



womanspace

NOVEMBER 2020

# your impact

## You Have the Power to Transform Our World

Certainly, this year – 2020 – will go down in history as the year when our entire world began a global sea change! At Womanspace, where one of our four essential values is “transforming our world,” we have been uniquely challenged to make good on that value. We look with new eyes at things we formerly took for granted: our health, time spent with friends and family, the ways we worship, shop, entertain, and the many ways we learn. What is community when members are physically distanced from one another? How do we keep our bonds strong?

As one of the oldest non-profits in Rockford, Womanspace is meeting these challenges and remains an outstanding place to learn and grow artistically, educationally and spiritually. Womanspace has undergone internal challenges, to be sure, including a recent transition in board leadership. An interim board is now enthusiastically moving forward, devising new and creative ways of strengthening and building our community. For now, Womanspace programs are focused on smaller group experiences, virtual learning and home-based classes. Technology such as Zoom is allowing us to serve our local membership and to expand beyond our immediate Rockford community, with class and workshop instructors from different parts of the country. Local Rockford Womanspace members can and do now regularly interact with participants and partners around the world!

We invite you to read more in these pages about the innovative, nurturing, generous and cooperative work that Womanspace engages in within Rockford and around the world. We invite you to be part of these initiatives by supporting Womanspace with a generous financial gift. With your help, we will emerge from this time of pandemic as a stronger and even more vibrant organization than before.

One thing we promise: your gift will have a magnified impact when you invest your dollars and your trust in Womanspace.

Sincerely,

Elaine Hirschenberger  
Executive Director

Pat Bonavia  
Board President



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**Page 1 & 2:**  
*Whether it was virtually,  
 outdoors or in the Anjali  
 Pavilion, many of our classes  
 still took place this summer.*

## Learning & Creating on the Fly

The early days of the COVID-19 crisis tested Womanspace's adaptability far beyond what we had ever envisioned for this organization. The "Covid shove" caused us to be more nimble, resilient and creative, to invent solutions on the fly; to respond to up front needs while observing social distancing. For an organization like Womanspace whose core values are connecting, empowering, creating and transforming our world, we have had to invent new ways of living those values while broadening the perspectives of our own members and others.

So, what changed?

Prior to the crisis, Womanspace had begun to explore offering some classes via Zoom. There seemed to be no rush so we had (of course) been taking our sweet time with those plans. In mid-March, though, it became obvious that it was time to stop planning and start implementing. In the early days of lockdown, we experimented with staff meetings online and became more proficient at the process ourselves. We reached out to some of our older members (particularly those without younger family members close by) with individualized tutorials. We helped members move beyond their (dis)comfort level to become proficient Zoomers! The sense of real empowerment allowed for some positivity amidst the early weeks of fear and depression.

As comfortability with technology has grown, so have the opportunities for connection. We have learned that online programming breaks geographic boundaries and opens new opportunities to grow our impact exponentially. We can now reach women across the globe as easily as we can talk to our

friends across the street. An example: last week's meditation class had participants from Rockford, Rockton, DeKalb, Houston TX, and Mumbai India. Members who live part time in Florida can take part in Bookwoman or environmental programs offered in Rockford. Dream Circle classes are taught by Jean Kathryn from California. Sakshee and Shivani are two of our marketing interns, posting Womanspace offerings in the media from their homes in India. No longer bound by geographic area, we are creating programs meant to reach women across the globe, giving them tools to enhance their creativity, maximize their health, develop as individuals and as community leaders, and have a greater impact on shaping a more equitable and harmonious world.

While the pandemic has opened our incredible potential to widen our impact virtually, it has also reinforced the value of what we do by physically bringing women together locally to share in life-enhancing programming. For many individuals, the pandemic has created a social media fatigue. Despite people's proficiency with the online world, there is a great craving for real human interaction and the importance of "real world" relationships. Womanspace has always valued bringing women together to connect deeply and create lasting friendships that help all of us to lead more purposeful lives. We are confident that when gathering in groups becomes safe again, people will again relish the intrinsic value of community. There will be even more potential for us to reach women of all ages and backgrounds to bring them together into a space that cultivates growth, inspires community service, and fosters a life of creativity, purpose and connection.

