

A Force of

Women reweave

By Marielena Zuniga

Sharon Hanshaw stands in the baking sun in a parking lot in Biloxi, Mississippi. Hands on hips, she points to the concrete beneath her. "Here. This is where my house used to be. This is where I lived, enjoyed and had family dinners every Sunday, gatherings with my friends, surprise birthday parties for my brothers and sisters. This was my house."

Five years later, Hanshaw still finds it hard to shake the memories. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005, she returned to total annihilation. Her daughter's bed had been hurled into a neighbor's yard two doors over. Her furniture was caked in mud. She trudged through the remnants of her home in ankle-deep sludge, looking for family photos. She wanted to save those. "They were critical to find," she says.

"I think my mouth was open the entire time," she recalls. "My friends were gone, anything I knew was gone. I couldn't contact people. I kept thinking, 'We're going to wake up and it's all a joke.' But it wasn't. Ninety percent of the infrastructure of Biloxi was destroyed."

Thankfully, Hanshaw had been out of town when the hurricane struck. She sees it as part of a divine plan that spared her to do the work she was about to do as executive director of Coastal Women for Change <www.cwc-biloxi.org>. Her livelihood for 21 years had been as a cosmetologist. "I did hair," she says bluntly.

) 42 / 3 -3. \$16-67/56 continued on page 14



Nature

social fabric after disaster strikes



Japanese women hit hard

Women everywhere, in both developed and developing countries, suffer greatly after a disaster. And Japan is no exception. In the aftermath of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake that shook the Kobe area in 1995, hotline workers reported that 60 percent of calls concerned spousal abuse, along with stories of rape in unsafe post-quake neighborhoods. Many cases went unreported, however, because women were urged to remain silent.

Evidence suggests that abuse and discrimination occurred not only in homes and shelters, but also in the workplace. There, women made up more than half of Japan's 17 million part-time and non-regular workers, and devastated companies let these female workers go first. And while government subsidies provided help to victims after the quake, just the men were eligible for those funds because Japan only recognizes men as proper heads of households.

With more than 300,000 people displaced in the Hanshin region, "women's rights were disrespected and women suffered more severe and lasting consequences," according to the authors of *Gender Bias in the Great Hanshin Earthquake* (Masai, Kuzunishi and Kondo).

The earthquake destroyed all the old homes and showed no remorse as it attacked the elderly, according to Rie Yanagawa of Himeji, who shared her story with the Disaster and Women Information Network in Japan <<http://homepage2.nifty.com/bousai/eng/index.html>>.

The majority of women, she said, lived alone and had finished raising their children and taking care of dying parents. Having survived their husbands, they lived in old wooden homes. As a result, more elderly women than men died because they lived in substandard housing. Barefooted and with nothing but the clothes they were wearing, they escaped to shelters. In the middle of the freezing cold weather, they slept with just one blanket.

"A woman—as daughter, wife and mother—takes care of everyone," she wrote. "In the end, she is left alone. Living by herself on a small pension. No social status. No house to live in if her husband doesn't leave her with some inheritance. If there is an earthquake, she is the first to become a victim." **8 (!,!**

) 42 / 3 -3. \$16-67/56 continued from page 12

After Katrina, her beauty parlor and her income were gone. "I lost my home and the business I had devoted my whole life to build," she says. "And although the whole Gulf Coast was devastated, the poor were hardest hit as they had no resources to fall back on—and women most of all, especially single mothers with no housing or childcare who were forced to leave their children with strangers so that they could look for work."

Today, Hanshaw's work is rebuilding her community with the power of women. "From cosmetologist to activist. Amazing," she says. "Just amazing."

Bearing the brunt

After the winds shrieked and the waves swallowed houses whole and spit them out in splinters, women took the brunt of Katrina's fury. Most were African-American, like Hanshaw. Most were poor.

"Poor is poor in any language," she says. "And whether in Biloxi or in Darfur, Africa, it's the poorest who get hit hardest by climate change and disasters. My sisters from all over the world know this firsthand."

Indeed, they do. During and after disasters, women are more likely to die than men. They are at increased risk for violence and trafficking. They don't receive necessary health care, such as obstetrics or sanitary supplies. They are often denied adequate relief aid because women aren't recognized as "heads of households." They suffer ongoing economic vulnerability as many either rely on husbands for income or are in part-time and low-income jobs. And they are often excluded from a say in rebuilding and reconstruction efforts.

"There are complex aspects of disasters that don't apply equally to women and men, including the reconstruction process following disasters," says Lori Blair, SIA's senior director of program services, who oversees the Soroptimist Disaster Grants for Women and Girls. "Women need housing, safety, health care and especially earning opportunities so they are not lured into prostitution or trafficking in order to survive. They also desperately need protection from sexual

violence and abuse in the aftermath of a disaster."

That women are impacted disproportionately is irrefutable. But never have women been more affected as in the last few years, a time when the world has reeled from an onslaught of natural disasters. Women made up 55-70 percent of the 2004 Banda Aceh (Indonesia) tsunami deaths, and in the worst affected village of Kuala Cangko, 80 percent of the deaths were women. Of the 2003 French heat wave toll of 15,000 deaths, about 70 percent were women, many of them elderly.

