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How can we create more community awareness about the importance of women in the island's economic, social and cultural platform?

People who are economically, socially, and culturally oppressed often get overlooked, and the women in these categories are underrepresented, sometimes even unseen. I might have fallen into this category if people did not see the potential that I possessed.

I graduated from Guam Adventist Academy in May 2013. This would not have been possible if I did not have sponsors who were aware of my cultural, economic, and social standing. I am a Micronesian of mixed descent – my ancestors have migrated from island to island in search of a better living. Socially and economically, my family is at the bottom. We are on government assistance and I qualify for full government assistance because we have no financial assets.

The women raise children like me – the older ones dreaming of a better future and the younger ones content in their oblivion. Outside the apartment, children can be seen swarming the parking lot - some with dirty faces, others with dirty diapers sagging to their knees. The older girls run around in second-hand clothes, pushing strollers and monitoring their younger siblings. The older boys do not stick around – they are usually at a nearby basketball court.

In this kind of community, the women are the most important. They have to raise these children, even though they do not always have the financial means to shelter them. Some of these women put up with the worst: they raise the children of men who beat them, or men who can drink two weeks' worth of money in one night. However, the worst happens when these women

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join in the profligate habits of their boyfriends, husbands, or common-law spouses because the children suffer.

How do we raise community awareness about the importance of women? Remind them. Guam is ethnically diverse and culturally rich, so there is not one specific way to address the importance of women. Start with the schools and the churches because these venues already exist. They create a common meeting place for people of all cultures and social standing. The future of Guam is in our public schools, our private schools, our military schools. People frequent our churches every weekend, and the faithful ones even attend mid-week. Speak with the leaders of our Micronesian and other ethnic communities, and ask for a time slot during their island liberation celebrations. There are extended families that meet periodically to discuss the financial or social problems that plague them, so this would also provide an occasion for brief education.

To raise community awareness about the importance of women, engage women that live in the communities that you are trying to help. Ask them to host small events in their neighborhoods, and help if they need assistance. If it is an event for women, then women should also become involved. Also, tweak the presentations so that they fit the cultural, social, or economic setting that these women are in.

Finally, teach the children that their mothers, older sisters, aunties, and grandmothers are important. Remind them that these are the women that raised them, so they deserve to be valued. Remind the men, women, and children that we need each other to create a community that we all wish to live in.

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