



Hope, New Beginnings participant

► [READ MORE INSIDE](#)

A

ASPIRE

SPRING 2021



WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER
STRATEGIES FOR WORK. SKILLS FOR LIFE.

New Beginnings

**SUPPORTING WOMEN TO ACHIEVE PURPOSE,
FULFILLMENT, AND FINANCIAL STABILITY
THROUGH MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT.**

Board of Directors

Chair
Dick Spruit

Vice Chair
Roya Bruce

Treasurer
Danielle Pennings

Secretary
Melissa Reardon

Past Chair
Carol Crawford

Chief Executive Officer
Sandra A. Gaddy

Board Members
Scott Ayotte
Karen Brush
Shaquanda Gordon
Lori Houghtaling
Barbara Muller-Wilson
Adam Sturdivant
Danielle Williams
Linda Witte

“You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.”

- Maya Angelou

This March, the International Women’s Day theme was *Choose to Challenge*. It was an invitation to celebrate progress made in the area of gender equality while recognizing and refusing to accept areas where improvement is still needed. We feel that tension between celebration and challenge every day as we equip women in the workplace.

We celebrate the accomplishments of our resilient participants. Women who refuse to be limited by life’s challenges and are determined to achieve their goals:

- We celebrate women like Lisa, who was able to pursue a career in social work and earn her certificate thanks to encouragement from her Career Coach.
- We applaud women like Dejaia who are taking employability classes through the New Beginnings Program and finding full-time careers after incarceration.
- We are proud of participants like Hope, who found resources at WRC to finish her bachelor’s degree and secure a job.

While we celebrate those accomplishments and many more, we are also mindful of the inequities that are a continuous barrier for the advancement of women in our community:

- Grand Rapids was recently listed as the #1 city in the nation with the lowest percentage of women out-earning their husbands.
- Women still hold less than a quarter of senior leadership positions in workplaces across the country.
- Male employees win more promotions and have more access to top leaders than their female counterparts.

In March, many of you joined the #GoGreenforWomen challenge and united with us to spread a sea of green across our social media feeds. By “going green” together, we took a stand in support of women achieving purpose, fulfillment, and financial stability through meaningful employment. In April, we recognized former Pillar Award winners who are actively advancing working women within an inclusive culture.

There is much to celebrate, but there is still work to be done. As allies, mentors and volunteers we value your partnership as we collectively support women striving to excel in their careers.

With the theme of *Choose to Challenge* still fresh in my memory, I ask you today—what’s one thing you are willing to do to lift up women in the workplace? Let’s get to work.



Sandra Gaddy
Sandra Gaddy
Chief Executive Officer

Supporting Women Through Divorce

We offer a variety of resources designed to support women who are going through a divorce. During the COVID-19 shutdown, we modified group workshops to take place over an individualized phone call. Over the past year, Attorney Audra McClure has volunteered to provide 11 free, one-on-one consultations to women, providing an enormous benefit and a solid first step for women in this situation. Enjoy our conversation with Attorney McClure below:

Why did you make the decision to volunteer for the Women's Resource Center?


I knew about the Women's Resource Center because I had volunteered there during a project with the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan. I had also heard about WRC's other projects in the community, and had walked by their office many times. It has been my experience in my divorce practice that women are more often left with fewer resources during and after a divorce, and often can't afford a divorce attorney. It seemed like a perfect fit for me to be able to bring some of my knowledge to women going through this process, hopefully in such a way that they feel empowered and supported.

What has been the most rewarding aspect of your volunteer experience?

I have very much treasured my conversations with women I have met at WRC, both staff and people who come there for my workshop. They come from such a variety of backgrounds, and

have had such a wide range of different experiences. At each workshop, I learn so much from them, as I'm trying to teach them. Often women will offer each other support and have ideas for each other at these workshops, and the human connections I see between people who have never met each other is extremely rewarding.

What should the community know about the divorce workshop at the Women's Resource Center?


I would like the community to know that all are welcome at this workshop. Anybody who is going through a divorce or custody case, who is contemplating it, or just wants to know more about the process to help out a loved one, could learn from the workshop. I invite people to share as little or as much about their personal situation as they would like, and it can help to feel like you're not alone. Divorce is extremely emotional and sometimes complex, but knowing more about the process and what options you might have can really help to feel more in control of the situation. The folks who work at the Women's Resource Center, and all the attendees who have ever been at my workshop, are kind, supportive, and welcoming, too. 

