

## A SOROPTIMIST RESOURCE FOR CLUBS & MEMBERS

### Going Beyond a Cash Award to Build Collective Impact

#### Introduction

Soroptimist International of the Americas recognizes the power and potential of the Live Your Dream Award and continues to seek ways in which to strengthen its impact on women's lives. In fact, SIA's new strategic direction, referred to as "Shaping the Future," sums up this concept as part of its single, overarching organizational goal: **increasing collective impact**. This goal seeks to increase SIA's social change by strengthening the cohesion of its collective efforts and focusing on the quality of change in a woman's life.

As a measure of success for this goal, SIA seeks to have **85 percent of Live Your Dream Award recipients report an increased standard of living** within three years of receiving the award. Based on an outstanding history of creativity and commitment to this program by SIA clubs, we are confident that if clubs implement some of the below strategies, we can meet this challenge!

#### Increasing the Impact of the Soroptimist Live Your Dream Award in the Lives of Award Recipients

A 2016 survey of the 2012-2013 Live Your Dream Awards region award recipients asked which resources or assistance, in addition to a cash award, would have been most helpful for these women as they completed their education. Their responses spanned a wide range of support options:

- 71%: An opportunity for additional funding to support further education or training
- 32%: Mentoring by a local Soroptimist member
- 30%: An opportunity for funding to start a business
- 27%: An on-line, private support group of women who have received a Live Your Dream Award
- 24%: Tax or financial advice
- 20%: On-line mentoring
- 15%: Other (Networking/internship/volunteer opportunities, help navigating financial aid and loan systems, job searching, mentoring post-graduation)

The below strategies were devised both in response to this feedback from former award recipients and also based on existing ideas from clubs already working in their communities to creatively increase the impact of the Soroptimist Live Your Dream Award.

#### Mentoring

Seek to create a long-lasting relationship with your award recipient wherein you provide ongoing mentorship and support to help her reach her educational and professional goals.

- Contact your award recipient throughout the year and ask how she is doing.
  - What frustrations is she experiencing?
  - Do you share similar obstacles?
  - How have you worked to overcome those obstacles in your own life?
  - Are there things you can do to support her while she seeks to overcome similar obstacles?
- Offer to take your award recipient out to lunch every couple of months to check in and develop a deeper relationship.
  - Provide recipients with online mentorship through regular emails or chats.

## Job Support

Many recipients note that one of the biggest changes in their lives stemmed from knowing that a strong community of successful women believed in them. As Soroptimists, you are respected female leaders and professionals in your local community.

- Assist recipients with completing job or school applications, provide letters of recommendation or serve as a reference for a job application.
- Ask your recipient if she would like you to review her resume or offer to conduct a mock interview. Provide advice about interview etiquette and attire or how to best structure a response to questions.
- Offer to take her shopping and buy her an interview outfit.
- Provide strategies to enhance networking capabilities and tips to facilitate a successful job search.
  - Do you have networking strategies that have worked well in your professional life?
  - Are there contacts that you have that might be helpful to the recipient?

## Financial Support

Encourage club members to think about ways to provide ongoing financial assistance throughout the year to supplement your club's generous cash award with other types of assistance to help meet the multi-faceted needs of female heads-of-household.

- Donate student or family support items, such as laptops, professional clothing, children's clothing or household goods.
- Provide gift certificates for day-to-day needs, such as gas, automotive care, public transportation, haircuts, self-care items, prescriptions or groceries.
- Clubs can also donate services that are of financial value, such as volunteering to prepare your recipient's income taxes.
- Purchase and wrap holiday gifts for recipients and their families.

## Working with Children

The majority of award recipients have noted that the positive impact of the award extended beyond the recipients themselves to their children. There are many ways clubs can engage in enriching opportunities with or provide support to award recipients' children.

- Create programming, such as a "Mommy and Me" fun day for recipients and their children.
- Sponsor a summer camp opportunity.
- Help defray back-to-school costs by providing backpacks filled with school or art supplies.
- Donate musical instruments to allow an award recipient's children to participate in a school band or orchestra.
- Arrange carpools to increase access to after-school programming and activities for recipients' children.
- Assist with childcare.
- Offer to take your award recipient's children out to dinner or a movie so that she can have an evening of free, uninterrupted study time.
- Host birthday parties for her children or help purchase birthday gifts for them.

## Program Support

Ask former recipients to engage with members in supporting the Live Your Dream Awards. Ask them to lend their talents and creativity to ensure the success of this program. This will further demonstrate that your club values and respects your recipient as a member of your community and as a strong, capable woman.

- Find other applicants: Recipients can informally spread the word about opportunities available through the Soroptimist Live Your Dream Award with classmates or friends who might be eligible to apply. Encourage recipients to get creative and generate ideas about new groups or agencies at which to provide application information.
- Serve as judges: Asking a former award recipient to serve as a Soroptimist Live Your Dream Award judge further demonstrates your club's respect and admiration for award recipients and deepens your working relationship with each other.

- Marketing materials: Former award recipients can speak to what appealed to or inspired them to apply for the Soroptimist Live Your Dream Award. They may have some additional insight on how to best promote it to others.
- Newspaper articles: Interviewing recipients about how their life has been changed through the Soroptimist Live Your Dream Award is another meaningful way in which recipients could contribute to supporting the program while simultaneously being celebrated as a role model within their local community.

### **Connect Past Club Recipients as a Support Group**

Clubs can help create networks of peer support for recipients by providing the contact information and resources necessary to form support groups of current and former award recipients from both their own club and other nearby clubs.

- Offer to secure a space, such as a room at a community center, for recipients to come together and meet or help facilitate an online support network.
- Invite former award recipients to attend club banquets or award ceremonies together to build community.

### **Connect with Other Community Resources, Including Opportunities for Additional Funding, Financial Advice, etc.**

Clubs can serve as a bridge from the recipient to a wealth of other community resources.

- Invite recipients to LiveYourDream.org to connect them with a community of change makers who support them. LiveYourDream.org has a blog that is especially geared towards women seeking support to live their dreams.
- Connect recipients to community center programs or other free instruction that might bolster practical skills, such as computer skills.
- Keep a record of community resources so clubs can connect recipients to appropriate services, such as free counseling for survivors of domestic abuse, free financial planning services or community agencies that provide assistance with utilities or heating costs.
- Direct to resources or provide assistance to help a recipient launch her own small business.
- Invite recipients to sign up as a LiveYourDream.org supporter.
- Investigate opportunities for other grant awards or scholarships to complement the financial assistance provided by the Soroptimist Live Your Dream Awards.
- Do other programs provide assistance with paying back student loans?
- Are there opportunities to reduce insurance or other costs based on degree completion?

### **Include in Club Activities or Membership**

Because of the life-changing nature of this award and how proud many recipients are to receive it, recipients often express an interest in remaining in contact with the club.

- Invite your recipient to join your club in participating in a rewarding service project.
- If a former recipient is now in the financial position to do so, invite her to join your club.

Gift a former recipient her first year's membership with Soroptimist as a graduation gift.

### **Conclusion**

Through the Soroptimist Live Your Dream Awards, SIA reaches tens of thousands of women across its 20 countries and territories. But there is still more that can be done to further increase the quality of change in the lives of award recipients and improve the standard of living for these women and their families. Beyond a one-time cash award, Soroptimists can provide ongoing support and encouragement to women in ways that deepen this impact and go even further to fulfill our mission.