

Soroptimist

International of the Americas, Inc.®

Our Vision

Women and girls have the resources and opportunities to reach their full potential and live their dreams

Our Mission

Soroptimist is a global volunteer organization that provides women and girls with access to the education and training they need to achieve economic empowerment.

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WE BELIEVE IN YOU!

When I was a girl, I was obsessed with Nancy Drew, the amateur girl detective. The Secret of the Old Clock. The Whispering Statue. The Hidden Window Mystery. I would stay up late at night, reading under my covers with a flashlight, shivering with fright at the scary situations Nancy found herself in. Nancy, of course, was unusual because she was a woman doing a job typically reserved for men. And girls, starved for female role models, propelled the books' enormous popularity in countries throughout the world. 80 million copies. 45 languages. Countless girls inspired.

Fast-forward a few decades, and now we're in the era of Girl Power. Nancy Drew books are still in print, but girls have many more examples of real and fictional female role models, and media eager to promote them:

In Industry

(Pause for slide on screen with text)

Sheryl Sandberg, FaceBook COO

Sonia Dulá, President, Bank of America, Mexico

Indra Nooyi, Pepsi Co.

In the Arts



SOROPTIMIST®
Investing in Dreams



LIVEYOURDREAM.ORG®

Banana Yoshimoto, Writer

Midori, Musician

Beyonce, Singer

Lea Salonga, Singer & Actress

Lina Bo Bardi, Architect

In Government

(Pause for slide on screen with text)

Yuriko Koike, Governor of Tokyo

Miriam Defensor Santiago, Philippines Senator

Tsai Ing-Wen, President, Taiwan

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, U.S. Supreme Court Justice

In Science

(Pause for slide on screen with text)

Mae Jemison, Astronaut

Chiaki Mukai, Astronaut

Jane Goodall, Primatologist & Activist

Joanne Liu, President, Pediatrician and President of Doctors Without Borders

Katherine G. Johnson, NASA mathematician

In Sports

(Pause for slide on screen with text)

Mao Asada, Olympic Ice Skater

Kim Yu-na, Olympic Ice Skater

Serena Williams, Champion Tennis Player

Mariana Pajon, Olympic Cyclist

In Fiction

(Pause for slide on screen with text)

Hermione Granger, Harry Potter

Mulan, Mulan

Katniss Everdeen, The Hunger Games

Olivia Pope, Scandal

And, Changing Our World

(Pause for slide on screen with text)

Malala Yousafzai, Education Activist

Tarana Burke, #MeToo Founder/Activist

Melina Laboucan-Massimo, Canadian First Nation Activist

Melinda Gates, Philanthropist & Activist

Han Bi-ya, Poverty & Refugee Activist

We're making progress. But girls today, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, continue to face steep challenges that can separate them from their dreams. Poverty. Sexual violence. Teen pregnancy.

For many girls, it goes like this: You have dreams. Big dreams. You are bombarded by messages that you can be and do anything you want. But you lack the resources and knowledge of how to move forward toward accomplishing your dreams. You hear you can do anything ... but you don't see your own power.

This is Jessica. She knows this story all too well.

Jess grew up in a family that struggled mightily to get by. It was a family filled with great love, but as she learned at a young age, love does not put food on the table or pay the electric bill.

Her parents worked long hours doing manual labor—cleaning houses and washing windows— but never earned enough to provide a stable home life. They moved around a lot and Jessica and her brother were never sure what was around the corner.

“Did my parents always make the best decisions? No, most definitely they did not,” says Jess.

Jess describes her father as “quite possibly the world’s most loving man,” Unfortunately, he was debilitated by depression and then drug addiction for most of his life. After suffering a massive heart attack because of his drug use, he was no longer able to work. He spiraled further into depression and addiction—a battle he was never able to win.

Says Jess, “My mom finally found the strength to leave my dad. Then I witnessed first-hand the challenges single moms face. Now, after having children of my own, I’m not sure I’ll ever be able to fully grasp the situation she was in.”

“We were fortunate because a lot of the people my mom cleaned for were really good to us. They gave us food, clothes ... and compassion.”

Life for Jessica and her younger brother didn’t get better after her mom met and married a man who would turn out to be another bad decision.

Jessica relied on the support and kindness of family friends to get her through.

She says, “They took me on vacation with them. They hired me to help with their kids, watch their pets when they went on vacation, and work in their businesses. One of my friend’s parents even gave me a car so I could get to and from my job. They showed me there was another world out there. That another life was possible. One with stability and normalcy.”

“I decided then I was going to live a different life than the one I had grown up in. I was going to get an education so I could earn a good living. And have a house. And health insurance.”

That was Jessica's dream—a stable, normal life. And she had the wisdom to know that getting an education was the only way she could make her dream a reality. But what she didn't have was a professional role model or mentor to show her the way. "I didn't have any idea about potential careers, or the steps I needed to take to get into college," she says.

"The tests. The financial aid. I had no idea how to get from point A to point B. My mom helped by giving me the money for the application fees. But otherwise I was completely on my own, and I really could have used some help."

How many of you remember thinking about potential careers and then all the hoops required when applying to college or trade school? For yourself or maybe your kids or grandkids?

