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The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) is a collective of Commonwealth Parliamentarians who, irrespective of their gender, race, religion or culture, are united by community of interest, respect for the rule of law and individual rights and freedoms and by pursuit of the positive ideals of parliamentary democracy. Margaret is a member of the CPA Executive Committee (Scotland branch) and the Association's aim is to promote the advancement of parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance.

Since September the Executive Committee has hit the ground running. Committee members have met with Annie Lennox, the CPA Special Envoy, held discussions with Dr. Kalliani MP, the Minister for Health, Malawi and most recently with a delegation from the South African Parliament. Earlier this month Margaret attended the International Parliamentary Conference in London on the Millennium Development Goals as part of her CPA duties.



Margaret with Annie Lennox, CPA Special Envoy and Sarah Boyack MSP at the Millennium Development Goals conference.

Dyslexia and Us

In November the Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group (CPG) on Dyslexia held an event to highlight the impact of dyslexia on education and learning, health, behaviours and in the workplace.

Sir Jackie Stewart, President of Dyslexia Scotland, was the principal speaker at the event and was joined by Jane Edwards, who was named Educational Supporter of the Year 2011 for her work with school groups on her farm in Dollar, Clackmannanshire.

The event also highlighted the publication of an excellent book entitled 'Dyslexia and Us', which is a collection of personal stories compiled by Dyslexia Scotland describing the impact of dyslexia on individuals, families and relationships.

Commenting, Margaret, who is the convener of the CPG on Dyslexia, said: 'The event was very well attended with representatives from a huge variety of walks of life ranging from academics to the armed forces and the Scottish Football association. Also in attendance were a number of MSPs which underlines the cross party support the issue attracts. All who attended were enthused by the inspirational contributions from Sir Jackie who is a terrific ambassador for Dyslexia Scotland and who works tirelessly to raise awareness about dyslexia and also from Jane Edwards who spoke about her innovative programme that gives local pupils the opportunity to visit and work on the farm. I hope that this is a programme which more people and schools will participate in to give dyslexic children and adults the opportunity to take part in practical activities which help to bring out their ingenuity and lateral thinking.'

Those present also heard how 'Dyslexia and Us' provides a revealing insight into the daily lives of dyslexic people and those whose lives have, in some way, been affected by the condition. It includes contributions from children, parents, prisoners and job seekers, as well as public figures such as Michelle Mone OBE. Proceeds from sales of the book will go to Dyslexia Scotland and will help to raise awareness of the impact that unidentified and unsupported dyslexia can have as well as emphasising how vitally important it is to have early identification of the condition.'

Roots of Empathy

In November Action for Children hosted an event at Edinburgh's Dynamic Earth to promote the Roots of Empathy programme and to welcome its rolling out across 16 local authorities in Scotland, following a successful pilot at New Stevenson Primary School, Motherwell.

Margaret, who spoke at the event, said: 'I attended the launch of the pilot scheme in November 2010 and it was terrific to hear that the programme is now to be rolled out to more schools across Scotland, including those in South Lanarkshire.'



Margaret at the event with Mary Gordon, the founder of the Roots of Empathy programme.

Roots of Empathy is a classroom-based programme that aims to reduce bullying and aggression in schools in the short term and in the long term, seeks to encourage the children to be compassionate citizens and good parents. As part of the programme, a local parent and baby will visit the class every three weeks over the school year. As a former primary school teacher, I am most impressed by the inclusive nature of Roots of Empathy and how it encourages every child in the class, even the most reticent, to participate.

The programme has a proven track record of success internationally in Canada, New Zealand and the USA and it has the potential to have a huge impact on children in those crucial early development years and help them to grow in confidence and to understand their class mates and the wider community. Importantly, it also gives the pupils the skills and knowledge that will help them to be good parents in the future.'

Prescription Medicine Waste

Following a Freedom of Information request into prescription medicine wastage in Scotland, Margaret lodged a motion that was then discussed during a members' debate at The Scottish Parliament in November.

Commenting on the debate Margaret said: 'According to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society the cost of providing medicines is rising every year.'

Some measure of prescription wastage is unavoidable. For example, treatments can be changed by a doctor because they have adverse side-effects. However, there are various ways wastage can be reduced such as raising awareness about repeat prescription usage and encouraging people to think before ordering items on a 'just in case' basis.

Ultimately, there must be better communication between healthcare professionals, GPs, pharmacists and patients - thereby both improving patient treatment and reducing waste.

Providing pharmacies with time-saving technology and enabling pharmacists to have access to accurate up-to-date records will allow them to spend more time with patients. This in turn helps to address any problems with medication and ensures that medicines are only dispensed in the quantities required, when they are needed.

Furthermore, most people don't realise that even if they return unused medicines to their pharmacy, these medicines cannot be re-used and are destroyed. To this end, during the debate I asked Michael Matheson, the Minister for Public Health, to look at the possibility of adopting a recycling scheme similar to the French one, to help the people in Africa and other parts of the world where these medicines are desperately needed and where they could make such a massive difference.'