The year 2010 was especially brutal. An earthquake of 7.0 magnitude shook Haiti, killing more than 250,000 people. An earthquake in Chile reached 8.8 magnitude, making it the fifth worst in history, and displacing more than a million people. Floods in Pakistan caused widespread destruction, directly impacting six million people and touching the lives of a total 14 million. And a fierce and unremitting heat wave and a bout of irrepressible wildfires blanketed half of European Russia, including Moscow, in billows of smoke.

The numbers of women killed or adversely affected by these most recent disasters are still being tallied. But make no mistake. Whether the disaster is natural in the form of earthquakes, flood, typhoons or hurricanes; manmade, such as the BP oil spill; or wars or the breakdown of law and order—women suffer and die most because of gender inequality and poverty. In the aftermath of disasters, women's needs are often hidden or unmet, and yet, women are the first to start the healing process, says Elaine Enarson, Ph.D., of Lyons, Colorado.

The consulting sociologist who has written and taught about gender issues around disasters says that women are at the heart of the rebirth of a devastated area, and the emotional center of gravity for families on the road to a new normal. "Though not this simple, it is often said that men rebuild buildings while women reweave the social fabric of community life," she says.



Photo credit: Agostino Pacciani

After the 2004 tsunami devastated much of Asia, women united to rebuild their houses, villages, cities and lives. Visit <www.agostino-reportages.com> to see more images from *Women Rebuilding Life in Post-Tsunami Asia*, an exhibit by photo-journalist Agostino Pacciani, who traveled to several countries affected by the disaster to witness the specific situation of women in these regions.

Already vulnerable

Those burdens are a microcosm of hardships carried by women in almost every part of the world in the wake of disasters. Why? Because the status of women in most countries already puts them in a vulnerable position, a gender inequity that Soroptimist knows all too well and addresses through its many programs, including the Soroptimist Disaster Grants for Women and Girls.

The program, which began ad hoc following a 1964 earthquake in Alaska, recognizes that women are already vulnerable before disasters strike. The program is specifically designed to provide assistance to women and girls who have been victims of natural disasters and acts of war. The majority of funds are used for longer-term recovery projects.

For example, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Soroptimist made an immediate donation to the Louisiana Coalition against Domestic Violence (LCADV). The non-profit network works to end domestic violence against women, and helps them and their children with basic needs such as food, diapers, clothing and prescriptions. Soroptimist donated additional funds to two agencies assisting women in the Gulf Coast—a shelter for victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault, and a women's health care clinic in New Orleans.

Soroptimist also funded an Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) project that studied the effects of the disaster on the women of New Orleans and the surrounding affected areas of Mississippi.

The study focused on the special needs of women as they rebuild their lives, and is being used to provide a roadmap for the future.

At risk for violence

In addition to being disproportionately affected by disasters, women and girls face a huge increase in the potential for domestic and sexual violence. Women's mobility in the wake of disasters is often limited because they are still the primary caretakers in society, says Amy Gaver, director of program integration for international response and programs of the American Red Cross <www.redcross.org>, Washington, DC. "So, their first thought is, 'How do I save my children?' and not saving assets, which is a luxury. And because women are often secondary wage earners, if they lose their husbands (and their income) in a disaster, women are much more vulnerable to violence, survival sex or trafficking."

Abuses of many kinds are all too common for women in the chaos and social breakdown following disasters. Tents in camp cities don't have locks and women are completely vulnerable in their own living space, Gaver says.

"They may have to go a distance for water or the latrine, and the greater the distance, the greater the opportunity for sexual assault. Or, if they have to take small children with them, they're not agile because they're focusing on watching their children," she adds.

Taking Action

The best way to mitigate the impact of a disaster is to implement disaster risk reduction projects. These projects provide women and girls with the skills and knowledge they need to respond promptly, expeditiously and effectively once a disaster strikes. Disaster risk reduction projects can lessen the intensity and adverse affects that disasters inflict on women and girls, and can reduce their overall level of post-disaster vulnerability.

Some sample risk reduction projects include:

- Identify disaster prone zones and develop a plan of action that uses the unique skills, talents and knowledge of women in the community. Share with neighborhood associations.
- Include women in the creation and implementation of community education programs on early warning systems.
- Work with neighborhood women to develop a family communication plan and safety kit.
- Conduct meetings with local women to network, and to share expertise and hard-won lessons regarding disasters.
- Work with women's groups to develop disaster plans for the community.

Soroptimist clubs can apply for a Soroptimist Disaster Grant for Women and Girls to fund a disaster risk reduction project. The program is a joint project of Soroptimist International of the Americas and Soroptimist International of Europe. The application form is located in the program section of the SIA website at <Soroptimist.org/members/program/Program_DisasterGrants.html>. Applications can be submitted at any time.

For more information about the impact of disasters on women and girls and what can be done to help, please refer to the Soroptimist white paper, "Reaching Out to Women When Disaster Strikes" and the club resource Frequently Asked Questions about Soroptimist Disaster Grants, available on the SIA website at <Soroptimist.org/members/program/Program_DisasterGrants.html>.

Social media a lifeline in Haiti quake

When communication channels collapsed in the wake of the Haiti earthquake, Haitians turned to Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites to show the world what had happened and to plead for help.

The first images were blurry but ahead of news wire services and told a grim story—people covered in rubble and bleeding, a woman screaming and frantically reaching toward the camera.