# A Spiritual Experience

During the course of the pandemic, nothing has brought more solace than the tranquil beauty of nature, undisturbed by the uncertainty of this bizarre time. The Womanspace garden has been a place of calm amongst the storm for our community, bringing serenity and peace. More guests than ever before have sought refuge on our grounds this year.

Anne Godin and Sherri Crawford, both members of the Grounds Committee since 2000, have now collectively spent more than 800 hours since the onset of the pandemic working to keep the grounds pristine. Anne said that the garden helps Womanspace fulfill our mission by offering, "nurturing, contemplation and meditation" as well as an opportunity to spend time with yourself and enjoy beauty. Sherri agreed, adding that experiencing the garden is truly "deeply spiritual." While they have worked tirelessly to keep the grounds beautiful for the public to enjoy, they emphasized how it has been beneficial for them – their hours of volunteer work have been both therapeutic and calming, keeping them physically fit and mentally centered during this tumultuous time.



*Anne Godin & Sherri Crawford captured in one second of the 800 hours spent in the gardens!*



Clockwise from upper left:  
Linda Wellens, Melody Pearson,  
Ila Adam and Una Ryan.

## Safety Tranquility, & Friendship

For a while, I have been part of a group of four women who meet monthly to share our lives, inspirations and anything else that comes up. We are all Womanspace members and find that bond to be especially meaningful.

Back in March of this year when the coronavirus reality started affecting our community, we chose not to meet for several months. Three of us live alone and are retired or were unable to work during that time. The solitude was depressing and prolonged. We kept in touch by phone, but it was so unfulfilling. Then, one of us had the idea of meeting on the patio at Womanspace! It was Spring; the gardens were blooming, the sky was blue, the birds sang or cawed, and being outside with masks was safe!

What a gift we gave ourselves. We went from meeting monthly to meeting weekly. We often saw others with whom we visited or not, but it was special to see others also savoring the beauty and peace of our shared haven. When we realized that three of us were eating all our meals alone, we ordered delivery from a local restaurant and had a joyful supper together in the pavilion one summer evening. It felt like a sacred breaking-of-bread together after so many solitary meals.

This is what Womanspace meant to the four of us. And it literally saved our sanity on some days while filling us up with peace, friendship, nature and beauty – plus a good dose of laughter! Thanks to all the members and donors that made these days possible. We are still meeting – although our outerwear is now a little thicker!

– Melody Pearson



## A Landmark Celebration Honoring Women!

On October 31, The Women's Suffrage Centennial 2020 (WSC2020) Steering Committee unveiled Rockford's first public art installation, the Women's Centennial Sculpture. The piece (15' tall on a 10' wide base) is located on the riverfront of the Rockford YMCA, next to the Log Lodge. It is dedicated to women and celebrates passage of the 19th amendment. This project was undertaken by a coalition of civic and women's advocacy organizations. Of those groups, Womanspace took the lead for design and creation of the piece.

The sculpture design includes a three-panel tower and six surrounding benches. One panel depicts Rockford suffragist, Kate F. O'Connor, who worked tirelessly in the early part of the century for extending voting rights to women. The second panel features inspirational Rockford educator and activist Dr. Connie Goode, representing the many women of color who marched and advocated in the 1960s for broadening the vote to include, by enforcement of law, all people of color. The third panel depicts our future – four young women representing different cultures and ethnicities who now freely exercise the power of their voice and their vote. The six mosaic benches surrounding the central tower (to be installed in Spring 2021) will continue the visual narrative of suffrage, celebrate Rockford's unique landmarks, and serve as seating in this dynamic gathering space.

