



Cultivating Justice,
Nonviolence & Well-being

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A nonprofit organization

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Inside

Circle Volunteer Spotlight / 2

Circle News Roundup / 3

Passionate young leaders / 5

Summer program / 6

November 2014

PEACE CONNECTIONS NEWSLETTER

Simple Gifts: Remembering Jeanette

by Deb Zeiner

Her name was Jeanette and she was my Circle Leader, and friend.

My husband and I moved to Newton in 2011, where we knew but one person. We were leaving a very small community in the Flint Hills to be closer to our children in Wichita and had chosen Newton as the place to move based on our observations of the town, which seemed to be a place where people cared for each other. It seemed that wherever I went I spotted posters for the Circles of Hope program, which was looking for volunteers. So I signed up for an Ally training class, just to see if it felt like a good fit for me.

Circles of Hope was a great fit. I felt comfortable with the program and those from the community who were involved as Allies or volunteers and I felt even more comfortable with the admirable folks who were past, present and future Circle Leaders.



Shortly after we moved here, and much to my surprise, I found myself having a craniotomy at The Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN – not something I'd recommend doing unless you absolutely have to! But that surgery was what opened the door for me to meet Jeanette, who had a similar surgery a few weeks after I did. We shared our stories one night at a Circles meeting, compared scars and fell in love with each other's spirit and positivity.

Jeanette had brain cancer and I had time. We were the perfect match. For 19 months we were Team Jeanette. She was a Circle Leader and I her Ally. But our relationship became more than Circle Leader/Ally or Team Jeanette. We became as close as sisters as we went to her medical appointments and Circle activities.

For several months, we were able to follow the Circles program while Jeanette was cancer-free, and I watched in awe as she made plans for the beautiful future she wanted for herself and her daughter. When I would pucker about the precarious nature of her financial life, or her health, she would laugh at me and tell me, "Don't worry. God has this."

■ Continued on page 2

■ Continued from page 1

When the cancer returned, Jeanette was not bitter or worried. We had the luxury of time together to talk about her beliefs and her daughter's future. I promised I would be her friend forever, be with her for as long as she needed me and would take care of her 17-year old daughter after she was gone.

Jeanette died May 3, 2014. Her daughter lives with me and my husband. We consider this child a great gift in our lives.

Jeanette taught me so much about life that I, a crusty old journalist, would not have imagined I did not know. I look in her daughter's eyes and see Jeanette every day. In my mind, I say hello to the friend who lives in my heart and thank her for the lessons she gave me and the gifts she left me.

Circles Volunteer Spotlight: Volunteering is a Family Affair

When Kathy Leininger called the office back in March of this year, her enthusiasm for Circles blew in like a fresh breeze out of the west.

Kathy first encountered Circles while working in the social services field in Cheyenne, Wyoming. When her husband's job relocation brought the Leiningers to Kansas, Kathy took time to get the household arranged and her family settled into new routines and then went in search of a place to be of service, which serendipitously brought her to Circles of Hope.

Her professional experience was like a dream-list of attributes for exactly the kind of volunteer the organization needed: social services, early childhood education, retail management.

Almost immediately Kathy found a niche in Circles childcare and asked if her college- and high school-aged daughters Kalyn and Shannon could also volunteer. The answer was a loud and grateful YES! A new Circle Leader Training Class with a lot of young children had abruptly hiked the childcare census to new heights. Kristin Neufeld Epp was skillfully leading the kids one Tuesday a month, but there was still an enormous leadership vacuum – one that turned out to be a perfect fit for Kathy, Kalyn and Shannon.

Meanwhile, in the Peace Connections gift shop, Marlene Smucker's long-time service as volunteer manager was coming to a close. Kathy's willingness to pitch in with her creative ideas and her retail marketing experience are a dream come true and an answer to prayer.

Kalyn is a junior at Wichita State University, majoring in psychology with a focus that is especially beneficial for Circles: she wants to be a behavioral specialist for kids. Shannon is a sophomore at Augusta High School. Kathy recently accepted a part-time position at Sunshine Children's Home, a part of the Sunlight Children's Advocacy & Rights Foundation.

The Leiningers are an outstanding example of the power of volunteer service to make a difference. The quality of their hands-on caring is a healing balm for young lives whose earliest circumstances have been challenging and even traumatic. Kathy, Kalyn and Shannon are love in motion.



Caring volunteers make a difference in the lives of Circles kids. Standing: Cousins Jason & Leah Mueller. Seated: Shannon, Kalyn & Kathy Leininger.

