

# No Greater Love

The quarterly newsletter from St. Gianna Program of Catholic Social Services

Spring 2023



“  
The secret of  
happiness is to  
live moment by  
moment and to  
thank God for  
all that He, in  
His goodness,  
sends to us day  
after day. ”

-St. Gianna

## An incredible transformation

Veronica Hotovy

St. Gianna Program Manager

When I did my internship at what was then called St. Gianna Women's Home - now St. Gianna Program (SGP) - seven years ago, it was apparent to me that the home itself and all the care offered to the women and children was provided almost solely by the three Marian Sisters. For nine years, the Sisters ran the SGWH program themselves, organizing volunteers, classes, and activities, meeting weekly with each resident, cleaning the common areas, overseeing all maintenance - in many cases learning how to fix what was broken, completing the endless paperwork that this project requires, implementing case management, and dealing with difficult situations as they arose (and boy, do they arise often). I have to say, SGP has been blessed with some incredible volunteers that made those nine years possible, because without them I'm not sure how the Sisters would have made it.

But having that firsthand experience of what SGP used to be allows me to appreciate all the more what it is becoming. I've been working at SGP for 3 ½ years now, and the transformation has been incredible to witness. SGP has slowly grown from being the three Marian Sisters to an entire team dedicated to serving our clients to the very best of our ability. We have a part-time employee who assists in filing all of the necessary paperwork when a family moves in. We have two amazing counselors providing mental health services on-site once a week, breaking down as many barriers as possible for our women and children to receive the assistance they need. And our newest addition to the staff: our Crisis Response & Residential Care Coordinator, who provides services that compliment

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# “I so scared, I so scared”

Sr. Bernadette Radek, M.S.

Have you ever looked into the eyes of terror? I have, twice. It is hard to explain the feeling you experience when you encounter this. The two times I saw terror in the eyes of a person were with women trying to seek help from St. Gianna Program (SGP). One of the women, in sheer desperation looked at me with a piercing horrified look and said, “Sister, if you don’t take me, he will kill me!” She had an unbelievable story and was fortunate to be alive telling of the time she had spent in the hospital, and then therapy recovering from the horrific abuse she had experienced. Because she was in such danger, Catholic Social Services had her stay at a hotel until we could give her a room at SGP. I am happy to report that she and her children were able to move on with a new life. We continue to keep in contact.



The other woman was a more recent resident. She came to us with literally nothing. She was foreign born, had several children and a very abusive husband. He destroyed her passport, birth certificate and all her identification papers. She experienced mental, physical, sexual and financial abuse from him. In his last physical assault on her, he deliberately cut himself and then called the police, blaming her. She spent three days in jail for a crime she did not commit. On release, she went back to the house when he was gone, took two of her children and sought help from a local shelter. When she could no longer stay there, she turned to Catholic Social Services. Fortunately, there was an apartment for her at SGP.

The first month was rough for her. She had a car, which

she managed to take with her, but apparently, her husband had put a GPS on that car because he showed up everywhere she went. She went only to places where many people were present. He would text her, “They can’t protect you forever and when you leave, I will kill you!” We found it necessary to get a donated car from Catholic Social Services for her and eventually she got a different phone. The day I saw terror in her eyes was when I had a meeting with her and she said, “I so scared, I so scared!” In her broken English, she expressed her horrible fear that the police would come and take her children and she would never see them again. Then they would take her to jail. She was working from a frame of reference of the police state in her homeland, the threats from her husband, and foreign family and friends. They had brainwashed her into thinking that she was helpless and would never make it. Furthermore, the police would always be looking for her and she could never become a U.S. citizen.

It took many months to assure her of her personal dignity and her right to be her own person. With the united help of staff, volunteers, and social workers, she was able to get back all important documents, find a new job, get a divorce from her abusive husband and become a United States citizen. Oh, how she studied for that citizenship test. When she graduated and received her citizenship all she could say was, “I so happy, I so happy.” She is confident now and in fact, she received an invitation from the first shelter to talk to other women from her country who find themselves in positions like what she had experienced. When she told me about the invitation, I told her this was a wonderful opportunity for her to help other women. Her response was, “I can do that, I brave now!” Yes, brave she is. Her happiness and enthusiasm are contagious. We have seen a wonderful transformation of a person with terror in her eyes to that of eyes that sparkle happiness with a hint of humor. PRAISE GOD FOR HIS GOODNESS. Thanks to all of you who made these two success stories become a reality through your prayers and support. God bless you.