Social media proved to be a lifeline for those in need. It served as a first responder, keeping Haiti in the news and improving the ability to locate missing persons, with Google and Facebook setting up missing person lists. Social media sites also helped increase global giving.

Ultimately, the increased use of social media enabled the worldwide community to respond to this disaster more quickly and allowed people to participate in relief efforts from anywhere in the world, say experts.

Women also stepped in, creating a Feminist International Solidarity Camp to open channels of communications directly with Haitian women. The camp serves many purposes, including a communications center to include radio transmission via internet by FIRE (Feminist International Radio Endeavour) <www.radiofeminista.net> as well as blogs and electronic networks organized by women's communication networks throughout the region. FIRE was the first international internet radio created and run by women from Latin America and the Caribbean.

"The camp has brought together Haitian women in the United States and women in Haiti, to identify and try to address gender issues in that country's recovery," said Elaine Enarson, Ph.D., consulting sociologist around gender and disaster issues.

Undoubtedly, women will continue to leverage the power of social media when rebuilding their communities after disaster strikes. **8(!,!**

At least 40 rape cases were reported in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and in the tsunami-devastated region of Banda Aceh, Indonesia, security forces had a history of rape and other crimes of sexual violence against women.

"Everywhere we've looked carefully at disasters, we see an uptick in domestic or sexual violence," says Joni Seager, Ph.D., professor of global studies at Bentley University in Waltham, Massachusetts. "When there's great social disruption and people are under stress, that stress often manifests itself in violence. When women are also removed from the former structures that might protect them, there's no functioning police or authorities or shelters and that leaves women vulnerable to violence."

According to the Soroptimist-IWPR study, the overwhelming destruction by Hurricane Katrina created an acute affordable housing shortage throughout the region, especially in the city of New Orleans. As a result, many women and girls were forced to share accommodations with extended family members, acquaintances, or even in some cases, former abusers, simply to have a place to call home. The city's remaining domestic violence and sexual assault service providers pointed to the resulting overcrowding as a factor in abuse specifically linked to the Katrina experience.

Women mobilize to help

While women may be victims in the aftermath of a disaster, they also are positive change agents. Following hurricane Mitch in 1998, women in Guatemala and Honduras were seen building houses and shelters, digging wells and ditches, and hauling water.

In Japan, Women's Net Kobe <<http://homepage1.nifty.com/womens-net-kobe>> was established in 1992 to promote equal opportunity and protect women's rights, including a telephone hotline for women. In 1995, after the Kobe quake, the organization hosted a gathering for women to share their sorrow and anger, and for the next two years, continued to sponsor seminars to support women and mothers with infants.

And six months after Banda Aceh, Indonesia, was devastated by the tsunami, more than 70 percent of the local civil organizations working in the area were women's groups or groups mostly staffed by women. In the wake of the tsunami, Soroptimist supported the UNFPA long-term plan to assist women with childbirth and emergency obstetric care; provide psycho-social support to women who had become heads of households as a result of the disaster; and prevent and treat cases of violence against women, among other efforts.

To include women and girls in this part of the world in the planning and implementation of resettlement and reconstruction efforts, Soroptimist contributed additional funding. Through four grants totaling more than \$115,000, Soroptimist assisted more than 4,000 women and girls in rebuilding their lives. Recipients included organizations working in many ways, among others: helping to create and or strengthen employment opportunities for women; providing health education and services; ensuring women and girls were fully included in planning and implementing of ongoing post-tsunami resettlement and reconstruction efforts; relocation and reconstruction of a girls' school; and supporting scholarships for girls.

Women are adept at mobilizing the community to respond to disasters, says Emily Farr, forming groups and networks to meet the most pressing needs of the community. Women generally know what's going on within their own households and others, says the humanitarian livelihoods specialist for Oxfam America, Boston, Massachusetts.

"Women's roles and strengths also play out in different ways and one way we've found is in doing cash responses," she explains. "It makes sense to give cash to women on behalf of their households because they're really good at allocating it to household priorities ... and we've found that men have been pleased with this because they recognize the money is used to meet the family's needs. In many locations, it's also the first time women have had the opportunity to make decisions around money, which is also empowering to them."



Photo credit: Agostino Pacciani

After disasters, women redefine gender-roles, taking on work in areas previously dominated by men.

Soroptimist recognizes women hold the key to rebuilding. As part of the Soroptimist Disaster Grants for Women and Girls, individual Soroptimist clubs can receive grants up to \$20,000 to assist women who are victims of disasters in their local communities. Disaster grants totaling \$70,000 were disbursed during 2009 to clubs in the Philippines, Brazil and the United States to help women recover from devastating typhoons and floods. Projects included: building a multipurpose hall where women are learning skills to preserve food, grow vegetables and sew dresses; reconstruction of livelihood centers where women are learning income-generating skills; renovation and restoration of a shelter for homeless women and their children; and providing food, medical supplies and other immediate necessities to affected girls and their families.

Women like Sharon Hanshaw are finding their own ways to rebuild their broken communities. But first, she had to get her life in order. After Katrina hit and she had no place to live, she ended up in Houston with her sister. Then, one month later, disaster struck again, in the form of Hurricane Rita. Hanshaw recalls being on the road for 23 hours, trying to leave town.

