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## **WHITE PAPER: Domestic Violence as a Workplace Concern**

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*Ellen works for a small shipping company in the western Canada city of Vancouver. She has been unhappily married to Paul for more than 20 years, and she and her two daughters bear the brunt of Paul's verbal taunts and controlling behavior. Though he has never physically abused the children, he often beats Ellen so severely that vicious bruises cover her arms and legs. Ellen regularly lies to her coworkers about the origin of her bruises, claiming clumsiness, embarrassed by their true cause. At least once a month Ellen is so badly hurt that she must call out of work. In the past two years alone, she has lost 22 days of work and thousands of dollars in wages.*

*One night, Paul angrily smacks Ellen's younger daughter, and she falls down the stairs, cutting open her knee. After years of abuse, Ellen has finally had enough and leaves. She moves in with a friend and changes her phone number and personal email address. For a while things are fine, but soon Ellen begins receiving threatening prank phone calls at the office and nasty emails to her work email account. She thinks it might be Paul and her suspicions are confirmed when one evening she discovers him waiting for her in the office parking lot. In a dark and menacing tone Paul threatens to kill her—and their children— unless she returns to him.*

*Ellen does not know who to turn to or where to go. For years she has been hiding her abuse from her friends, family, coworkers and employers, and the threats continue to escalate...*

In all societies and socio-economic classes, women are the victims of physical and sexual violence. The United Nations Development Fund for Women estimates that at least one in every three women globally will be beaten, raped or otherwise abused during her lifetime. In most cases, the abuser is a member of her own family.

Domestic violence, or intimate partner violence, occurs behind closed doors, and is the verbal, physical or sexual abuse by current or former intimate partners. According to a National Violence Against Women survey, in the United States alone, an estimated 5.3 million acts of domestic violence occur each year against women 18 and older (U.S. Centers for Disease Control). Each year, around 1,200 American women are killed by an intimate partner, with another two million women sustaining serious injuries as a result of domestic violence, more than a quarter of which require medical attention (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees). The National Organization for Women explains this tragedy more graphically: the number of American women murdered by their intimate partners since the Vietnam War is greater than the number of soldiers killed in the Vietnam War, over 58,000.

Globally, one in four women will experience intimate partner abuse at some point in their lives (The National Network to End Domestic Violence). Out of 10 countries surveyed in a 2005 study by the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 50 percent of women in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Tanzania reported having been subjected to physical or sexual violence by intimate partners, with

figures reaching a staggering 71 percent in rural Ethiopia. In addition, a 2006 survey by the Japanese government reported that 22.6 percent of Japanese women had suffered some form of violence or harassment at the hands of their spouse at least once. Almost half of all victims did not tell anyone about their abuse, most often because they felt it would not help or because they were ashamed.

Domestic violence can take many forms. However, the perpetrators are usually men and the victims are mostly women. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, domestic violence acts generally fall into one or more of the following three categories:

*Physical Abuse:* The abuser's physical attacks or aggressive behavior toward his partner can range from slaps to murder. It often begins with what is excused as trivial contacts, which then escalate into more frequent and serious attacks on the victim.

*Sexual Abuse:* Physical attack by the abuser is often accompanied by or culminates in sexual violence, wherein the victim is raped or forced to have sexual relations with her abuser.

*Psychological Abuse:* The abuser's psychological or mental violence can include constant verbal abuse, belittling, harassment, and excessive possessiveness, isolating the woman from friends and family, depriving her of physical and economic resources, and destroying her personal property.

*Economic Abuse:* By controlling and limiting the victim's access to financial resources, the abuser ensures that the victim will be financially limited if she chooses to leave the relationship. As a result, the victim is forced to choose between staying in the abusive relationship or facing economic hardship and possibly homelessness.

Domestic violence is rarely an isolated incident. The abuse may start with name calling and violent behavior like punching a wall, but it usually intensifies as time goes on and the relationship progresses. Many victims find that the violence can escalate quickly. In many cases, domestic violence can escalate to the extent of being life-threatening or even murder.

Intimate partner violence also affects teen relationships. Forty-five percent of teen girls surveyed in a 2004 National Resource Center on Domestic Violence survey reported to have had encountered some form of physical aggression during the course of dating. Furthermore, a 2007 American Bar Association study found that 57 percent of the teens surveyed reported knowing someone who has been verbally, physically, or sexually abusive in a dating relationship. The patterns and signs of teen dating violence tend to mirror those exhibited in adult abusive relationships. In both cases, there is often a pattern of repeated violence that escalates over time. Also, abusive boys, like men, tend to isolate their partner from friends and family, equate possessiveness and jealousy with love, and use their social status to establish control over their partner.