## St. Gianna Program: slightly new name, same mission

After twelve years of being known as St. Gianna's Women's Homes, dedicated to caring for the women and children in our 24 apartments, alongside St. Gianna's West, which serves clients primarily in Hastings, we have begun expanding our services to better serve our communities. As we widen our horizons, we are also receiving a new - not so unfamiliar - name. To include all of the work we are doing at all four of our locations, our domestic violence and crisis pregnancy services will now be known as the St. Gianna Program (SGP). This change allows us to include our apartment complex in Lincoln (St. Gianna Women's Home), our current & expanding program in Hastings, any services provided in Auburn and Imperial, our new crisis response services in Lincoln, and all of the many projects that we have underway. It's a busy and exciting time to be a part of the SGP mission, and we thank all of our volunteers, donors, and staff that make it possible.



# It started with a simple invitation

Alexis Brouillette

Crisis Response & Residential Care Coordinator

What first drew me to St. Gianna Program (SGP) was an invitation. I was invited to come eat dinner with the women and take part in a Bible study that was being put on by the Christ in the City, Summer of Service missionaries that came to Lincoln last summer. I remember the Marian sisters, women and children were all very welcoming and excited to have us. The first night we met with the residents was more of a space to get to know each other over a shared meal which is a big part of Christ in the City. They have lunch in the park once a week on Wednesday's and every second Saturday of the month for those experiencing homelessness and poverty to share in a meal, to experience community and conversations with those around them. To truly be known, seen, and loved.

Over the course of June I came to multiple Bible Studies that the missionaries hosted. After the missionaries left, I felt called to continue this Bible Study as I had seen the women slowly start to open up and share their own hearts with the group. At one of the first Bible Studies, we read Mark 5:25-34 which is when the woman had been bleeding for over 12 years and had great Trust in Jesus that if she touched His cloak she would be healed from this terrible suffering. After she touched the cloak Jesus' response to her was this, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." In all of our lives there is suffering, great or small. These women who live at SGP have been through so much and continue to go through the suffering but just like the woman who touched Jesus' cloak in trust that she would be healed these women reach out to Jesus and entrust their pain and suffering to the Lord knowing that He will heal them and be there for them. In entrusting themselves to the Lord, I have been able to see firsthand the peace and joy that has come in their lives.

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## "CAROLE FEST 2022" A FESTIVE SUCCESS



On Sunday, December 18th, St. John the Apostle Church in Lincoln was the site of "Carole Fest 2022". A fundraising event for St. Gianna Program Carole Fest has quickly become an Advent tradition. Those in attendance as well as an online audience enjoyed Advent and Christmas songs of the season performed by choirs from St. John's, St. Teresa's, North American Martyrs, St. Patrick's and the Marian Sisters. If you missed this year's Carole Fest, you can still watch it online at [csshope.org/carolefest2022](https://csshope.org/carolefest2022). Thank you to all who helped make Carole Fest 2022 our most successful Carole Fest yet!



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### *An incredible transformation (Continued from page 1)*

the Sisters' work with each resident, and who is dedicated to serve families who, for one reason or another, are not able to live at SGP, but still need help moving forward from the situations that they left. Adding three new office spaces and a counseling area in the old classroom has us bursting at the seams, but even though we're a little tight on space, we are so thankful to be able to provide so much more to each of our families.

We can see the difference. Increased guidance and assistance during their time with us and in their transition out of SGP better prepares them to take the next step. We are overjoyed to see them healing, growing, and ready to continue on their journey.

### *It started with a simple invitation (Continued from page 3)*

Since that first invitation to partake in the Bible Study and to encounter the women and children living at SGP, I have been leading the bible studies. This led me to doing an internship for my social work degree in August. During the internship, I had the opportunity to work with the women one on one and assist them with goals that they worked towards. Then last month, I started as the Crisis Response and Residential Care Coordinator where I serve as the initial contact for clients seeking assistance for domestic violence and crisis pregnancy as well as coordinate onsite education or programming opportunities. It was beautiful to look back at my year in the ways that I have trusted the Lord and where this trust has taken me. Which all of this stemmed from a simple invitation to join the missionaries at SGP. The Lord invites each of us in a unique way to place our trust in Him.



**Since its inception in November 2022, our SGP Crisis Response program has provided \$3,769.42 in assistance to our clients. Thank you for helping us bring Hope in the Good Life!**