Me too.

It's complicated and hard to imagine getting through it without a responsible adult's help.

Our organization has always been at the forefront of meeting the needs of women and girls. We know the future for women will depend on the foundation we lay for the girls of today. A few years ago, we undertook a massive study of girls to determine how we could best help girls like Jessica set and achieve their goals and dreams.

SIA sent an electronic survey to girls in 22 countries and territories. We held focus groups and conducted interviews with experts from leading girl organizations. We surveyed our members and talked to attendees during an SIA convention. We sought out research from the UN and other organizations.

What did we learn?

We learned there are 10.2 million girls in our countries and territories who face steep

obstacles. They are living in poverty. They lack stable home lives. They are vulnerable to sex traffickers.

Our research confirmed education is the single most effective antipoverty intervention. And we determined that girls like Jessica are exactly who we should target through a new Soroptimist program. Girls who need assistance with setting goals and overcoming obstacles. Girls who need a boost in their self-esteem. Girls who need professional role models to show them the way.

“The most important thing that will help me achieve my dreams,” said one respondent, “is to have someone that takes the journey with me.”

So your program department at Soroptimist headquarters put together all the research with SIA clubs and members, organizations that work with girls, and other experts. They created the materials and curriculum, and ***Dream It, Be It*** was launched.

In two short years, we have already touched the lives of more than 20,000 girls. And the results are impressive. Between 80 and 90 percent of participants feel more confident and prepared, with new tools to move forward and strategies to overcome setbacks. Our Dream It, Be It girls are being introduced to professional role models, and for the first time could—as Jessica put it—see a way to get from Point A to Point B.

Studies have proven that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who have professional role models or mentors are more likely to attend college, participate in sports, take leadership roles and volunteer in their communities. Our program is new, so we don't have any hard data yet, but we already know this one touch with a girl gives her a new perspective.

Here's what a few of the girls had to say:

“I feel enlightened and unstoppable.”

“I feel inspired and the program helped me to understand myself.”

“I feel capable of managing my future.”

“It was great to build ourselves up and become visionaries of our future.”

“I loved the whole idea of empowering us—they made us feel like no matter our background or situation, we can make it.”

Powerful words from powerful girls.

Let’s check back in with Jessica. Through sheer determination, she got herself through college. She will tell you she’s lucky because many people continued to help her along the way, whether it was college professors or employers.

“The most important thing is knowing people believe in you,” she says. “That’s what got me through.”

Jess says she often thinks of this line from *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee: You never really know a man until you understand things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.

“So as I’m out there walking my own mile,” says Jess, “I keep in mind how lucky I am to be in the skin I’m in, and do what I can to help those whose skin is not as lucky.”

Her experiences and philosophy of life led Jess to a career working for an organization with a mission she believed in.

You see, about 13 years ago, she joined SIA’s headquarters staff. She wrote a beautiful letter when applying, outlining her experiences as the daughter of a single mom and her belief in

our mission. Even though she didn't have the exact experience required, she was hired because it was obvious she had much to offer. And she did.

Jess is our director of marketing and design. In fact, she designed the beautiful PowerPoint you are watching now!

She lives outside of Chicago with her husband, Jeff, and two feisty daughters, Charlie and Addie.

"I feel fortunate to work for an organization with a mission I relate to personally," she says. "Through my work with Soroptimist, I feel like I'm giving back to every person along the way who said, through word and deed, Jess, we believe in you."

Our ***Dream It, Be It*** program is the perfect bookend to our tried-and-true ***Live Your Dream Awards***. Many of our recipients fall on hard times because they lacked financial resources, direction or opportunity. Others because they were victims of violence after they fell in with the wrong man. They lacked confidence. They lacked role models. They lacked someone to show them the way.

Those were the circumstance for every one of the past ***Live Your Dream Award*** recipients you see up on the screen. Just imagine if these beautiful women had had access to ***Dream It, Be It*** when they were teenagers. It's entirely possible that program could have helped them get on a different, healthier path. And that's the potential of ***Dream It, Be It***.

"I often think how much easier my life would have been if I had had access to a program like ***Dream It, Be It***," says Jess. "It would have saved me a lot of time and heartache. And my mom could really have benefited from a ***Live Your Dream Award*** as well when she decided to return to school at age 50.

In a recent *Time* magazine piece, musician and activist Bono said, “When you invest in girls and women, they rise and they lift their families, their communities, their economies and countries along with them. They rise—and they lead.”

He’s right. That’s why our new big goal, beginning in 2021, is to “Invest in the dreams of one-half million women and girls through access to education.” We need to work as one to make sure every deserving woman and girl has the opportunity to make her dreams real. I’m hoping all of you go back your clubs and encourage your fellow members to recommit to increasing support for our life-changing Dream Programs.

20 million deserving women and girls in our 21 countries and territories need our help.

Let’s be there for all the Jessica’s out there waiting for someone to help her realize her dream.

Let’s support them so they will rise and lead.

Let’s take the journey with them.

Let’s tell these women and girls, loudly and clearly: WE **BELIEVE** IN YOU!

Thank you.