

Fairy Godmother Presenters for the 2006 Spring Conference

Marilyn Walls		Pyjamas and toys for children in crisis
Pauline Duncan-Thrasher	Ignite a Spark	Good Neighbour Project in White Oaks
Marcia Majoor	Major Changes	Quilts for Sick Children
Sharon Armstrong	London Health Sciences	Blanket Warmer for University Hospital
Frances Rodrigues	Occupational Safety Group	My Sister's Place—for homeless women
Heather Brydges	Shiatsu Massage Therapist	Easter Seals mail-out
Deborah Mitchell	Meals on Wheels	Easter Seals mail-out
Shannon Wilson	London Life Great West Life	Christmas Stockings women & children
Linda Woodard	Womenspeak	My Sister's Place wish list

Deborah Mitchell, Meals on Wheels Heather Brydges Moore, Shiatsu Therapist Easter Seals Moms

Investigating in the community for spots where my Fairy Godmother Project funds could be used, I discovered the Easter Seals Moms, and their upcoming getaway weekend which was planned for April 28th-30th, 2006, at the Wood-eden Easter Seals Camp in London. This is an event that is organized on a shoe string budget, to ensure it remains affordable to all who wish to attend.

The organizers were in need of financial assistance to cover the mailing costs for invitations and newsletters to 930 Moms in the southwestern Ontario region. They calculated that about 130 women had email addresses, so they required postage for the other 800. It seemed to be a good fit for the Fairy Godmother Project.

The Moms' Getaway Weekend is developed and lead by moms—for moms. It combines relaxation with information sharing and peer support, and is open to all Moms who have, or have had a child

registered with the Easter Seal Society, Ontario. This is their chance to relax, rejuvenate, network and have a great time. The women will enjoy special presentations, games, catered meals, crafts, and get some much needed sleep.

These moms deserve the break! They work hard all year taking care of their physically and mentally challenged children. It is extremely important that all eligible Moms are aware that this respite weekend is available for them. As a result of the Community Spirit Challenge donation from the Women's Conference, we were able to send out the getaway weekend information to 800 moms. The organizing committee was very happy to be able to go ahead with their project, as a result of the Fairy Godmother Project contribution.

Many thanks to Deborah, Heather, and the Women's Conference, for their kind donations.

P. S. We've recently heard that the mail-out was a great success, as the enrolment of mothers to the week-end program has been phenomenal. The week-end connects the mothers with each other, and gives them ideas and strength to continue their challenging work with their special needs children.



Marcia Majoor
Major Changes
Quilters for Children



When I was given the Fairy Godmother Project cheque I was thrilled yet a little apprehensive, to be chosen for this honour. A straight donation to one of the man charities was easy, but I wanted to do something different and unique. Together with friends and family we decided to create quilts for a children's charity.

Choosing the actual charity came next. While skimming over the Londoner one day, I saw an add looking for some one to make quilts for children suffering with cancer. I was so excited that I immediately called the number, but found that the executive director was on vacation. Finally, I finally connected with Carole Vairne who is the Executive Director of Childcan. This organization offers support to families of SW Ontario with children ages 0 to 18 yrs who are currently undergoing cancer treatment. The goal was to give each child a quilt when they first come to London Children's Hospital for treatment.

After meeting with Carole and showing her some of my work it was decided that I would head up the quilting group. As she received contacts from the quilting community she would forward them to me. I was receiving calls daily and in order to manage the response, I formed a quilting group named Community Cares Quilters (CCQ). I recruited a

group of eight quilters who meet every couple of months to quilt. CCQ have so far completed 10 quilts for Childcan with several more in process.

We also have a group from the Hyatt Street Church named the Piecemakers who are currently working on some jean quilts for us. I recently did a workshop with another church group that chose CCQ as their charity. To raise money CCQ raffled off a Christmas theme quilt, and we intend to continue making special theme quilts to raise money. We are currently working on making CCQ an independent charity which can offer quilts and fundraising for other charities and causes. The \$210 seed money was used to purchase quilting backs, thread, and other sewing supplies to get the project rolling.

My daughter recently celebrated her 10th birthday. At her party instead of gifts we had the girls bring a old pair of jeans. The girls drew pictures and wrote encouraging note on the squares. These squares were then sewn in to lap size quilts. There was enough fabric available for me to complete 3 quilts so far and I am still quilting. I then received 4 more quilts from a person who heard about me from a friend. The word is spreading slowly but we are getting results. Thought the last conference I was connected with the Children's Hospital Child Life services. There will be receiving four of our quilts. This weekend my son is having his 5th birthday party. To kill time I will have the children colour fabric which will also become quilts for the Children's Hospital.

