

SI Barnstaple: Human Trafficking – not just an Inner City problem

Looking at the SIGBI Federation Programme Focus objective 2, 'to end human trafficking and all forms of violence against women and girls,' members of SI Barnstaple decided to hold some awareness sessions at club meetings, regarding trafficking, as we realized that we knew very little about the issue, and considered that it was likely to be an inner city problem rather than something that happened in North Devon.

We had some idea of the work SI Poole was carrying out, with their Purple Teardrop Campaign, but little else. We decided, however, that, should we take on trafficking, as a project, it would be in conjunction with SI Poole.

We started in June 2010 with four members researching different aspects of trafficking and reporting back to the Club. The fact that we initially had known so little of the subject brought us to the conclusion that other people might be interested in learning more, and so came the decision to hold a seminar, to which local organizations and dignitaries would be invited.

We contacted SI Poole, Purple Teardrop and obtained their CD, Model of Excellence, providing step-by-step guidelines on how to get started with all the relevant human trafficking background information, which we were able to adapt easily for our own purposes.

Our first considerations were financing the seminar and raising public awareness prior to the event. We purchased Purple Teardrop pins, posters and leaflets, 'Human trafficking- the signs', which also publicized the Crimestoppers helpline 'phone number, should anyone identify something as suspicious. We chose a venue on a public thoroughfare, at the entrance to the Barnstaple pannier market in the town centre. The date was close to our SI Women's Day of Service in March. We collected 304 signatures for the 'ban sex for sale' advertising campaign and collected £40 from pin sales and donations.

Pauline Monk, from SI Poole, had been contacted, in mid-November 2010, and had agreed to give a presentation, covering the national and global perspectives of trafficking. We also arranged for a Detective Inspector from Devon & Cornwall Police Serious & Organized Crime Investigation Team to focus on the extent of trafficking in South West England. He was previously a member of the Devon & Cornwall Constabulary's 'Operation Nerio' team, responsible for investigating possible premises used for trafficking, and bringing the traffickers to justice. The results of the investigations led to a recent TV documentary series.

A small working group was formed to plan the seminar, although as many club members as possible were included throughout. Each of the eight meetings held covered a different aspect of organization, commencing with setting a date and booking a room in our local Civic Centre (with parking), capable of holding 70 delegates.

We defined our objectives, sought sponsorship for the provision of delegate packs, and selected the information sheets from the Purple Teardrop CD, which were easily adapted for local use, prior to printing. All club members were involved in identifying delegates, and 200 invitations were printed. An initial 100 invitations were distributed with an information leaflet on Soroptimist International and, where possible, prospective delegates were contacted prior to receiving an invitation, to provide background to the seminar. The invitations went out five weeks prior to the event, with a two week reply deadline, giving us the opportunity to issue further invitations, should the response be poor. The second batch also had a two week deadline, due one week prior to the event.

Two short articles were printed in the local newspaper prior to the seminar, and a photographer was present at the event.

We provided a finger buffet with choice of wine or fruit juice, served after the two hour session. This enabled delegates to mix and visit the Purple Teardrop stand and SI Barnstaple's membership table.

The response was beyond our expectations with 75 delegates from a variety of groups including local dignitaries, Women's Aid, education, Rotary, W.I's, Townswomen's Guild, youth councilors, the editor of the local paper and the Girl Guides.

If we had thought that the seminar concluded our campaign, we are wrong! Several delegates requested posters and petition forms. Rotary have asked for a presentation, and there is a possibility of giving a presentation to first year students at our local college, as part of their course. We have now made contact with the local Girl Guide Commissioner and hope to work together once discussions are finalized at SIGBI Federation level. A further in depth article is to be published in the local newspaper, following a planned interview.

After a deduction for seminar expenses we have a reserve fund to progress other ideas relating to our human trafficking objectives in tandem with the Purple Teardrop campaign.

What started out as a casual look at the issues involved has resulted in our change of perspective. We are a club in a rural area of the country, but we realize we can't remain complacent as human trafficking, as we have learned, is not just an inner city issue.