten years. The club also began to work with young carers and the annual carol singing event took place at Forestgait Old Folks Home.

In 2001 prior to attending the Federation Conference in South Africa members of the Scotland North clubs provided money for the refurbishment of several rooms in the Saartje Baardman Centre in Cape Town for abused women and their children. Club members funded the Bon Accord Room. Donations were later made to Find Your Feet, a charity supporting poor rural families in remote parts of Asia and Africa, and to UNICEF, the Salvation Army, Childline and Sleep Scotland. Activities included manning a local Breast Screening Unit and providing toiletries for the homeless. A group of members joined other North Region members at a weekend away in Edzell and the club enjoyed a Burns lunch and an Italian evening. Funds were raised for Corrieneuchin, a Children 1st project for abused children and for Mr Ayliffe’s charity which carried out cleft lip and palate surgery in Africa and the Philippines. Funds were also raised for Cornhill Hospital and Young Carers. The club went on to adopt a blond ray at Macduff Aquarium. Members also attended the 2002 SIGBI Conference in Belfast. The SI Convention took place in Sydney in 2003 and two club members met with members of SI Denilquin, another of the club’s friendship links.

The club celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2004 with a weekend of events which included a civic reception in Aberdeen’s Town House, a coffee morning at the Gordon Highlanders’ Museum, a dinner at Elphinstone Hall at the University of Aberdeen and a Sunday service also at the university. A floral display in Union Terrace Gardens also commemorated the anniversary. From 2004 to 2011 groups of members took annual three- day trips to Orkney to meet up with the club’s link member and to visit and enjoy the local historical attractions. In 2005 the club began working with the Gomel Cerebral Palsy Association to fund sanatorium treatment for three young people over sixteen. Members provided two new computers and a printer to improve dexterity and employment skills.

Concern for the environment was growing and members carried out a survey of glass recycling from commercial outlets in the city. The club also took part in projects supporting women’s refuges and substantial funds were raised for CLAN Cancer Support in Aberdeen. International Women’s Day in 2006 was marked by a service in the local St John’s Church with members speaking on Soroptimism, violence against women and women in Africa, and by lighting candles for all these women. During 2006 and 2007 supermarket vouchers were collected by club members to purchase equipment for local primary schools. At this time another service project to collect used stamps was continuing and although it previously supported cancer charities, today the stamps are donated to Oxfam.

Former club president Amy Souter was awarded her forty years’ service certificate in 2007 and was made an honorary club member. She continued to support the club and not only received a forty-five years’ service certificate in 2012 but was the guest of honour at the club’s eighty- fifth anniversary celebrations. Following her death in 2015 she left a bequest to the club. During 2007 help was given to a local Scout group and a Christmas afternoon was organised where nail painting and jewellery and card making were enjoyed by the women from two local refuges. Funds were donated to CLIC Sargent. and to a Social Services Centre in Chikanata in Zambia. Money was also sent to Gomel to help fund activities for the members of the spinal injuries group. For the 2007 SI Convention ‘Suncatcher’ decorations were made by club members as gifts for all 1500 attendees, donated jewellery pieces were remodelled and tartan brooches produced, all to be sold at church fairs, craft stalls and at that year’s conference.

Throughout the year new members gave ‘job talks’ to the club and around this time funds had been raised for the Salvation Army, Water Aid, the British Skin Foundation, the Pulmonary Hypertension and to Grampian athletes and coaches attending the Special Olympics in Leicester. The club also raised funds to support the Federation Quadrennial project, Project Sierra – a Family and a Future, undertaken in partnership with Hope and Homes for Children, helping families that have suffered in the civil war in Sierra Leone. Two members of the Gomel Cerebral Palsy Association were invited by the club to come to Aberdeen to observe and discuss practice and projects for disabled people.

Between 2008 and 2009 the club had established an alliance with the Prince’s Scottish Youth Business Trust, a charity which helps young people between the ages of eighteen and twenty- five years to set up and continue in business. Substantial funds were raised by producing and selling a recipe book. Projects that year also included collecting bras for Oxfam and tights for use by fistula patients in Africa. The club celebrated its 80th birthday lunch in Elphinstone Hall and members were joined by local, national and international colleagues and friends with the Federation President and the Lord Provost attending. Some club members attended the Federation Conference in Cardiff giving a presentation on the club’s work with the Phoenix Club. During the next few years, the club supported Cairns Counselling, a small, local, voluntary counselling service, as well as NESS (North East Sensory Services), and items of stationery were collected to send to schools in Africa. Club members also welcomed visitors from a Soroptimist club in Montana, USA. In 2011 the club embarked on a two- year major project to support Alzheimer Scotland. A meal, raffle and fashion show, which featured some dementia patients as models, attracted local sponsorship and with more than one hundred guests not only raised in excess of £10,000 that evening but enabled the club to feature in the local TREND magazine!

