



Soroptimist  
International  
of Gig Harbor

## ***Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards Program***

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The Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards program is Soroptimist's major project. The program provides women with cash grants to offset costs associated with their efforts to attain higher education and additional skills training. The ultimate goal of the program is to help women improve their economic status by preparing them to enter or re-enter the workplace. Unlike other award programs, the Women's Opportunity Awards can be used for books, child care, transportation or any other expense that will help a woman reach her educational goal.

### **History**

The Women's Opportunity Awards program was created in 1972 by popular vote of the Soroptimist membership. Because of their interest in "upward mobility for women," members voted overwhelmingly for the creation of an award for training or retraining that would enable women to obtain higher level jobs. In December 1997, the Soroptimist Board of Directors adopted the Women's Opportunity Awards as Soroptimist's major service project because the program best exemplifies the aims of the organization.

### **Program Structure**

The program begins on the club level, where award amounts vary. Club-level recipients become eligible for additional awards at other levels of the organization. In addition, Soroptimist grants three \$10,000 finalist awards each year. Soroptimist disburses more than \$1 million annually through this program to help women reclaim their dreams of a better life for themselves and their families. Since 1972, Soroptimist has disbursed about \$20 million and helped more than 25,000 women through the Women's Opportunity Awards program.

### **Accolades**

In 2007, the Women's Opportunity Awards program received the *Associations Advance America Summit Award*—ASAE & the Center for Association Leadership's highest level of recognition—and the *Award of Excellence*.

To date, Women's Opportunity Awards finalists have been the focus of two *First for Women* magazine articles. The first article told the story of Kathy Medley, a single mother of five who left an abusive marriage to make a better life for her family. With the help of the Women's Opportunity Awards and support from local Soroptimists, Medley turned her life around. She eventually earned a degree in dental hygiene and provided a financially and emotionally secure life for her children. Medley has since remarried and is a dental hygienist and the proud co-owner of a hardware store. In 2002, Soroptimist created a public service announcement (PSA) based on Medley's inspirational journey. The PSA earned an Award of Distinction in The Communicator Awards 2002 Video Competition, which recognizes excellence in the field of communications.

P.O. Box 2761  
Gig Harbor, WA 98335  
(877) 435-4474  
[www.soroptimistgh.com](http://www.soroptimistgh.com)

The second *First for Women* article introduced readers to Guadalupe Vidales, who emigrated from Mexico to the United States only to end up in a violent marriage. Vidales fled with her two children to a domestic violence shelter supported by a local Soroptimist club. Eventually she enrolled in college and with the help of the Women's Opportunity Awards earned a degree in psychology. Vidales, who organized domestic violence awareness programs at her university, went on to earn a Ph.D.

In 2002, Soroptimist and the Women's Opportunity Awards program were showcased on *Voices of Vision*, a televised documentary series on Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). *Voices of Vision* featured individual stories of people who have been helped or affected by non-profit organizations. The episode featuring Soroptimist—Women Helping Women: A Tradition of Service—was beamed by satellite to PBS stations in the United States and Canada.

**To be considered for SIGH's Women's Opportunity Award, or to recommend someone, please complete the WOA Application Form and the WOA Reference Form available on our website (<http://www.soroptimistgh.com/projects.html>), or you may contact us directly at [info@soroptimistgh.com](mailto:info@soroptimistgh.com) for more information.**

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