Sarah’s Circle is a refuge for women who are homeless or in need of a safe space. By providing life necessities, housing, case management, clinical and social services, we encourage women to empower themselves by rebuilding both emotionally and physically; realizing their unique potential.*

*In 2014 the Board of Directors voted to update the list of services in the second sentence of the mission statement to represent the housing, clinical and social services that are already a part of our services. The core of our mission remains the same.

Dear Friends of Sarah’s Circle,

Sarah’s Circle has been providing support for women who are homeless or in need for several decades. We have been able to serve thousands of women by building on their incredible strengths such as resilience and fortitude. A strength-based approach to programming is both evidence-based and consistent with the core philosophy of our mission.

This year’s annual report focuses on the strengths of the women we serve, and to depict their strengths, we generated a “word cloud” from the words women used in an art therapy session to describe themselves. Words that were identified most often appear larger in the image. Hope, faith, and the ability to trust and love even after experiencing so much hardship were characteristics that women believed were their most important strengths.

This report starts with an overview of the strengths of the women served, and then discusses the challenges, solutions, and impact of our programming. We hope you’ll notice in the section on solutions that our work relies on a foundation of community support from donors and volunteers. Your gifts of time and money make the programming possible, and the section on impact is a result of your contributions.

Thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,

Judy Krueger
President, Board of Directors

Katherine Ragnar
Executive Director
Women come to Sarah’s Circle with incredible strength and resilience. Most have shown deep fortitude and resourcefulness to survive desperate circumstances. They have also demonstrated a willingness to ask for help and work to rebuild even after so many people in their lives have turned them away.

Women also have unique individual strengths. An important part of the case management process involves conducting an assessment to determine each woman’s individual strengths and challenges. Service plans are then tailored to the circumstances and goals of each woman. If a woman has skills and interest in food service, the case manager might try to connect her to an employment program focused on that sector. If a woman struggles with a mental illness but has a strength of being able to connect with others, a group therapy setting might be a good fit.

An important component of Clinical Services is often helping women recognize their own strengths. Homelessness can contribute to depression and a loss of a sense of positive self worth. By coming to appreciate their own strengths, women improve their self-esteem and ability to use those strengths to rebuild their lives. In addition to generating the words used in the “word cloud” on the cover, women in an art therapy group created the collage at right to illustrate their strengths. While women listed many specific strengths, there is an overarching theme of hope, faith, and the ability to stay positive despite so much adversity.
Challenges

*While women come to Sarah’s Circle with great strengths, they also face many challenges.* Structurally, Chicago has a shortage of affordable housing. Women who become homeless have also typically struggled with multiple challenges simultaneously. It is not only the shortage of affordable housing and limited income that lead to homelessness, but also outdated job skills, physical health problems, and the long-lasting impact of trauma.

An in-depth research study conducted in Massachusetts confirmed what Sarah’s Circle has learned through experience, that approximately 92% of women who are homeless have experienced severe physical or sexual assault at some point in their lifetime. Whether these assaults were child abuse early in life, recent domestic violence, or random acts of violence, these traumas often have long-lasting effects. A history of trauma has been linked to physical health problems, mental illness, and substance use disorders.

These issues are major challenges for women, but can also be understood and addressed more effectively through a strength-based lens. For example, hyper-vigilance, the trait of constantly being on guard for possible threats, is a common symptom of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Yet, for women who have experienced severe assaults, being on guard for possible threats may be a way they have adapted to avoid future trauma. Other women may use alcohol or other substances to self-medicate when they do not have access to treatment. Sarah’s Circle’s effective Clinical Services programming helps women learn new coping strategies, while understanding the strength they have shown in finding other ways to cope when they did not have sufficient supports.
Sarah’s Circle has always started with a strong foundation of volunteers, donors, and community support to help women address challenges. Volunteers help throughout the organization, including board and committee members, professionals providing services pro bono to the organization, and direct service volunteers who deliver essential basic services and educational programming. Building on that foundation, compassionate and well-trained staff provide essential services throughout the programs.

The Daytime Support Center is Sarah’s Circle’s core program, providing daily essentials, community space, educational and general interest programming, case management, and clinical services to women in need. Any woman in need may participate in the Daytime Support Center, so women who may be street homeless, doubled up with friends or family, or at risk of homelessness all receive support.

Sarah’s Circle’s 50-bed Interim Housing Program provides 24-hour shelter and intensive supportive services to help women who are currently homeless move on to permanent housing as quickly as possible. Sarah’s Circle’s program is the largest of its type in the City of Chicago and is open to any woman who is homeless.

Sarah’s Circle’s 22-unit Permanent Supportive Housing Program is essential to helping the most vulnerable women end their homelessness. Women with disabling conditions who have been homeless for years are placed in housing and provided with intensive supportive services to help address the issues that have contributed to their long-term homelessness.
Impact

In 2014 Sarah’s Circle made significant progress both in expanding programmatic capacity and helping women meet their goals. One of our most important measures of success is the number of women placed into permanent housing. Despite dramatic reductions in affordable housing available in the community, Sarah’s Circle helped 92 women move into permanent housing in 2014. Most of these placements came from our Interim Housing Program, which increased the rate of placing women into permanent housing by approximately 30%. The women achieved their goals faster and opened more space in the program to provide shelter and supportive services to other women in need.