After she finally returned to the stricken Gulf Coast, she found shelter in a government-issued trailer. Women of all ages, from 18 to 82, began meeting, talking about how to survive after the storm and how to revitalize their community. Her car gone, Hanshaw hitchhiked to meetings.

"The women were broken down and had lost family members," she says. "The meetings helped everyone understand that we were all going through the same thing."

With no organized community groups in Biloxi to help hurricane victims, Hanshaw, with the help of Oxfam America <www.oxfamamerica.org>, launched Coastal Women for Change in January 2006. The group gives women a voice for their concerns about the direction and future of their community. What she does on a daily basis, she explains, is outreach—going out to women and asking them what they need.

"The women were already oppressed and now they had to find childcare, transportation, work, housing—a lot of them were under domestic violence," she says. "They couldn't easily get a job. They would say, 'My husband died during the storm and I have to be the total breadwinner.' So women had a double burden."

A shifting tide

Today, an increased awareness about women's needs before, during and after disasters is growing. Enarson applauds UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), <www.unifem.org>, which began highlighting women's needs in tsunami-affected areas not being addressed by relief agencies. "The point is that international women's organizations and other groups are beginning to make that link around gender equality and disaster resiliency," she says.

The tide is shifting, with evidence of more gendered work turning up in practice, efforts Soroptimist has championed for decades. Soroptimist's Blair adds, "Because women and girls have unique needs during and after disasters, they need to participate in the plans for disaster relief and the rebuilding efforts. They know better than anyone what they—and their families—need and how those needs should be met. In addition, women are generally better skilled at organizing the community to meet the needs of those most vulnerable. And women have proven to distribute resources more equitably than men."

If bright spots can be found at all, disasters provide an opportunity for women to challenge prevailing gender norms, and help them gain self-confidence and leadership skills. Sharon Hanshaw can speak firsthand to the latter. An unlikely leader in the disaster relief movement, she is ready and willing to tell the world the story of Biloxi in the wake of Katrina.

"I want to tell them about the devastation," she says, "and the perseverance and community spirit. The lessons of preparedness and how women picked up the pieces."

Today, she continues to pick up those pieces, both figuratively and literally, going through the remnants of what had been her home. When she finally found the photographs of her family, they are washed out and faded by Katrina's water and winds, but still visible.

"It took me 16 hours to clean the pictures, but we had them," she says. "At least we'd know that we did exist." 🌐

Read about the new disaster grant partnership between Soroptimist International of the Americas and Soroptimist International of Europe on page 19 of this issue.

Marielena Zuniga is SIA's award-winning staff writer. She is a long-time contributor to *Best for Women* magazine.

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In the next issue: *The Economic Abuse of Women*. Please email Editor Jessica Levinson <jessica@soroptimist.org> with relevant information.

membership



Bring On The Zing: Listening To Members = Healthy & Happy Clubs

Do you remember when you first heard about Soroptimist? Chances are you were excited to find a place where you could form friendships, be personally fulfilled, and volunteer with like-minded women.

Perhaps you felt like today's potential members who, when asked why they are interested in joining Soroptimist, have told us:

"I would like to volunteer my skills, talent, and compassion to strengthen women and girls. I know that I was put on this earth to help people, especially women and girls, who are hurting or in need and want help."

"I want to be a part of an organization that I can contribute to whether it is by investing my time, mentoring another woman, or just financial contributions."

"I checked out every volunteer organization I could find, but when I found this one, I felt a real 'zing' inside, like this was something I could sink my teeth into!"

The enthusiasm new members bring can be a breath of fresh air for a club. Another thing that can breathe new life into a club is performing a club assessment, which will lead to new ways of recruiting and retaining the lifeblood of our organization: our members.

While we all support our mission of improving the lives of women and girls in local communities and throughout the world, at times, it may seem that a club's atmosphere has become stale. The monotony of working on the same projects, outdated traditions, and club members who "do it all" can lead to decreased member satisfaction, and ultimately to members who decide that renewing their membership isn't in their best interest.

Think about yourself for a moment. Remember yourself at age 20, 30, 40, etc. Are you the same person? Now think about your club. How has the club changed in the last 5, 10, 15 years? Just as we have evolved personally, so have our clubs. Or, at least that's the hope!

We want ALL members, not only new members, to embrace the feeling of excitement and passion of working together with

Check out the Sample Club Assessment on SIA's website at Soroptimist.org/members/membership/MembershipDocs/RecruitReten/SampleClubAssessmentForm.doc.

other women toward common goals. This is where performing an annual club assessment can be the "yearly health exam" needed to identify strengths, weaknesses, and establish priorities for members.

A sample club assessment form is available at Soroptimist.org. Clubs are encouraged to modify, add and delete questions based on specific areas of concern. It is important that clubs not shy away from including questions that may challenge long-standing practices ingrained in their culture, such as meeting schedules, programs that do not focus on women and girls, and preconceived notions about eligibility for membership based on title, occupation, and age.

Some tips for conducting the assessment, once a club has identified areas to address and has developed the form, are:

- Assign an assessment coordinator—a neutral, unbiased club member (not on the board or in a leadership position)—to lead the initiative.
- Include all members in the assessment—mailing and emailing the assessment form as necessary. When mailing forms, provide a stamped return envelope to increase the response rate.
- Ask club members to answer all the questions to the best of their knowledge.
- Assure members that all information is confidential and/or anonymous unless they choose for it not to be. Encourage them to be direct, honest, and to submit additional ideas.

