



# A

## ASPIRE

WINTER 2024



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

## *Heather's Story*

**“My Career Coach at Women’s Resource Center, Tia, HEARD me and I was not a number to her.”**

► [READ MORE INSIDE](#)

# 2023 BY THE NUMBERS

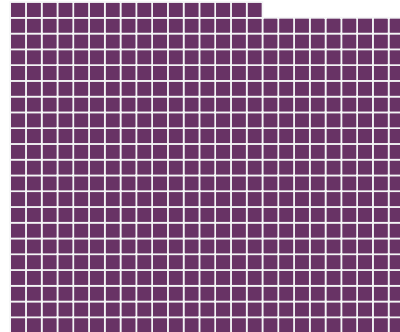


**\$34,572**

in participant financial assistance for emergency housing, rental assistance, food and transportation.

**516**

participants served



95% women  
1% men  
4% unreported



Over

**4,000**

personal care items distributed



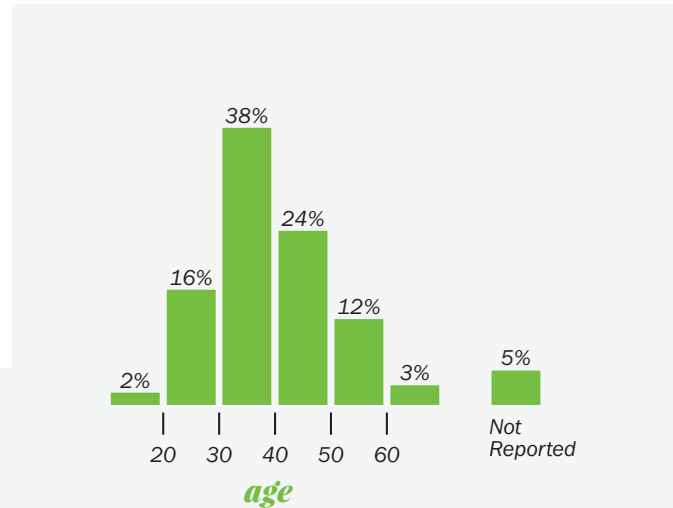
**1,321.25**

Hours of volunteer work

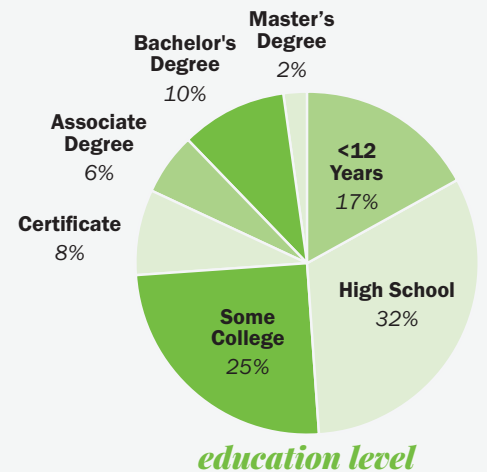
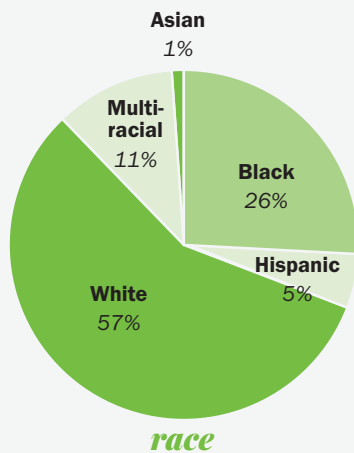
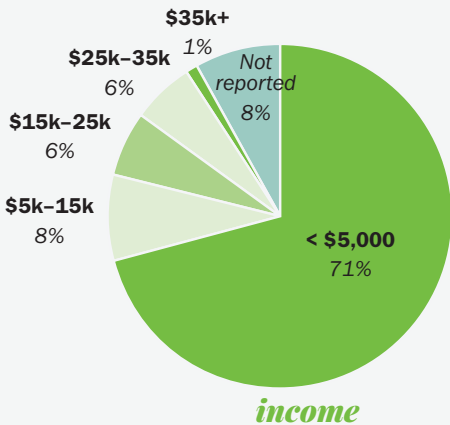


**39**

Volunteers




## Our participants are...






# Outcomes

66  women participants had an increase in salary

9  women enrolled in an education program (certificate program, college, trade)

72  women accessed clothing and accessories in the Business Boutique

92%  of New Beginnings Program Participants and

86%  of Empower Program Participants **Successfully Entered Employment**



## Adrienne's Journey

Six years ago, Adrienne was serving a sentence at the Kent County Correctional Facility. She was determined to get clean and sober after many years of drug addiction. Her determination to get better for her six children was the key factor in deciding to get involved in the New Beginnings program while in jail. While a participant in New Beginnings, Adrienne worked diligently with her career coach Julie to prepare for release. She attended weekly classes where she learned how to write a resume, search for a job, and interview. Adrienne and Julie worked together to address the additional barriers she was facing by finding secure transitional housing and food assistance. She was on a path to rehabilitation with the support of her career coach and mentor.