There is a growing concern that the widespread loss of jobs and decreased economic security due to the global financial crisis will increase threats to women's and girls' personal security and exacerbate levels of violence against them. A four-country study of the impact of the Asian financial crisis in 1997 documented an increase in crimes of all types, including domestic violence and sexual assault. Similar findings are reflected in recent reports from shelters and hotlines across the globe. A May 2009 survey of more than 600 domestic violence shelters across the United States found that three out of four shelters reported an increase in women seeking help for abuse since September 2008, when the economic downturn became more severe (Ines Alberdi, *UNIFEM*). In addition, the National Domestic Violence Hotline released data in 2009 showing a link between financial stress, domestic

violence and the current economic crisis. For victims who called the hotline during the six-week study, 54 percent reported a change in their household's financial situation in the past year.

### **Domestic Violence as a Workplace Concern**

While it may not immediately seem that domestic violence is a work-related issue, abuse, threats and violence often follow victims to work. According to SafeWork, a national movement to empower corporate America to address domestic violence in the workplace, one in five employed adults are victims of domestic violence; 64 percent of domestic violence victims say their ability to work is affected by the violence; and 74 percent of employed victims say they have been harassed by their abusive partner while at work (Newell, *The Glasshammer*). This has a profound effect on a victim's performance at work, can give rise to financial hardships for her employer and can create a dangerous workplace for the victim and her co-workers.

A Futures without Violence study reports that in the United States, approximately 74 percent of women who experience abuse at home also experience abuse at the workplace. Furthermore, more than 75 percent of domestic violence perpetrators used workplace resources to express remorse or anger towards, check up on, pressure, or threaten their victim (Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence, CAEPV). Abusers often harass victims at work via telephone or e-mail, or may even come into the workplace to harass or threaten their victims and their co-workers.

Along with physical and emotional suffering, domestic violence victims also suffer economically. Domestic violence in the U.S. causes an estimated \$975 million in lost wages for victims just in days missed from work. According to a Family Violence Prevention Fund study, domestic violence caused 56 percent of employed domestic violence victims to be late for work at least five times a month; 28 percent to leave early at least five days a month; and 54 percent to miss at least three full days of work a month. Lower productivity and absenteeism prohibits these women from receiving raises and pay increases, (*Domestic Violence Reduces Business Productivity and Profit*), and can even affect victims' ability to keep a job (Family Violence Prevention Fund): an estimated 24 to 30 percent of abused working women lose their jobs as a direct result of their domestic violence situation (CAEPV, *Workplace Statistics*). Furthermore, victims are often trapped in low paying jobs and are unable to advance their careers because of having to change jobs frequently.

Domestic violence also has an impact on victims' coworkers, both in terms of productivity and psychologically. In a 2007 CAEPV study, 44 percent of respondents personally experienced domestic violence's impact on the workplace, most frequently because a co-worker was a victim. Violence in the Workplace, a 2005 landmark study from CAEPV, found that 27 percent of victims' co-workers reported "frequently to somewhat frequently" having to do a victim's work, and 31 percent often "covered" for a victim of domestic violence, cutting down on worker productivity. Furthermore, 38 percent of co-workers were concerned for their own personal safety and 30 percent noted that abusers frequently visited the office, heightening victims' and coworkers' sense of fear.

Victims' and coworkers' lower productivity as a result of domestic violence also takes an economic toll on both the workplace and the general economy. Researchers have found that general costs from domestic violence in the United States range from \$10–\$67 billion per year. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), domestic violence victims lose a total of nearly eight million days of paid work a year—the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs. In addition, domestic violence costs American businesses more than \$4.1 billion in health care-related services for victims and an additional \$727.8 million in productivity losses each year, according to the Family Violence Prevention Fund.

The United States is certainly not the only country whose economy suffers as a result of domestic violence. Domestic violence costs countries around the world billions of dollars in health care, police and court costs, and lost productivity. For instance, a study conducted by the Inter-American Development Bank found that the cost of domestic violence for Canadian businesses was \$1.6 billion per year, including medical care and lost productivity. According to the Women and Equality Unit in the United Kingdom's Department of Trade and Industry, domestic violence costs business as much as £2.7 billion a year in lost productivity. It is estimated that around half of the costs of absences is borne by the employer and half by the individual in lost wages. The total cost of domestic violence for the UK as a whole, employers and victims, is estimated at £23 billion a year.

