



# Lift Up Your Heart

A newsletter of the

## WOMEN'S RESPITE PROGRAM

Volume 29, Issue 1

Spring 2025

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.



## S. Diane says, "So long."

**S**ister Diane Gianadda, founder and director of the Women's Respite Program, is retiring this summer. We're sad, but mostly grateful for 36 years (!) of programming for women who need a little rest and relaxation. It's her turn now for some R&R, but if we know S. Diane, she'll fill her days with creativity and more service, only now at a pace of her choosing. You may know that S. Diane is a talented watercolorist. We think there have been about a thousand women who have passed through the doors of the Center of Renewal, some of whom were young mothers the first time they came and are now grandmothers, but still attend whenever they can.

We expect to celebrate S. Diane sometime early in the fall with a party at Stella Niagara. Watch for an invitation in the mail. In the meantime, S. Diane wants you to know how important it is for you to continue your support—financial, volunteer time, or promotion of the program. We're sending you an envelope with this issue and hope that you will make a special contribution in honor of S. Diane and her three-plus decades of love and leadership.

## Maggie says, "Hello."

**W**e are so happy to introduce you to Maggie Dreyer who has joined the staff of the Women's Respite Program as Program Associate. She and Teresa Maciocha, the new director, will be the new team leaders and will continue to rely on all the wonderful volunteers and donors who make our program possible.

Maggie comes to us from the Social Work Department at Daemen University where she is the Director of the Field Education Program and a Clinical Assistant Professor.

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Refreshing Bodies • Restoring Hopes • Renewing Spirits

Maggie says, "Hello" continued

Maggie's credentials are impressive as is her wisdom and warm personality. Just one example: As a result of going through her teenage daughter's experience of cancer, Maggie started Kaely's Kindness, a nonprofit organization that focuses on providing resources for teens living with cancer. By the way, Maggie's daughter, an adult now, is fully recovered.

Maggie has attended a number of Respite weekends already and is impressed with the program itself, but mostly with the wonderful women we serve.

Welcome aboard, Maggie!



In February, one of our beloved grandmothers, Colleen Degenfelder, passed away.

We will miss her.



"Grief is not a disorder, a disease, or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical, and spiritual necessity, the price we pay for love, and the only cure for grief is grieving."

Earl Grollman

Thus far in 2025, we've had three great groups—our alums who started in a summer program, grandmothers raising their grandchildren, and women with cancer. Familiar faces, new faces—all were great.

Unfortunately, we were compelled to end our February weekend before lunch on Sunday. It was snowing hard and we wanted to get on the road before more snow fell. Everyone got home safely. A shout out to the intrepid S. Mara who safely got the women on the bus home.



Above: The grandmothers are connected by a web of care and good wishes.

Below: Super great volunteer Pam Dixon (bottom left corner) brought the women a photo album craft. Thanks, Pam!



Women with cancer — some in remission, some not; all wonderful.

"It is important for me to continue to work on me."



"I can be changed by what happens to me, but I refuse to be reduced by it."

Maya Angelou

If you move,  
send us your contact info.



Women's Respite Program

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Puzzles were popular with the April group who completed four!

Sometimes it's the right time for cozy jammies, antlers and all!

Below: The women are holding the doorprize they received.

Thanks to all the volunteers who baked cookies! The women had fun decorating.



## Grandmothers and aunts raising children



“ surround yourself with people who fill you up. ”

Sara Lindberg

"I am forever changed. I feel lighter. Healed in mind and soul connecting with the women here. The love here is incredible."

"I didn't know what to expect when someone suggested that I come here. But being here was one of the best decisions I've ever made"

## Alumnae who first came to a summer program



"As always, I love my time here. I love all the new people I meet and am humbled by their stories . . . The love, acceptance, and spiritual connections made here will carry me for the rest of my life."

## Two more weekends this year:

**Moms with low income — June 13 to 15  
and  
Women raising children  
on the autism spectrum — Sept 19 to 21**

**W**omen must be at least 25 years of age. We give priority to women with low income. Anyone with alcohol or substance issues must be sober for one solid year. All attending must find their own childcare.

The June program is for women who have never attended before. The deadline to apply is May 27. Besides the application, you will need a written referral.

If you are an awesome mom who has been to a weekend before, expect an application in the mail in August. If you are an awesome mom who's not attended, please inquire.

Call for information or an application: 716/877-6896.

## Stay-for-One-Night Offer

Would you like some quiet time to yourself for a day and a night? Maybe it's time you took advantage of this offer. The Respite Program will cover the cost of your room for one night plus up to four meals at the Center of Renewal (COR). It's possible that we could help with transportation depending on where you live. Two or three alums can come at one time. If you'd like to extend your stay, you can pay the additional cost.

This is NOT a Respite Program; you will have to entertain yourself. There are the beautiful grounds for walking and free wifi. 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. You must call Teresa for a reservation; have some dates in mind: 716/877-6896.

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