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HAPPENINGS

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News & Notes from St. Margaret's House ~ Improving the Lives of Women and Children

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me.

~ Matthew 25:35-36

Being a constant for our community

As we return to full operations here at St. Margaret's House, we are deepening our long-time engagement with trauma-informed care and beginning to explore restorative justice practices as a tool in that process. Staff training in both areas informs our daily work.

Trauma-informed care gives us contemporary language, rooted in the latest neuroscience research, for expressing our mission from the Gospel of Matthew (see above right). Both call us to meet each person where they are.

Tanika Harris, Director of Guest Services and staff member since 2008, explains a concept from her training: "When working with someone, it's knowing that: *the only thing I can assume is that I know nothing about your experience.*"

She says, "Again and again in my work, I find myself asking: *what put this human being in the situation they're in right now?*" By listening with an open heart, questioning our assumptions, and not rushing to judgment, we connect authentically with the women who come through our doors.



Especially in those moments when the emotions of unresolved trauma are triggered, Tanika says, "We always want to work to find solutions that allow a woman to remain present and in relationship with the very place that can help." The restorative justice circle process is a helpful tool in this regard. Circles build trust and respect among participants in a safe, shared space, allowing each person to be seen, heard and known.

"Love, care, and respect have always been at the heart of what we do. We want to be that constant for others," Tanika says. "It's embedded in our DNA."

Top and left. Director of Guest Services Tanika Harris interacts with guests on a recent afternoon.



What is trauma-informed care?

This approach acknowledges the trauma that a person may have experienced in their life. It's a shift from asking, *What is wrong with this person?* to *What has happened to this person?* By recognizing and responding to the signs and symptoms of a person's trauma, we can better support their next best step forward.

What is restorative justice?

The restorative justice model prioritizes the repair of harm while recognizing that positive relationships with others are a primary human need. Restorative justice looks at the root causes of a conflict.



I N H E R W O R D S



Leaving a legacy of words and love

Connalita Stewart, longtime beloved member of our St. Margaret's House community, died on March 24. Connalita loved writing and in 2015, she participated in *The Legacy Project* through the Bridges Out of Poverty program. During the project, Connalita wrote:

I've always felt that I was a special person because, when God made me, he was just showing off! I was placed in a position to sit still one day and just take a good look at my life. If something hurts me today, I will cry if I need to and I will become frustrated if I need to, but I'm going to keep swinging my bat and keep running towards my destiny.

I believe that I'm a lighthouse shining bright for the world to see, one if by land and two if by sea!

The next time I want to see success, I'll look in the mirror and say, "Yes! I've passed that test."



One of the writing prompts asked participants what they hoped people would say after they died. Connalita wrote:



At the time of her death, she was ...

Still telling jokes

Still loving to see us

Still finding a new way to express herself.

This was definitely true about Connalita! We are thankful for the gift of her beautiful life.

Top: Connalita and dear friend Kimberly Clark during an interview with ABC 57 in February. Middle: Winter Walk 2018. Bottom: portrait from *The Legacy Project* booklet.



Our 2022 Community Partner of the Year is Indiana University South Bend!

IUSB's dedication has strengthened the impact of St. Margaret's House on our community. For years, IUSB students have interned, volunteered, participated in the Winter Walk, held collection drives, sponsored special events, and more. Above: IUSB Chancellor Susan Elrod and students leading this year's Winter Walk.

Recap: Winter Walk 2022



620

walkers locally and across the country



over **\$81k** raised



over **325**

volunteer hours

Thank you to our sponsors, volunteers, and all of our walkers!

What is it like to be a volunteer?



It's amazing to be here. I love the solidarity of working with other women to help women. I cannot imagine my life not being here.

~Denise Berscheid, Thursday cook, former Board president and Winter Walk chair, volunteer since 2001

Being here reminds me how important it is to sit and listen, to talk with other people. Our life is running around so much. This place reminds me to stop.

~An Luu, front desk receptionist, volunteer since 2021



It's great to have art as an escape — to forget all the stuff that is going on — and express ourselves. We turn on music and paint — and we are in our own world. Being able to do it together is the best part.

~Ravini Fernando, Silk Creations program, volunteer since 2017

I was in a dark place in my life and new to this area. Coming here helped me figure out how much passion I have for helping women. This place saved me.

~Julie Sims, front desk receptionist, volunteer since 2021



To learn more about volunteering with us, please visit our website: stmargarethouse.org to submit a short form OR contact Felicia Metoyer at felicia@stmargarethouse.org or 574.234.7795.

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

A place at the banquet table



Often in the Gospels, we see Jesus standing in solidarity with a marginalized woman, against the forces that oppose her, refusing to participate in or condone the social practices of the day that relegate her to the margins and seek to keep her there. As we delve deeper at St. Margaret's House into restorative justice practices and what it means to be a trauma-informed organization, my thoughts return time and again to these Gospel stories.

One particularly relevant story is John 8:1-11, the woman caught in adultery. Jesus refuses to go along with the mob's desire for swift and shaming punishment for the woman. Jesus understands that there is likely more to her story than the mob is willing or able to acknowledge. Jesus realizes, for example, that she may have been set up by a husband seeking grounds for divorce, or any number of other scenarios that commonly befell women at a time when they were denied basic rights, including the right to have a voice.

One of my favorite theologians explains that God has a special love for those who live in poverty because they are farthest from the banquet table of love to which all people are invited. This theologian understands, as we do here, that the desperation, violence, and injustice of living in poverty can lead to destructive behaviors.

We seek to create space for our women to find their voice, share their story, and take a step forward towards healing. The principles of trauma-informed care and the practices of restorative justice help us do this. We are learning, we make mistakes, and there is a long road ahead of us — for this work is hard, inherently messy, and without shortcuts. We are sustained by fleeting glimpses of our women taking their rightful place at God's banquet table.

We could not do this important and humbling work without all of you — our faithful supporters — who share your time, talent, and treasure with St. Margaret's House. Thank you for your role in sustaining this sanctuary for women in the midst of our complex world.

~Katie Elliot, M.Div., Ph.D., Executive Director

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St. Margaret's
House

UNDIE
500

Join us in the race to collect 500 pairs of new women's and children's underwear!

Help us affirm the dignity of each woman who walks through our doors by providing these much needed items.

Drop off your donations and cross the finish line under the checkered flags in the St. Margaret's House parking lot on **Saturday, May 21st from 9am-noon.**

Can't be there? Cheer us on with a donation at **stmargarethouse.org**



Saturday, May 21 9am-noon