

Fels
RESEARCH
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SOROPTIMIST:

*Investing in Women's Empowerment
Through Education*

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INVESTING IN WOMEN

Soroptimist, a leading global organization, invests in and improves the lives of women and their families throughout the world. Active in 19 countries and territories, Soroptimist reaches out to women and girls who face extreme challenges. Since 1972, Soroptimist has helped more than 30,000 women reclaim their dreams through its cornerstone program, the **Live Your Dream: Education and Training Awards for Women** (formerly Women's Opportunity Awards). Assistance has been provided to women who are overcoming challenges such as sex slavery, domestic violence, poverty or drug abuse, women who lack education or marketable skills, and women with few resources to improve their lives.

LIVE YOUR DREAM AWARDS

The **Live Your Dream Awards** has helped thousands of women and their families to reclaim their dreams and improve their standard of living. The **Live Your Dream Awards** funds women's efforts to increase their education or improve their skills, often functioning as the only source of support for women where no other granting organizations exist or are accessible.

The result is that Soroptimist, through the **Live Your Dream Awards**, transforms lives and communities. By creating a targeted intervention and investment in women in the one area that has the most impact – education – the **Live Your Dream Awards** has allowed thousands of women to improve their economic situation. Soroptimist's focus on women and girls paves the way for an entirely new generation of independent, educated and financially secure women and families, who in turn become contributing members of their communities and countries.

IMPROVING LIVES, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

Education has long been identified as the decisive factor in bringing women and families out of poverty into financial stability and the middle class.ⁱ In fact, investment in women and girl's education is demonstrated to yield greater positive impact on the entire family's economic well-being than other anti-poverty interventions.ⁱⁱ A recent report on the benefits of higher education states that:

The payoff to educational attainment is generally greater for women than for men in terms of such economic benefits as higher average income, greater likelihood of health insurance, lower likelihood of receiving public assistance, and greater perceived connection between higher education and employment-related benefits, and such non-economic benefits as a reduced likelihood of smoking and increased likelihood of voting.ⁱⁱⁱ

At the same time, of the world's one billion poorest people, three-fifths are women and girls. Of the 774 million adults

i A recent World Bank position paper on gender equality, education and economic impact states: "countries with better gender equality [with regard to education] are more likely to have higher economic growth." http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099080014368/Factsheet_Girls_Education_WB.pdf

ii The State of the World's Children (2005), p 24, UNICEF, Accessed at: www.unicef.org/sowco5/english/sowco5.pdf. And, Sex of Parent and Children's Well-Being in Single-Parent Households, Downey, D. B., Ainsworth-Darnell, J. W., & Dufur, M. J., Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1998, 60(4), 878-893: The greatest predictors of child academic success are (1) the educational level of a child's mother and (2) the socioeconomic level of the home. Regarding the mother variable, while it may translate to mother-substitute primary caregivers, this research has found that "adolescents from single father households are judged by teachers to be less well behaved and to show less effort in class. They also score slightly less than their single-mother counterparts on standardized tests, both verbal and math, and are perceived to be less academically qualified for college. Children raised by single fathers attain on average six months less education."

iii The Benefits of Higher Education: Sex, Racial/Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Group Differences, Laura Perna, The Review of Higher Education, Volume 29, Number 1, Fall 2005, pg. 23-52.

in the world who cannot read, two-thirds are women and girls.^{iv}

Soroptimist has long attended to this striking discrepancy: **women are those most likely to be denied and barred from education, yet educating women yields higher impact in improving the lives of families and the economies of nations.**^v This is precisely the insight that led to the creation of the **Live Your Dream Awards** and the investment of more than \$1.6M each year through the program. Soroptimist's **Live Your Dream Awards** functions as a direct and immediate intervention to make education accessible to women, allowing them to achieve social and economic independence.

The investment has yielded measurable results in four key areas :^{vi}

- Women's **quality of life**: economic well-being and quality of life for their children
- Women's **confidence and sense of self-worth**
- Women's **self-determination**
- Women's ability to **help others and continue the cycle of growth** and independence for other women

Quality of Life

The economic value of the award is evidenced by the majority of recipients who report an increased standard of living as a result of the education they obtained with the **Live Your Dream Awards**.

- 63% of **Live Your Dream Awards** recipients report being able to secure higher paying employment as a result of the award removing obstacles to education or skills training.
- 79% of women report an improved standard of living as a result of receiving the **Live Your Dream Awards**

From finishing college to starting a certificate program, the award allows women to gain the education necessary to improve their employment situations, their pay and their financial independence.