If you or someone you know is interested in assisting with the divorce workshop, please contact Linda at Imedcalf@grwrc.org

LYNN

I called the Women's Resource Center just over a year ago. I was so overwhelmed, planning to file for a divorce, unsure of resources available and feeling very unsure of myself. Linda contacted me after only a day or two following my call. This was just as things began to shut down for COVID and so much was unavailable. It was a godsend. She was what I needed to anchor my thinking and support me as I went from feeling helpless to making a plan. **This experience reminded me that even the most successful women need the support of another person to find their way through a very difficult time.**

Linda kept in touch with me as I began to sort out what I needed to do. She was dependable in returning calls, followed up with resource searches that I requested, and followed up after I began the process. The divorce support volunteers helped me diversify my thinking and identify the resources that I needed.

I cannot thank Linda and the Women's Resource Center enough. I am just now finalizing my divorce and beginning to develop a new life of rediscovery, self-trust, and growth. Bless you to all of you at the Women's Resource Center! 

April is National Volunteer Appreciation Month

Since opening our doors in 1973, volunteers have given of their time and talent to encourage and empower women on their journey to economic independence. **In 2020, our volunteers spent over 1,400 hours championing the work of the Women's Resource Center. Their investment into our mission is valued at \$38,080, according to the Independent Sector which estimates the value of a volunteer hour at \$27.20.** Thank you to our volunteers, current and former, for your willingness and passion to serve.



**OVER 1,400
VOLUNTEER HOURS
IN 2020**



**VALUED AT \$38,080
(\$27.20 PER HOUR)**

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

New Beginnings

Understanding that incarceration presents unique challenges for future job seekers, Women's Resource Center's New Beginnings program provides enhanced gender-responsive mentoring services to women at Kent County Jail pre-release and up to 18 months post-release.

DEJAIA



Dejaia first heard of the Women's Resource Center after sitting in on a session led by Coach Julie Harper-Shears at the Kent County Correctional Facility. She was immediately hooked and asked to officially join the New Beginnings program. Each week in class, Dejaia learned what it takes to become employed and how to stay employed in today's market.

"I learned that although I made a mistake in my life, it was not over; it had just begun. I have now focused on staying on the right path, staying positive, having faith, loving myself, and working hard," said Dejaia. She began working full time in retail last year and has since received a raise and a promotion. She celebrated her one year anniversary at work this spring. Dejaia credits her success to Coach Julie who encouraged her and refused to let her give up.

"All of my children are doing great and are so proud of me. I have a man that loves me and wants nothing but the best for me. I have an amazing support system. And most importantly, I have my higher power," said Dejaia. "Thank you, Ms. Julie, for never giving up on me and being like a mother figure to me." [w](#)

HOPE



Hope is the very first person in her family to graduate from college. As she walked across the stage to receive her diploma, her career coach from Women's Resource Center was in the audience, proudly cheering her on. Her bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice has led her to a fulfilling job as a case manager and recovery coach.

Just a few years earlier, Hope was staying at Sacred Beginnings transitional housing. She was ready to find a job and needed help to find full-time employment, including appropriate interview clothing and help updating her resume. She took part in the New Beginnings program and was able to complete employability classes that helped her prepare for college and her career. More than just interviewing know-how, Hope gained confidence and courage through the Women's Resource Center.

"The difference between Women's Resource Center and other agencies is the way the staff cared for me and my family," said Hope. "They helped me to build my confidence and self-esteem. They made me feel that someone cared about me; like I truly had purpose in life." [w](#)

In Her Words

LISA, NEW BEGINNINGS PARTICIPANT

To begin, I would like to introduce myself to you. My name is Lisa. I am a 32-year-old woman who didn't always make the right choices, which landed me here.


That is actually how I met Coach Julie. I was incarcerated at Kent County Correctional Facilities working in the laundry. I kept seeing Ms. Julie in the sober living program and throughout the week. So I asked around and found out she was part of the Women's Resource Center New Beginnings program. They help women who are incarcerated get back on their feet during the time of incarceration and after being released. I asked Ms. Julie if I could join the employability class—and of course she said yes! She and I completed the New Beginnings general orientation packet that included the guidelines to attend employability classes with WRC.