Circle News Roundup



Circles of Hope is one of eight Kansas recipients of \$20,000 worth of in-kind leadership development from the **Kansas Leadership Center**. Staff, Circle Leaders and volunteers have been attending a series of Building Community Leadership training sessions. (Pictured at left: Danny Barrerra, Jennifer Rose, KLC Coach Lynette Lacy and Wanda Pumphrey)

Three Circle Leaders, two volunteers and two staff attended the **Kansas Conference on Poverty** this July in Topeka. Highlights included inspiring keynote speakers and workshops demonstrating best practices and advocacy work from around the state.



The **5th Tuesday Potluck Picnic** in Military Park on July 29 was one of the most well-attended events of the year, including more kids than usual due to a special visit from the Trinity Heights United Methodist Church youth group who came to help with activities for the Circles kids, donated food for the picnic and stayed after the picnic to learn more about local poverty and what Circles is doing about it after the picnic.

A number of low-resource individuals and families stopped and asked questions at the Circles of Hope booth at the Lion's Club-sponsored **HopeFest** on August 2 at Eby Learning Center. This was a great opportunity to raise awareness about Circles among Harvey Countians who most need it.



The **9th Circle Leader Training Class** celebrated on August 19, with 8 graduates. The keynote speaker was Dwight Ray, President of Community Nat'l Bank & Trust in Newton, who shared inspiring anecdotes from his own journey out of poverty. Congratulations to these courageous individuals and one couple who made the decision to change their future stories by connecting to Circles.

The Circles of Hope Big View Team showed the film "**American Winter**" on August 26 and invited the community to attend. The film documents the experiences of eight families struggling to meet their basic needs and turning to social services for assistance after unforeseen financial setbacks.

■ Continued on page 4

■ Continued from page 3



Preparation for the September 27 **Harvey County United Way Chili-Cookoff** was a cooperative affair as the Circles community collaborated on peeling, dicing and spicing the 9 gallons of chili needed for the annual cookoff. This year's recipe was an RN-certified healthy mix of wild venison, veggies and other beneficial ingredients. Thanks to Sherry Clark for helping with the recipe and preparation, Bobby Rose for the venison and Everence for pitching in on the ingredients.

On November 7 representatives from the 9 Circles sites across Kansas will convene in Salina for the second annual **Kansas Circles Community of Practice**. Staff, Circle Leaders and volunteers will gather to learn together, encourage each other and hear updates from Circles USA.



The **poverty simulation at Bethel College** on September 21 was a success, with approximately 40 participants and 20 volunteers interacting with each other in a fast-paced role play experience simulating the real life challenges faced by families in poverty. Throughout the 2 hour awareness-raising event participants could be seen scrambling to cash paychecks, buy diapers, make it to school on time and even make arrangements to stay at the homeless shelter. Dialogue after the event included expressions of frustration, the sense of lacking community and an increased need for support, "something many of us take for granted," as one person put it.

We are grateful to the following people for their gifts of time and talent

- ◆ Thanks to everyone who came out to meet the new executive director and tour our facilities at the Open House on September 18.
- ◆ We are so grateful for our VISTA volunteer, Danny Barrera! He is a tremendous asset.
- ◆ If you contributed through our annual Phonathon in September, we thank you.
- ◆ Laurie Oswald Robinson has been working on two Peace Connections-related stories for an upcoming issue of *The Mennonite*. Thanks, Laurie!
- ◆ Thanks to *The Kansan* and *Harvey County NOW* for recent coverage of Circles of Hope. We appreciate our community connections.



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www.peaceconnections.org
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Passionate young professionals

by Marva Weigelt

At first I ignored the boldly-labeled brochure for Young Professionals (YP) someone left on my desk at Peace Connections at least a month ago. After all, I'm in my mid-50s and well past the most generous outer limits of the YP demographic (39).

This week I finally picked up "An Open Letter to a Young Professional" and started reading, quickly realizing I'd found precisely the context I needed to help me tell you about what's so exciting at Peace Connections these days.

"Leadership is not a position, but rather an activity," writes Ed O'Malley, President and CEO of the Kansas Leadership Center, in the small brochure. "**Young professionals need to lead in community life now.**"

I remember sitting at a staff meeting a year or two ago and realizing we were all over 50 and similar in so many respects. I gave voice to what I saw as an organizational need for more diversity, energy and vision.

Now when I look across the table I see a mother of three in her 30s who is juggling family, finances and a career. Jennifer is personally familiar with the struggle to balance priorities when family resources are limited. I also see a first generation Mexican-American in his 20s who has elected to serve as a VISTA volunteer for a year. Danny knows that choice includes the dual challenge of learning to live on a poverty-level stipend while working to end poverty.

