



A global volunteer organization that improves the lives of women and girls through programs leading to social and economic empowerment.

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF THE AMERICAS

NEWS RELEASE: Soroptimist® Announces 2018 Recipients of *Live Your Dream Education and Training Awards for Women*®

Economically empowering women & creating stronger communities

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Philadelphia, PA — Soroptimist, a global volunteer organization that economically empowers women, awarded three recipients—Shamayel, Lucia and Ana Caren—with its finalist-level *Live Your Dream Education and Training Awards for Women*. By providing resources to improve education, skills and employment prospects, the program helps women facing extreme adversity to create better lives for themselves and their families. Soroptimist recently presented the awards during its convention in Yokohama, Japan. This year, Soroptimist's corporate partner, Torrid LLC—a fashion brand for curvy women—and its Torrid Foundation supplemented the finalist-level awards.

Soroptimist awards more than \$2 million annually in *Live Your Dream Awards* to almost 1,500 women. These women face enormous obstacles including poverty, domestic violence, sex trafficking, teen pregnancy and substance abuse. The program is unique in that recipients may use the cash grant to offset any costs associated with their efforts to attain higher education—such as books, childcare, tuition and transportation.

Each of the 2018 *Live Your Dream Awards* finalists has a story of strength and courage.

Shamayel's parents were human rights activists in Afghanistan. Her father was murdered for defying the Taliban, which included sending Shamayel to school, and her mother died of a heart attack upon hearing the horrible news. Shamayel, who was determined to be in danger as well, immigrated to the U.S. with her siblings. "I am honored to be one of the recipients," she said. "I am the first in my family to attend college. My educational pursuits would not be possible without generous support from the *Live Your Dream Awards*."

Lucia, from Canada, battled ongoing physical and emotional terror, including a horrific rape orchestrated by her children's father. He controlled every aspect of her life including her friends, education, finances and religion. "I didn't have a voice and wasn't allowed to have an opinion without fear of consequence or repercussion. It was a never-ending, hurtful and desperate situation where I felt lost. That all changed with this award. The *Live Your Dream Award* was my way out. It offered opportunity and opened doors for me and my children."

Ana Caren was forced to deal with the trauma of an abusive father and mentally ill mother while growing up in Mexico. After her mother died, Ana Caren began caring for her three younger siblings—all while going to college. A bright young woman and good student, Ana Caren is studying for a degree in engineering and business development/innovation. Ana Caren's first priorities are getting through school and being there for her siblings, but she also dreams of starting her own business one day. "This is no longer a goal or a dream, it has become stronger than a commitment," she stated. "There is no choice ... I will simply fight until I accomplish it!"

“We are so proud of the effect this program has on the lives of women like Shamayel, Lucia and Ana Caren,” said Soroptimist’s Executive Director & CEO Elizabeth M. Lucas. “And we are thankful for our partnership with Torrid and their belief in the power of our *Live Your Dream Awards* to transform lives.”

In addition to cash grants awarded at various levels of the Soroptimist organization, thanks to the generous financial contributions of Torrid LLC and its Torrid Foundation, Shamayel, Lucia and Ana Caren each received additional \$25,000 cash grants. Torrid provided for the three recipients to travel to Yokohama, Japan, where they accepted their awards and shared their inspirational stories at Soroptimist’s 45th Biennial Convention. Torrid also donated wardrobes for each recipient to wear during the week’s activities.

“Torrid is all about helping women and changing lives. It’s in our DNA. For us, it isn’t just about selling clothes to women who wear sizes 10-30. We also hope to inspire women of all sizes to feel beautiful, confident and empowered,” commented Liz Munoz, Torrid CEO.

[Read more about the recipients and how they are turning their lives around with help from Soroptimist’s Live Your Dream Awards.](#)

Since the *Live Your Dream Awards* program began in 1972, Soroptimist has disbursed about \$35 million in cash awards, helping more than 35,000 women achieve their dreams of a better life for themselves and their families. The Fels Institute of Government, a research and consulting organization based at the University of Pennsylvania, released a study evaluating the program’s impact. The report concluded it is highly effective in helping women gain the tools they need to make economic improvements in their lives by increasing their employment prospects and self-esteem. Many recipients create a ripple effect by pursuing careers designed to help other women or girls. Recipients are able to free themselves from public assistance while serving as positive role models for their children—leading to stronger communities and nations. Read the Fels study: <http://www.soroptimist.org/pdf/FelsCaseStatement.pdf>.

The *Live Your Dream Awards* received the 2017 American Society of Association Executives’ Power of A Gold Award, a top-level recognition for associations working to make a better world. Soroptimist is now accepting *Live Your Dream Awards* applications through November 15, 2018, and encourages eligible candidates to apply: <https://www.soroptimist.org/our-work/live-your-dream-awards/apply-for-the-live-your-dream-awards.html>.

Soroptimist is a global volunteer organization that economically empowers women and girls. More than 110,000 members and supporters in 21 countries and territories invest in the dreams of women and girls through access to education. Soroptimist’s signature programs, Live Your Dream: Education and Training Awards for Women, and Dream It, Be It: Career Support for Girls® target women and girls who face obstacles to their future success. Soroptimist also powers LiveYourDream.org®, an online community that provides individual volunteer opportunities in support of women and girls. To learn more, please visit: www.soroptimist.org.

Torrid LLC is the leading and fastest growing retailer of apparel, intimates and accessories for curvy women sizes 10 to 30 in North America. Established in 2001 and based in City of Industry, California, Torrid has annual sales of \$1 billion, operates 579 stores and employs 6,800 people. The company pioneered the notion of “first at fit” in the plus-sized fashion retail market to create clothes that truly fit the modern and curvy woman. To learn more about Torrid, please visit: www.torrid.com.

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