“Unfortunately I ended up back in jail after being released. But Ms. Julie stayed connected with me. She never gave up on me and mentored me. Everything that she did for me helped put me on the right path. Now, I am clean and sober! I am currently working a reliable job and have two of my children back with me.”

New Beginnings is a jail-based, trauma-informed program providing workforce and life development services, mentoring, and wrap-around support to justice-involved women in Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa counties. The program's purpose is to reduce recidivism and increase the economic self-sufficiency of women returning to the community after incarceration. [w](#)

We extend our deepest gratitude to the visionary founders and pioneers of the Women's Resource Center whose unwavering dedication and foresight planted the seeds for empowerment and change fifty years ago. Their courage, determination, and passion laid the foundation for an organization that has become a lifeline for countless women, empowering them to achieve their fullest potential. Their legacy of compassion and commitment continues to inspire us as we carry forward their inspiring vision.

## *WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER PIONEERS*

Irene Alba	Penny Ladd
Barbara Amberg	Sandy LeFerve
Jan Blaich	Bruce Loessin
Shirley Collier-Perkins	Sally Loessin
Margaret Cook	Joan Martin
Joan Crandall	Jean Mckee
Joy Deboer	Kathy Miles
Jenny Delong	Anne Mulder
Linda Dykstra	Kay Oldstrom
Barbara Fisk	Connie Phillips
Patty Gunn	Pat Reis
Priscilla Hallas	Nancy Seidman-Dempsey
Deanne Haney	Gloria Bursey-Slykhouse
Jan Hayes	Audrey Snile
Tina Henderson	Vernis Schad
Marianne Hopp	Marilyn Sherwood
Norbert Hruby	Ella Sims
Jane Idema	Ruth Van Hempen
Kyle Irwin	B. Margaret Voss
Dorothy Johnson	Mary Wallace
Marjorie Keeley	Judy Wise
Becky Knack	Pat Wulp
Alice LaBour	Gretchen Zuiderveen



# A Legacy of Empowerment: 1973-2023

In 1973, a vision emerged from the hearts of a few dedicated individuals in our community. Today, that vision stands tall as a testament to resilience, empowerment, and unwavering support for women across Grand Rapids and beyond. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Women's Resource Center (WRC), we reflect on a legacy that has transformed countless lives and paved the way for empowerment and equality.

Over these five decades, the WRC has been a beacon of hope and opportunity, providing a safe haven for women seeking guidance, support, and resources. From the humble beginnings of a small grassroots initiative to the comprehensive programs and services offered today, the WRC has continually evolved to meet the changing needs of women from all walks of life.


The impact of the WRC resonates deeply in the stories of resilience and success

shared by the women whose lives have been touched by this organization. Through career counseling, educational workshops, mentorship programs, and advocacy initiatives, the WRC has empowered women to break barriers, pursue their ambitions, and thrive in their chosen paths.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication of our passionate staff, tireless volunteers, generous donors, and the unwavering support of the community. Your commitment to the mission of the WRC has been the driving force behind every success story and every milestone achieved over these 50 remarkable years.

As we continue our celebration of this significant anniversary, we renew our commitment to empowering women, fostering inclusivity, and advancing equality. The journey ahead may hold new challenges, but with the continued support of our community, we are

poised to continue making a profound difference in the lives of women for the next 50 years and beyond.

To everyone who has been a part of this incredible journey, thank you for your dedication, passion, and unwavering belief in the power of empowering women. Together, we have created a legacy that will continue to shine brightly, inspiring generations to come. 



ANNIVERSARY

WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER

*50 years of empowering women in the workplace*

## 2024 PILLAR AWARDS

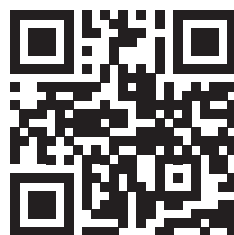


*Save the Date*

**Thursday, March 14, 2024**  
**JW Marriott**

Through the Pillar Awards, Women's Resource Center recognizes West Michigan employers that have implemented best practices which empower women at work. Since 1987, this prestigious award showcases the noteworthy efforts of local employers who are pillars of support for working women.

**Scan below to purchase tickets!**



Sponsorship opportunities are available. Please contact Tatum Hawkins at [thawkins@grwrc.org](mailto:thawkins@grwrc.org) for more information.

