

No Greater Love

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

Summer 2023



“
Before I came here,
I was only surviving
through my days.
I would cry because
of what I was feeling
and going through...
Now I've learned
how prayer totally
changes everything
around me. I've
finally started living
this time around.”

-SGP client

A way out of “the dark alley”

Veronica Hotovy

St. Gianna Program Manager

As we approached St. Gianna's feast day this past April 28th, God blessed me with frequent opportunities to reflect on her example of loving her little one and choosing to preserve her baby's life no matter the cost.

At its beginning nearly 13 years ago, St. Gianna Women's Home rapidly became known for serving women fleeing domestic violence, and while that continues to be a large portion of what we do in the St. Gianna Program, lately we've been blessed over and over again to be able to address more of our founding idea: to serve women in unexpected and under supported pregnancies.

Most recently, we've found ourselves working with a mother who expressed feeling like she was “trapped in a dark alley with no way out.” This young woman, mother of 2 young children with a baby on the way, was overwhelmed by an awful situation, but lacked the support necessary to leave. As she desperately sought a way out, she began considering an abortion. One of the things I most clearly remember from our first encounter, as we began to discuss the option of moving into the St. Gianna Program and participating in our program, is her look of despair turning into one of hope. You could see her envisioning a life for her family that she hadn't thought possible. One of the last things she said to me that day

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Conversations

Sr. Bernadette Radek, M.S.

Have you noticed that one of the buzzwords of the day is the word “conversation”? If you ever attend any meetings, you have probably heard that word repeatedly during the meeting. Have you ever wondered what life at St. Gianna must be like, or what our conversations are like? Well, like any other social institution, life can be very intense at times. Working with families coming from domestic violence and/or young women seeking help to save their unborn child can be, as said, intense. However, we have many bright, happy moments at St. Gianna, and they outweigh all the suffering we see each day. Some of those bright spots in our day are the conversations we have with the children. Currently, we have an unusually high number of infants and toddlers. What enjoyable moments they bring to everyone. We also have quite a few grade school children. One of these is the Pokémon expert, a little first grader who faithfully comes into the office before the school bus arrives to show me his Pokémon collection. He goes over each new card, the ones he plans to trade, the one he “bought” with a toy, and the history of each. We have quite a conversation, mostly his. And then there is the two-year-old who has a vocabulary of one word, “NO”! That makes for another interesting conversation.

Most of our children have never seen a nun before (most of the moms as well) and starting up a conversation when they first arrive is always a new

adventure. One new little fellow was talking to Sr. Carol for the first time when he saw Sr. Karen walk down the hall. He had this puzzled look on his face and turning to Sr. Carol said, “Is that you?” We also have a darling two-year-old girl who does not need to say a word. All she needs to do is bat her eyes and all are mesmerized. One day we watched one of our young girls, who has two very ornery younger brothers, playing so nicely with one of the babies. When we commented that we did not know she likes babies, she said, “I like babies, I just don’t like children”. Recently one of our four-year-old children had seen baby chicks for the first time. His mom explained how they hatched from an egg. The next day his mom heard something going on in the kitchen. She found her son wrapping fresh eggs in a blanket and he was planning to sit on them to hatch. Mom saved all but one egg. I would like to have heard that conversation. She said she had a hard time not laughing. In another conversation with a first grader who was going on a field trip to Pioneers Park, he asked if I was ever there. I said, that yes, I took my class to the park when I taught grade school. He had all kinds of questions about where I taught and what grades I taught. No matter what I said, he always, with a very serious face, said, “But you never taught first grade?” After his saying this several times, I finally concluded that he could not comprehend my teaching other grades if I had not taught first grade. When he returned from his field trip, Sr. Karen asked him how his field trip went. His response was, “Actually, it was rather boring”.

One of our loudest conversations comes from a toddler who lets out a screech of protest when his

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Longing to be called by their name

Alexis Brouillette

St. Gianna Program Crisis Response
& Residential Care Coordinator

I recently read a reflection from Catholic Meditations that was reshared on Easter about Mary Magdalene when Jesus appeared to her after his Resurrection.

“Mary Magdalene thought that Jesus was the gardener and she recognized Him only after He called her by name. Even today the Lord is present in the situations and in the events we encounter in life. He passes by our lives, although we may not recognize Him. Jesus presents Himself to us in a new way that is beyond our expectations. The Gospel teaches us that when things don’t go our way and when life doesn’t turn out the way we expect it to, we need not feel discouraged; rather we need to recognize Jesus, present and working in our lives. Do you recognize Jesus’ presence in the sacraments especially in the Eucharist and in the Word of God?”

I think when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb of Jesus her mind was preoccupied with the crucifixion and the suffering that Jesus had just endured. I imagine the pain that she saw Him endure, unable to alleviate that suffering on the cross. Mourning the

death of a dear friend, a teacher. When she first saw Him she didn’t recognize Him. Only after He called her name did she realize it was Jesus.

This reflection makes me think a lot about my own life and the women who live at Gianna’s. The women who come here have been through so much suffering and abuse in their life like Mary Magdalene. They too are preoccupied by the suffering and pain they have endured. Oftentimes, I want to try to take that pain and suffering away but it’s not that easy. I can’t just alleviate the pain they are going through, that they have been through. I have to truly be Christlike in the ways that I am present to them by listening to their life story, walking with them through the pain, offering advice and resources, filling out applications and inviting them to counseling, events, or classes. These are all ways we allow each woman here to be seen, to be brought to light and heal, to be called by name just as Mary Magdalene was seen and healed by Jesus in her sin and suffering throughout her life.



The sound of hope at SGP

Hosted by Catholic Social Services’ (CSS) Development Officer John Soukup, “Hope in the Good Life Podcast” features stories of hope from CSS clients, volunteers, supporters and staff. Marian Sisters Sr. Bernadette, Sr. Carol and Sr. Karen recently recorded a podcast with John, discussing their work at SGP. You can visit csshope.org/podcast, or scan the QR code at the right to listen at anytime. We hope you enjoy our “Hope in the Good Life Podcast”!





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A way out of "the dark alley"
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was, "What I want is a safe place to live out my pregnancy."

So often, what the women we encounter most need is support. They need someone to walk alongside them, and to show them that there is a way out of the dark alley. Once enveloped in the love and support of those who truly want the best for them and are willing to accompany them in their journey, they too find the strength to choose the life of their baby, no matter what other circumstances they are facing.

Since opening in 2011,
St. Gianna Program has provided
assistance and safe shelter to

550

women and children escaping
domestic violence

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mother takes him past the playroom because she does not have time to let him play.

One of my classic conversations happened years ago and it still brings a smile to my face. I was visiting with a kindergarten boy, and he was enthusiastically showing me all the computer games he had learned from school and his friends. I asked him what he liked best, and he said, "I like to play games with my friends". Then he asked me, "Do you like to play computer games with your friends"? I said, "No. I don't play computer games with my friends". With a very sympathetic look on his face he said, "Don't you have any friends?"

We know why Our Lord loved little children. They are a breath of fresh air with their simplicity, honesty, innocence and beauty of body and soul. We love them to pieces, and we thank you for helping us care for God's little ones with your prayers and support. God bless each of you.