“Most importantly, I can be independent, never again putting myself in a position to feel ‘stuck’ in an unhealthy, abusive situation. I now have a means to support myself and my family and hope that my children will see that education is the key that unlocks many doors to freedom, to opportunity, to happiness.” – 2006-07 **Live Your Dream Awards** recipient from the United States

iv See, Partnership, Participation and Power for Gender Equality in Education, Elaine Unterhalter, UNGEI E4 Conference, Dakar, Senegal, May 2010.

v Educate the Women and You Change the World: Investing in the Education of Women is the Best Investment in a Country's Growth and Development (2009), Forum on Public Policy, Leah Witcher Jackson. Measuring the Economic Gain of Investing in Girls: The Girl Effect Dividend (2011), The World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 5753, pp. 21-25.

vi Soroptimist surveys women three years after receiving the **Live Your Dream Awards** and results reported here are based on survey responses from **Live Your Dream Awards** recipients from 2006-07; 2007-08; and 2008-09.

Confidence

For many women who receive the **Live Your Dream Awards**, it is the first occasion in their lives where they are singled out for positive recognition by other women who have achieved professional and business success. The impact of this recognition is an increase in self-confidence, belief in their ability to change their own lives while modeling the value of a work ethic:

- 98% of **Live Your Dream Awards** recipients report an increase in self-esteem as a result of receiving the award.
- 92% of women receiving the award report they now serve as a positive role model for their dependents.

This sense of confidence and self-esteem has ripple effects that impact the lives of women in some very concrete ways. Women's confidence leads to motivation to stay on their path and continue to improve the quality of life for them and their children:

“After receiving the Live Your Dream Awards I felt committed and motivated to improve academically.... When I became aware of my own ability I continued improving myself, for me and for my three children who depend on me.” – 2008-09 **Live Your Dream Awards** recipient from Mexico

“Having someone else (a group of people) recognize and encourage what you are trying to do is such an overwhelming feeling, and it kept my dedication and determination where it needed to be in order to attain my goals and not lose sight of things.” – 2008-09 **Live Your Dream Awards** recipient from the United States

Confident women who feel able to serve as role models for their children become an influential force for the next generation to obtain an education, pursue economic independence and believe that change is possible:

“I find education is a real treasure that I can pass on to others. It is one of my first steps to empowerment. When I finish my courses, I can now prove to myself and to others that change is possible.” – 2008-09 **Live Your Dream Awards** recipient from the Philippines

Self-Determination

In addition to the direct economic and psychological impact of the **Live Your Dream Awards**, there is an indirect benefit to recipients because they are empowered through the grant to decide for themselves how to use the award.

The **Live Your Dream Awards** stands out because it is a grant to an individual woman directly, rather than a scholarship given to an educational institution on a woman's behalf. The **Live Your Dream Awards** goes directly to the women themselves who are able to use it to cover expenses related to completing their education, such as childcare or purchasing a computer or paying for tuition. In transforming women from dependence to independence, the discretionary nature of the **Live Your Dream Awards** is key. As a World Bank study on empowerment has put it:

“Many definitions of empowerment contain the idea that a fundamental shift in perceptions or ‘inner transformation,’ is essential to the formulation of choices. That is, women should be able to define self interest and choice, and consider themselves as not only able, but entitled to make choices.”^{vii}

vii Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development, Gender and Development Group of the World Bank, p. 6. Anju Malhotra, Sidney Ruth Schuler, Carol Boender, June 28, 2002.

Soroptimist's data shows that women primarily use the award to cover tuition expenses (69%), but paying household bills (45%), covering transportation costs (38%), obtaining a computer (21%) and paying for childcare (17%) are also identified as uses of the award.

“If it weren't for the Live Your Dream Awards, I wouldn't have been able to complete my unpaid final internship to become a teacher while also keeping a roof over my family's head, as well as keeping our health insurance in force.” – 2006-07 Live Your Dream Awards recipient from the United States

Continuing the Cycle of Growth

The discretionary dimension of the award also means that women choose which educational program to pursue. And, the majority of women choose to concentrate their studies and their work in areas that help others to live their dreams.

- 79% of **Live Your Dream Awards** recipients surveyed report entering the helping professions such as nursing and social work, with the intention of helping others improve their lives.

