

No Greater Love

The Quarterly Newsletter of St. Gianna Women's Homes of Catholic Social Services

JOIN US IN TAKING A STAND

It is horrific the amount of emotional and physical abuse the women and children we protect at St. Gianna Women's Homes have endured. Let me share an example of what these women and children can experience.

Recently, one of our women went to a designated, safe "Swap Spot" to drop her kids off with their dad for the weekend. Before doing so this brave young woman approached our Marian Sisters for support. It seems that in previous weekend "swaps" the dad (aka, the abuser) had yelled at, berated, and humiliated the woman right in front of the children at the very "Swap Spot," which is supposed to be safe since it is located outside of a police station. Perhaps it is physically safe. But emotionally and mentally it was not a safe spot at all for the woman we care for at St. Gianna's---or her kids for that matter. The children would get a front row seat to seeing their dad yell at and humiliate their mom to tears in a public setting.

So, our client at St. Gianna's wanted some support. Our Interim Executive Director Katie Patrick, her husband Ryan, and myself all met at the "Swap Spot" to meet our client and her kids. When the abuser came out of his car he locked eyes on the mother, and before he began his tirade Katie, Ryan, and myself got out of our cars to stand by the woman. His yelling, tirade, and tantrum never commenced. The woman stood proudly and hugged her children as she said goodbye to them for the weekend. The dad took the kids with a look of exasperation in his face and didn't even dare stare the woman down as he drove away. The woman stood strongly. She felt her worth and her power. She felt her strength and confidence brimmed on her face. Katie, Ryan, and myself could not be more proud of her.



Would you consider standing with that young woman and supporting her with us? We wish we didn't have to do what we do at St. Gianna Women's Homes. But the fact is the work is needed in order to help protect and save women and children from physical, emotional, and mental abuse.

We are in our 10th year of service at St. Gianna's. We are grateful to Almighty God for our mission and we are grateful to you for supporting our mission. Please pray for us and if you can please send in a donation. \$45 provides one night of safety and security for 1 woman and her family. Consider providing a few nights' worth of protection if your means allow you to. You can donate at csshope.org or with the enclosed envelope. Consider making a recurring gift to ensure women and children in Southern Nebraska are provided security throughout the year. Or if you would like information on how to make a donation, recurring donation or planned gift and help for many generations please give our Department of Marketing & Development a call at (402) 327-6235 or email at hello@csssis.org.

Thank you for your consideration. Thank you for your support of St. Gianna's. And thank you for your faith in Jesus Christ! God bless you.

Cheers,

Father Justin Fulton
Vicar General, Diocese of Lincoln
Administrative Oversight, CSS

“WHY DOES HE DO THAT?”

Lundy Bancroft wrote a book that has been a tremendous insightful reading for our ladies here at St. Gianna. You might say that, *Why Does He Do That?*, is a bestseller around here. In so many ways it has helped the ladies make sense out of the domestic violence they have long experienced. As one lady said, “Mr. Bancroft was looking in my window when he wrote this book”. Besides our own ladies reading this book, at their request, we have passed on books to a priest, administrator, principal, and a mom concerned about her daughter, to name just a few. For the month of February, Pope Francis’ prayer for the *Apostleship Of Prayer* was, “For women who are victims of violence, that they may be protected by society and have their sufferings considered and heeded”. Wouldn’t you say we are all in this together?

Some women have more challenges than others. I am thinking of Gena (not her name) who had every conceivable obstacle to overcome and did a tremendous job. She was brought to the states many years ago. Her husband became a citizen but wouldn’t allow her to be one. In fact he did away with all her identification papers. The abuse, isolation, and what you would almost call slavery came to an end when friends helped her escape. Somehow she found Catholic Social Services and eventually St. Gianna. At St. Gianna her problems were not over. Her abuser put a GPS on the car she was using and followed her around to terrorize her. He would pull up next to her car at a stop sign and glare at her, or shout threats at her. He found a way to empty her bank account and broke into her car to steal important documents. The harassment was endless. She had a restraining order but he found ways to keep harassing and not get caught. He threatened to kill her when she came out of hiding from him. He had money to hire a good lawyer for the divorce. Gena was a fighter and we were right there to support her. She found a pro bono lawyer and he was a good one. With his help she won the court case and full custody of her children. She now has a car given to her by Catholic Social Services and is more confident that her abuser will not find her as easily. Gena knows she will always need to be on the alert. Her abuser’s insane need for power, control, and narcissistic behavior will continue. So what is to become of the abuser? Bancroft states that, “counseling abusive men is difficult work. They are usually very reluctant to face up to the damage that they have been causing women, and often children as well, and hold on tightly to their excuses and victim blaming”. We see this statement play out in Gena’s life. She realizes that he will not change and she needs to move on in life. She is gradually seeing herself as a free person who has rights and dignity. Please pray for Gena and all those victimized by domestic violence so they will be able to live normal and grace-filled lives. The abusers need your prayers as well. God bless you for your prayers and support.

-Sr. Bernadette Radek, M.S.