These are the young professionals Ed O'Malley challenged to "lead now." And that is exactly what they are doing here at Peace Connections.



The new executive director, Jennifer Rose, is not shy about sharing her direct experience of utilizing public assistance to keep her household afloat. At the time, she was pursuing her education in social work so she could raise her family's standard of living. Jennifer brings work experience from Youthville and CommCare as well as her social work education and certification as a drug & alcohol addiction counselor to her leadership of Peace Connections and its initiatives. She sees issues from multiple sides and is helping to bridge gaps in understanding across a broad spectrum of community interests.

Danny Barrera, a lifelong Newton resident, graduated with a major in Business from Bethel College this spring. While considering his next steps, an email from the VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) program caught his

attention. His year at Peace Connections is dedicated to building the organization's sustainability. At the same time, he sees it as a personal laboratory for testing whether he wants to migrate toward a career in social work, an option that seems increasingly compelling.

What a joy it is for me to work with these young professionals! They possess the qualities O'Malley listed as essential to change communities: "Passionate, Steadfast, Informed, Collaborative, Courageous, Credible, Action-Oriented."

Ed O'Malley's letter is available at <http://issuu.com/kansasleadershipcenter/docs/youngprofessional>

Board Notes

We are so thankful to **Rosi Reimer** for her most recent stint of service on the board at Peace Connections, which began in November of 2011 and came to a close this fall as she took on a new job and schedule that conflict with board meetings. Rosi's long history with Peace Connections dates to helping start recycling in Newton in 1987 and serving on the board in the early 1990s. Her mother Gladys also served on the Peace Connections board and continues her support in various ways.

We welcome **Marjean Harris** to both the Board of Directors and as an Ally in Circles of Hope. Marjean, recently retired from a social work career, took the Ally training earlier this year and has just been matched with a Circle Leader. We look forward to having Marjean's perspective as a resource!

CALENDAR

Celebrity Servers fundraiser for Circles of Hope, **Monday, November 10, 5 pm – 8 pm** (see details on page 7).

Holiday Hours: The Peace Connections gift shop will be open on Saturdays during the holiday season, 10 am – 2 pm on November 22 and 29, and December 6, 13, and 20. After that we will revert to the current schedule of Monday – Thursday, 10 am – 4 pm (closed Fri-Sat-Sun).

Circles of Hope meets every Tuesday at the First United Methodist Church, 801 N. Main, Newton. Meal is 5:30 – 6:15 pm; meeting is 6:30 – 8 pm. *Note that open meetings for visitors are the first and fourth Tuesdays.*

- First Tuesday (Open), Educating ourselves
- Second Tuesday (Reserved), Matched Circles supporting each other
- Third Tuesday (Reserved), Guiding Coalition Teams sustaining Circles of Hope
- Fourth Tuesday (Open), Big View changing our community

Peace Connections Board of Directors meets the 2nd Monday of each month at 5:30 pm at the Peace Connections office. Meetings are tentatively scheduled for Nov. 17, Dec. 15 and Jan. 12 and are open to the public.

Change to newsletter publication schedule: In order to better fit with our fiscal year and other logistics, with this issue we launch a shift to a new publication schedule: November, February, May, August.

Name change for summer program clarifies roles

The name “Kids’ Summer Food & Activity” has for a number of years been used collectively to describe complementary programs begun in 2006 (food) and 2007 (activities). Initial collaboration among an inspiring number of local institutions and concerned citizens helped get both efforts off the ground in grassroots fashion.

Over the years, as both programs were fine-tuned and became more sustainable, roles and responsibilities also differentiated. Here’s a clarification:

- The USDA-funded Summer Food Service Program is managed by USD 373.
- USD 373 provides facilities for both programs while Peace Connections recruits and coordinates community volunteers for both.
- Peace Connections provides fund-raising, publicity, staff and coordination for the newly-named Summer Enrichment Activities (SEA) program, which has a staff of three.

Summer Enrichment Activities (SEA) brings to mind “an ocean of possibilities,” which seems apt for an offering so popular that parents race to secure one of the 40 available slots for their 6-10 year olds each year. A lengthy waiting list is typical, with priority given to families who can make the most consistent use of the program.

This year SEA served 46 children from 23 families, many of whom might not otherwise be able to enjoy structured programming designed to boost academic readiness and socialization. Coordination with the summer food program is a fantastic asset that allows SEA kids to eat two free meals and enjoy a morning of activities in the same facility (Sunset Elementary).

Meanwhile, the Summer Food Service Program feeds many more hungry kids with the help of community volunteers mobilized by Peace Connections. This summer they served close to 10,000 meals in June and July.