## What's In Store for 2024?

- More community partnerships providing workforce development and employment opportunities to women
- Collaboration with higher education institutions to provide certificate programs and learning opportunities
- Career exploration and apprenticeship programs in skilled trades
- Resource navigation and more barrier elimination support to meet participant essential needs



# Not Just a Number

*When your life comes crashing down all around you, it's really hard to pick yourself up without some help.*

Four years ago, my world came crashing down on me. The life I thought I had built for myself turned out to be a well-planned illusion, which I had fallen for. Following the worst moments of my life was a series of heartbreak after heartbreak, which resulted in me losing my 3 children, home, job, and even freedom. This is when I learned about and began taking classes through the New Beginnings Program. I continued with the program as soon as I was released from jail, as I knew I needed this. I needed the guidance, knowledge, and support and still do, as my battle isn't over yet.

One of the things that makes this program so special is that it isn't just for right when you get released, but for

all the mess that follows after, too. It took a few months for me to go from being homeless, car-less, and jobless, to overcoming all three things. However, in the process of working so hard to get these things, I didn't notice that my anxiety and depression had taken over. Because of this program and the trust I have built at Women's Resource Center, I felt safe enough to open up about the new struggles I was just realizing.

Asking for help is so hard, it can be embarrassing and feel shameful even. But I feel safe here to share, unlike so many other places I have dealt with over the past four years. After the tragedy that happened to my family, all the trauma that has happened since, and all the terrifying challenges before me, finding a safe place has been a miracle I have needed for so very long.

Over the past few years, I have had numerous counselors at another organization. Although there has been helpful information and some progress made, I could always tell that I was a number, not a person. With each new counselor, I had to start over, tell my

whole story, and go over what I had done with the previous counselor. It felt like clockwork. Each suggested the same things and what felt like in the same order, as though they read off a script.

My Career Coach at Women's Resource Center, Tia, HEARD me and I was not a number to her. Instead of telling me to practice "positive self-talk", like everyone else has, she came up with something different and that actually works for me. We text each other every day, which is something we are proud of ourselves for doing. It doesn't matter how big or how small, because sometimes it's the small things that pull you up and out of the hole you have started falling into. So many times, people fall down too many holes and eventually don't come back up. I don't want that to be me. But I know that having Tia and Women's Resource Center on my side has kept that from happening. It gives me faith that I can do this, even if I need help sometimes. [w](#)

**- Heather**





# *New Beginnings Improves Outcomes for Justice-Involved Women*

The National Institute of Justice defines recidivism as being measured by criminal acts that resulted in rearrests, reconviction or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the person's release.

Following a formal program evaluation conducted by REA Analytics, we found that the recidivism rate among New Beginnings participants in Kent County is 14% and 21% in Ottawa County, compared to the national average of 65%. These data points show that participation in the New Beginnings program has a tremendous impact on reducing the risk of recidivism among women in jail.

The interventions provided to participants through coaching, goal setting, resource navigation and mentoring are key factors in their rehabilitation and successful community reentry. Through the work of New Beginnings and our other programs, Women's Resource Center empowers women returning to their community after incarceration through career opportunities and, in turn, reducing their risk of recidivism, providing greater stability for their families, and strengthening our community as a whole.

## *WRC Has a New Home!*

Women's Resource Center (WRC) officially opened its doors to a new facility located at 816 Madison Avenue SE. The historic building was purchased and renovated by Women's Resource Center through a successful \$2.8 million capital campaign. Launched in the fall of 2021, the Propel campaign exceeded its original \$2 million goal by raising \$2.8 million for the building purchase, renovation and program expansion. More than 170 community donors, local businesses, and area foundations supported the campaign.



The new facility features:

- more space for programming and employability skills trainings
- a location that is more centralized and accessible to the women we serve
- a children's space and lactation room for parents and caregivers
- a wellness room for staff and community partners
- an enhanced business center featuring independent and collaborative workspaces

Three years ago, we embarked on a journey to create a new vision for how to better serve women in our community who seek to improve their lives. That vision manifested into a place where our staff, participants, and community will experience hope, dignity, and empowerment.

**To every philanthropic partner who gave generously to bring forth this vision, THANK YOU!**





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

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(616) 458-5443 | [grwrc.org](http://grwrc.org)



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## *Ways to Give*

- Consistent giving helps us sustain our programs and plan for future needs. Join our **EMPOWER monthly giving program** by making a recurring gift at [grwrc.org/donate](http://grwrc.org/donate).
- Make an impact by donating **long-term appreciated securities**, including stock, bonds, and mutual funds. Contact your financial advisor to discuss the best option for you.