Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE4876

Soroptimist International of Canberra Incorporated

(1954 -)

Born	19540101, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia
Occupation	Service organisation, Women‚Äôs advocacy

Summary

Soroptimist International is a worldwide organisation for women in management and the professions working through service projects to advance human rights and the status of women. Soroptimists work at all levels of civil society, local, national and international, and are involved with a wide spectrum of women’s concerns. The Soroptimist Club of Canberra was chartered on 1 April 1955 and has met continuously since then.

Details

Soroptimists are committed to a world where women and girls together achieve their individual and collective potential, realise aspirations and have an equal voice in creating strong, peaceful communities worldwide.

The inaugural meeting of the Soroptimist Club of Canberra was convened at the Hotel Civic on 6 September 1954. The club was chartered on 1 April 1955 with a dinner at the Hotel Canberra. The Charter President was Mary Stevenson. In 1978 the Club became part of the new Federation, Soroptimist International of the South West Pacific (SISWP). Maris King of the Canberra Club was the second President of SISWP. The Canberra Club was incorporated in 1982.

Much of the effort of members has been devoted to service, an important objective of Soroptimism. The Canberra Club's first project was 'Buy a Brick' to assist in the provision of a unit for the proposed Goodwin Homes for the aged in Ainslie. Subsequently further funding was provided to Goodwin Homes and members took an interest in the occupants of Soroptimist Cottage until its demolition in the early 1990s.

The Canberra Club has helped, financially or in other ways, a wide variety of organisations in Canberra such as Sir Leslie Morshead War Veteran's Home, Koomarri, Guide Dogs for the Blind, Morling Lodge, Marymead Children's Home, the Girl Guides Association, Dr Barnardo's Children's Home, the Women's Shelter in Belconnen, Life Line, the Meals-on-Wheels Service, the Noah's Ark Toy Library, Multiple Sclerosis, ACT Blind Society, Motor Neurone Care and Support Group and the National Brain Injury Foundation. Assistance has also been provided in many other ways such as support for women's refuges, children with disabilities and needy women students in ACT tertiary institutions.

More recently the Club has provided scholarships through the Canberra Refugee Support Programme and microcredit loans to enable women to start their own small business.

The Club has also supported Soroptimist projects in other parts of Australia and overseas e.g. Fiji, Solomon Islands and East Timor as well as providing support for victims of natural disasters both in Australia and overseas. In recent years, the most successful international projects have been in Northern Thailand where young women were trained and given employment opportunities which meant that they didn't go to Bangkok to work in the sex industry (SIAM – Soroptimist International AIDS Mediation), and in Cambodia where schools and hospital facilities were provided for villagers on the Thai/Cambodian border (Hands across Borders). The Club's current project is training PNG women as midwives to work in their villages to improve the conditions for mothers and babies at the time of birth (Birthing in the Pacific).

Contributing to good will and understanding is an important part of Soroptimism. Members of the Canberra Club have taken the opportunity to develop a spirit of friendship among Soroptimists of all countries by extending hospitality to the many Soroptimists visiting Canberra and by attending meetings and conferences at the local, regional, national and international level. Many members plan business and holiday trips round international gatherings.

Over the years, the Club has taken an active interest in the Canberra community and has interacted with government, community and national organisations to promote public policy issues and projects of concern to its members.

As part of the centenary of Canberra celebrations, the Canberra Club has assisted the Canberra Museum and Gallery in an exhibition entitled *The Women who Made Canberra* to be held at the Gallery from 24 November 2012 to 17 March 2013. Additionally, in February 2013 Soroptimist Point at Yerrabi Pond in Gungahlin will be officially named in a ceremony recognising the contributions made by Soroptimist International. The Canberra Club has taken the responsibility for organising this event.

Published resources

Book

One Very Big Year: Canberra 100, 2012

Fifty Years On: The History of SI Canberra Inc. for the Club's Golden Jubilee, Passmore, Virginia, 2005

Resource

Soroptimist International,
http://www.soroptimistinternational.org/

Soroptimist International of the South West Pacific,
http://www.siswp.org

Site Exhibition

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Records of the Soroptimist Club of Canberra, 1955-1973 [manuscript]

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