### **Protecting Employees**

When a victim attempts to leave an abusive partner, the workplace may be the only place the assailant can locate and harm her. The U.S. Department of Justice has found that approximately 20,000 workers are threatened or attacked in the workplace every year by partners or spouses. In addition, according to the Workplace Violence Institute, homicide by intimate partners is the leading cause of workplace deaths among female employees. Not knowing the signs of domestic violence increases the risk of danger to the victim as well as to her co-workers, according to AFSCME.

In the United States, businesses have an obligation to provide a safe workplace and liability issues could arise for companies failing to protect their employees. However, over 70 percent of workplaces in the U.S. have no formal program or policy that addresses this issue (*Safe Horizon*). A 2002 Liz Claiborne Corporate Leader Survey found that 68 percent of corporate leaders believed that a company's financial performance and productivity would benefit if domestic violence were addressed among its employees. Furthermore, a 2007 Liz Claiborne survey of senior executives found that while 90 percent of corporate executives believed intimate partner violence affected both the private and working lives of employees, only 13 percent said that corporations should play a major part in addressing the issue.

The employees seem to feel differently, however. In a parallel employee survey by CAEPV, 90 percent of employees indicated company representatives should be trained to recognize the signs of domestic violence. More importantly, CAEPV's 2005 survey found that 21 percent of those surveyed were at some point victims of domestic violence and that of those who identified as domestic violence victims, 48 percent indicated a comprehensive work place domestic violence awareness program would have been helpful and 43 percent wished their employers offered training on domestic violence. Furthermore, 61 percent of American men believe employers should be doing more to address domestic violence in the workplace (*Safe Horizon*). Seventy-eight percent of human resources professionals and 94 percent of corporate security directors consider domestic violence a critical workplace issue (*SafeWork*).

A study presented at the 2006 International Work, Stress and Health Conference found that victims of domestic violence are more likely to stay employed when the workplace offers some type of support. Workplace support initiatives that include flexible working hours, supervisor-approved workload modifications, and implementation of safeguards such as the screening of telephone calls, may help victims stay employed.

All employers have an obligation, be it legal or moral, to intervene when one of their employees is experiencing domestic violence. Simple steps can be taken by businesses, large and small, to protect women and their co-workers, help them stay safe from violence, and find needed resources. Companies should have formal policies and domestic awareness training. The first step is for supervisors and co-workers to understand domestic violence and recognize the signs. The workplace may be the only place a woman has sanctuary from her abuser and where she is safe to receive help

and support. Supervisors and co-workers should therefore be encouraged to keep their eyes and ears open for signs that a woman in their office may be being abused. Some warning signs include:

- Social withdrawal from co-workers.
- Bruises or physical complaints that show signs of assault (but may often be explained as being caused by accidents).
- Crying or outbursts of anger when on the phone.
- Frequent personal calls that leave her upset.
- Frequent or unexplained absences or lateness.
- Reduced productivity, decline in job performance and a lack of concentration.

Even though warning signs may be present, a victim of domestic violence is often reluctant to discuss it out of embarrassment or fear—which means the situation should be handled with extreme care. Communicate support even if the woman is not ready to discuss her abuse. If a woman admits to being abused, a co-worker or supervisor can approach her using the following strategies, as suggested by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME):

- Believe the victim.
- Encourage her, but don't pressure her to talk about the abuse.
- Respect her need for confidentiality.
- Listen to the victim and support her feelings without judging.
- Let her know she is not alone.
- Reassure the victim that the abuse is not her fault and she is not to blame.
- Give her clear messages that she can't change her partner's behavior; apologies and promises will not end the violence; and that violence is never justifiable.
- Physical safety is the first priority. Assess the victim's physical safety, discuss the woman's options and help her make plans to ensure her safety and the safety of her children.
- Give the victim agency. Allow her the time she needs to make her own decisions.
- If she is not ready to make major changes, do not withdraw support.
- Provide the woman with a list of key community resources that support and work with victims of domestic violence.
- Encourage the victim to save any abusive e-mails or telephone messages from her partner.

Positive communication and affirmation is desirable when speaking with a domestic violence victim. Some statements and actions must be avoided, as they can be harmful and even dangerous:

- Avoid judgmental or domineering language. Don't tell the victim what to do, when to leave, or when not to leave.
- Don't tell her to go back to her abuser or to try a little harder to make the relationship work.
- Don't attempt to rescue the woman by trying to make decisions for her.
- Don't attempt to mediate the situation by offering to talk to the woman's partner to straighten things out.
- Don't advise the victim to stay in the abusive relationship because of her children.