For the first time, Peace Connections offered SEA parents the chance to offer formal feedback on the program. Here are highlights of what we learned:

- The top benefits to the kids were: friends, meaningful activities, and social skills.
- The top benefits for parents were: saving money on daycare or latchkey and giving parents a break/free time for errands or caring for other children in the family.
- Parents are very satisfied with the program, with 90% giving a rating of 9 or 10 (out of 10)

Thanks to Sue Elder, Angela Altum, Kathy Willis, USD 373 and all the volunteers and donors who make the dovetailing of these two programs such a great resource for Harvey County children.

Celebrations and Gratitude

Friendships continually remind us of celebrations and challenges, especially during holiday seasons. We are grateful that you choose to share in the work of **Circles of Hope** and **Summer Enrichment Activities (SEA)**.

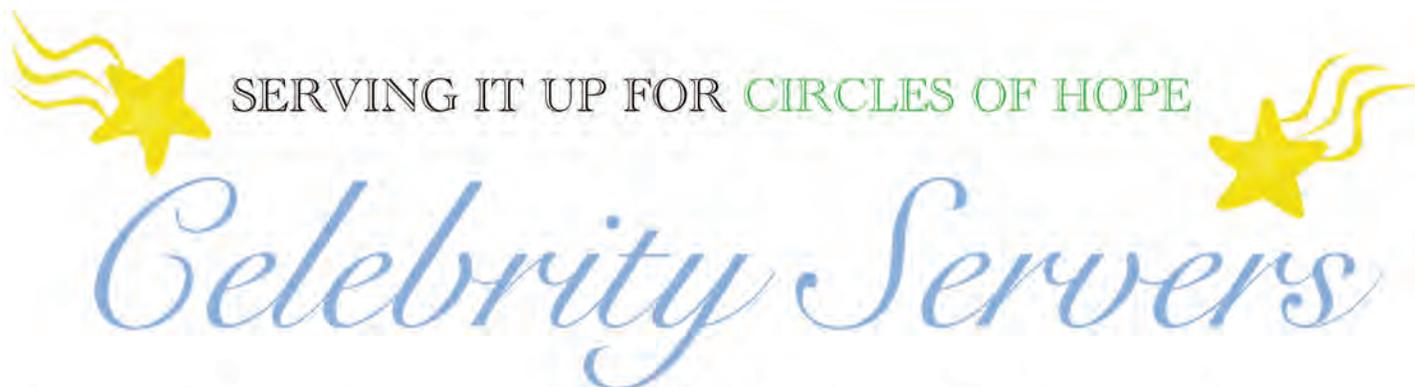
Your generosity, by talent, material or money, helps our greater community to grow in health and wholeness. Thank you!

As you plan charitable gifts at the end of the year. **Please consider Peace Connections with your generous annual gift or an additional gift.** Please remember these options:

- You can give immediately at our postal address or secure website.
- We can help you arrange automatic monthly gifts, a simple sustaining grace!
- It may be to your advantage to make a gift of stock, bonds, farm commodities or other assets.
- There may be other creative ideas best suited for you. Please call and we can assist your generosity!

Whether this is a good time for you to make a financial gift, Peace Connections is always deeply grateful for your investment of volunteer time, and your thoughts, prayers and advocacy. **You help make *thriving communities sustained by social justice and compassion a reality.* Thank you!**

Watch your email for information about **#GivingTuesday**, Dec. 2, 2014. If you enjoy excitement online and a chance of having your gift matched, this may be for you!

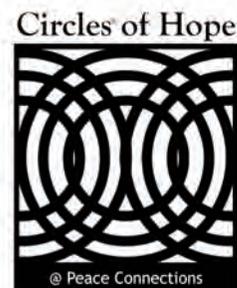


Come have some fun eating great food served by local mayors, executive directors, bank presidents, attorneys and other Celebrity Servers at a **fundraiser for Circles of Hope**, a Harvey County initiative that **inspires and equips families and communities to resolve poverty and thrive.**



Monday, November 10, 5 pm - 8 pm
Water's Edge Restaurant
703 S. Main, Hesston, KS
620-327-4099

Reservations are encouraged





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Newton, Kansas 67114-2230

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Vision: Thriving communities sustained by social justice and compassion.

Peace on earth begins with
peace in the human heart.
It is the result of an inner
transformation in you that
affects all of your external
conditions.

- Wisdom Hunters
Daily Devotional

Peace Connections partners with others to:

- ▶ **build resources within families and communities**
- ▶ **teach and practice nonviolence**
- ▶ **nurture personal and spiritual well-being**

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The Board of Directors meets monthly at 612 N. Main,
Newton, KS. Meetings are open to the public.