Margaret Mitchell MSP



CROSS PARTY GROUP ON TAIWAN

Since the inception of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 the links between Scotland and Taiwan have grown steadily and in January 2010 the Cross Party Group (CPG) on Taiwan was formed. The group re-formed for the fourth parliamentary session with Margaret as co-convener and aims to facilitate the political, cultural, educational and economic links between Taiwan and Scotland.

Commenting on the links between Scotland and Taiwan Margaret said:

'Scotland and Taiwan have many historical connections and over recent years have developed strong economic and cultural links. For example, Taiwan is now a huge market for Scottish whisky and shipments to Taiwan grew from £48 million to £70 million in the first six months of 2011 alone. Furthermore, The Council of Taiwanese Chambers of Commerce in Europe (ETCC) held its annual conference in Edinburgh on May 28, 2011, with over 150 Taiwanese business leaders across Europe taking part. In addition, this year performers from Taiwan participated in both the Edinburgh International Festival and at the Edinburgh Fringe.'

Towards the end of 2011 a tartan was commissioned by the Taiwanese community of Scotland to mark the centennial of the founding of the Republic of China (Taiwan). The tartan was designed by Kinloch Anderson and features the colours of the national flag of the Republic of China (Taiwan). The General Taipei Representative Office in UK, Edinburgh Office, kindly gifted every MSP a scarf made with the tartan and invited the co-convener of the cross-party group to commemorate the creation of the tartan. It is vitally important that we continue to develop these strong connections with Taiwan as they are of great benefit to both the Scottish economy as well as recognising our cultural heritage.



I hope that in 2012 the positive relations between Scotland and Taiwan will grow in strength and that the CPG will continue to play a significant role in developing these relations.'

Margaret (wearing her scarf) and Steven Reyyuan Chu, The Director General Taipei Representative Office in UK, Edinburgh Office, holding the official certification of the tartan.

BUSY YEAR...

What a year it has been with the Scottish Parliament elections in May and the party leadership race this Autumn all of which has meant that since the parliament returned from its summer recess it has been an exceptionally busy few months!

During this time I was pleased to lead a members' debate highlighting the issue of prescription medicine wastage a subject which is particularly relevant given the introduction of free prescription charges. I also welcome having the opportunity to voice constituents' concerns in debates on waste management and on housing where the vexing issue of anti-social tenants was again brought to the minister's attention.

I also relish my new role as the Parliamentary Conservative Group Local Government and Regeneration spokesman shadowing the minister and I look forward to serving on the Local Government Committee. In addition to this there have been numerous activities on-going which I have been involved in as a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Executive Committee.

In the region there have been some terrific events which I have been fortunate to attend including the opening ceremony of the International Children's Games; the Monklands the Life Skills initiative and the Scullion's Law Schools Debating Challenge, where I had the tough task of again being a judge in the final which saw some outstanding contributions from the speakers.

In general I've been working hard trying to help constituents with local issues which have ranged from advocating for an extension to early evening bus services to attempting to find a productive use of local authority derelict land.

You can read more about what I've been up to in this newsletter.

In the meantime I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy (and healthy) New Year.

Best wishes,
Margaret

Margaret Mitchell, Member of the Scottish Parliament for Central Scotland (Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party)



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Spectacular International Children's Games

August saw the opening ceremony of the 45th International Children's Games at Fir Park, Motherwell. The games, which are the world's biggest youth sporting event, were coordinated by both North and South Lanarkshire Councils and were being held in Scotland for the first time.

Commenting, Margaret said:

'It was a real pleasure to attend the opening ceremony for the games, which were a huge success. There were 1,300 competitors and coaches, administrators and delegates from 33 different countries participating in the games including 80 young athletes from Lanarkshire. I congratulate them on their achievements and hope they'll remember the experience for many years to come.'



Lanarkshire young people perform at the opening ceremony of the games.

Kittoch Park

Kittoch Court in East Kilbride is the latest block of flats specifically designed for retirement living for the elderly. The facility encourages independent living by providing various services such as an onsite housekeeper to support the owners. Having taken part in a tour of the property following the official opening on August 12 Margaret was impressed by the design of the apartments and the attention to detail which focuses on anticipating potential situations which could occur where the resident may require support.



Margaret and Gibby Cox MBE, former Lord Lieutenant of Lanarkshire who officially opened the flats.



Margaret is pictured with David and the class of 2011.

Out & about in Central Scotland

Life Skills Programme

Six Monklands schools took part in the Life Skills programme which ran from 6 September to 6 December 2011. The programme is part of Strathclyde Police's pro-social behaviour campaign and involves officers working with 5th and 6th year pupils to explore their expectations of society and what expectations society has of them. Issues such as the older generation in the community, roles and responsibilities in the workplace, self-image and relationships, politics, restorative justice and prisons are all covered. The young people have the opportunity to engage with various groups in their local community and society at large.

