

No Greater Love

The quarterly newsletter of St. Gianna Women's Homes

Summer 2022



“
My daughter and I
came to St. Gianna's
and received gifts of
love, both tangible
and emotional. I
questioned 'why?'
I felt undeserving
until the Sisters and
other women at St.
Gianna's helped me
realize that 'I'm
enough just being
myself!' ”

-Former SGWH client

Just knowing they are not alone

Veronica Hotovy

St. Gianna Women's Homes Program Manager

Hannah contacted me about two weeks ago. She had come to Nebraska along with her 6-year-old daughter seeking to continue her education, but her circumstances took a big turn when she found out she was pregnant. Dad was no longer in the picture, and was not particularly supportive of her decision to have the baby. We discussed all of her options, initially searching for ways that would allow her to continue her studies, including the possibility of living at St. Gianna's. In the end, her decision was to return home to St. Louis to be with her family, who wanted to be by her side and support her.

My experience with Hannah reminded me that so often the thing a woman most needs to make positive decisions is the support and encouragement that allows her to do so. Whether she is trying to leave an abusive relationship or make the decision to choose life when faced with an unexpected pregnancy, more often than not the only thing these women need to say YES is someone who is willing to walk with them, to let them know that they can do it and that they are not alone.

God created us in His image, to be in communion with others. Now more than ever we are called to accompany those who need our support to make the decisions they don't feel able to make on their own.



The smile of a child

Sr. Bernadette Radek, M.S.

There is nothing that warms the heart and lifts one's spirit so much as a small child's smile, hug, laughter, or funny comment. We get all of the above at St. Gianna Women's Homes.

Meet Ben, whose mom, ready to have a newborn, came to us some months back. He steals your heart when you first make his acquaintance. He bats his big brown eyes and your heart melts. Ben's cute accent and precocious questions and responses make one take notice. Each morning as he waits for the school bus, swinging his legs with endless energy, he greets and carries on a very interesting conversation with anyone who passes by. I am reminded of Sr. Karen telling us of her young great-nephew who went up to a lady in uniform and said "Thank you for keeping us safe" (apparently something he heard his parents say). Then he proceeded to say, "Could you give me your phone number so we can call each other and talk about what it is like to be in the Army?" Yes, that would be like our Ben. You are taken back at what he can say at times. His little kindergarten friend who waits with him for the bus, has his day in the sun also.

Recently I knew his mother would be late to open the door when the bus dropped him off after school. When I opened the door he said, "I told the bus driver that the old sister would be opening the door." Then as an afterthought he turned back to me and said very kindly, "You are old, you know." When Ben's mother gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, Ben would refer to her as "My baby." These boys and all the other children are here at St. Gianna for one reason; they have experienced domestic violence in their little lives. How wonderful it is for us to see them blossom and be themselves during their stay here. For the time being they are protected from the chaotic world of the adults. We witness a world that is living without God and without hope. How we would like to protect our children from all the poison that is spilled out daily in the streets of America. Hopefully Ben and his little friend will know a better world and live to see a beautiful future and become good husbands and fathers someday. May the Lord bless all of you for your support of St. Gianna so faithfully, prayerfully and financially, to make a better life for all the little Bens. You are always in our prayers.

The importance of self-care

Dr. Courtney Miller

Director, Immaculate Heart of Mary Counseling Center

This August (2022) marked the one year anniversary for the Immaculate Heart of Mary Counseling Center (IHMCC) providing on-site mental health services at St. Gianna's Women's Homes (SGWH). A counselor from the IHMCC has been on-site at SGWH one designated day each week. Services provided range from individual counseling, parenting support, psychoeducation, and community activities.

Throughout the time on-site, our counselors have had the opportunity to hear the women's journeys that have brought them to SGWH. In making the decision to leave domestic abusers, the women often express their great love and concern for their children as the motivation. While their own safety and wellbeing is also a factor, it sometimes falls secondary.