The results of an assessment can help clubs determine what has kept them from reaching their goals and what must be done to overcome these obstacles. For example, if an assessment reveals that a majority of club members feel the club's projects do not promote the Soroptimist mission, the club should consider revamping current programs or trying new ones.

By continually evaluating and adapting projects and practices, a club will maintain the interest of current members and attract new ones. An annual assessment gives clubs a framework within which members can create a campaign for positive change, build teamwork, and equally as important—revitalize their enthusiasm.

Go on—bring back the "zing" members felt when they first learned about Soroptimist! 🌟

Just as we sometimes take our own health for granted, clubs also tend to take their health for granted. Think about your own club for a few minutes and see if you recognize some of the following symptoms:

- Is your club experiencing a slowing down of member involvement?
- Have club meetings become routine?
- Is your club locked in tradition and unwilling to change?
- Are you finding it harder to attract and keep members?
- Is there genuine desire to bring in new members?
- Do club procedures make it complicated to bring in new members or cause delays?
- Are the same few members doing all the work?

By Nicole Simmons, Membership Director
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SIA and SIE Join Forces to Help Women and Girls Around the World

In August 2009, the leaders of Soroptimist International of the Americas (SIA) and Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) met to discuss ways to collaborate on Soroptimist work in order to increase their impact and scope. At a strategy session, leaders from both federations agreed they wanted to:

- Share information, research, knowledge and expertise.
- Reduce duplication and increase efficiency.
- Increase the impact on the lives of women and girls.
- Expand opportunities for international cooperation and collaboration.
- Have a relationship that is equitable and fair, results-oriented and mission-focused.

Both federations already had versions of disaster grants and project matching but recognized that if combined, both programs would be stronger. Staff began the work of combining the two programs in ways that would respect the differences and build on the similarities. The collaborations were announced in September and October.

Soroptimist Disaster Grants for Women and Girls: A Joint Project of Soroptimist International of the Americas and Soroptimist International of Europe <Soroptimist.org/members/program/Program_DisasterGrants.html>

Soroptimist Disaster Grants seek to meet the special needs of women and girls before, during and after disasters. The partnered-program builds on the success each federation has had with its own disaster grant programs and through prior partnered-projects addressing disasters in Kenya and Haiti.

Each federation will maintain separate disaster funds, but applications for grants will be reviewed by both federations, and impact will be tracked and reported jointly. Applications for grants and donations from clubs in SIA should be submitted to SIA headquarters.

The first partnered grant was given in September 2010 to support SI/Santiago, Chile, in SIA following a February 2010 earthquake registering 8.8 on the Richter scale. The country suffered further when an earthquake-triggered tsunami hit the coastline completely devastating several towns. As a result of both the earthquake and tsunami, more than 500 people lost their lives and approximately one million people were left homeless.

To assist with disaster recovery efforts, SI/Santiago applied for and received a \$20,000 grant to rebuild the homes of 10 women in the Huechuraba community where SI/Santiago has been working with women and girls for more than eight years. The beneficiaries of the grant provide the primary financial support for their families. While their homes are being constructed, the grant will also cover the cost of temporary housing for the women and their families.

Soroptimist Project Matching: A Joint Project of Soroptimist International of the Americas and Soroptimist International of Europe <Soroptimistprojects.org>

For many years, SIE has been matching clubs needing support with those offering support through its Project Exchange Pool. SIA launched a similar project—the Soroptimist Club Matching Project—in 2008. By combining the two programs, the federations can offer more opportunities to support Soroptimist clubs around the world. The objective of the project is to match resources between clubs—those that need assistance with a local project and those able to assist. This project enables Soroptimist clubs to work together to address the needs of women and girls in countries far away from their own.



SI/Nakuru, Kenya's project proposes to empower girls with sustainable transportation to school and to equip them with the resources they need to improve their studying at home. Clubs can support these efforts through the project matching program at <Soroptimistprojects.org>.

Although the support is mainly through funds, it is not the only support needed. Exchanges may also be set up in the form of expertise, support for project participants, sale of products produced by the project participants, technical or medical equipment, teaching materials, giving advice/ideas for good practices, scholarships, etc. Soroptimist Project Matching is a way for clubs to work together to share information about their countries, their communities and their projects.

All of the information that clubs need to get started is available on the Soroptimist Project Matching website at <www.soroptimist-projects.org>.

A New Way of Working Together

"Soroptimists have always looked beyond their communities to help women and girls in places far from their homes" said Sharon Fisher, SIA president. "These new collaborations will provide Soroptimists with opportunities to support women and girls through sustainable club projects in not only our own federation but in the 57 countries that form SIE. It is a win-win situation." The collaboration with Soroptimist International of Europe, will provide opportunities to help women and girls through 74,000 members, 2,600 clubs and 76 countries. Dr. Elaine Lagasse, president of SIE, stated that "SIE is thrilled and grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with SIA on the project matching and disaster initiatives. This will allow Soroptimists worldwide to gain a stronger voice, thanks to proven and effective results on grass-roots-level projects." 🌍

By Lori Blair
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public awareness



The Press Release Lives On

Even in the age of social media, a press release is still an invaluable tool for sharing important news with key audiences. That is evident in the number of press releases journalists receive daily. Some receive as many as 100 releases a day from organizations that believe they have newsworthy information to share. Truth be told, journalists will only follow up on a small percentage of the releases they receive.