Programmatic capacity was expanded in the Daytime Program by extending hours until 7pm on Thursday evenings for supper. The new meal fills a gap in food availability in the community and provides extra time for engagement and case management with women in need of help who may have other obligations during the workday. Staff also helped women achieve hundreds of goals in addition to housing placements, such as gaining employment, securing benefits, and completing therapy to address past trauma.

The Permanent Supportive Housing Program helped 100% of the women living in our permanent supportive housing to maintain their housing or to move on to other permanent housing in the community when they no longer needed such a high level of support. Additionally, Sarah’s Circle was able to expand one of the grants for the program to include one additional unit for a total of 22 units, ending homelessness for one more woman in need.
Donors

Government Contracts
$100,000+
City of Chicago Department of Family and Support Services
City of Chicago Small Business Improvement Fund
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

$10,000-$99,999
Federal Emergency Management Administration
Illinois Department of Human Services
Illinois Housing Development Authority
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (in collaboration with AIDS Foundation of Chicago)

Grants
$50,000+
The Michael and Nancy Burgermeister Family Fund at The Chicago Community Trust
Polk Bros. Foundation

$20,000-$49,999
Anonymous
The Blowitz-Ridgeway Foundation
The Chicago Community Trust
The Crown Family
The Field Foundation of Illinois
Frechette Family Foundation
John R. Houlasy Foundation

$10,000-$19,999
Anonymous
CME Group Community Foundation
Gallop Family Foundation
Helen Brach Foundation
Henrietta Lange Burk Fund, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee
Higher Path Foundation
J. Jill Compassion Fund
The Owens Foundation
The Pierce Family Charitable Foundation
Thorek Memorial Foundation
W.P. & H.B. White Foundation

$5,000-$9,999
Chicago Foundation for Women
George M. Eisenberg Foundation For Charities
Full Circle Foundation
McGraw Foundation
The Patrick & Anna M. Cudahy Fund
Peoples Gas
Roundy’s Foundation
Sara & Two C-Dogs Foundation
U.S. Bank Foundation

$1,000-$4,999
The Dewan Foundation
Rothman Family Foundation
Suizter Family Foundation

Religious Grants and Organizations
$5,000-$20,000
First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest
Kenilworth Union Church
Racine Dominican Mission Fund
Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Winnetka Congregational Church

$1,000-$4,999
First Presbyterian Church of Wilmette
Fourth Presbyterian Church
Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit
Northminster Presbyterian Church
Presbytery of Chicago
St. Paul’s United Church of Christ
Yorkfield Presbyterian Church

$500-$999
WELCA of Edgebrook Lutheran Church

$50-$499
Chicago Metro Baptist Association
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Mision Dei Chicago
North Shore Baptist Church
Ravenswood Presbyterian Church
Sinsinawa Dominicans
Sisters of St. Joseph of La Grange
St. James Parish
Unity in Chicago

Businesses and Other Group Contributions
$1,000-$4,999
Bridgeview Bank Group
Calmosepine
JP Morgan Chase Foundation
KPMG LLP
The Private Bank
Village Bank & Trust
West Monroe Partners

$500-$999
Employees of Mercer
Jaffee Family Foundation
JBT Corporation
Zonta Club of Evanston

$100-$499
Allstate Giving Campaign
American Express Charitable Fund
Boeing Company Employee Match
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The Chicago Outfit Roller Derby
Exelon
Feminist Forum of Loyola University
HHL Foundation
The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
Margate Park Block Club
Mother McAuley Liberal Arts High School
Motorola Solutions Foundation
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Michael and Nancy Burgermeister
Jessie Ewing*
Bert and Judy Krueger
Abra Prentice
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Edward Goings
Oliver Gugenheim
Edward and Kathleen Halloran
William and Marta Krug*

$5,000-$9,999
Scott and Cynthia Paradise
Dr. John J. Tracy

$1,000-$4,999
Anonymous
Norma Bennett*
David and Janet Bergman
Lisa Bertagnoli*
Stephanie Blatt
Lesley and Spencer Bloch*
Maree Bullock

June

- Hobby: writing poetry
- Something that inspires her: life, being better
- Her favorite part about Sarah’s Circle: it provides a safe space and gives her something to look forward to
Janice

- Hobbies: listening to music, watching good movies
- Something that inspires her: Sarah’s Circle
- Favorite part about Sarah’s Circle: Everything, but especially the opportunity for any woman to relax without being bothered by the outside world
Doreen

- Hobbies: music (playing piano), bike riding, looking at the stars
- Something that inspires her: listening to gospel music in the morning
- Favorite part about Sarah’s Circle: educational programming, toiletries and supplies