Making choices about how to facilitate their own education, recipients of the **Live Your Dream Awards** demonstrate that the award empowers them. By choosing careers that allow them to help others, they multiply the cycle of improvement and growth for women, their families and communities.

LIVE YOUR DREAM AWARDS MEANS MEASURABLE DIFFERENCE

Programs to support women's education are intended to improve the quality of life for women, and pave the way for the next generation to experience improved outcomes as well. As the results of Soroptimist's annual research with women receiving the **Live Your Dream Awards** demonstrate, this program achieves demonstrable impact in each of those three areas – improving women's quality of life, increasing women's confidence, and yielding multiplier effects for other women and the next generation.

This impact cannot be taken for granted. Some investments in women's education and women's quality of life yield higher returns than others. The **Live Your Dream Awards** is such a program it has produced demonstrable results, yielding economic and social return for women, their families, communities and nations.^{viii}

The impact demonstrated by Soroptimist's research on the **Live Your Dream Awards** is, in fact, particularly striking. In addition to the measurable impact on women's economic status and well-being, additional results include:

- Adding to the body of knowledge regarding improving the lives of women and girls through Soroptimist's annual research with award recipients, research that is among the most thorough of any educational program of its size.
- Achieving impact internationally, in countries and regions where there is less support than in the U.S. and Canada for women's education, such as the Philippines, Korea and Mexico.
- And, targeting investments in education, an area that yields a multiplier effect by benefiting the women receiving the awards, thereby positively impacting their children, families and communities as well.

viii Seven scholarship programs were researched that are comparable in size to the **Live Your Dream Awards**. All are limited to North America and only two have tracked the impact of their awards. Many scholarship programs have no data on the results of their awards, either because they lack the resources to track the impact or are skeptical that such impact can be demonstrated. These programs include:

- Emerge Scholarship Foundation: 10 scholarships annually of \$5,000 to be used for tuition and fees at an educational institution in the US
- Philanthropic Educational Organization International: 600 loans of up to \$12,000 to women in the US and Canada
- Linda Lael Miller Scholarships for Women: \$75,000 awarded since 2001 to cover tuition and fees, educational supplies, child care, transportation or other education-related costs for women in the US and Canada
- Executive Women International: 1 \$10,000 award; 2 \$5,000 awards and 10 \$1,000 awards for women to pay for tuition, books, and mandatory school fees
- American Business Women's Association: An annual scholarship program of grants of \$10,000, \$5,000 or \$3,000 to women to cover tuition, fees, and books only
- Other scholarship programs have found results comparable to, but not as comprehensive as, the **Live Your Dream Awards**.
- 96% of survey respondents receiving the Jeanette Ranking Women's Scholarship Fund reported they were either enrolled in school or graduated at the time of the survey. Half (51%) reported that their college experience helped them secure their current employment.
- The Women's Independence Scholarship Program surveyed grant recipients more than six years ago and found that 85% had graduated after receiving their award and 90% report feeling "more hopeful" about their future

MORE INVESTMENT MEANS MORE IMPACT

The results of Soroptimist's research into the impact of the **Live Your Dream Awards** demonstrate the award is transforming lives and yielding impact for families, communities, and nations. As UN and other data show, however, there is even greater need to be met.

Women still face poorer outcomes than men because women are provided with fewer opportunities to further their education.^{ix} And, investing in educational opportunity for women yields multiplier effects for families and communities because it is shown to lead to higher standards of living and increased education for those women's children as well.

With this evidence in mind, it is fair to say that the **Live Your Dream Awards** is a smart strategy that out-performs other philanthropic efforts. Each year Soroptimist grants \$1.6M to almost 1,600 women to:

- Increase their standard of living
- Enable them to secure higher paying employment
- Improve their confidence and self-esteem
- Increase the likelihood that their children – both boys and girls – will obtain an education and secure a future of economic independence and success.

If this is what is accomplished with an annual investment of \$1.6M in women and their education, just imagine what can be accomplished when that figure is doubled or tripled. With greater financial resources, Soroptimist will be able to extend the **Live Your Dream Awards** to even more women, helping them to reclaim their dreams. Enhancing this proven program will increase the impact for women, their families, communities, nations and the world.

ix The Global Gender Gap Report, 2012, World Economic Forum, Ricardo Hausmann, Laura Tyson, Saadia Zahidi.