How do clubs increase their chances of getting noticed? In various articles in the past, SIA has shared information to help clubs do just that:

Use social media. Sites like Facebook eliminate gatekeepers. Clubs don't have to rely on journalists to share their news. They can provide news directly to interested audiences.

Pitch smaller newspapers. Clubs don't have to compete with news in large media markets. What constitutes news at the local level may not be appropriate for a larger media market.

Provide photos. A press release with a good action shot will go a lot further than a release with no photo at all.

While the above actions could help clubs increase their chances of getting noticed, press releases still need to be high quality. Below are some tips for writing a good press release.

Contain the basics. Every press release should contain a headline and subtitle; release date; answers to the questions who, what, when, where, and why; contact information; and a brief paragraph about the organization (boilerplate). Below is the boilerplate SIA includes in all its press releases. Clubs should use a similar boilerplate:

Headquartered in Philadelphia, Pa., Soroptimist offers programs that improve the lives of women and girls through social and economic empowerment. Its major program, the Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards, provides cash grants for women seeking to improve their lives with the help of additional education and training. Each year, about \$1.5 million is disbursed to deserving women through this award-winning program. Soroptimist, a 501(c)(3) organization that relies on charitable donations to support its programs, also sponsors the Live Your Dream campaign in recognition of the power of women and their dreams. Visit the campaign's online home at: LiveYourDreamCampaign.org. For more information on Soroptimist, visit Soroptimist.org.

Be newsworthy. The point of writing a press release is to share an interesting and relevant story. The good thing about Soroptimist is that the mission is both interesting and relevant. If clubs do women- and girl-focused projects, they shouldn't have a problem with writing a newsworthy press release. The information will speak for itself. Sharing stories of award recipients, for example, provides substance and human-interest elements. If a club sends stories with no news value, they'll lose credibility, and eventually reporters will lose interest in them.

Include good quotes. Quotes help to add more useful information to the story and to state why the news is important. SIA usually includes quotes from the federation president or executive director to back up important key messages. Ask the club president for a quote, or write one for her approval that sounds natural.

Double check statistics. Press releases aren't about creating propaganda, but about sharing facts. In addition to being newsworthy and interesting, information should be objective and accurate. Statistics really help back the information up. Check releases to make sure the information is correct. The sample publicity materials for Soroptimists STOP Trafficking, for example, provide space for clubs to insert local statistics about trafficking, which helps make the information more newsworthy to a local audience.

Optimize it. Search engine optimization (SEO) is the practice of adding various keywords to a website to increase the number of visits it receives. Add a newsroom to the club website where news releases can be posted. Add some relevant keywords to the news release text to help drive traffic to the club website.

Make it tight. News writing means writing tight. Too much information can actually be a bad thing. Stick to the point, which is to share a simple news story. If a reporter is interested, he or she will ask for more information.

With the right information and style, a press release can go a long way! 🌍

By Kamali Brooks
Public Relations Manager
Email: kamali@soroptimist.org



Club Giving

empowering women to live their dreams

Not long ago I read an article by Tara Sophia Mohr, a coach and author, who put forth an invitation for women to step outside their smaller circle of family and community and step up to work at saving the world.

Loving and helping our families and communities is important—but as Mohr states, it's not enough. We must think larger, globally. Why? Because, as the writer states, “women have the hearts, the empathy and the collaborative capacity to do it. We also have the talent, the wisdom and the brilliance needed—though we often doubt it.”

Soroptimist's mission is to improve the lives of women and girls in local communities AND throughout the world. And as members, we each play a part in that mission. No matter how small our part, the job is made lighter and more effective because of the collective work of all Soroptimists.

Our local and global programs continue to make a difference in our communities and our world. Countless lives have been changed through the Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards, Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls, and other programs. These are funded in part through the contributions made through our “Club Giving: Empowering Women to Live their Dreams” program.

You may know Club Giving by its former name “Annual Club Campaign.” The transition to Club Giving came about because of the positive response to the Live Your Dream Team, member feedback and member surveys. The federation Board of Directors and Fundraising Council listened to our clubs and redesigned the campaign to give more meaningful recognition for a wider range of donations.

“We realize that each club's capacity to fundraise is different and individual. Each club gift is appreciated and an important part of the success of Soroptimist programs,” said

Marie Kennedy, SIA Fundraising Council chair. We also know that clubs want to keep the greatest part of their fundraising to support projects in their communities. In order to ensure the success of local programs and international programs, it is suggested that a club donate 10 percent of the funds raised locally through the Club Giving program. The 10 percent guide allows for the natural desire to retain the greatest amount of your locally raised dollars, while still honoring the commitment to support the Soroptimist mission.

When your club participates in Club Giving, everyone wins. Your club has local AND international impact. We reach more women and change more lives.

In her article, Mohr goes on to give valid reasons why we should—and must—broaden our work in the world. She says, “Let's do it through our work, our volunteering, our philanthropy—whatever works in each of our complicated lives. But let's dedicate ourselves, in a serious way, to the places in this world where the suffering is most extreme, to the wounds that most need healing. If nothing else, do it because you want to create a better world for your children. Do it because there is a person somewhere in the world who wants to feed her family, to sleep safely, to be free. That someone is without the access to a computer that you have, without the dollar to give that you possess, without the political voice you've been blessed with. Do it because you could have been born as her.”