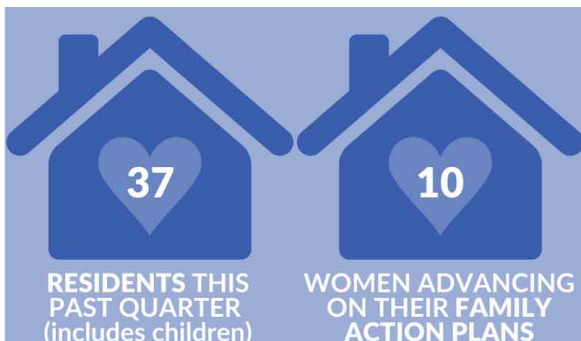
One focus in supporting the women of SGWH is that of self-care. While self-care is a necessary need for all of us and may seem "basic," women fleeing domestic violence often have not had the space to focus on their own self-care. It is humbling to hear women speak to the fact they feel "selfish" in making this time for themselves. Women of SGWH may feel the pressure to keep active in order to keep moving

forward, which may entail pursuing education or employment, securing transportation or child care needs, navigating community services and support networks. While all of these are certainly important, completion of such tasks becomes more difficult if the person is depleted, physically, emotionally, mentally, and/or spiritually.



In creating such space for the women of SGWH to experience self-care, counselors provided necessary supplies for a "make and take" self-care activity. This activity allowed women to make bath salts and hand scrubs with scents of their choosing to be used for self-care. Not only was the product one of self-care, but the activity in and of itself too. Women were given the opportunity and permission to take this time for themselves. Educational information was provided on the importance of self-care along with a self-care assessment and self-care plan sheet.

Please pray for the women of SGWH who have taken a very courageous step in fleeing domestic violence for the safety of themselves and their children. Please pray too that each woman may feel the love and dignity for which God created her and to know that self-care is part of this love and dignity.

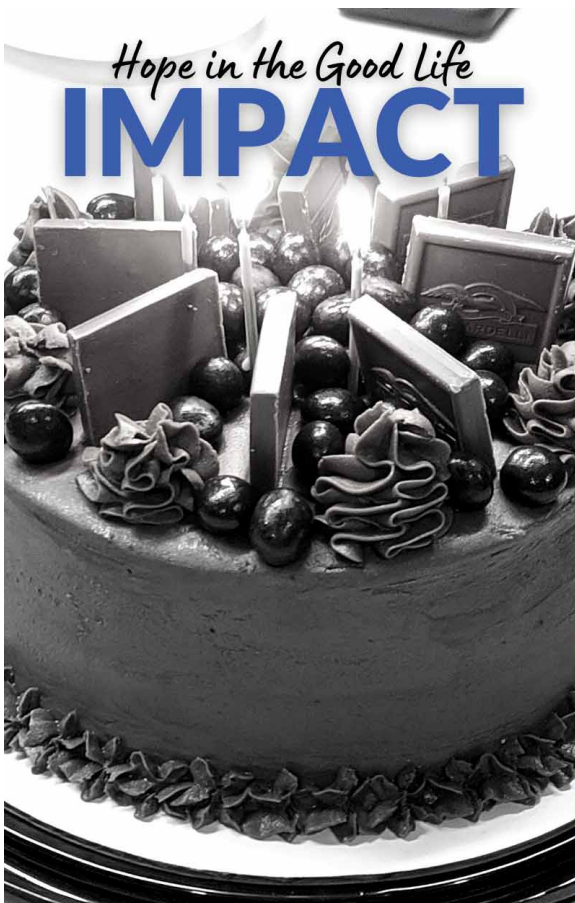


There is a lot of truth in the saying *failing to plan is planning to fail*. That's why our SGWH staff visit with residents to review their family action plan and safety plan. Developed by our program manager, **the Family Action Plan is a proposed strategy or course of action that breaks down large, sometimes overwhelming goals or tasks into smaller, more manageable ones.** It gives our residents a step-by-step path to keep them accountable and help them to succeed.



PO Box 30425
Lincoln NE 68503-0425

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Hope in the Good Life
IMPACT

St. Gianna Women's Homes Manager Veronica Hotovy sent this email update to one of our SGWH volunteers who provides birthday cakes for our residents: *She and her 5-year-old son were SO excited about the cake and said, "This is the kind of cake that you share!". I pulled out paper plates and plastic forks while her son ran around gathering chairs for everyone. Two other residents and our three Marian sisters joined us. She thanked us for coming so many times! She was bursting with joy as we sang 'Happy Birthday.' She took pictures with us all, excited to be having a birthday party. Most residents share their cakes with family or friends outside of SGWH, but there are a few that don't have anyone else to celebrate with. It's amazing to be able to offer them such a beautiful and special moment - especially seeing how SGWH can become so much more than a safe place to live. It means so much to us as staff to see them receiving the love that they deserve through something as simple, but incredibly special as a birthday cake. Thank you so much for being a part of our mission. **Thank you for helping us celebrate important events as we bring Hope in the Good Life one birthday cake at a time.***