

NORTHLAND

Neighbors

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Cover Photo by Natalie Carver

Giving Hope & Help: A Non-Profit with a Big Heart

BY NIKKI SWARTZ

Jessica Lynn McClellan celebrated her 45th birthday in a big way – by helping thousands of people thrive despite difficult situations. In November 2013, she began a non-profit – Giving Hope & Help (GH&H) – to support domestic violence survivors and shelters.

McClellan's personal story includes surviving and thriving after suffering sexual assault as a teen and then deciding to leave an emotionally abusive relationship as an adult, as well as losing a dear friend to domestic violence. All this sparked the beginning of her non-profit. She felt a calling to give to those affected by domestic violence by providing least-donated personal items to boost their dignity and confidence – specifically, sanitary napkins and tampons. At the launch of GH&H, more than 5,000 feminine products were collected for domestic violence victims and shelters.

“Giving Hope & Help is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that supports domestic violence survivors, provides essential resources to end period poverty, empowers college-bound and non-traditional students and inspires cancer patients, lifting all those we serve to live their best life,” McClellan, founder and president, explained. “We are making a difference in thousands of lives locally and across the globe with our initiatives.”

GH&H works to make a difference in several areas: domestic violence support/prevention, cancer support, college scholarships and ending period poverty. Period poverty is the lack of period products – including tampons and sanitary napkins – for women. Many simply do not think to provide or donate this very basic need for women fleeing from domestic violence. Sanitary napkins and tampons are the two least-donated items to places of refuge across the country.

“The original goal was to speak out against domestic violence and ensure that when a survivor had the courage to leave and flee to a safe haven or shelter, period products would be accessible,” she said. “I know how hard it is to leave an abusive or toxic relationship and my goal was to ensure the items of dignity were available when needed. Shelters should aim and purpose for their clients to have no reason to return to abuse.

GH&H missions to support them to do that while taking care of the clients period product needs.”

Growing & Giving

GH&H has expanded its original mission to serve more places and more people. It continues to advocate against domestic violence and works to end period poverty, and it has gone global. GH&H encompasses the No Female Without PERIOD Products MOVEMENT (#NoFemaleWithout), which provides period products to more than 25 places of refuge in Kansas, Missouri, Texas (operating as Texas Giving Hope & Help) and across the country and world. GH&H supports those affected by natural disasters with donations of period products as well as donating to girls' and women's organizations and schools.

The non-profit has also added two additional arms of outreach: The LOVE Bags 4 Cancer (including LOVE Bags 4 Her to benefit those in need of feminine products and homeless women, and LOVE Bags 4 Him to support homeless men) and the Education Is Your Passport Program, which includes a college scholarship program.

The non-profit is making a huge difference for thousands of people around the globe.

“We have supported 200 girls in Africa with funds for period products and panties for the last three years. We donate enough products at our annual feminine hygiene product drives to local domestic violence shelters and homeless shelters in Kansas, Missouri and Texas to last a year or more,” McClellan said. “We also have impacted over 500 cancer patients' lives with the LOVE Bags 4 Cancer initiative and have made an annual donation for the last five years from the LOVE Bags 4 Cancer Donation & Delivery Events proceeds to the American Cancer Society.”

Through its Education Is Your Passport program, GH&H is changing the lives of underserved high school students and single parents. The



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non-profit has awarded 49 college scholarships since the 2015 scholarship program launched, including three full-ride scholarships to Metropolitan Community College (MCC) awarded June 2019. McClellan said GH&H will award 10 more full-ride scholarships to MCC at the 2020 Scholarship Program on June 25, including the following:

- *The Giving Hope & Help Education Is Your Passport Scholarship:* Students receive a new laptop, a bed-in-a-bag set for the dormitory and a backpack filled with supplies.
- *The Metropolitan Community College-Giving Hope & Help Education Is Your Passport:* Students are awarded a full-ride scholarship that will benefit high school seniors and single parent applicants.
- *Two \$500 cash scholarships in honor of McClellan's grandparents:* The Alexander Sr. & Cleo McCallop Legacy of Giving Scholarship Award; and The Neoma Spearman Literacy Scholarship Award

All scholarship recipients will receive a scholarship app that will allow them to continue to apply for additional scholarships while in college. Interested students can apply online at www.givinghopeandhelp.org. Watch the highlight video of last year's scholarship program at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C24C-WJi97M&feature=emb_title

Challenges & Opportunities

McClellan said GH&H's biggest opportunity is making a difference in the community and beyond. Making a difference at least partially depends on spreading the word about its work.

Lillian James Creative, a marketing and advertising company, recently unanimously awarded GH&H \$10,000 worth of marketing and media for 2020.

McClellan said this award is the non-profit's biggest success so far. GH&H also won the 2019 4th quarter grant from 100+ Women Who Care KC. The \$14,000 grant was the largest in the organization's eight-year history.

In addition to grants, GH&H's funding comes from business sponsors, individuals, companies and organizations.

"We plan to become a household name for giving," McClellan said. "We want to inspire others to give to meet community needs and make a difference locally and across the globe with our arms of outreach."

Future Growth

McClellan said GH&H plans to expand its programs and initiatives to make a larger impact without forgetting its roots. She said GH&H will continue to advocate against domestic violence and speak out against it. It will continue to gain the support of men in the community to help advocate as well. It will offer more products and services to places of refuge. It will advocate for feminine products to be free. It also will expand its scholarship program to include paid internships with Fortune 500 companies and training for its scholarship recipients. Last but not least, McClellan said her non-profit will increase its giving to find a cure for cancer and continue to inspire cancer patients in honor of her late niece, who lost her battle with cancer after fighting for six years.

She loves to share her story and give motivational talks to inspire others to see the leader and giver in themselves. That's what she founded GH&H to do, and that's what she'll work to ensure it continues to do, making life better for an ever-growing number of recipients.

"I feel the biggest gratification when helping others," she explained. "My personal mantra is: I live to give hope, give help, give love, give love, period."

GH&H Events & Fundraisers

More than 100 volunteers assist Giving Hope & Help, but this growing organization can always use more.

Visit www.givinghopeandhelp.org to register to volunteer, email donate@givinghopeandhelp.com or call 816-607-1813.

You also can support GH&H's 2020 campaign, www.givinghopeandhelp.org.

If you want to get involved next month, support Giving Hope & Help at the following events:

May 5: Mother's Day LOVE Bags 4 Cancer Donation & Delivery Day. Provide donations to fill bags with inspirational items and toiletries. The LOVE Bags 4 Cancer are provided to hospitalized men and women battling cancer the day before Mother's Day.

May 28: Community Wide Period Packing Party. Join us at Waldo Branch Library @5:30-7:30pm, to support the homeless community and those in need of feminine products.

July 30: Education Is Your Passport Scholarship Awards Program and Fundraiser Banquet. Join us at Stoney Creek Hotel and Conference Center in Independence to gear for this event.

Watch for event updates at www.givinghopeandhelp.org