### **Workplace Guidelines**

In addition to creating awareness about domestic abuse and teaching employees how to recognize the signs and reach out to victims, companies should be proactive and have policies in place for dealing with domestic violence in the workplace. These policies will communicate to workers that in addition to an awareness of and understanding about domestic violence, resources may be available to help victims. This is particularly important since many victims are reluctant to disclose their situation. Even if a woman is not ready to confide in her co-workers or supervisors, making workplace policy

information available could assist her in finding help outside of the office (*Swanberg, Logan and Macke*).

The following suggestions for employers were compiled from information in Christina Morfeld's *Domestic Violence is a Workplace Problem*, AFSCME's *Unions Respond to Domestic Violence*, and Soroptimist's Workplace Domestic Violence Guidelines:

- Design employee assistance programs as a way to foster respect, trust and open communication.
- Have a formal domestic violence policy on file, including guidelines on confidentiality, schedule and leave flexibility, procedures that supervisors are to follow if they believe a subordinate may be a victim, steps victims should take, and available resources.
- Include information about domestic violence and the employer's response in orientations for new employees and in the organizational handbook.
- Make reasonable efforts to maintain a secure office environment.
- Support local domestic violence shelters with clothing, toys, and furniture drives or with funding as a way to raise awareness of the problem.

Once a woman has made it known that she is a victim of domestic violence, employers can offer a number of strategies to ensure her safety:

- Change the employee's work station and/or schedule.
- Provide the woman with parking near the front door and an escort to walk her to and from her car.
- Provide photos of the employee's abuser to security personnel and the receptionist.
- Remove the woman's e-mail address and telephone extension from public directories.
- Have another employee or third party screen the victim's telephone calls and e-mail messages.
- Change payroll addresses, direct deposit information or beneficiaries, as needed.

The U.S. federal government launched a nationally funded resource center on October 27, 2010 to acquaint employers to the issue of domestic violence in the workplace as well as help them raise awareness of the issue and establish domestic violence workplace policies (*Legal Momentum*). Section 701 of Title VII (Providing Economic Security for Victims of Violence) of the Violence against Women Act mandated the creation of this national resource center. The Office on Violence Against Women was established within the United States Department of Justice following the passage of the reauthorization of VAWA in 2000, and funds the Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence: National Resource Center. The organization receives a million dollar federal grant annually to provide knowledge and materials about domestic violence in the workplace to employers.

### **The Moral Obligation of Protecting Employees**

While it is clear that domestic violence has significant negative economic impacts, domestic violence should be considered a workplace concern on the basis that all employees deserve to be protected from violence. Violence against women is a human rights violation of pandemic proportions that needs to be addressed from every angle. As previously stated, the workplace may be the only place a domestic violence victim is away from her abuser, or the only place an abuser can locate and harm a victim if she leaves the abusive partner. It is thus a vital location to offer support to victims.

An important piece of U.S. federal legislation was introduced to the 110<sup>th</sup> session of congress in 2007. "*Too Much, Too Long? Domestic Violence in the Workplace*" was the topic of a hearing before the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety in April 2007. Advocates at the hearing pressed for the passage of the *Security and Financial Empowerment (SAFE) Act* to promote the economic security of domestic violence victims. The act would keep domestic violence victims from losing their jobs if they needed to miss work to get their affairs in order (such as attending court appearances, obtaining a restraining order or finding a new

place to live). They would also make victims eligible for unemployment benefits and protect them from employment and insurance discrimination. Unfortunately, after being referred to the Committee on Finance and the Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities respectively in 2007, the bills never became law. The SAFE Act was reintroduced for debate under in the 111<sup>th</sup> session of congress in 2010, but was again not signed into law.

In the absence of such federal laws, many states have enacted laws to protect the economic security of domestic violence victims. At least 29 U.S. states currently have laws that allow people who voluntarily leave their job because of domestic violence to be eligible for unemployment benefits. Individuals generally are ineligible for unemployment benefits if they leave work voluntarily without “good cause.” However, for these states, domestic violence satisfies the “good cause” clause. Other states, including Maine, Montana, North Dakota, Indiana and Oregon, also include sexual assault and stalking as “good cause” (Deschenaux, Joanne). However, in a 2005 study conducted by the state of Maine’s Department of Labor and Family Crisis Services, 94 percent of the women who participated in the study (women who had experienced domestic violence while employed) were unaware of state statutes that provided unemployment compensation to victims of domestic abuse, and 93 percent were unaware that Maine law requires employers to provide time off to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