Linda Woodard

Publisher, WomenSpeak

My Sister's Place, Items from their 'Wish List'

When Linda accepted the Fairy Godmother Challenge in the fall of 2005, her mind was on 'My Sister's Place', a transitional support centre for women who are homeless. She wanted to do something that would make their lives a little easier despite their difficult circumstances. But when Linda heard about Sharon Armstrong's blanket warmer project for the hospital, her heart was again touched, and she wanted to help. She went to the Bank of Nova Scotia, Cherryhill Branch and the bank generously donated to the blanket warmer fund.

Back to the original plan, with the \$210 from conference, she added \$100 of her own money and a friend contributed an additional \$100 for a total of \$410 for items for My Sister's Place.



Frances Rodriguez
Occupational Safety Group
My Sister's Place Project
life's necessities for homeless women



This women's only day facility was recommended to me by Diann Vail but nowhere in my wildest dreams did I conjure any thoughts of a bright and happy place where upon entering you could smell good old fashioned home cooking. I must admit, I had some trepidation about visiting a facility that provides food, shelter and life's basic necessities to women who are homeless, or need a safe place.

I'm not entirely sure what I expected to see, but how pleasantly surprised I was when I walked in with the boxes filled with purchases for their use. I brought with me an assortment of necessary items like toothbrushes, toothpaste, socks & underwear and some supplies for their art therapy programs that I thought would be useful & because when I looked at the huge container of brightly coloured markers and packaging for the beautiful spring bulbs purchased for planting in their empty garden, looking at these items made me feel happy and hopeful.

Happy and hopeful is just what I felt when I got in my car after spending a couple of hours at My Sister's Place. The women workers were concerned, caring and generous with hugs to the women who came to their facility. The women who used the facility treated this old Victorian house as if it were their own. From where I sat in a comfy rocking chair with the sun rays coming in through the windows, I could see a woman sweeping the front foyer, another woman knitting next to the dining table filled with women eating, laughing and chatting over lunch just made by a very kind lady, proud of the delicious and nutritional meals she makes daily for these people.

A very tired and very young woman napped in a cozy corner on a chaise lounge. All of these women were troubled in some way, beaten up, addicts, some with mental disorders, and others just poor and hungry with nowhere to go.

I thank the Women's Directory for their donation not only on behalf of My Sister's Place but for the opportunity to experience a sample of goodness in this world that can be filled with sadness and turmoil.

Marilyn Walls
Pyjamas & toys for children in crisis

I knew my project would be to help children remain safe, but I was unsure of how that would happen. I was asked to speak to the third year, UWO nursing students who were participating in a family violence workshop where the Women's Community House were also part of the panel. When Susan Dill, director of residential services called and confirmed my role and provided me with all the information I would need, I began to fret about not allowing myself the time I needed to practice for this huge event. I was scared to death.

The night before the workshop I lay in bed staring at the ceiling. The house was cold, and we had borrowed an electric floor heater for my son's room. I hoped the combination of that little heater and his flannelette pajamas would be enough. Then it hit me! I knew how the Fairy Godmother seed money would be used. Tomorrow when I talked to the kids at Western and tell them the events that resulted in my shelter experience, I was going to let them know about the project for children, and that I would donate the fairy godmother project funds as well as the honorarium from that day, to the Women's Community House to start a 'pajama fund'. When I had used the service, resources were minimal and my children had slept in their clothes for days. A few hundred dollars would provide a brand new pair of warm pajamas for each child, giving a little comfort during a stressful situation. The next day was magical.

When professor Pam Deitrich, third year co-ordinator, turned to me and announced who I was, I walked toward the old wooden podium, with a sense of calm and determination. I shared my experiences and told them of my idea to contribute pajamas to the children at Women's Community House. My emotional presentation seemed to connect with the young students. Many of them rushed forward to donate money which could be used for the Pyjama Project. I was truly touched by the experience.

It was a life changing experience to be a part of the Women's Conference of 2005. I would like to present this to the conference, but my mother is dying and I need to be with her. I have learned so much from this process. I have purchased outdoor sports equipment for the children's recreation and donated to the Women's House pajama Fund.