In one of the classes I became totally disrespectful toward Ms. Julie and other participants in the class. To this day, I don't know what I was thinking. I was warned a few times about my behavior, and I ended up getting kicked out of class. But because Julie believes in second chances, she gave me one, and I am truly thankful for it. When I was released she didn't waste any time continuing my path to employment. I needed clothes for an interview and personal hygiene items and Ms. Julie made sure I had everything I needed.

“WRC is a vital place for women who are just trying to get somewhere in life that is positive.”

I was honored to receive a scholarship from the Metallica Scholars Program to attend classes at GRCC in welding. Ms. Julie was there every step of the way, from Orientation at GRCC to popping into class unexpectedly to make sure all WRC participants were there. That's where I learned how to weld. Who knew! Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would receive a certificate in welding.

What I can say is that I don't know where I would have ended up after being incarcerated if it was not for Ms. Julie and Women's Resource Center. I am grateful that she is a person who really cares about helping women. WRC is a vital place for women who are just trying to get somewhere in life that is positive. I thank God for these women and their care for this community.

So if you're reading this, know that this program is all about helping women from all walks of life. I am a symbol of this, and I will do what I can to show them that they didn't waste their time on me. Thank you for this opportunity and time. 



Staying Connected with Justice-Involved Women

The pandemic has presented many opportunities for the Women's Resource Center to reimagine the way we provide our services, including how we stay connected with women in the Kent County Correctional Facility (KCCF) involved in our New Beginnings program. Due to COVID precautions, we have not been able to have staff and mentors go into the facility. However, Career Coaches have had the opportunity to engage with program participants through virtual meetings and sending letters of encouragement. As we continue to prepare women for release and community reentry, we are grateful for our partnership with the KCCF and our New Beginnings mentors. If you would like to get involved by becoming a New Beginnings mentor, contact Julie at jshears@grwrc.org.



Starting with a Clean Slate

New legislation has made Michigan a national leader in helping residents more easily set aside criminal records. A study by two University of Michigan Law School professors found that those whose criminal records are set aside experience “a sharp upturn in their wage and employment trajectories.” We are excited that this package helps eliminate barriers to employment for some of the women we serve.

- ▶ Join our monthly giving program, EMPOWER. A monthly gift helps sustain our team and expand our reach to include more resources for more women in our community. Get started by visiting grwrc.org/donate.
- ▶ Shop at [Smile.Amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and Amazon will donate .05% of every purchase back to us!



WOMEN'S **RESOURCE** CENTER
STRATEGIES FOR WORK. SKILLS FOR LIFE.

Riverview Center
678 Front Ave NW Suite 180
Grand Rapids, MI 49504
(616) 458-5443 | grwrc.org




A Path to Career Success

“Every time I attend a Women’s Resource Event, I find my confidence improves,” said Lisa, who came to WRC for help securing a job after college. “I still struggle at times, but Coach Niesa is such a great mentor and support. She makes me believe in myself and believe that I can do this.”

Two years after graduation, Lisa was discouraged at not being able to find a job in her field. Coach Niesa Nelson led her

through a series of mock interviews, and eventually Lisa became more confident in the interview process. She learned how to build a resume and write a cover letter, and she also felt empowered to take on a one-year certificate program at Michigan State University. Lisa now works as a social worker who specializes in working with combat veterans.

Lisa felt welcomed by the staff at Women’s Resource Center, where everyone knew her by name and asked how she was doing. While she previously felt isolated, Lisa began to recognize a sense of community and belonging. She found people who genuinely cared about her future and believed in her.

“Unity of women is something we need to foster more,” said Lisa. “And at Women’s Resource Center, they do. I cannot wait until I am in a place where I can give back to WRC for all that they have done for me.” 

Boutique Now Open

The Business Boutique has reopened and is now accepting new donations! We ask that you call our main office at (616)458-5443 to schedule an appointment to drop off your donation. As spring arrives, clothing appropriate for warmer weather is appreciated. Plus sizes are also needed. Please be aware that for the time being, WRC will continue operating with limited onsite office hours and will not be accepting walk-in donations.

Wine, Women & Chocolate

**SAVE THE DATE:
OCTOBER 7, 2021**

Join us for Wine, Women & Chocolate this fall! Tickets and sponsorship information are coming soon.