Additional fundraising events including a summer supper and raffle took place to boost the funds with the final total donated being £13,000. A group of members went on to participate in a service project with the local branch of Alzheimer Scotland to support dementia patients and their carers at their Musical Memories sessions. In 2012 the club’s main project was to support Famine Relief for Orphans in Malawi which helps girls and boys to go to school by providing food, clothes and equipment. The same year, following the untimely death of Professor Gabrielle (Gay) Hawksworth, former club president, Regional president and Federation Councillor, members learned that she had made a generous bequest to the club. The Gay Hawksworth Legacy Fund was set up and continues to help young people achieve their full potential by travelling abroad and using their time productively for a worthy cause. Applicants receive grants to cover part of their costs and on their return, give talks at club meetings to describe their work in their chosen project abroad, the benefit to that local community and to themselves personally.

Between 2013 and 2014 club members supported Charlie House, a locally based charity supporting children with complex needs and life limiting conditions, and their families. Members attended a White Ribbon talk as part of International Women’s Day and supported MSP Jenny Marra’s Modern Slavery Bill. Around this time members began supporting the local food bank run by the Instant Neighbour charity by making monthly donations of tinned and non-perishable food. This project continues today. In 2015 support was given to the Red Cross, the Boko Haram girls and the Kaduna School for the Deaf in Nigeria. Two club members participated along with other Scottish Soroptimists in the United Nations GIFT box scheme at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

Over the next eighteen months the club’s main project was the support of Tillydrone Vision, a local community collaboration, giving young people the opportunity to help others in some of the poorest communities in Uganda. Funds were raised through coffee mornings, craft fairs, a quiz night and a week in the local charity shop. Money raised was also given to the young people travelling to Uganda. Replacing the girls’ dormitory building at Kamuli Township Primary School was identified as needing direct support and clothing and other items were provided by the club for use in the school.

In the summer of 2016 a large group of members gathered in the Town House to be presented with individual Gold Award certificates by the Lord Provost in recognition of their service and contribution to volunteering in the city. From 2016 to 2019 members supported the SIGBI Meru Women’s Garden Project. In collaboration with the charity Child.org the project aimed to create sustainable gardening techniques and tools for enabling women in Meru, Kenya, to become mentors and pioneers of agricultural sustainability within their community. Aims of the project included educating girls on their rights and empowering them to stand up to damaging cultural practices like FGM. One club member volunteered for the role of Scotland North Region Ambassador for the project and in 2018 two members visited Meru. The total funds raised by SIGBI members for this project was in excess of £160,000. In 2017 members ‘dressed up’ to take part in the annual Daffodil collection for Marie Curie.

From 2017 to 2018 club members raised funds for Mental Health Aberdeen through a week’s use of the city’s charity shop, and the proceeds of a musical evening and meal went to Grampian Child Bereavement Network. Funds were also given to Edinburgh Direct Aid which supports Syrian Refugees in the Lebanon. The club went on to sponsor a Democracy poster competition steered by the local St. Margaret’s School for Girls to celebrate the centenary of some women gaining the vote. Club members discussed the issue of the use of palm oil and how to reduce consumption and only use products which contain sustainable palm oil.

In March 2019 members celebrated the club’s 90th anniversary with a lunch in the local Douglas Hotel. It was attended by many former club members, family members, other soroptimist club members and the Federation President. The speaker, Professor Sarah Pederson gave a talk entitled ‘Scottish Women and the Campaign for the Vote’ describing the Suffragette movement in the North East of Scotland more than a hundred years earlier. The club’s longest serving member Norma Michie cut the celebration cake! Later a group of members manned the Community Corner in Aberdeen Royal Infirmary over one week to promote the club and the Scottish Charity Air Ambulance service which relies on public donations to safeguard their life saving services, and for which the club was fundraising. Later that year members attended the SIGBI Conference in Bournemouth.

Since 2016 the club has been investing in Kiva (Kiva.org), a non -profit organisation whose mission is to expand financial access to underserved communities worldwide. By May 2019 the club had invested twenty- seven loans, totalling almost $1000, for women in eighteen countries, including Paraguay, Vietnam, Palestine and Kenya, in the agriculture, food production and housing and health sectors.