In 2010, Delaware Governor Jack A. Markell announced the State of Delaware Domestic Violence Policy. The goals of the policy are to promote the health and safety of state employees by creating a supportive workplace for employees who are victims of domestic violence, in which employees feel comfortable discussing and seeking assistance regarding domestic violence; providing responsive guidelines and procedures to assist employees who are affected by domestic violence; and providing support and assistance to employees who are victims of domestic violence (The State of Delaware Official Website, *State of Delaware Domestic Violence Policy*). Governor Markell created the policy on the basis that “no one should go to work in fear. We want employees who feel threatened by domestic violence to get the help and support they need” (*Domestic Violence in the Workplace blog*).

The workplace is clearly a vital location to provide domestic violence victims with information and support. As such, companies must recognize their obligation to institute comprehensive domestic violence workplace policies and programs. Such policies could help protect the performance of employees and the prosperity of companies, and most importantly, the lives of women in domestic violence situations.

### **How Soroptimist Assists Domestic Violence Survivors**

Soroptimist is an international volunteer organization for business and professional women who work to improve the lives of women and girls in local communities and throughout the world. Clubs undertake a number of different projects to confront local realities facing women. Many of these projects are aimed at helping survivors of domestic violence rebuild their lives. As an organization, Soroptimist supports the following programs:

**[Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence](#)**—Soroptimist International of the Americas has focused on domestic violence, particularly as it affects the workplace, for many years. The Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence is an ongoing effort to raise awareness about domestic violence as a workplace concern. Local Soroptimist club members distribute hotline cards personalized with local contact information for domestic violence shelters and other services. Club members leave the cards in restrooms or put them in paycheck envelopes. This is a way to get information to women without requiring them to identify themselves as victims. Each year tens of thousands of domestic violence hotline cards are distributed in workplaces throughout the world. Soroptimists further customizes the program for cultural relevance. In Japan, for instance,

women are not likely to pick up a card in a restroom, so members place them in packages of tissues and hand them out in the street.

In addition to distributing the hotline cards, clubs also hold lectures in their workplaces to draw attention to the issue of domestic violence as a workplace concern; lobby their employers to institute policies and include domestic violence information in their personnel handbooks; and hold seminars for local businesses about the costs associated with domestic violence in the workplace.

As working women, Soroptimists understand the importance of reaching out to women in the workplace. In May 2005, Soroptimist developed comprehensive guidelines called the Soroptimist Domestic Violence Workplace Policies. Available to clubs and the public via Soroptimist's website, the guidelines provide information and statistics about domestic violence as a workplace issue, and offer step by step instructions for implementing a domestic violence workplace policy.

In 2002, the Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence won the Associations Make a Better World Award sponsored by the American Society of Association Executives.

**Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards**—The Women's Opportunity Awards program is Soroptimist International of the Americas' major project. The awards improve the lives of disadvantaged women by giving them the resources they need to upgrade their education, skills, and employment prospects. Each year, Soroptimist clubs in 19 countries and territories assist women in overcoming personal difficulties and improving their lives through education and skills training. The women, who provide the primary source of financial support for their families, may use the cash award to offset any costs associated with their efforts to attain higher education, including books, childcare and transportation. Club recipients become eligible for additional cash awards at other levels of the organization, including three \$10,000 finalist awards.

Many Women's Opportunity Award recipients have overcome enormous obstacles in their quest for a better life, including poverty, domestic violence, and substance abuse. Each year, more than \$1.5 million is disbursed through awards at various levels of the organization to help women achieve their dreams of a better life for themselves and their families. Since the Women's Opportunity Awards program began in 1972, it is estimated that \$25 million has been disbursed and more than 25,000 women have been assisted. In 2007, the Women's Opportunity Awards received the Summit Award from the ASAE & The Center of Association Leadership, its highest honor, bestowed on associations that implement innovative community-based programs.

**Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls**—Soroptimists work to improve the lives of women and girls in their communities and throughout the world. Often the abilities and ambitions of clubs exceed their financial resources. Soroptimist introduced the Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls in 1997 to assist with community projects that improve the lives of women and girls. Each year, grants are given to clubs working on projects that help domestic violence survivors. For the 2011-2012 club year, SIA received 78 grant proposals requesting more than U.S. \$525,000 in funding. Twenty-eight projects were awarded a total of US\$175,000 in funding. Since the program's inception, nearly \$2 million has been awarded and clubs have assisted more than 100,000 women and their families. Recent projects include providing resources for immigrant women fleeing domestic violence; funding a micro-enterprise artisan project for low-income women; providing reproductive health services for women in poverty; and teaching marketable job skills to girls with disabilities. In 2007, the Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls won the Associations Make a Better World Award for US-based associations.