After attending the launch of the programme in September, Margaret returned later in the year to take part in a Question Time session with the pupils where they drew on the experience they had gained by asking really probing questions on a variety of issues.

Above: Margaret and other guests at the official launch held at Coatbridge College.

Right: Margaret and other panel members at the Q&A.



Open Secret

Towards the end of the year Margaret visited Open Secret, a service based in Falkirk, which offers support to those who have been affected by childhood sexual abuse. As a Central Scotland MSP, Margaret, is already very familiar with the organisation's work through previous visits and in her role as convenor of the Parliament's Cross Party Group (CPG) on Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse. On this occasion she wanted to hear more first-hand about Open Secret's pilot study into the physical effects which manifest themselves as a result of childhood sexual abuse.

Commenting on her meeting Margaret said:

'Open Secret do fantastic work with the survivors of abuse and in particular their pilot study this year has been ground breaking in both researching and raising awareness of the physical illnesses that can occur as a result of childhood sexual abuse. However, more needs to be done to raise awareness of the physical effects of abuse as well as the physiological impact and to work towards developing for training GPs, nurses, and other health professionals so that they can improve early identification of victims and appropriately treat their illnesses. Open Secret's research will continue next year and I hope that real progress can be made on this immensely important issue.'

Margaret with Janine Rennie, CEO and Traci Robertson Assistant CEO, Open Secret.



Tribute to David Johnstone

A very special Question and Answer Session at Greenfaulds High School took place on Friday 30 September with Margaret and the pupils of the Advanced Higher Modern Studies class as this was the last one that the school's Head of Modern Studies teacher David Johnstone would arrange before he retired.

Commenting Margaret said:

As usual I was very impressed by the in depth and range of questions from the pupils. It has been a real pleasure to visit Greenfaulds High School and meet with David Johnstone the Head of Modern Studies and his pupils. I have been visiting the school for the last 9 years so it is with huge regret that this occasion represented the last time that I would have the opportunity to meet with David as he retired from teaching pupils on the 11 November 2011. After 41 years at the chalk face, 20 of which have been at Greenfaulds, David is taking up a post as an Associate Tutor at the Jordanhill Campus of Strathclyde University where he hopes to pass on to future teachers all the skills involved in being a truly effective and inspiring teacher. I can't think of anyone more suited for the task!'

Glenmavis Bus Service

Following concerns expressed by constituents regarding the last departure of service 181 being too early in the evening for Glenmavis residents, Margaret, approached Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) about the possibility of the service departing slightly later.

Commenting on the issue, Margaret said:

'Local residents were concerned that the last 181 departure to Glenmavis was 17:20 in the evening. This, they felt, was too early and did not allow much time for those finishing work at 17:00 to catch this service. I am delighted, therefore, that SPT has decided, as of 9th January 2012 to put back the departure time by fifteen minutes to 17:35. This, together with the on-demand MyBus Rural service 400, will allow greater flexibility when finishing work. I hope that these arrangements will make the lives of those living in Glenmavis a little easier.'

Fernieshaw Farm

Fernieshaw Dairy Farm in Cleland was the venue for a visit organised as part of an initiative by the National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS) to encourage MSPs to get out and meet their farming constituents.

Commenting on the visit Margaret said:

'It was and great to be given a tour of Fernieshaw Farm by the owner William Bankier and to see the farm in operation. I learned first-hand about the concerns of those in the agricultural sector; the continuing debate surrounding the production costs of milk and the price paid per litre to producers which is a huge issue. The visit concluded with a return to the farmhouse and a cup of tea and some delicious p a n c a k e s made by Mrs Bankier!'

Margaret and farmer William Bankier take a look at some of the new born calves.



Kirklands Hospital, Bothwell - Money Well Spent

A brand new 12 bed in-patient facility has opened at Kirklands Hospital. The Kylepark Assessment and Treatment Centre provides short term treatment and assessment for people with learning disabilities who require specialist services that cannot be provided for within the community.

A short tour of the facilities followed the opening ceremony during which Margaret saw first-hand the gymnasium, a multi-sensory room and specially designed kitchen to help the users use cooking utensils and equipment. In addition to all of this, the courtyard garden allows patients to participate in therapeutic gardening sessions whether growing sun flower plants, beetroot or rhubarb in the vegetable plots.

This is an investment for the future needs of patients with learning difficulties who require hospitalisation for a short period of time and although costing £7 million was money well spent by the NHS Lanarkshire.



Margaret at Kylepark beside the plaque to commemorate the opening.

Liberty Road Bellshill Potential Community Project - A Work in Progress

Following concerns from local residents Margaret visited the site of the old lock-up garages at Liberty Road, Bellshill and saw for herself the debris caused by fly tipping. North Lanarkshire Council cleared the debris and made the site secure. However in order to make best use of the ground, views are being sought to see if there is sufficient interest from local people and organisations in the community to establish a community project which will be an asset for local people.

The site at Bellshill.