Susan Burton, Womanspace member and mosaic artist from Marseilles who has taught here for over a decade, was chosen to guide this work because of her mastery of the mosaic art form and her experience with large, community-built art projects in other cities. Over 100 people in our community – children, adults, and seniors – have worked on this project, learning about mosaic and the women's suffrage movement while cutting tiles, filing edges, and strategically placing the pieces.

To date, the WSC2020 project has raised almost \$80,000 of the \$120,000 needed to complete this project. Donations to this cause do NOT go toward Womanspace or our annual fund drive, but the money is managed by Womanspace specifically for this large civic project. If you want to contribute, you can write a check to Womanspace AND designate Women's Centennial Sculpture on the memo line. Or, to donate online, go to: [Charity.gofundme.com/wsc2020il](https://Charity.gofundme.com/wsc2020il).

The WSC2020 Steering Committee is represented by AAUW Rockford, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, League of Women Voters of Greater Rockford, Midway Village Museum, NAACP, National Council of Negro Women, NSDAR Rockford, PAIC (Promoting an Inclusive Community)-RVC, Rockford Public Library, Rockford Area Arts Council, SPoRT Makeup, WNIJ, Womanspace Inc, Women's March Rockford, and the YWCA Northwestern Illinois.



## A Stitch Just in Time...

Last March, when the global pandemic was new and many were in urgent need of masks, Womanspace mobilized over 200 volunteers to help provide them. For the first few weeks we worked with Boots Upholstery. Then in April, when we received a \$10,000 grant from Rockford Rotary and Rotary District 6420 to purchase raw materials for the masks, we were able to refine our process using space in the factory at Mohop Shoes. Some of our volunteers came to Mohop and worked at die cutting masks in bulk and sorting them into kits for our volunteers. The volunteers picked up the kits and dropped off the completed masks at the socially-distanced Mohop loading dock. By the end of the project on May 18th, we had donated a total of 13,355 masks to hospitals, nursing homes, social service organizations, at-risk individuals, and others in need. Womanspace is so proud of the teamwork that allowed us to accomplish this community service. It is a magnificent asset to have an organization uniquely positioned to mobilize women who will step up selflessly in times of need to benefit the entire community.



*Members and friends mobilized to produce over 13,000 masks for our frontline heroes.*



## And the Winner of the Scholarship is...

Womanspace selected **Caitlin Corso** to be the 2020 recipient of our \$1,000 college scholarship. Caitlin plans to study Creative Writing/English at Eastern Illinois University. She attended Belvidere North High School where she had a 3.87 GPA and was the Cross Country Team Captain. She volunteered for the BraveHearts Therapeutic Riding program since 2016. In her application essay, Caitlin wrote, "Creative freedom touches a person on a deep level. Being able to reach someone with words is a fantastic power to have. Being able to see things from a new perspective and being able to solve a problem in a nontraditional way makes creative people a valuable asset in society." Congratulations, Caitlin!

## Your Gift of Self

There are, of course, more ways to contribute to Womanspace than just financially. You can always share the gift of your time and talent. As we look toward creating our future together, the interim board is seeking energetic and visionary women to help Womanspace adapt to the changing signs of the times. If you would like to explore becoming more involved in Womanspace leadership through board membership or heading up a certain project, we want to talk with you to see how your skills and talents can help to serve the common good. If this invitation stirs a chord in you, please Pat Bonavia at [patbonavia@comcast.net](mailto:patbonavia@comcast.net) or Kristin Kofoed at [krisilizie@mac.com](mailto:krisilizie@mac.com) or any of the other board members.

### Interim Board of Directors:

Pat Bonavia, Kristin Kofoed, Becki Dennis, Ruth Ora Jackson, Anne Totenhagen Johnson, Pam Lonsway, Loretta Reif, Mary Tuite and Connie Wenger

# We are SO Grateful

Womanspace extends very special thanks to all who contributed since our last annual reporting period. This listing includes all cash gifts that were received September 1, 2019–August 31, 2020 for the Annual Fund, Memorials, Honor Gifts, Benefits, Special Events and Fundraisers.

