



# Lift Up Your Heart

A newsletter of the

## WOMEN'S RESPITE PROGRAM

Volume 27, Issue 1

Spring 2023

Sponsored by the  
Sisters of St. Francis  
at Stella Niagara, NY

The Women's Respite Program provides women in need with opportunities for rest and renewal in a safe, comfortable and healing environment.

We have programs for mothers with low income, women with cancer, grandmothers raising their grandchildren, and mothers with children on the autism spectrum.

### Spring!

Happy Spring greetings from the Women's Respite Program. Thus far in 2023,

we've had two great programs—our alums who started in the summer (many of them from many summers ago!) and grandmothers raising grandchildren.

A reminder to all our alums that the offer for you to have an overnight stay at the Center of Renewal is still on. See p.2.

A note to all alums, friends and donors that there will be a fundraiser in the fall, so save the date—October 13.

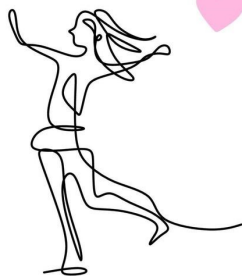
Here's a little springtime encouragement from yoga teacher Vanda Scaravelli and the Women's Respite Program:

*"Movement is the song of the body."*

So everyone, sing, sing, sing that song!

It doesn't matter if you're off key, sing your own song and

move, move, move! Start off gently, and be kind to yourself.



## Shine on, grandmothers

In April, the Respite Program had its annual weekend for grandmothers raising their grandchildren, including women who have been coming for respite for years and some new grandmothers, too. They came from Allegany, Cattaraugus, Erie, and Niagara Counties. Some were married or with partners. Others were single, divorced or widowed. The youngest grandchild was five years old; the oldest 21. Some families have one grandchild; others multiple grandchildren. One family has great grandchildren living in the home. There is lots of blending, that is, couples with children from previous relationships raising grandchildren and stepchildren.



In spite of the demographics being all over the map, the women had one thing in common—they were all tired—physically and emotionally. Even so, they were wonderful company for one another and the facilitators.

We sat down with the women to ask about the joys and challenges of raising grandchildren, and the women were ready with answers. Clearly they had thought about this a lot. There seemed to be agreement that the court system was not in their corner, something we've heard over the years of hosting grandmothers. Even though social services prefers family members take on the

*Continued on the next page.*

*Grandmothers continued from cover page.*

care of children, grandparents have to fight long and hard if they want some kind of legal status such as full custody. Private lawyers are expensive and court-appointed lawyers are overworked at best, indifferent at worst. It is very difficult for any of us to be judged, but to be judged on your fitness to bring up a grandchild who has been in your care anyway and to have that judgment made based on what is written in a file is aggravating, even infuriating, for many of the grandmothers.

Having the financial resources to raise one or more grandkids is a definite challenge, also something we've heard over the years.

It is also difficult to be at odds with the grandchildren's parents and other relatives. These can be sad and depressing relationships. Adding to the poignancy are the questions from the children who want to know why they can't live with their parents or why their mother or father doesn't want them.

Dealing with the education system can be tough, too. So can getting help for the grandchild when behaviors are difficult. Living with angry and acting-out behaviors is even more difficult.

A comment that we had not heard before has to do with the difficulty in navigating online schoolwork and homework and social media. While it's a cliché that kids are more computer savvy than adults, in many cases it's true, especially for women who did not grow up using technology. Keeping children safe from online predators is something the Respite Program did not hear about ten years ago, but today it is a reality.

There are joys, too. Many grandmothers chimed in on the pride they feel when they see their grandchildren thriving. Graduating and or making the honor roll are really special occasions, knowing that grandparent and grandchild overcame obstacles and heartbreak and did it together. One grandmother with a grandchild in Special Olympics was over the moon with the child's accomplishments.



Whenever the Respite Program hosts grandmothers raising grandchildren, the wisdom of the group is obvious. One grandmother told us that she has learned that it is OK to cry through her laughter, and laugh through her tears. These women deserve so much respect. To all the Respite Program grandmothers past and present, we honor you and admire you. Stay strong and shine on!



## **WE MISS YOU, SR. MAUREEN**

**F**or the past few months, our own beloved Sr. Maureen Harris has been serving in the rural area of Mwanza, Tanzania. Mwanza is a city of 4 million, located on the shore of Lake Victoria.

This is Sr. Maureen's fourth trip to Africa! This time, among other things, including some travel, she has been working with Sisters in ten communities to write the chronicles of their community to keep the history of the mission.

In the photo, Sister is visiting a kindergarten class in Burimba. They all look pretty happy even if it's not a real elephant.

## **Stay-for-One-Night Offer**

If you'd like some quiet time to yourself for a day and a night, the Respite Program continues to offer our alums access to the Center of Renewal (COR) for an overnight stay. Two or three alums can come at one time. The Program may be able to help with transportation.

The Respite Program will cover the cost of a room for one night and up to four (4) meals. If you'd like to extend your stay, you can pay for a second night and additional meals. This is NOT a Respite Program; you will have to entertain yourself. There is wifi and of course the beautiful grounds for walking. We recommend making a reservation at least two weeks in advance. You can stay during the week or on the weekend as long as COR has a room. If you have a date in mind, call Teresa for a reservation: 716/877-6896.



Respite Program alums enjoyed themselves during their weekend in March. Crafts are always a crowd pleaser. You can see their focus in the photos. Because so many women had experienced loss, we held a brief but moving memorial service one night, followed by a group discussion.

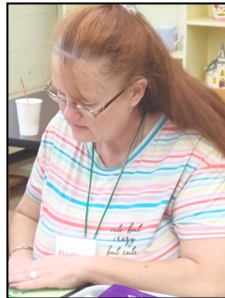
# March

"I am so grateful for this program. Being alone in life, raising my kids, doing everything myself gets to be a lot sometimes, and this was exactly what I needed."



# April

The April 2023 weekend was for grandmothers raising their grandchildren and included a wonderful session of gentle movement and music making.



"I feel lighter, more clear headed, able to think about me and what I've been through and enjoy time away from technology."



Our newest volunteer craft leader, Pam, is standing on the right. Thanks, Pam! The women have loved making the gift boxes.

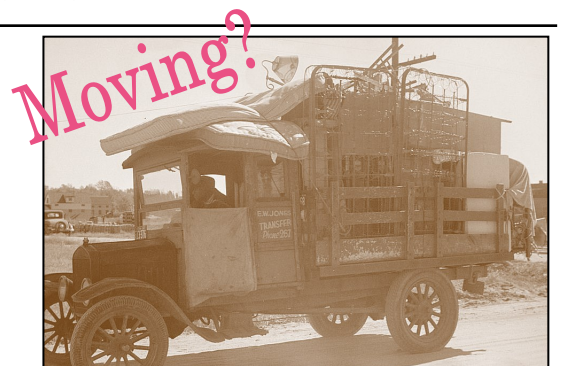


" Sometimes I need only stand wherever I am to be blessed. "

Mary Oliver

Send us your new contact info.

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**Save the  
date!!!  
October 13  
Meat Raffle**

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A fundraiser for the  
Women's Respite  
Program  
Details to come.



**The Weekend  
for Women  
Raising  
Children  
on the  
Autism  
Spectrum**

is coming up  
from September  
29 to October 1.

If you've been  
before, expect an  
application in the  
mail in August. If  
you've never been  
and would like to  
come, call for an  
application:  
716/893-0931.

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