Many Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls recipient projects provide domestic violence survivors with the support and resources to restart their lives. SI/Dazaifu and SI/Fukuoka-Kita, Japan received a \$10,000 grant to establish a multilingual hotline that provides counseling services for victims of domestic violence and human trafficking. Although support-systems for domestic violence and human trafficking victims already exist in Japan, many immigrant women are not able to receive the support of these organizations as a result of the language barrier. These women will now have access this support. SI/Fremont, OH also received a grant to continue their TRAP (Teen Relationship Abuse Prevention) program, a public relations and educational campaign designed to reach teens, parents, and social and civic groups to increase awareness and knowledge about dating violence and healthy relationships. TRAP arranges guest speakers for school assemblies on teen relationship violence and also provides smaller group presentations. SI/Rio Negro, Brazil plans to use their grant to create a cooking and home management course for women and girls in a local domestic violence shelter. The main goals are to help prepare these women for reentering the job market, improve their own home management and sanitation conditions, improve their personal hygiene, and help them to understand nutritional value.

**Soroptimist Disaster Grants for Women and Girls**—Soroptimist reaches out to women and girls before, during and after disasters by providing financial assistance to regions affected by natural disasters or acts of war. SIA is pleased to join with [Soroptimist International of Europe](#) to increase the scope and impact of the Soroptimist Disaster Grants for Women and Girls. Women and girls are hardest hit by acts of war and natural disasters, and suffer from a heightened risk of violence during and after disasters. The prevalence of domestic violence increases in the aftermath of a disaster due to stress and economic uncertainty. Lack of adequate reporting procedures in the midst of the chaos of disaster recovery and conflict make it difficult for authorities to effectively track cases of violence and apprehend perpetrators. Because relief efforts targeted to women are often overlooked during a crisis, and because women and girls have special needs in times of crisis and disaster, Soroptimist Disaster Grants for Women and Girls support projects that specifically assist women and girls.

Clubs can apply for disaster relief grants for local areas hit by natural disasters or warfare. In the 2010-2011 club year, four grants were given to clubs or regions totaling \$65,875. Additionally, in the wake of the earthquake that devastated Haiti in January 2010, Soroptimist donated \$60,000 to two organizations to support reconstruction projects that benefit women and girls. In the aftermath of the 9.0 magnitude earthquake and resulting tsunami that hit Japan in March 2011, Soroptimist made an immediate \$10,000 donation to The Iwaki Fureai Support Center, an organization that works with domestic violence victims in Iwaki City, Fukushima prefecture. The funds were used to repair the badly damaged facility so that it could reopen to assist abused women in need of shelter and support services. Three clubs also received Soroptimist Disaster Grants for Women and Girls totaling nearly \$60,000 to benefit women and girls affected by the disaster in their local communities.

**Soroptimist Violet Richardson Award**—Named for the president of the first Soroptimist club, the Soroptimist Violet Richardson Award honors girls who are making a difference through volunteer efforts. Each year, Soroptimist clubs honor girls who donate their time and energy to causes that make the community and world a better place—such as working to end discrimination and poverty, assisting women and children who are victims of domestic violence, or mentoring young girls. The program begins on the Soroptimist club level, with club recipients becoming eligible for additional awards at other levels of the organization. One winner is chosen to receive a finalist award, which includes a contribution of \$2,500 to the charitable organization of the recipient's choice.

The Soroptimist Violet Richardson Award supports girls in their volunteer efforts with the hope that they will feel more self-confident and empowered to continue to pursue their interests and dreams. By

doing so, the Violet Richardson Award helps keep these young girls on the trajectory towards success and empowerment.

**Live Your Dream**—Launched in conjunction with International Women’s Day (March 8), the Soroptimist Live Your Dream campaign inspires women from all walks of life to live their dreams and encourages them to pass on their good fortune to others. Soroptimist programs enable women and girls to live their dreams and create positive change for themselves and their families. The Live Your Dream website features many stories about inspirational women, as well as provides tools for women everywhere to begin or continue living their dreams.

Soroptimist International of the Americas is a 501(c)(3) organization. Since 2004, Soroptimist has received the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations (PANO) Seal of Excellence for its successful compliance with the Standards for Excellence program.

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