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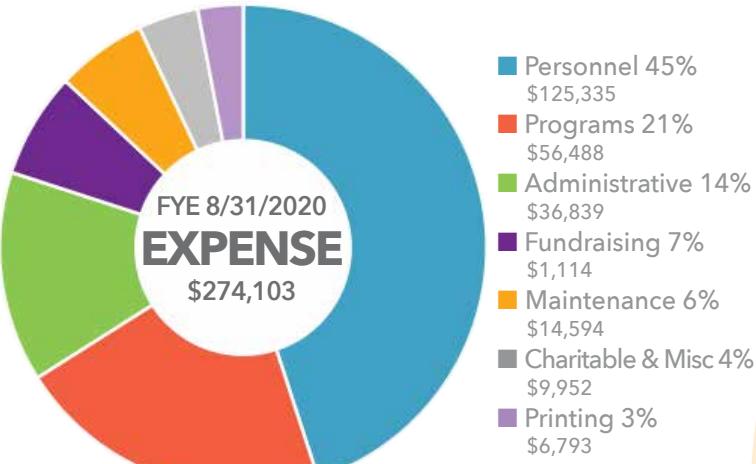
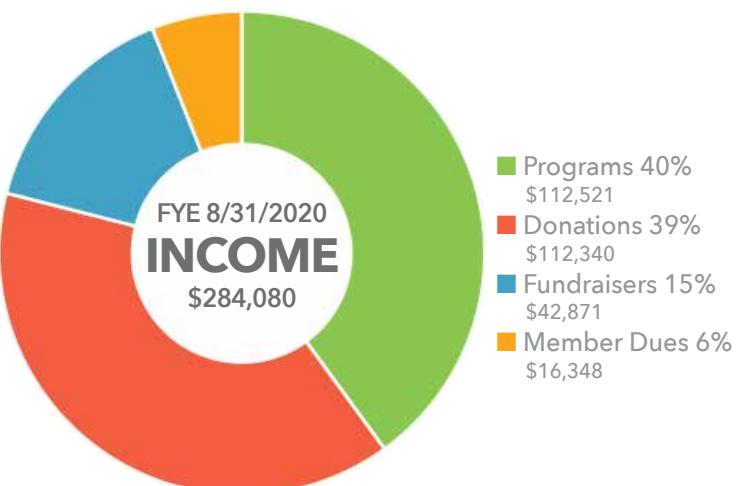
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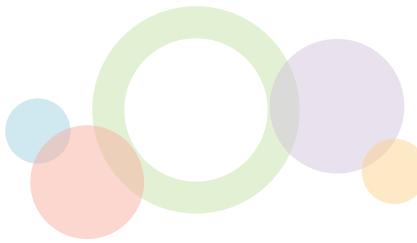
We are so grateful for those of you who have already sent your unsolicited donations as signs of support, particularly in this Covid-driven year of 2020! Some have shared all or part of their government stimulus checks; some are GEMs and Give Every Month, some arrange for regular monthly or quarterly donations through their banks. Some regularly donate the amount they would pay for classes they would regularly attend except for COVID. Some just surprise us with a large overnight donation out of the blue. However and whenever you give, you need to know that WOMANSPACE IS GRATEFUL. Thank you!



womanspace

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**Join us for a VIRTUAL experience February 5-March 5, 2021**

**Womanspace and Jhoole invite you to support our unique collaboration for women's empowerment.** This event will feature pre-recorded programs related to Indian culture, ethical fashion and women's empowerment efforts (locally and across the globe), an online auction with various items including experiences, art and handicrafts, and an introduction to the new hand-dyed, block-printed athleisurewear collection designed by a collaborative group of artists from Womanspace and Jhoole. This handcrafted, made-to-order collection will generate income to support women's empowerment both here and abroad through the power of social enterprise. This is a great opportunity to travel, have fun and empower others without leaving the comfort and warmth of your home!

Jhoole is an ethical, nonprofit fashion social enterprise based in Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh, India that employs women to help them gain economic independence, invest in education and break the cycle of poverty in their community.