“...I will be forever thankful to God for St. Gianna’s Home for Women, the Sisters, and Catholic Social Services. May God richly bless you for all that you do.”

-St. Gianna’s client

Ten years ago, we broke ground for our St. Gianna Women’s Homes. Thank you for helping us provide a safe home for women and their children fleeing domestic violence over the past decade. Join us throughout this year as we will be sharing special stories and ways you can support the work of St. Gianna Women’s Homes across southern Nebraska.



HOW ABUSE CONTINUES AFTER SHE LEAVES

When a woman moves into St. Gianna Women's Home in Lincoln one of the first conversations we have with her is about the Family Action Plan. Developed by our Resident Care 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 guide to keep them accountable and help them succeed. However, it may take a few weeks or in some cases a few months for a woman to really reflect and put pen to paper about the goals that she wants to achieve while living at St. Gianna's.

This can be for any number of reasons. We know that establishing stability comes first. For example, if she comes to us homeless, after being on the streets or at the mission, then settling into her own apartment takes time. If she has children, she may need to transfer schools or childcare centers, which also takes time. If she suffered any physical injuries because of the abuse, a period of healing must also first take place. You can see what a gift it is for us to be able to offer women not just a few weeks, or a couple of months of shelter but up to a year, or more if needed while they secure employment and create a new life for themselves



and their children.

And so, once she has settled into her new home, we revisit the Family Action Plan. She talks about her goals with one of the Marian Sisters, who serve as advocates. Areas of focus might include finding a job, getting a GED, going to a counselor, taking parenting classes. All wonderful, forward thinking goals, which are easier said than done. This brings me to another conversation that we have upon her arrival and that is the Safety Plan. Perhaps you are thinking, "But she is already at St. Gianna's. She is safe." And you're right, she should be, but unfortunately that is rarely the case.

Living at St. Gianna's does not protect her all of the time. Her abuser might find her and threaten her at the grocery store. Her abuser might break into her car, smashing the windows while she is at work. Her abuser might manipulate the children to dislike and mistreat their mother. Her abuser might fight her in court because he has the financial means to do so.

Sadly, these are examples of what our residents and staff have had to respond to in the past few months. Abusers can be relentless; especially once she leaves. His ability

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CELEBRATING ANOTHER SUCCESS

"Anne" was at the end of her rope. Having a small child and nowhere to go, her life was quickly spiraling out of control. A friend of hers was a resident at St. Gianna Women's Homes and brought her to Sister Bernadette, begging for help. Through the intake process, Sr. Bernadette discovered Anne was a heavy drinker and smoker who had not attended church in 14 years. Anne was accepted into St. Gianna's and began the journey of rebuilding her life. She gave up drinking and smoking and soon found a job.

Anne worked hard at both her job and at rebuilding her life. She saved enough to move out and get her own apartment. It has now been over 500 days since she has smoked, and she has given up drinking as well. These lifestyle changes had been good for her mental, physical, and financial well-being- in fact, she has been able to save \$4,000 since giving up drinking and smoking! She has also rediscovered her faith and her little boy is attending daycare and thriving. Anne has even reconnected and shared her success story with the ladies at St. Gianna's.



This year, St. Gianna Women's Homes is commemorating its 10th year of providing a safe, loving environment for women and their children fleeing domestic violence. St. Gianna Women's Homes consists of a range of services for

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**HOW ABUSE CONTINUES AFTER SHE LEAVES
(CONTINUED)**

to control her has diminished, and that upsets him.

Over the past two years since I have overseen St. Gianna Women's Home in Lincoln, I have seen mothers spend thousands of dollars to family law attorneys and the courts fighting for custody of their children. All because the abuser decides that is the only way he can continue to control her and cause her pain. (If you are an attorney or know of a law office that can provide affordable, reliable services to our residents, please reach out kpatrick@cssisus.org).

When we visit with the women about the goals of their Family Action Plan, we must stay positive. We focus on building her self-confidence and helping her stay on track, knowing all too well that most of the setbacks she will face are simply out of her control. Some abusers will stop, oftentimes only when they have found another woman to abuse. But for many of our residents, they will always be looking over their shoulder. Pray for them.

-Katie Patrick
Interim Executive Director

**CELEBRATING ANOTHER SUCCESS
(CONTINUED)**

women fleeing domestic violence and other forms of abuse and control and includes a 24-unit long-term housing complex that opened in 2011. These fully-furnished units are designed to give women and children the time and support they need before transitioning into permanent housing. This is in addition to a three-bedroom home in Lincoln and scattered site housing available to us in the Hastings area. Collectively this program is called St. Gianna Women's Homes. We are now able to provide a safe place for over 100 women and children.

As we celebrate this milestone anniversary, we thank all of our generous benefactors who have believed in our mission and supported the women and their children at St. Gianna Women's Homes over the past ten years. We ask that you join us in celebrating our tenth anniversary by making an anniversary gift to help those who, like Anne, use GWH as the starting point for their life's rebuilding journey. Thank you and God bless!