Sharon Armstrong

London Health Sciences Centre
Blanket Warmer & big screen TV
for the Kidney Dialysis Unit at University Hospital, LHSC



At the Fall conference, I knew I wanted to do something to make a difference and I had so many ideas that it was difficult to choose just one. It took me a few weeks to decide, but it was obvious when I did. But, first of all, I need to backup a bit....

Just a few months prior to the Conference, it was determined that my nephew, Stephen, needed a kidney transplant. Stephen is in his 20's and has had his share of health issues. He was born with spina bifida and hydrocephalus and as such is wheelchair restricted. He's such a great kid, positive minded, and I've never known him to feel sorry for himself. It's easy to like him! As you might know, the waiting list for an organ transplant is long and because of this, my sister Wendy, Stephen's mom, decided she would donate one of her kidneys.

In September, everyone was excited that the operation would finally take place and Stephen would be freed from the routine of dialysis three times a week, four hours per day. As the day progressed, however, the excitement was replaced with the fear that something was terribly wrong. After a very long surgery, the physicians broke the news that the healthy kidney removed from Wendy could not be transplanted to Stephen! The doctors were amazing and they persevered for almost 15 hours in the OR to find a way, without success. At the end of a very long day, my sister's kidney was donated to another recipient and we are consoled that this person's life has changed forever.

After the Conference, Stephen went back on dialysis. Working at University Hospital, I tried to visit Stephen often to help relieve some of his boredom, especially after the disappointment. What broke my heart was looking into the Unit one day and seeing him with his teeth chattering and the sheets pulled up so only his eyes were peeking out. His whole body was shaking. From there, I learned that the hospital does not have the capital funds for new equipment of this nature. This need became my project.

A blanket warmer, with cabinet, costs approximately \$5,500. Staff in the Dialysis Unit had already raised \$ 1,000 but needed the remaining \$4,000. This

is the amount I set out to raise.

With the \$210 seed money, I purchased supply costs to produce a staff cookbook, which is now in its 3rd printing. The idea for my cookbook came from a former secretary and I used her idea to ask staff to contribute their favourite recipes, based on the very successful potluck lunches we've always had. I expanded it to include our Human Resources and Information Management departments. Originally, each sold for \$8 but with new additions over the various printings and to meet what the market would bear, the price was increased to \$10.

Cookbook sales continue but the peak period was definitely pre-Christmas, with many copies ending up in Christmas stockings! One of the Dialysis patients, Gayle Shanfield, worked very hard to successfully penetrate the community, in between her dialysis appointments. Linda Woodard of WomenSpeak, and one of our other fairy godmothers this spring, thought she could help. She approached the Bank of Nova Scotia, Cherry Hill Branch and asked if they would help to sell some cookbooks, and they responded quickly with a purchase of 50 books, which they will sell at their branch. Many thanks to them for seeing the vision and helping to get this project completed.

As late as April 19th, the project was still \$1,500 short and I began to wonder if my goal would be realized. At the final hour, I am very pleased to report, the last \$ 1,500 was anonymously donated by an organization that supports health care. With their generosity, the blanket warmer is now on order and is due to arrive at the hospital, shortly!

Finally, I would like to thank the very special women who gave so generously of their time and efforts: Gayle Shanfield, Linda Woodard, Sharon Taylor, Gail Senyshen, Patricia Kehoe and Karolanne Bolton. In the end, almost \$7200 was raised which paid for the blanket warmer and flat screen TV for the Kidney Dialysis Unit with funds left over to donate to another charity.



Pauline Duncan-Thrasher

Ignite a Spark
Good Neighbor Project

Although this project did not come anywhere near my grandiose vision of a room full of cheering inspired volunteers champing to get out and help their neighbors and sign up for, it gave me, an extra dose of insight. Passing out flyers in cold, Canadian winter was not much fun.

The time spent resulted in only nine people maximum at our 4 Tuesday night meetings in February and March. Without this project, I'd never have known about the wonderful efforts by volunteers who work cheerfully and without fanfare only blocks from where I live- to help babies and their moms, teenagers, seniors and new Canadians facing the challenges of learning English.

Because of this project I connected with the mayor of our city, a former Grade two student, and through her met the wondrous Nancy Needham-community development coordinator and executive director of the South London Neighborhood Resource Centre. With Nancy's encouragement I did an impromptu rah rah speech in English for an all Arabic group of seniors with Mohammad translating and a second speech for a room full of mixed languages, various ages and only a little English.