Your support of your club's fundraising efforts and the contributions that come to SIA through “Club Giving ... Empowering Women to Live their Dreams” are part of our work to save the world. You should be very proud of that! 🌍

By Nancy Montvydas
Senior Director of Development
Email: nancym@soroptimist.org

Donor Spotlight

When Soroptimists put their passion into action, they can change the world. Take, for instance, SI/Glendale, California, in Camino Real Region. Desperately wanting to bring awareness to the plight of women and girls caught in the vicious web of sex slavery and trafficking, the club decided to collaborate with SIA by donating start-up funds to establish a federation awareness campaign.

When club member (and current Fundraising Council member) Sandy Schultz suggested this to her club's Foundation Committee, they were more than enthusiastic. Member Beverley Scott offered, “We have the money, let's donate \$25,000.” The club vote was unanimous and has since voted to send an additional \$3,000 to SIA to further the cause.

SI/Glendale is passionate about the changes it is able to effect in the world as part of the larger Soroptimist organization. The gift enabled SIA to fund the Soroptimists STOP Trafficking program, which would not have happened without the club's financial support.

Reclaiming the Dream:

Sheila Burson

Sheila Burson, 58, of Oroville, California, calls herself “a big believer in never giving up.” She never gave up when she left an abusive marriage and hid in a women’s shelter with her two children. She never gave up when the only job she could find to survive was making pizza dough. And she never gave up when in 2004 she was in an auto accident, rear-ended by a car traveling at 70 miles per hour. She sustained a brain injury that resulted in short-term memory loss, moderate aphasia (language disorder), and intermittent balance disorder.

The crash was devastating in many ways. Sheila had always loved reading and writing, and now the impairment of her cognitive and speech skills seemed to end her lifelong dream—to channel those loves into a teaching career.

Ironically, Sheila’s upbringing didn’t foster education. “I was raised in an environment where education was not considered good for girls,” she says. “I was told to be a good wife, have a lot of kids and that was what was expected of me. But I would always read whatever I could get my hands on and always had a library card. And the books that piqued my interest were always those with a bit of history.”

With her dream to teach English and history seemingly lost forever, and unable to work, Sheila didn’t want to depend on government support. “I needed to do something other than sit and stare at the walls of my house,” she says, “and I was also fighting depression because I didn’t know where to turn.”

Sheila had experienced that feeling of desperation before. A native of California, she had moved to Missouri when she married. But then, without family or friends in the area, she struggled alone in an abusive relationship. In 2001, she left her husband, but he stalked her, despite a restraining order. Selling her house at a loss, she packed herself, her two small children and her belongings into a van and found sanctuary at a women’s shelter.

“The only job I could find was making pizza, but I never gave up on the idea that things would get better,” she says. She eventually found work as a full-time legal secretary, but then realized one day that she had no support systems in place in case of a catastrophe.

Her best friend suggested she return to California. So, for the second time in her life, Sheila started over with her two children, traveling across the country in a van and staying with her friend until she could find work. But then her accident happened.

With financial help from permanent disability coverage, Sheila saw a speech therapist who encouraged her to take a class at Butte College in Oroville with one goal in mind—a cognitive skills class to help with her problems.

When Sheila had the opportunity to return to school full time, she told herself she could do it, with the help of scholarships and grants. While at Butte, she learned about Soroptimist and applied for the Women’s Opportunity Award. Named the club recipient by SI/Chico (\$500) and then the SI/Sierra Nevada Region recipient (\$3,000 from SIA), Sheila says she was “grateful, shocked and thrilled all at the same time.”



Today, Sheila uses a special software program to read scanned texts two or three times, highlighting important sections. “Because of my short-term memory loss, I buy my text books as soon as I can and read them four or five times ... that way I can get the information into my head so by the time I get to class it makes sense.”

While at Butte, she also revitalized the college’s defunct literary magazine as part of her service to Phi Beta Kappa, an honors society for two-year colleges.

“It was one of my biggest joys serving as senior editor of Butte’s literary magazine, *Branches of Inspiration*, a task that allowed me to encourage other students to express themselves creatively through poetry, prose, artwork and photography,” she says. “It afforded me the opportunity to edit and show other students the joys of writing while showcasing their efforts for them to proudly show their families and friends.”

Graduating this past spring from Butte College with a dual major in English and history, Sheila transferred to Mills University in Oakland, California, to fulfill her dream of earning a degree in education.

While bad things have happened to her, she always has turned her life around by never giving up. “I have never given up in spite of obstacles,” says Sheila. “Every time I’ve had to start over it scared the daylights out of me, but I’ve always faced my fears, telling myself, ‘Here I go. I can do this.’”

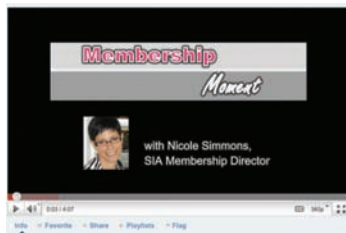
By Marielena Zuniga
Email: marielena@soroptimist.org

By participating in the Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards program, clubs can make a profound difference in the lives of women like Sheila. Without generous donations from clubs and individuals, it would not be possible to continue this program. To make a donation or to download program materials, visit <Soroptimist.org>. 🌐

Updates, highlights and other news of note from Soroptimist headquarters.

Membership + Videos = Fun and Useful Resources for You!

You can't deny the power of videos on the internet today and Soroptimist is adding to the genre! Hear what current members are saying by viewing member testimonials on our website! There are also lan-



guage-specific videos on our Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish pages. Use these videos to show potential members WHAT we do and to remind current members WHY we do what we do. Instructions for how you can videotape and send your own testimonial to SIA are on the way. Stay tuned!

Also, check out the latest "Membership Moment" video about Engaging Members for tips on how to keep current members satisfied, happy, and enthusiastic about renewing their membership. If you have a topic you want to know more about, please email SIA's membership director, Nicole Simmons at <nicole@soroptimist.org>.

Jackson Hewitt

SIA sincerely thanks Jackson Hewitt for its continued support of the Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards program. Each club that participates in the Women's Opportunity Awards in 2011 has the opportunity to receive a laptop for its club recipient. If you need assistance with participation or are still looking for a woman to honor, please contact your region's Women's Opportunity Awards chair.

2011-2013 Board of Directors

Congratulations to the following Soroptimists who have been elected to serve on the 2011-2013 SIA board of directors: Angela Bunting, SI/The Tri Cities, Western Canada Region; Michiko Terao, SI/Nayoro, Japan Kita Region; Sylvia Fernandez Gandarillas, SI/Santiago, America del Sur Region; and Carmen Flor, SI/Silay, Philippines Region. In Electoral Area 8, Japan Chuo Region, no candidate received a majority of the votes,

and re-ballot is underway with ballots due to headquarters on March 14, 2011. Full results of the ballots may be found at <Soroptimist.org>.

SIA Bylaws Revision Adopted

The mail ballot to approve the revision of the SIA bylaws and three resolutions concluded in December with all four questions being approved. Results, as well as the new SIA Bylaws, SIA Procedures and Be It Resolved, can be found at <Soroptimist.org>.

Error in September/October/November issue

The editors regret that in the last issue of Best for Women magazine, it was incorrectly stated that the 2010 Ruby Award: For Women Helping Women recipient, Lisa Culp, was originally nominated by SI/Sacramento, California. Lisa was actually nominated by SI/Greater Sacramento, California.

Get in the Network!

Soroptimist is now on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Flickr! Having a presence on these interactive sites enables members to talk with each other, network, share photos, videos and Soroptimist friendship! Visit these networks and search for "Soroptimist International of the Americas" to follow SIA today!



For a complete list of sales items, pricing, and shipping information, or to make a purchase online using a credit card, visit the Soroptimist Store located in the members area of <Soroptimist.org>. If assistance is needed logging in, please contact <siahq@soroptimist.org> or call 215-893-9000.

NEW! SOROPTIMIST PROMOTIONAL CARDS #250

Set of six different promotional cards. The full-color 5" x 7" cards feature compelling stories and entice readers to learn more about the organization by visiting the Soroptimist website. A great way for clubs to raise awareness of Soroptimist! **\$20/pack of 120 cards (20 of each card)**



SOROPTIMIST NOTE CARDS #316

Send a note in Soroptimist style! These cards are great for a quick handwritten note, and the folded format is perfect for more formal correspondence as well. Cards measure 4.5" x 6" and come with white envelopes. **\$10/pack of 10 cards and envelopes**

"S" LETTER OPENER #502

Opening mail is a breeze with this new stainless-steel letter opener. Features "S" logo and includes gift box. **\$12**



SOROPTIMIST PEN #463

Sign in style with an embossed pen! This new promotional item features the Soroptimist logo and includes a leather case. **\$10**

Magazine Matters: All magazine-related information, including editorial guidelines and submission deadlines, is available on SIA's website. Mailing address changes should be sent to <siahq@soroptimist.org>. Magazine submissions and letters to the editor should be sent to Editor Jessica Levinson at *Best for Women*, 1709 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103-6103 or <jessica@soroptimist.org>.

Subscribe to Best for Women: A subscription to the magazine is available for \$11 a year (U.S. and Canada; \$15 all other countries). Translated excerpts of the magazine—in Spanish, Portuguese, Korean and Taiwanese—are also available on SIA's website. For more information, or to subscribe, go to: <Soroptimist.org>.

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MEMBERS!

Are you missing out on important emails, alerts, or the magazine? In order to keep SIA's rosters accurate, please review your profile at <Soroptimist.org/members/membership/updateprofile.html> and make any necessary changes.

CLUBS!

The best way for headquarters and potential members to contact clubs is through the Soroptimist club email accounts. A designated member should be checking the club email account regularly (at least once per week) to keep up to date with the latest SIA news. For help with setting-up or accessing the account, see the members area on SIA's website <soroptimist.org/members/membership/membershiphome.html> or contact <siahq@soroptimist.org>.

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Anne K. Ream is a fighter. After suffering a brutal assault, she established the “Voices and Faces” project to give sexual violence survivors a forum.

Thanks to Anne, survivors no longer suffer in silence.

Visit Soroptimist.org to read Anne’s inspirational story. Learn how you can support women like Anne in their transformative work on behalf of women and girls.



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