At the Centre I met Houda, my first Muslim acquaintance, attended an International Women's Dinner and participated in my first International Women's Day celebration complete with Arabic dancing. To that event I invited a fellow tai Chi member Elizabeth from Korea and we who used to be silent and watchful started talking to each other. We met more women from Korea, Iran and China.

My neighbor four doors away has evolved in my eyes to become more of a friend and less of an aggravation as I've grown to realize that giving can be small or big. It just needs to be from the heart and it needs to suit the receiver.

On my Good Neighbor Nights Max and his two girls needed a place to go so they wandered in and the two girls amused themselves while I attempted to lead inspiring discussions about good neighbors with three adults. His six year old loved using the white board. By the second night, my fractured attempts at conversational French had helped his older "shy" nine year old to smile more. On night



four a fifteen year old boy from Korea initiated many ideas about a Spring Celebration to take place on the field behind the Centre. On his way out he asked if he could get a high school credit for this project. The celebration hasn't happened yet.

But my own official volunteerism at the Centre will begin next week with a visit with Nancy. In the winter I ran a Youth Leadership program for Home Schooled children in another part of the city. It was a good neighbor project, but not THE special project. A greater awareness of personal responsibility for starting neighborly deeds rather than the more public act of inspiring others is less glorious but more real and more meaningful.

**A good part is that I've been able to learn without using the seed money. Thanks to our Fairy Godmothers Diann & Louise, for inspiring so many of us to look deeper into how we can help.

PS. Pauline turned in her \$210 to be used for future Fairy Godmothers. The money motivated her to get out and do something. Nothing was wasted.

PPS: When Pauline heard of a neighbour who was sick, she not only went to the grocery store to purchase what the woman needed, she insisted on paying for it herself. Now, I call that true 'Good Neighbour' attitude.



Shannon Wilson

Great West Life/London Life
Christmas Stockings

This Fairy Godmother is so excited to share the results of my project... it's a story that can be best described as... well, magical. This past conference was my first. I knew I was in the company of "sisters" the moment I read about the Fairy Godmothers. You see, I'd already been doing fairy godmother-ish projects on my own.

A couple of winters ago, while on maternity leave, I was dropping off some donations at the Women's Community House. It struck me then how much I took my quality of life and happiness for granted. I couldn't imagine being a woman in need of help, standing in that lobby with my kids at Christmastime, knowing that the only gift I could give my kids for Christmas that year was the chance of a better life. How lonely and devastating that would feel. If ever a woman needed to know that she had a friend to lean on, it was then.

So I took on the task of creating and delivering Christmas stockings to the kids and women at the Women's Community House, each one labeled simply "from a friend". With limited financial resources and two little ones in tow, I was only able to do a dozen stockings. But the wonderful letter of thanks that I received on behalf of the women at the shelter proved that every little bit



helps, and my stockings brightened some lives on Christmas morning.

As I sat in that conference, I realized, WOW! How many stockings could I do for \$210! I jumped up when Louise asked for volunteers. When I got home, I shared my idea with my family. They wanted to help. I shared my idea with my friends. They wanted to help. I told the folks at work, they wanted to help. There are a lot of Fairy Godparents out there.

In the days before Christmas Eve, I delivered stockings for every kid at both locations of the Women's Community House - 25 in total - each one customized with toys, treats and books for the boy or girl that would open it on Christmas morning. I then delivered 19 stockings for the women, containing little treats like scented body lotions, make-up, gift certificates for manicures, new slippers, socks, warm gloves and scarves, etc. On Christmas Eve day, this 'Santa' dropped off a new portable stereo for the family recreation room at the Wellington location. Pamela Coray at the Community House had mentioned that their old stereo was on its last legs, and there was a disco dance party coming up soon...

Often I was moved to tears by the generosity of those around me. One work colleague heard about my plan and spent a Saturday sewing a dozen hand-made Christmas stockings for the kids. Another used all of her Shoppers Drug Mart points to buy stocking stuffers. My chiropractor's office purchased and donated a huge box full of gifts. I was amazed when my good friend, herself struggling with the recent news of her husband's cancer, donated towards a stocking and thanked me for what I was doing. The thanks should go instead to each and every one of the special people who took the time out of their busy lives to contribute gifts, time and money towards a grand total of almost \$1000 worth of Christmas stockings for the Women's Community House. I also want to thank everyone at the Women's Conference. Without your contribution, we wouldn't have been able to do this. Thanks to Diann for giving us Godmothers our wings.

Note from Editor: As of Christmas 2009 — Shannon continues the Christmas stocking project for the shelters.

